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Special Education Teacher Credential Candidates' Promotion of Self-Determination

By

Jenny Lynn Bisha

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy
with San Francisco State University

in

Special Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

Special Education Teacher Credential Candidates' Promotion of Self-Determination

by

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Joint Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

University of California, Berkeley

San Francisco State University

Professors Anne E. Cunningham and Maryssa K. Mitsch, Co-Chairs

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the perceptions, experiences, and applications of special education teacher candidates' promotion of self-determination for students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), a functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), Casual Agency Theory (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016), and the Ecological Theory of Self-Determination (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003) are the basis for the conceptual framework for the present study. A mixed-methods approach employed qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, document review, interviews, and observations was implemented among eight subjects. The results demonstrated that all participants place a high level of importance on the promotion of self-determination for their students; however, participant beliefs about and applications of self-determination are misaligned. Participants believed they are promoting self-determination at higher rates than were recorded during classroom observations. Participants report many variables that prohibit them from actualizing their beliefs about self-determination, such as a high-stress, high-demand, high-turnover career path.

Keywords: self-determination, Individualized Education Program, causal agency, autonomy

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to educators who tirelessly and selflessly serve students day in and day out. Your belief in the power of education for all students ignites change and progress. Thank you. To my husband, my greatest devotee, who believes in equality in all aspects of life, but especially within education. Finally, to my children, who are my inspiration to remain committed to education and to a better tomorrow.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The promotion of self-determination is considered a crucial component of education due to documented improved in-school and adult outcomes for all students (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). The component elements of self-determination include choice- and decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013) are a focus of self-determination skill instruction and practice. Among general and special educators, there is an agreement that self-determination is an essential aspect of school-based instruction (Carter et al., 2015). Research indicates that the component elements of self-determination can lead individuals to an active and independent life after formal education (Wehmeyer et al., 2013).

Although the promotion of self-determination has positive effects for all student (Denney & Daviso, 2012) intervention studies show a particularly significant in-school effect for students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). These positive effects include increased involvement in educational planning (e.g., Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015), higher academic achievement (e.g., Zheng, Gaumer Erickson, Kingston, & Noonan, 2014), and greater access to the general education curriculum (e.g., Hagiwara, Shogren, & Leko, 2017). Notably, students who have an IEP and who utilize self-determination skills also experience beneficial adult outcomes at higher rates than their comparable peers who do not use self-determination skills (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2012; Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012). These outcomes include access to employment opportunities (e.g., Powers, Greenen, Powers, Pommier-Satya, et al., 2012), higher quality of life (e.g., Lee et al., 2018), decreased depression and anxiety (Greenen et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2013), and increased engagement in higher education (Test et al., 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Students who have an IEP can develop self-determination at the same rates as their non-disabled peers (Shogren et al., 2012). However, students who have an IEP have fewer self-determination skills, on average, than their peers who do not receive special education services (Lee, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2015; Wehmeyer, 2015). Also, students who have an IEP continue to experience disparities in adult outcomes compared to their peers who do not receive special education services (McFarland et al., 2019).

Despite the positive outcomes that result from enhanced self-determination for students who have an IEP, the promotion of self-determination is not yet prevalent in schools (Raley, Shogren, & McDonald, 2018). Many variables may lead to the inconsistent or absent implementation of promoting self-determination. One example of these variables is an individual's environmental influences (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003; Palmer, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2017). Teachers are a vital influence of self-determination development for students who have an IEP within a school environment (Zheng et al., 2014). However, teachers report feeling unprepared for this role (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014; Thoma, Pannozzo, Fritton, & Bartholomew, 2008; Wandry et al., 2008). Wehmeyer (2015) posits that insufficient preservice training for special education teachers contributes to low teacher self-efficacy concerning the promotion of self-determination.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the perceptions, experiences with, and applications of special education teacher candidates' promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP. The positive outcomes related to developing self-determination, coupled with the finding that teachers believe they are ill-equipped to teach self-determination, motivated this study (Wehmeyer, 2015). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), a functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), Casual Agency Theory (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016), and the Ecological Theory of Self-Determination (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003) provide a conceptual framework for this study.

The present mixed-methods study explored definitions of, importance of, barriers to, and supports needed for promoting self-determination. The study also examined the frequency of instructional applications of the component elements. Participants included special education teacher candidates who were intern teaching at the time of the study. Participants were enrolled in a special education credentialing program for students with mild/moderate support needs at a California Bay Area university. Data collection tools included interviews, observations, and document analysis. The following research questions address the purposes of the study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Central Question

What are special education teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP?

- a. Central Hypothesis: Special education teacher candidates hold beliefs about promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP during K-12 education.

2. Sub Questions

- a. How do special education teacher candidates define self-determination for students who have an IEP?
 - i. Hypothesis 1: Special education teacher candidates have a rudimentary understanding of the meaning of self-determination.
- b. What level of importance do special education teacher candidates place on promoting self-determination?
 - i. Hypothesis 2: Special education teacher candidates place high importance on the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP.
- c. What barriers do special education teacher candidates perceive that inhibit them from promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placement?
 - i. Hypothesis 3: Special education teacher candidates perceive numerous significant barriers to implementing self-determination practices for their students, even when they place self-determination as a high priority for their students.
- d. What supports do special education teacher candidates perceive as necessary for promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placements?
 - i. Hypothesis 4: Special education teacher candidates perceive a variety of supports are needed to implement self-determination practices for their students, even when they place self-determination as a high priority for their students.

- e. How frequently do special education teacher candidates promote self-determination for students who have an IEP in a school setting, including instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities to practice self-determination skills?
 - i. Hypothesis 5: Special education teacher candidates provide instruction and practice promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP less frequently than reported.
- f. Does alignment exist between the frequency of the promotion of self-determination in classroom settings and the rated importance of each self-determination skill reported by special education teacher candidates?
 - i. Hypothesis 6: Misalignment exists between teacher candidates' beliefs and their practical applications of promoting student self-determination in their classrooms for students who have an IEP.

Conceptual Framework

Three theories and one model create a conceptual framework that aims to illustrate the construct of self-determination. Each of the theories describes aspects of enhancing self-determination among students who have an IEP. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), a functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), Casual Agency Theory (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016), and the Ecological Theory of Self-Determination are included (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a broad, macro framework of the study of motivation and personality within a psychological construct (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT asserts that when a person experiences an environment supportive of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, the individual more effectively develops curiosity, creativity, understanding, well-being, and compassion (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Although the application of SDT as it relates to education practices is the focus of this study, an acknowledgment of the application of the term more broadly is necessary to understand the complex and vast construct.

SDT came out of Deci's original work on motivation (Deci, 1971). His original work posited that extrinsic motivation acts as an inhibitor of intrinsic motivation, which he believed was the most effective form of motivation. After receiving criticism for his black and white, dichotomous views (Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996), SDT has been refined since its inception in 1985. It now includes a continuum of extrinsic motivation as an explanation for the power that extrinsic motivation encompasses, particularly in the study of work and health care environments (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ng et al., 2012).

SDT is concerned with the degree to which individuals act with volition, or the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-determined¹ (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Although Deci and Ryan agree with behavioral psychologists that external factors influence behavior, they argue

¹ Self-determination also refers to, "freedom of the people of a given area to determine their own political status; independence" (American Heritage dictionary, 2018); however, the present examination of literature focuses on self-determination from the perspective of individuals.

Table 1

Self-Determination Component Elements and Definitions

Self-Determination Component Element	Operational Definition
Choice-Making Skills	Making a choice involves the indication or communication of preference from among two or more options. Teaching choice-making skills involves teaching students to identify interests and preferences and to select an option based on those preferences and interests appropriately.
Decision-Making Skills	Decision-making is a process of selecting or coming to a conclusion about which of a set of potential solutions is the best. Teaching decision-making skills involves teaching students to use problem-solving skills.
Goal-Setting and Attainment Skills	Goal-directed behavior involves actions that enable a person to reach a specified preferred outcome. Teaching goal-setting and attainment skills involve teaching students to define and articulate a goal, identify current status concerning the goal, develop an action plan, and evaluate progress toward achieving the goal.
Problem-Solving Skills	A problem is a task, activity, or situation for which a solution is not immediately known or attainable. Teaching problem-solving skills involves teaching students to identify and define a problem and to generate potential solutions.
Self-Regulation	Self-regulation refers to the human response system that enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses and to revise their strategies as necessary. Teaching self-regulation skills includes teaching students to solve problems or employ self-management strategies (e.g., anger control).
Self-Advocacy	Self-advocacy means the ability to assertively communicate or negotiate one's interests, desires, needs, and rights. Teaching self-advocacy and leadership skills involve teaching students about their basic rights and responsibilities (knowledge), how to use self-advocacy skills, and how to be effective team members (at an individual and system level).
Self-Awareness	Self-awareness or self-knowledge refers to a comprehensive and reasonably accurate knowledge of one's strengths and limitations. Teaching self-knowledge involves teaching students to identify common psychological and physical needs of people, recognize differences among people, and understand how one's actions influence others.

that behaviorism is limited in its scope. Deci and Ryan posit that external incentives can inhibit intrinsic motivation, which they believe is the most powerful form of motivation.

One of the unique aspects of SDT compared to other theories of motivation is the separation of types of motivation into autonomous and controlled motivation, with four identified types of extrinsic motivation regulators. Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviors that occur based on a person’s volition and for the sake of the feeling of effectiveness and enjoyment. Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviors that occur for the sake of external feedback, such as social approval, avoidance of consequences, or the fulfillment of a valued result (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are autonomous, while extrinsically motivated behaviors fall on a continuum from controlled to autonomous. Extrinsic motivation can be considered external (controlled), introjected (moderately controlled), identified (moderately autonomous and internalized), and integrated (autonomous and internalized). Figure 1 provides a graphic depiction of the continuum posited in SDT.

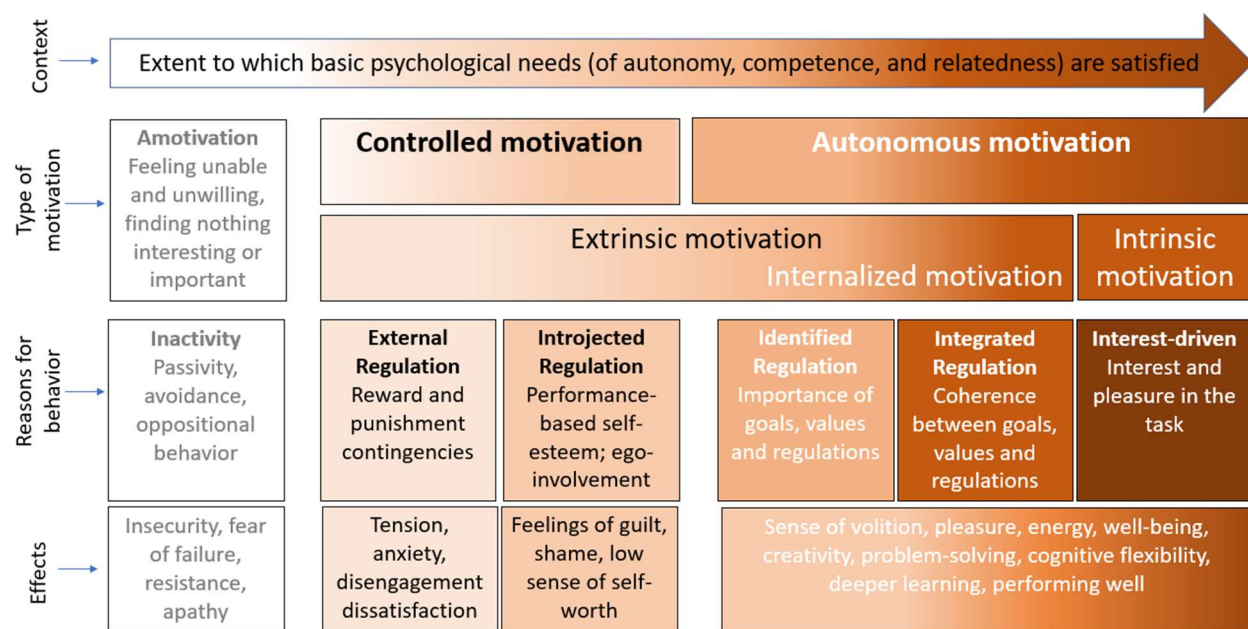


Figure 1. Graphic depiction of the SDT continuum.

In addition to the continuum of motivation types, three basic psychological needs identified within SDT are defined as follows. First, competence refers to the control given or taken by an individual to make decisions and set goals concerning individual outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2002). It is a sense of self-confidence that builds over time using one’s abilities and understandings to reach success. Successful experiences build on competence in a cyclical motion. Second, autonomy refers to having control over oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Ryan and Deci argue that autonomy—an acknowledgment by an individual that one is the origin of his or her behavior—is an essential aspect for understanding self-regulation of behavior. However, autonomy and independence are not synonymous. Lastly, relatedness refers to a desire to connect with others, including a sense that one is loved and cared for, as well as the potential to love and care for others (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Relatedness is a non-goal-oriented state in which one feels securely supported by a network of other people.

Although some theorists disagree (Tay & Diener, 2011), proponents of SDT assert that this theory is universal to all human life. It crosses disciplines, with its roots in psychology, but transfers to education, health care, human development, work, psychotherapy, culture and religious socialization, and economics (Ng, et al., 2012; van Egmond, Navarrete Berges, Omarshah, & Benton, 2017). More recent research applies SDT to research on video gaming (Mills, Milyavskaya, Mettler, Heath, & Derevensky, 2018), virtual learning environments (Huang, Backman, J., Backman, K., McGuire, & Moore, 2019), and massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Zhou, 2016). The practical implications are far-reaching and studied in various contexts across political, cultural, and international perspectives (Chen et al., 2015; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016).

Self-determination applied to education. Notwithstanding its extensive application, SDT is relevant to education in five main ways: (a) intrinsic student motivation, (b) autonomous learning environments, (c) achievement goals (versus performance goals), (d) teacher motivation, and (e) expanding education beyond academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT posits that children are intrinsically motivated to learn and are driven to explore their environments by their inherent curiosity. Research using SDT shows that students learn more deeply and are more creative when they are intrinsically motivated, and when learning is meaningful (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

When extrinsic motivation is needed, creating an autonomous learning environment is shown to be an effective strategy to encourage internalized regulation of behavior in students. According to SDT, internalized regulation of behavior refers to behavior that is personally valued by an individual, although the individual is extrinsically motivated to behave in a certain way. Though curricula in school often lack meaning and relevance for students, providing an autonomous learning environment can result in students' perceived control over their learning experience (Reeve & Halusic, 2009). An autonomy-supportive learning environment is one that incorporates student interests, preferences, and goals. It is an environment that attempts to develop the inner motivational resources of each student (Su & Reeve, 2011).

The satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of teachers affects their motivation to provide an autonomy-supportive environment. The lack of autonomy they have over significant facets of their career, such as curricula and classroom practices (Deci & Ryan, 2016) may create a perceived controlling environment. When teachers are autonomously motivated to teach and experience increased need satisfaction in their jobs, students are more likely to perceive their teacher as autonomously-supportive.

Goal setting and goal type are critical elements of engagement and learning under SDT, as well (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Performance goals, goals that focus on achievement outcomes, are motivated by extrinsic enforcers. In the context of education, performance goals typically include grades and evaluations. In contrast to performance goals, mastery goals focus on learning knowledge and skills. Students show deeper, longer-lasting learning when they learn material for mastery rather than for a test (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Performance goals can indeed improve academic functioning. However, performance goals may also undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Autonomous student motivation is more likely to be present when a student experiences a school context in a mastery-goal oriented, autonomous-supportive environment.

Finally, SDT posits that the goal of schools should move beyond a sole focus on academic achievement. According to research framed within SDT, school improvement is achieved at higher rates when both the well-being and cognitive performance of students is

considered. Additionally, teachers and other school personnel require training and ongoing support to satisfy their own basic psychological needs, and, in turn, promote the enhancement of self-determination among the students they serve. When classrooms become more engaging and less controlling, student achievement is more likely to increase, disruptive behavior is more likely to decrease, and the self-reported well-being of all involved is more likely to increase (Early, Rogge, & Deci, 2014).

Self-determination applied to individuals with disabilities. Although SDT has been in educational contexts for many years, the macro theory has not always been applied through a disability lens. Wehmeyer and Shogren (2016) describe the first writings of self-determination in a context of disability in 1972, in which Nirje melds the psychological and political constructs of self-determination. The framework includes the psychological focus of volition and the political focus of the right of marginalized people to self-governance. Nirje's (1972) writing called for the "right to self-determination" for people with intellectual and related disabilities in response to the oppression of people with disabilities. The initial application of self-determination helps to explain why there are differences in the application of self-determination within the fields of disability and psychology.

Almost 20 years passed after Nirje's proclamation before the use of self-determination became broadly applied in the field of disability. As the disability rights movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s evolved, choice and independence became cornerstone aspects of disability legislation in the 1990s and beyond. A functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), which emphasizes causal agency, was greatly influenced by Self-Determination Theory and the disability rights movement (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). The functional model of self-determination was used by Wehmeyer and Mithaug (2006) to propose Causal Agency Theory. Causal Agency Theory conceptualizes "how people become self-determined and act as causal agents in their lives" (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016, p. 118). Although self-determination is now broadly applied in the disability context, it varies in definition and application from SDT.

Functional model of self-determination. A functional model of self-determination grew out of the response to OSEP's call for new projects that promoted self-determination for students who have an IEP (Wehmeyer, 1999). Although self-determination was apparent within many disciplines, a definition for the application of self-determination in special education did not yet exist. Those who submitted projects to OSEP's funding competition did so to answer the following two questions. What is self-determination? How can we, as educators, promote growth and development in self-determination? (Wehmeyer, 1999). A functional model of self-determination aimed to help increase the understanding of self-determination, as well as the growth and development of self-determination. Figure 3 shows a graphic depiction of a functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1996).

Self-determination has many definitions, including "a) a basic human right, b) a specific response class (i.e., a set of behaviors), and c) based on functional properties of the response class (i.e., by describing what self-determined people do)" (Wehmeyer, 1999, p. 55). A functional model of self-determination views self-determination as based on the function of the specific response class, or the function of a behavior. Therefore, a functional model of self-determination first defined self-determination within a disability context as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24).

This definition eliminates the issue of merely listing behaviors that define an individual as self-determined. Although the component elements of self-determination define behaviors that

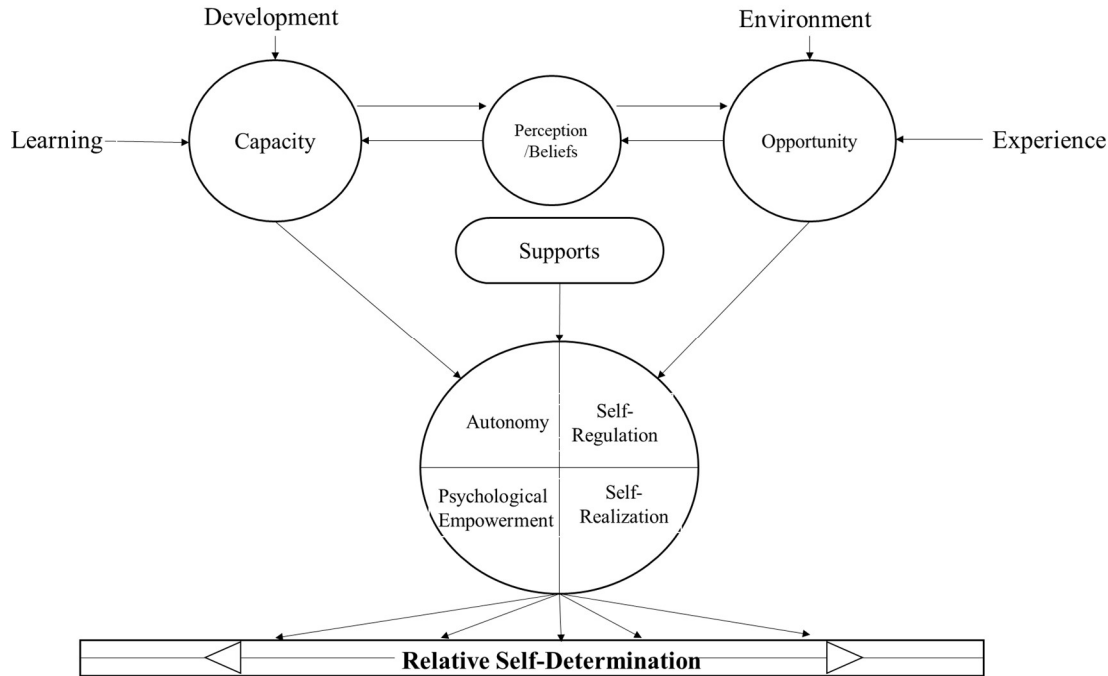


Figure 2. A functional model of self-determination. Wehmeyer, M. L. (1999). A functional model of self-determination describing development and implementing instruction. *Focus on Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, 14(1), 53-61.

guide instruction in the growth and development of self-determination, a set of behaviors alone cannot designate one as self-determined. To rectify the limited nature of defining self-determination as a set of behaviors, known as the component elements, Wehmeyer (1996) put forth the essential characteristics of self-determined behavior, which include: (1) the individual acted autonomously, (2) the behaviors were self-regulated, (3) the person initiated and responded to event(s) in a psychologically empowered manner, and (4) the person acted in a self-realizing manner. An individual acts in a self-determined manner if all four of the essential characteristics are present in a given behavior. Figure 3 shows a graphic depiction of the essential characteristics of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1996).

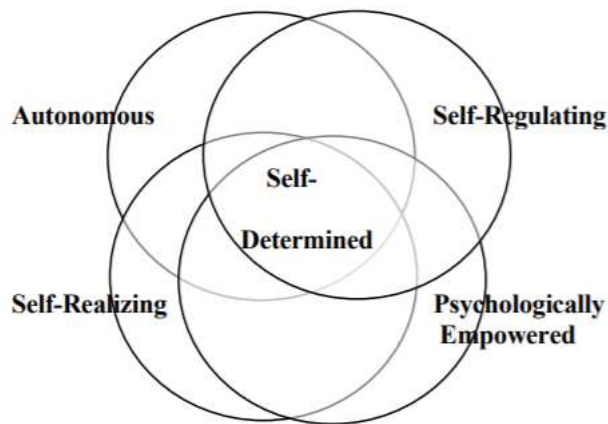


Figure 3. Graphic depiction of essential characteristics of self-determination. Wehmeyer, M. L. (1999). A functional model of self-determination describing development and implementing instruction. *Focus on Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, 14(1), 53-61.

The focus of the definition of self-determined is causal agent. Causal agent implies that an individual acted in a way that was intentional to meet a goal. Undue external influence and interference refer to the concept that human beings almost always make decisions that are influenced by their environment. A causal agent does not act without outside influence, but instead incorporates the influence of their environments and other people to make decisions that mold their lives and futures in personally important ways.

Causal agency theory. Drawing from and influenced by the early development of SDT (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016), Causal Agency Theory was proposed by Wehmeyer (2004) and updated by Shogren et al. (2017) to explain how people become self-determined. Causal Agency Theory is a theoretical framework for developing and enhancing supports to enable youth to engage in “agentic action” (Wehmeyer, 2004, p. 353). A causal agent is a person who makes or causes things to happen in his or her life (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2012). The authors of Casual Agency Theory argue that fostering volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs, what are known as the essential characteristics of self-determined actions, promote the “growth of casual agency and ultimately the agentic self” (Shogren et al., 2017, p. 258). Table 2 outlines the essential characteristics. Casual Agency Theory addresses the question “how do people become self-determined?” and claims a need for interventions and assessments of self-determination for all students. Figure 4. Graphic depiction of Causal Agency Theory overview. Wehmeyer, M. L. (2004). Beyond self-determination: Causal agency theory. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 16(4), 337-359. displays a graphic illustration of an overview of Causal Agency Theory.

Table 2

Causal Agency Theory Essential Characteristics of Self-Determined Actions

Essential Characteristics	Operational Definition
Volitional Action	Volitional actions are self-initiated and function to enable a person to act autonomously (i.e., engage in self-governed action). Volitional actions involve the initiation and activation of causal capabilities-the capacity to cause something to happen-and something to happen in one’s life.
Agentic Action	Agentic actions are self-regulated and self-directed. Such actions function to enable a person to make progress toward freely chosen goals and to respond to opportunities and challenges in their environments. Such actions involve agentic capabilities - the capacity to direct action to achieve an outcome.
Action-Controlled Beliefs	There are three types of action-control beliefs: beliefs about the link between the self and the goal (control expectancy; “When I want to do ____, I can”); beliefs about the link between the self and the means for achieving the goal (capacity beliefs; “I have the capabilities to do ____”); and beliefs about the utility or usefulness of a given means for attaining a goal (causality beliefs; “I believe my effort will lead to goal achievement” vs. “I

Essential Characteristics	Operational Definition
	believe other factors – luck, access to teachers or social capital – will lead to goal achievement”).

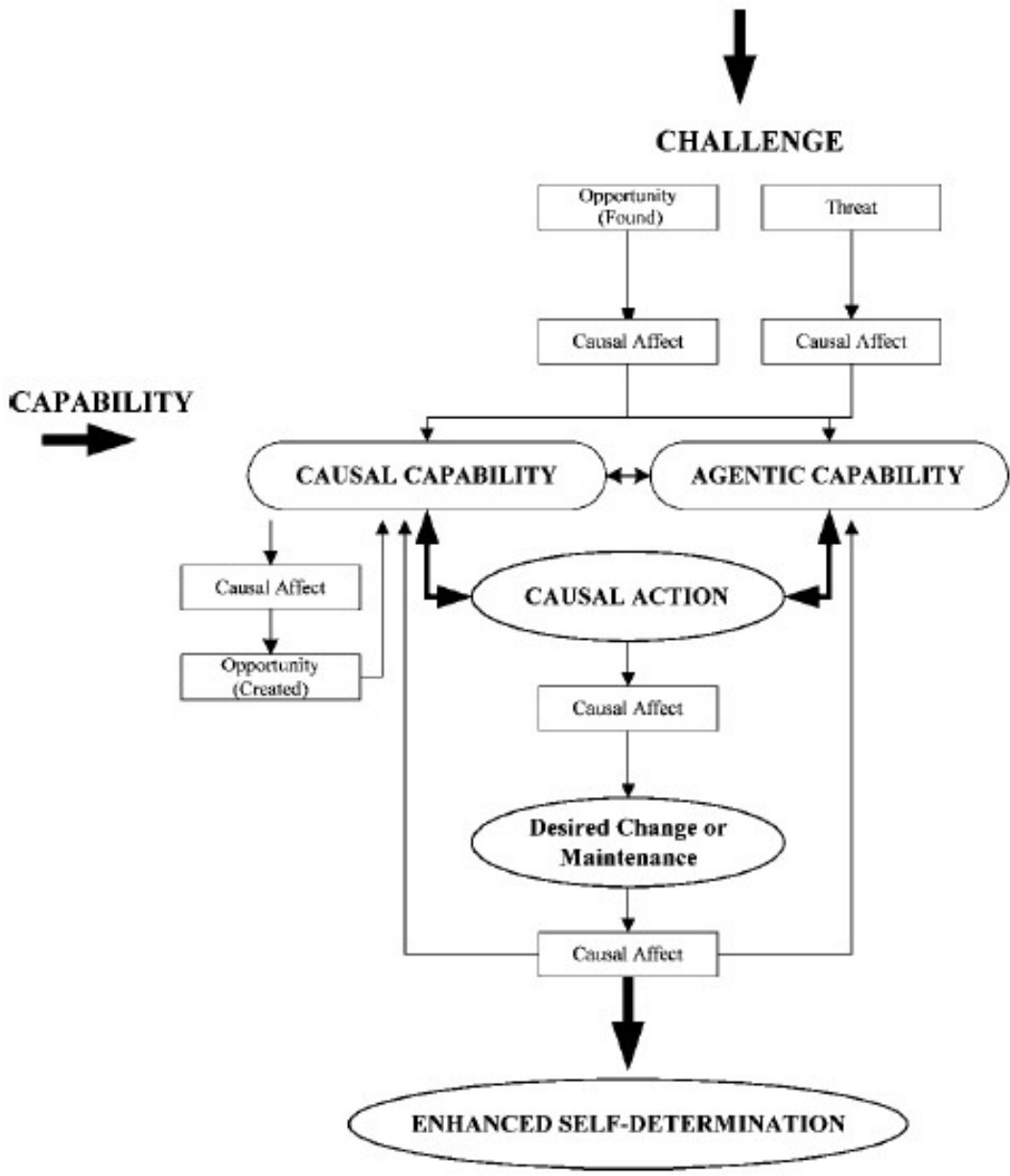


Figure 4. Graphic depiction of Causal Agency Theory overview. Wehmeyer, M. L. (2004). Beyond self-determination: Causal agency theory. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 16(4), 337-359.

Ecological theory of self-determination. Ecological psychology is one of the underlying theories which influenced Abery and Stancliffe's (2003) Ecological Theory of Self-Determination. Within this theory, the authors substantiate the idea that becoming fully self-determined in adulthood is influenced by interaction among one's environmental systems. The Ecological Theory of Self-Determination incorporates Bronfenbrenner's four environmental systems to demonstrate the environmental influences that affect an individual's level of self-determination. Figure 5 represents the theory. This theory assumes that almost all individuals have some capacity to become self-determined or to exert some sense of personal control on their lives. However, one's capacity to become self-determined interacts with one's environmental systems and impacts individual enhancement of self-determination in individual ways.

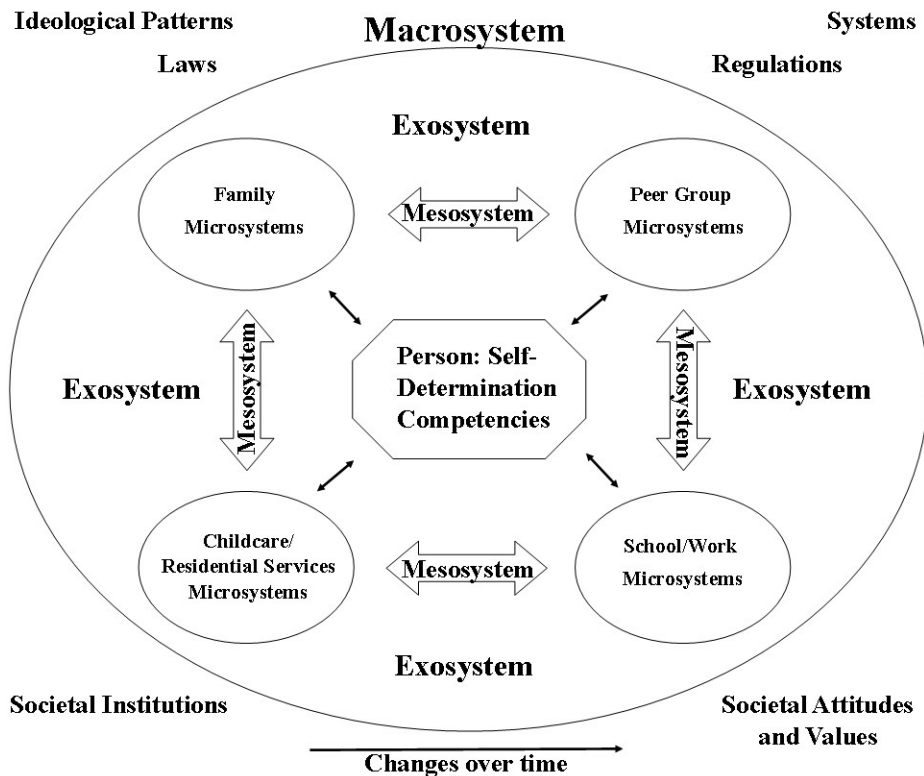


Figure 5. Model of ecological theory of self-determination. Abery, B. H., & Stancliffe, R. J. (2003). An ecological theory of self-determination. In M. L. Wehmeyer (Ed.), *Theory in self-determination: Foundations for educational practice* (pp. 25–42). Springfield, IL: Thomas.

As described by ecological psychologists (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a continuous interplay exists between an individual and their environment. The Ecological Systems Theory distinguishes four types of environmental systems: (1) microsystem, (2) mesosystem, (3) exosystem, and (4) macrosystem. The microsystem includes the smallest, most immediate environments that affect a student's development. The mesosystem comprises the connections between settings in which the student actively participates (e.g., home, school, neighborhood peer group). The exosystem refers to the environments which only indirectly affect a student's development (e.g., parent's workplace or teacher's home life). The macrosystem consists of the overarching socio-cultural or political influences which affect the underlying ecological systems (e.g., technology, government programs, and educational systems).

Review of Research/Literature Review

In combination with the conceptual framework, a considerable amount of previous research steered the design of the present study. Several areas of research guided the interpretations of the data and the overall understanding of the study of the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP from the perspective of special education teacher candidates. The following review of the literature explores research that examines (1) a history of self-determination in a disability context, (2) the evolving definition of self-determination, (3) the development of self-determination, (4) the benefits of promoting self-determination, (5) educators' perceptions of self-determination, (6) preservice teacher training, and (7) limitations of the available literature.

History of Self-Determination

Research on self-determination for students who have an IEP can be found in the literature as far back as 1972 (Nirje, 1972). However, an influx of literature on the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP grew out of a landmark conference and funding competition in 1989 from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Request for Proposals (RFP) called for Model Demonstration Projects to teach self-determination skills to students who have an IEP. Over four years, 26 projects received funding through the OSEP. This program and the resultant National Conference on Self-Determination solidified self-determination as a vital part of special education.

The 1990 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) prompted yet another influx of research on self-determination for students who have an IEP. IDEA (1990) mandated that students who have an IEP be involved in the development of their transition plans by the age of 14. Transition services focus on adult life activities such as employment, community living, and independent living. The transition plan must be based on student's needs, preferences, and interests while students prepare to exit school. Self-determination is not explicitly stated in IDEA; however, one of the evidence-based practices associated with successful transitions to adulthood is the promotion of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2015).

More recently, research focusing on the promotion of self-determination addresses several legislative and policy changes. Firstly, the Developmental Disabilities Act of 2000 includes the promotion of self-determination as an empowerment tool for individuals with disabilities. Further, in 2002, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education Final Report acknowledged the need for services to promote self-determination. Subsequently, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2002) included self-determination in their initial preparation standards for special educators. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA includes the consideration of student strengths as a part of transition planning. Finally, the National Council on Disability (2004a, 2004b) advocates for an increase in the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP to improve high school transition services and to increase postsecondary education among students who have an IEP.

Evolving Definitions of Self-Determination

Self-determination has numerous definitions. Table 3 displays a few examples of the evolving definition of self-determination applied to education. Wehmeyer's (1996) definition

represents references to self-determination in the present study, which is as follows: “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p. 24).

Table 3

Evolving Definitions of Self-Determination

Author(s)	Year	Definition
Deci and Ryan	1985	“the capacity to choose and to have those choices be the determinants of one’s actions” (p.38)
Campeau, Wolman & Mithaug	1993	“choosing and enacting choices to control one’s life-to the maximum extent possible-based on knowing and valuing oneself, and in pursuit of one’s own needs, interests, and values” (p.2)
Wehmeyer & Mithaug	2006	“self-determined behavior refers to volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary and causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life.”
Carter, Lane, Crnobori, Bruhn, & Oakes	2011	“reflects the capacity to direct one’s life in ways that are personally valued” (p. 100)
Shogren et al.	2017	“a dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one’s life” (p. 258).

Development of Self-Determination

Self-determination skills begin developing as early as infancy. Self-determination is typically enhanced throughout youth, to encourage individuals to become autonomous adults with volitional functioning (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Learned incrementally, self-determination skill development varies for early, middle, and late childhood as well as in adolescence. Self-determination skill building at all developmental stages is profoundly affected by the environment for students to acquire, practice, and refine their developing self-determination skills (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003; Palmer et al., 2017).

Typical development of self-determination skills in early, middle, and late childhood. Childhood provides a time when children can begin developing self-determination skills that will lead to a capacity to have more control over their lives in adolescence and adulthood (Field et al., 1998; Wehmeyer & Field, 2007; Wehmeyer, Shogren, Little, & Lopez, 2017). To address the wide-ranging spectrum of possibilities for self-determination development among typically developing students, Field et al. (1998) recommend breaking down the early years of schooling into three categories. Early childhood, which ranges from ages 2-5 years, followed by early elementary years, from ages 6-8, and late elementary, encompassing ages 9-11.

Dependence on caregivers means that students in early childhood “are not developmentally ready to act in a self-determined manner, fundamentally due to a lack of maturity, experience, and overall capabilities” (Summers et al., 2012, p. 175). However, young

children can start practicing behaviors that lead to becoming a self-determined adult. Palmer et al. (2017) refer to the early childhood years as a time for “building the foundations for self-determination” (p. 69). During early, middle, and late childhood, children are expected to develop the following components of self-determination: self-awareness, choice-making skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, goal setting and attainment, and self-regulation.

Typical development of self-determination skills in adolescence. By adolescence, students have had years of opportunity to practice and refine skills that lead to becoming self-determined (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Adolescents are not entirely independent of caregivers and adults, but they are in the process of developing an individual identity. During adolescence (12-18 years), students are typically able to take more control over their lives. Perspective-taking skills are enhanced and can be used to negotiate with others during adolescence. As students move through this stage, they can typically begin to make decisions and solve problems in ways that are similar to adults. Students can typically participate in educational planning, long and short-term goal setting and monitoring, and self-regulated learning within a supportive environment (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Adolescents are developing self-management skills and self-advocacy skills in addition to refining existing self-determination skills (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016).

Development of self-determination skills for students who have an IEP. Self-determination development for students who have an IEP is equivalent to their same age, typically developing peers. However, the development of self-determination skills is heavily dependent on the environment in which people live and receive their education (Palmer et al., 2017). In large part, due to their often restrictive and controlling environments, students who have an IEP appear to exhibit less developed self-determined skills than their typically developing peers (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Students who have an IEP have less opportunity to make choices and communicate desires, which frequently results in a dependency on adults and underdeveloped self-determined behaviors in adulthood (as cited in Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016).

Benefits of Promoting Self-Determination

The promotion of self-determination is a crucial component of education for all students (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016). Among administrators, general, and special educators, there is widespread agreement that self-determination is an important aspect of school-based instruction (Carter et al., 2015; Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011). The same value found amid educators is reflected in legislation and policy initiatives, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the California Education Code, Section 56341(a)-(b)(7). The encouraging effects of self-determination resulted in an increase of research on the topic specifically for students with disabilities (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006).

In-school effects. Numerous representative studies illustrate the positive effects of self-determination development for students during their educational career (Lee et al., 2015; Su & Reeve, 2011; Taylor et al., 2014) The positive in-school effects include (a) increased student involvement in educational planning (Seong et al., 2015), (b) greater academic achievement (Zheng et al., 2014), and (c) greater access to the general education curriculum (Hagiwara et al., 2017). The following studies demonstrate the potential impact of in-school effects for students who experience the promotion of self-determination in school.

Educational planning. One plausible avenue to promote self-determination among students who have an IEP—particularly in areas such as goal setting and choice-making—is a

student-centered approach to IEP development and implementation (Seong et al., 2015). Specifically, student-centered IEP interventions may promote increased student involvement in educational planning. The IEP must include annual goals, student interests, necessary accommodations, program modifications, and student progress monitoring. Students can practice advocating for their needs when they understand their accommodations. Hawbaker (2007) asserts that “preparing students to lead their own IEP meeting provides a perfect, real opportunity to practice these critical life skills” (p. 3). Allowing a student to be the center of his or her IEP can be a vehicle for building advocacy, choice, and voice in their educational planning process.

Studies on the effects of student participation in the IEP process show positive benefits to students (e.g., Seong et al., 2015; Shogren et al., 2012). Additionally, students who have an IEP are often better equipped to participate in the later-required transition planning process if they have opportunities to practice contributing earlier in their educational careers (Cho et al., 2011); however, few studies have examined the promotion of self-determination skills for pre-adolescent students (e.g., Erwin et al., 2016; Sparks & Cote, 2012).

Academic achievement. Consistent research shows that academic achievement is a predictor of outcomes in adulthood (Erickson, Noonan, Zheng, & Brussow, 2015). Although the relationship between self-determination and academic achievement for students who have an IEP is complex, a positive correlation between the two is often cited (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015). The following examples illustrate studies that exemplify the relationship between academic achievement and self-determination.

Agran, Blanchard, and Wehmeyer created the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) in 2000. The SDLMI is the most frequently implemented and studied intervention to promote self-determination. The SDMLI aims to make students the primary agents for choices, decisions, and actions in their own lives. The study looked at the efficacy of the SDMLI through a meta-analysis using single-case studies in the US and Korea. The study includes 15 articles and 50 participants. The results indicate that SDLMI is an effective way to promote access to the general curriculum and transition outcomes. The use of the SDLMI enhanced problem-solving and goal-setting and attainment. Improvement in academic and functional outcomes resulted in a mean PND= 80%. The model was statistically more effective for adolescents, youth, and adults with disabilities than children, although there is a model for children that needs more empirical research to validate its efficacy. The finding that academic outcomes improved is contrary to the findings of other meta-analyses (Burke et al., 2018; Cobb, Lehmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Alwell, 2009).

Zheng et al. (2014) measured the relationship between self-determination, self-concept, and academic achievement. The researchers measured the self-determination of 560 adolescents with learning disabilities using the Arc’s Self-Determination Scale. In response to many critiques concerning insufficient rigor in many similar studies, Zheng et al. (2014) proposed a structural equation model. The results of the study indicate a statistically significant correlation between self-determination and math and reading achievement across all covariate variables (gender, income, urbanicity).

Student perception of the level of school effort to promote self-determination contributed to predictive and actual graduation rates (Cavendish, 2013). Students who perceived that their school environments support student involvement and autonomy at the end of tenth grade increased the likelihood that they were on track for graduation. Of the 154 participants of the study, 26% were on track for graduation. Additionally, student perceptions of agency in their school environment increased the likelihood of graduation. The results of the study were not

statistically significant concerning self-determination and graduation. However, students who indicated increased effort on the part of the school resulted in an increased likelihood that students graduated regardless of their on-track status at the end of tenth grade.

Access to the general curriculum. Promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP can support access to the general curriculum (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2013). Numerous studies show that students who learn self-regulation strategies gain more access to the general curriculum than their peers who did not receive the same training (Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin, & Palmer, 2010; Hagiwara et al., 2017; Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer, 2010). Additionally, regulations state that access to the general curriculum should be “to the maximum extent appropriate” (Rules and Regulations, 64 C.F.R. 12592, 1999). The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA stresses transition services and access to the general education curriculum by mandating documentation of academic and functional achievement [Sec.602 (34)(A)]. IDEA regulations define the general curriculum as “the same curriculum as for nondisabled children” (Rules and Regulations, 64 C.F.R. 12592, 1999).

The promotion of self-determination can be used as a catalyst to address the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to promote the inclusion of all students into the general curriculum. Included in the CCSS are anchor standards that address component elements of self-determination (Rowe, Mazzotti, & Sinclair, 2015). Embedding self-determination skill instruction within the mandated state curriculum is one recommendation to reduce the burden of instructional demands due to standards-based curriculum mandates (Bartholomew, Test, Cooke, & Cease-Cook, 2015).

Another avenue for providing access to the general curriculum is the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (CAST, 2018) (Bartholomew, Papay, McConnell, & Cease-Cook, 2015). This framework suggests making changes to the classroom environment to meet the needs of all learners. A model proposed by Wehmeyer, Sands, Knowlton, and Kozleski (2002) emphasizes making the general curriculum accessible to all students by modifying the representation or presentation of the existing curriculum as well as modifying the ways students respond to the curriculum, all which mirror the principles of UDL. Not only does the UDL framework align with the component elements of self-determination, but it also aligns with the CCSS. Table 4 provides examples of alignment between the component elements of self-determination, the CCSS, the UDL framework.

Adult outcomes. Students who have an IEP and use self-determination skills may experience beneficial adult outcomes (Palmer et al., 2012; Shogren et al., 2012). Positive outcomes in adulthood include (a) access to employment opportunities (e.g., Powers, Greenen, Powers, Pommier-Satya et al., 2012), (b) higher quality of life (e.g., Lee et al., 2018), (c) decreased depression and anxiety (Greenen et al., 2013; Schmidt et al., 2013), and (d) increased engagement in higher education (Test et al., 2009). The following studies exemplify the potential change in adult outcomes for students who experience enhanced self-determination during their school years.

A systematic review of the literature of the secondary transition correlational literature was carried out by Test et al. (2009). The purpose of the study was to identify in-school predictors of adult outcomes for students who have an IEP. Adult outcomes included higher education, employment, and independent living. Sixteen evidence-based predictors of outcomes were found, including self-determination/self-advocacy. Self-determination showed the most significant effect size (0.72) for post-school employment. In-line with SDT (Ryan & Deci,

Table 4

Alignment of Self-Determination, CCSS, and UDL

SD Comp. Element	CCSS	UDL Principle
Choice-making	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	7.1 Optimize individual choice and autonomy
Decision-making	CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP5: Use appropriate tools strategically.	6.2 Support planning and strategy development
Goal-setting	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B: Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.	6.1 Guide appropriate goal-setting
Problem-solving	CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP1: Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.	6.4 Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
Self-regulation	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	9.3 Develop self-assessment and reflection
Self-advocacy	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.	4.2 Optimize access to tools and assistive technology
Self-awareness	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	9.1 Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies

2017), the largest effect size (0.82-0.85) was student satisfaction with instruction (student support predictor category), which was a strong predictor of post-secondary education.

Additionally, students who received transition planning services before leaving school were more likely to engage in post-school education (effect size: 0.41-0.61). In agreement with studies on the in-school effects of self-determination (Hagiwara et al., 2017), students included in the general curriculum were five times more likely to engage in post-secondary education (effect size: 0.55). Academic achievement by way of inclusion in the general education curriculum as had a large effect size (0.74), which is reported as a strong predictor of post-secondary education, as well.

A longitudinal, randomized study was carried out by Powers et al. (2012) to assess the effect of a self-determination intervention program on post-school outcomes. The program aims to improve transition outcomes for students considered at-risk. The study included sixty-nine youth ages 16.5-17.5 who were both in foster care and who had an IEP at the time of the study. Moderate to large effect sizes were present between assessment at baseline, post-intervention, and the one-year follow-up for differences between groups in self-determination, quality of life, and use of transition services within the community. The results show confirmation of self-determination as a partial mediator of quality of life. Employment at baseline was 14% for the intervention group and 19% for the comparison group. At post-intervention, employment was 34% for the intervention group and 16% for the comparison group. At the one-year follow-up, 45% of the intervention group held employment compared with 28% of the comparison group.

To measure the relationships between self-determination and post-school outcomes, Shogren et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study. The purpose of the study was to explore the degree to which self-determination predicted post-school outcomes. The sample included 779 young adults with disabilities who participated in a self-determination intervention study while in high school. The results suggest that self-determination status when exiting high school does impact adult outcomes. Results also show participants' current level of self-determination predicts their future level of self-determination. The employment outcomes correspond with previous studies (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998). Participants with higher levels of self-determination were more likely to have a job and have access to job benefits 1-year post-school.

Another representative study was carried out by Lee et al. (2018). The study included 305 youth in foster care with disabilities between the ages of 16.6-18.5. Data collection occurred during a longitudinal RCT evaluation across three years. Outcome variables include mental health and general well-being (quality of life). Results show that self-determination is a predictive factor for all outcome variables. Self-determination and social support were protective factors for the mental health of the participants. Also, autonomy-supportive foster care environments were associated with higher levels of self-determination, which is in line with other research that employs SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Educator Perceptions of Self-Determination

Educator perceptions of promoting self-determination are explored in numerous studies. For example, in a survey of special education teachers conducted by Wehmeyer, Agran, et al. (2000), out of 1,219 respondents, 98% reported that promoting self-determination among their students is “very important.” In a similar study by Agran, Snow, and Swaner (1999), 42% indicated that self-determination was very important for their students, and 35% rated promoting determination as a medium-high priority. Additionally, of the 523 respondents in a survey

conducted by Mason, Field, and Sawilowsky (2004), 86% of special education teachers reported that self-determination is very important for their students. Finally, Stang, Carter, Lane, and Pierson (2009) gathered questionnaire responses about the perceived importance of self-determination for their students. The mean for importance among elementary general educators was 32.02 and 32.51 for special educators. The mean for importance among middle school general educators was 32.16 and 34.67 among special educators.

Although teachers place a high value on self-determination, they report several barriers that inhibit them from translating their value of self-determination into practice. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) only 33% reported that they felt they had adequate training to implement strategies to promote self-determination among their students. Wehmeyer, Agran, et al. (2000) found 41% of survey respondents indicated inadequate training to promote self-determination. Finally, Cho et al. (2011) report that respondents to a questionnaire identified three barriers to promoting self-determination. The barriers include perceiving more urgent needs for their students, insufficient time in the workday, and a lack of training or knowledge in promoting self-determination.

Preservice Teacher Training

General agreement exists among educators and policy-makers that teacher quality significantly affects student achievement (What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future, National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). One recommendation to address teacher identified barriers is to include explicit and in-depth information about promoting self-determination in teacher candidate university programs (Stang et al., 2009; Wandry et al., 2008). Evidence from teacher efficacy literature suggests that training during initial teaching preparation has a different impact than training received after teachers are in the field (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teacher preparation programs that prepare preservice special educators to promote self-determination may provide an advantage to both teachers and students (Erickson et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

Another suggested avenue to increase opportunities for student self-determination enhancement is through student-teaching during preservice preparation programs (Kim, Morningstar, & Jung, 2014). Literature suggests that pre-service teachers may experience higher levels of competency increases during a heavily supported student-teaching experience. Extensive practical experience in the field is considered a crucial element of teacher preparation programs. Many teachers report student-teaching as a "transformative experience" (Jordan, Kuriloff, Sutherland, Ponnock, & Hoffman, 2018, p. 7).

Additionally, the most effective teacher preparation programs incorporate what is taught in courses and with what is happening in fieldwork experiences (Jordan et al., 2018). Shorter, high-quality student-teaching experiences that take place in classrooms that model fairness, inclusive practices, and effective teaching result in more effective certified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Moreover, teachers who report that their coursework was useful, and teachers who spent greater amounts of time with their mentor teachers describe higher levels of preparedness upon receiving their teacher certification. Lastly, teachers who value their university supervisor also report feeling more prepared than teachers who do not (Jordan et al., 2018).

Limited studies currently available investigate preservice teacher candidates' understanding of, experience promoting, and valuing of the promotion of self-determination for students. This limitation, in part, motivated the present study. One representative study of special

education teacher candidates was carried out by Nevin, Malian, and Williams (2002). The authors of this study used qualitative research to explore participants' understanding of self-determination. All 29 participants showed growth in understanding the construct of self-determination at the end of a five-week course related to their fieldwork.

A mixed-methods study was carried out by Wandry et al. (2008), including 196 special education teacher candidates. The coding of written responses revealed that participants were optimistic about the information they gained in their teacher candidate training program about self-determination and transition planning. However, 71% of respondents indicated that their lack of knowledge about self-determination and transition planning was their most significant barrier to implementing strategies with their students. A primary concern reported by participants was that self-determination only appeared in their transition courses related to adolescents, and they believed students who have an IEP need to have instruction in self-determination in earlier years.

In a final example, Thoma et al. (2008) used document analysis to explore how special education teacher candidates understand self-determination, how they value self-determination for students who have an IEP, and how they felt they could implement strategies for the promotion of self-determination as credentialed special education teachers. The document analysis of the 50 participants revealed that these teachers were much more aware of the meaning of self-determination than previous research shows (Agran et al., 1999; Thoma, Nathanson, et al., 2002; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000). However, the participants were unsure of how they would implement strategies in their classrooms, a barrier similar to the reports of the credentialed teachers in other studies (Nevin et al., 2002; Wandry et al., 2008). Although a valuable resource, the study was limited to special education teacher candidates enrolled in programs to teach students identified as having a significant disability.

Limitations of Current Literature

One critique of the study of self-determination among individuals who have an IEP is an insufficient rigor applied to the study design in the available literature. Measuring self-determination and the potential effects of promoting self-determination is complex. Although efforts are in progress among scholars of this field, the robustness of research design remains a concern. For example, Burke et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of interventions to promote self-determination for students who have an IEP (2018). The study employed the quality indicators (Qis) established by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2014) as their measure of rigor. Of the 34 articles included in the study, only 4/34 studies met the criteria for methodological soundness. Implementation fidelity had a low (8.8%) adherence to the QIs, and social validity had a low (21%) adherence rate.

A meta-synthesis carried out by Cobb et al. (2009) supports the assertion that the construct of self-determination is complex and multidimensional. The study showed some significant outcomes of self-determination interventions. For example, positive outcomes increase when instructional interventions include multiple component elements of self-determination. Results also showed a strong positive correlation with adult independent living outcomes. In contradiction to many other findings (e.g., Hagiwara et al., 2017; Seong et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2014), Cobb et al. (2009) found that self-determination interventions do not appear very effective in academic quality effects. However, like Burke et al. (2018), the authors

of this study criticize the methodological soundness of the studies reviewed. They posit that a more robust research design may produce different results.

Definition of Terms

Causal agent—Individuals

who make or cause things to happen in their lives, rather than others (or other things) making them act in certain ways.... the individual acts with an eye toward causing an effect to accomplish a specific end or to cause or create change. (Shogren, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2017, p. 258)

Individual education program—According to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), an IEP “outlines the services a student with disabilities will receive, where those services will be provided, and educational goals for the student” (n.d.).

Individuals with disabilities education act (idea)—The IDEA is a law ensuring that children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education to meet their needs. Congress passed the most recent amendments in December 2004, with final regulations published in August 2006 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, PL 105-117, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1401, 602, 30B; National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2009).

Intern teacher—Per the state of California, an intern teacher is an individual enrolled in an intern program, which is

a path to the preliminary teaching credential that allows an individual the ability to complete their teacher preparation coursework concurrent with their first year or two in a paid teaching position, upon completion of the required minimum 120-hour intern preservice preparation. Completion of an intern program results in the same preliminary teaching credential as is earned through a traditional teacher preparation program route. (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016)

Promotion of self-determination—The promotion of self-determination by teachers includes instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities for students to practice those skills.

Self-determination— “Acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24).

Self-determined—Individuals who “act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life” (Shogren, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2017, p. 258).

Self-determination component elements—Several component elements of self-determination, also called self-determination are used throughout the field of study of self-determination among students who have an IEP (Test, Karvonen, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2000). The component elements, listed below, are significant at this level of research because they motivate instructional choices when promoting self-determination for students. Instructional choices may include the strategies, methods, materials, and supports that facilitate educators to teach self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, & Stancliffe, 2003). Component elements are often used to describe self-determination (Wehmeyer, Abery, et al., 2003). Seven of the most commonly referenced self-determination component elements include the following: (1) choice-making, (2) decision-making, (3) goal-setting and attainment, (4) problem-solving, (5) self-regulation, (6) self-advocacy, and (7) self-awareness (Algozzine, Browder,

Karvonen, Test, & Wood, 2001; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Test et al., 2000; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Wehmeyer & Field, 2007; Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004). Table 1 depicts the seven component elements of self-determination and their accompanying operational (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).

Special education teacher candidate—Either an intern or student-teacher enrolled in a special education teacher preparation program who does not yet hold a teaching credential, but who is completing the requirements to earn a credential to teach special education.

Student-teacher—Refers to special education teacher candidates enrolled in a traditional credentialing and master's degree program in which a student teaching experience fulfills a requirement toward completion of both the credential and the degree. A student-teacher is unpaid, hosted by a school site, and supervised by a university/college appointed faculty member.

Students who have an IEP—Legally defined under IDEA as when a student is clinically diagnosed with one or more of the disabilities classified in IDEA who require special education services to learn because of the disability (IDEA, 2004).

Summary

Students who have an IEP typically experience lower in-school and adult outcomes than their typically developing peers. The promotion of self-determination is one avenue that has the potential to reduce the disparities between these two groups. Numerous studies show that educators understand and value the potential benefits of building self-determination among students. However, educators report feeling under-prepared to apply the practice of promoting self-determination. To date, limited research has been conducted that aims to understand the preservice training teachers receive on the promotion of self-determination for their students. Training and preparation are two of the limiting variables that affect teacher practices of self-determination enhancement for students. The present study aims to better understand the perspectives of preservice special education teachers' understanding and experiences with the promotion of self-determination. A mixed-methods approach was employed. The subsequent chapter provides a detailed description of the study methods.

CHAPTER II: METHODS

Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a mixed-methods research design. Mixed methods research is valuable when both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection address the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In the case of this study, multiple perspectives of the research problem aimed to address the research questions. A mixed-methods design allowed for a more comprehensive examination than a single method design (Andrew & Halcomb, 2012). Qualitative methods encompass useful data collection tools during the exploration of an issue (Stake, 1995), which fits the purposes of this study. Qualitative data collection tools used in the present study include interviews, observations, and document reviews. Quantitative methods provide data collection tools that allow for close-ended data comparison (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Quantitative data collection tools used in the present study include a brief survey during each of two interviews and frequency counts of recurring themes during the coding of interviews and observations.

Role of the Researcher/Positionality

The researcher began her career in special education as a classroom teacher. The researcher holds the belief that students with disabilities have the right to become self-determined to the maximum extent possible, as one avenue for students who have an IEP to experience improved outcomes in adulthood. Furthermore, the researcher believes that many teacher preparation programs can improve their preparation of pre-service teachers to promote self-determination among their students. Finally, the researcher believes that the perspectives and voices of the individuals who are preparing to become credentialed special education teachers deserve their place in the special education literature and beyond.

Even though the researcher acknowledges strong beliefs about students who have an IEP, teacher preparation, and the promotion of self-determination, she used a reflexive research process to mitigate as much researcher bias as possible. As suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), the researcher used a “reflexive data generation process” (p. 115) to reflect on her role and her impact on the study. Reflection memos happened bi-weekly during data collection and analysis using a list of questions recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The researcher also created open-ended, non-evaluative questions in the interview protocols that were piloted and reviewed by colleagues, mentors, and friends within and outside of the field of special education.

Additionally, the researcher acknowledges the power she holds as an investigator. The researcher is a teaching assistant at the university where the sampling took place. As a teaching assistant, the researcher graded the work of some of the study participants. This power dynamic may have impacted the interview answers and observation behavior of the participants. The researcher attempted to mitigate power-dynamic influences by providing detailed recruitment and consent materials. The researcher reviewed the information in the consent form before each interview and observation.

Validity/Trustworthiness

Several strategies addressed validity and trustworthiness of the data in this study. One strategy employed was professional, verbatim transcriptions of interviews. Video recordings of

each observation validate the accuracy of field notes (Creswell, 2012). The use of detailed journaling and field notes described the observation context. The connection between this empirical study, the literature review, and the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 provide theoretical validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data triangulation increased the validity of the study by using multiple points of data collection at multiple times (e.g., observations, interviews, and document review) (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, the first observation was completed before the first interview to reduce the potential response and social desirability bias (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Participants

A purposeful sampling of students and faculty occurred at a local California Bay Area university (Maxwell, 2013). The intention of the sampling procedures was based on location and personal connections of the researcher. Although the study was open to both intern and student teachers from the university enrolled in the mild-moderate support needs special education program, all participants identified as intern teachers. Intern teachers hold an “intern credential” from the state of California, complete their fieldwork in a paid position as the primary teacher, and are simultaneously attending a teacher training program. In other words, these intern teachers are learning on the job and are not yet fully-qualified teachers. Student teachers, on the other hand, complete their fieldwork in an unpaid position under the mentorship of a credentialed special education teacher. During this study, participants were actively teaching students who have an IEP during the Fall 2019 semester. The mild-moderate support needs program was selected for this study because this disability classification consists of the largest percentage of students who have an IEP enrolled in K-12 education (McFarland et al., 2019).

Table 5 displays additional participant information.

An additional set of participants included three faculty at the participating university. The faculty participants included the interim coordinator of the mild-moderate support needs program, the instructor of the transition planning course, and the instructor of the student teaching workshop. The purpose of the inclusion of these participants was to create a robust understanding of how promoting self-determination is valued and encouraged within the mild-moderate support needs program at the participating university.

Procedures

After review and approval from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at both UC Berkeley and SFSU, recruitment of participants began. By October 1, 2019, documents were collected and analyzed. Interviews of faculty happened simultaneously with document collection and were complete by October 1, 2019. The first two rounds of participant observation began on October 1, 2019 and were completed by October 31, 2019. The first of two rounds of interviews occurred within two weeks following the first observation, between October 1, 2019 and November 14, 2019. The second observation was carried out 4-6 weeks after the first observation and was completed by December 15, 2019. Following the second observation, the second interview took place within two weeks and was completed by December 20, 2019. Data analysis began after the first round of data were collected and continued until the data analysis was complete. Figure 6. Graphic depiction of data collection timeline illustrates a graphic depiction of the timeline for data collection. The following section provides a detailed description of the procedures.

Table 5

Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Type of fieldwork		
Intern teacher	8	100.0
Previously held roles in education		
General education teacher	1	40.0
Special education teacher	3	5.0
Paraprofessional	5	5.0
Post-secondary education	1	5.0
Other		
Years of experience in special education		
0-1	2	12.5
2-4 years	4	50.0
5-8 years	2	37.5
Grade levels		
Elementary school	3	37.5
Middle school	2	25.0
High school	2	25.0
Post-secondary	1	12.5
Type of school		
Public	6	75.0
Public charter	2	25.0
School setting		
Urban	3	37.5
Suburban	5	62.5
School SES		
Low income	5	62.5
Middle income	3	37.5
Caseload Size		
13-16	3	
20-25	4	
35	1	
Disability categories serviced		
Autism	7	23.3
Deafness	2	6.7
Emotional disturbance (ED)	2	6.7
Hearing impairment	1	3.3
Intellectual disability (ID)	2	6.7
Other health impairment (OHI)	4	13.3
Specific learning disability (SLD)	7	23.3
Speech or language impairment (SLI)	4	13.3
Traumatic brain injury (TBI)	1	3.3
Primary curricular responsibilities		
Academic	7	
Social skills	5	
Functional life skills/Community-based skills	1	
Vocational/Transition	1	
Primary instructional setting		
Regular class	1	12.5
Separate class	2	25.0
Resource room	5	62.5

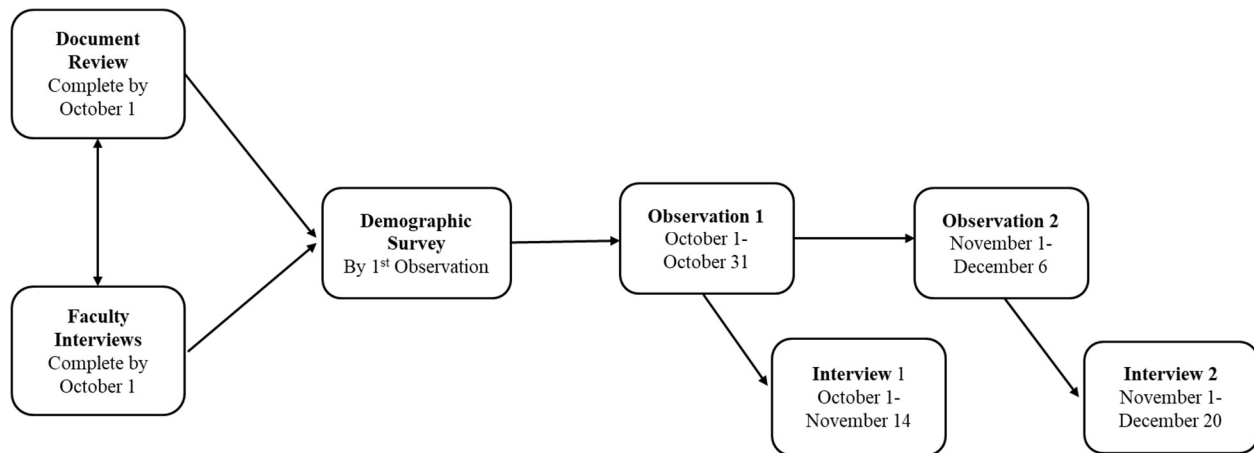


Figure 6. Graphic depiction of data collection timeline.

Recruitment

The researcher sent a recruitment flyer to the faculty at the university who teach students who meet the inclusion criteria for the study. Decisions about participation in the study remained confidential to those who sent recruitment information to potential participants. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, participants completed a consent form using Qualtrics software, which is also where the forms are stored. Each participant received a copy of the signed consent form. A total of eight graduate students agreed to participate in the study. All participants completed the consent form, the demographic survey, two observations, and two interviews.

Data Collection

Data collection included a demographic survey, document review, interviews with brief surveys, and observations. The use of multiple data collection methods aimed to add triangulation to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The examination of multiple data sources included analysis of overlapping themes and, thereby, the creation of validity within the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The following section describes data collection procedures and materials.

Demographic Survey

Each participant completed a demographic survey using the UC Berkeley Qualtrics software. Completing the survey was above and beyond the requirements of the participants' fieldwork experience. Therefore, each participant received a \$5 gift card to a retailer upon completion of the survey as a thank-you for the extra time they devoted to the study.

The three-part survey includes questions about participant experience in the field of education and participants' current teaching placement. The National Survey of Teachers' Promotion of Self-Determination and Student-Directed Learning (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000) provided a guideline for the creation of the survey. Adaptations of the survey include the deletion of questions about self-determination and personal information. Respondents to the original survey were credentialed teachers; therefore, the survey used in this study underwent

revisions to become appropriate for preservice teachers. Appendix A is a complete copy of the demographic survey.

Document Review

Document collection and analysis occurred before the start of interviews and observations during the summer of 2019. The document review aimed to add to the understanding of the formal instruction concerning self-determination that participants received in advance of their fieldwork (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Document analysis aimed to address the first and central question of the study: What are special education teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students with disabilities? One associated interview question was included in each of the two interviews to provide a comparison to the documents. Interview document analysis. Interview one included the question and probes, "Did you have a school or university-based mentor that encouraged you to promote self-determination with your students? What was their role? How did they encourage you?" Interview two included the question, "Regarding promoting self-determination for your students, has anything from your teacher preparation experience been useful?"

The university in the study provided the following for document review and analysis: (a) the student teaching handbook, (b) course syllabus from the required transition planning course, and (c) the mild-moderate support needs program handbook. The student teaching handbook provided an understanding of the requirements of the fieldwork of the participants in the present study, including any requirements to promote self-determination. The transition course was chosen to reflect previous literature and policy, indicating a focus on the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP at the time of transition planning (Hagiwara et al., 2017). The program handbook provided information on the overall program requirements for participants during their preservice teacher education training.

Observations

Observations occurred twice during the study. Two observation points provided a measure of temporal stability (Huber, 1985), or consistency, in the teaching practices of each participant. A larger number of observations may have shown a more exact approximation of the promotion of self-determination in each classroom; however, previous observational data in classroom settings show that most teaching practices are employed consistently (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Santoro, 2010).

The collection of direct observations allowed for an examination of the promotion of self-determination by participants among students who have an IEP. The observations, unlike the interviews, allowed the researcher to study behavior in a classroom setting (Creswell, 2012). Observed behaviors include instruction in the component elements, along with the opportunity for students to practice them (Agran & Hughes, 2008). The observations address the following two research sub-questions: How frequently do special education teacher candidates promote self-determination for students who have an IEP in a school setting, including instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities to practice self-determination skills? Does alignment exist between the promotion of self-determination in classroom settings and the rated importance of each self-determination skill reported by special education teacher candidates?

The first observation collection period occurred between October 1, 2019, and November 10, 2019. The second observation occurred four-six weeks after the first observation and was

completed by December 6, 2019. Observations lasted an average of thirty minutes. All observations occurred in Resource Specialist Program (RSP) settings (a program that provides instruction, materials, and support services to students with identified disabilities assigned to a general classroom for more than 50% of their school day). Participants received information about the purposes of the study before each observation. The researcher reviewed the consent form with each participant before each observation. Observations were video recorded either by the participant or by the researcher.

The credential program at the participating university requires fieldwork to complete the program. However, completing additional observations for this research project is above and beyond the requirements of the fieldwork. Therefore, each participant received a \$20 gift card to a retailer of choice for each observation completed as a thank-you for the extra time devoted to the study. The total amount of gift cards available for participation in the observations was \$40.

Interviews

Participants took part in two individual, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990). An individual, semi-structured interview aimed to collect detailed information about participant opinions in a more personal way than survey measures (Seidman, 2006). A general interview guide approach allowed the researcher to pre-structure the interviews for consistency and allowed the interview to shift in response to the interviewee (Creswell, 2012). The theoretical framework from SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), a functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), Casual Agency Theory (Wehmeyer & Mithaug, 2006), and the Ecological Theory of Self-Determination (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003) guided the development of the interview questions. The National Survey of Teachers' Promotion of Self-Determination and Student-Directed Learning (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000) also influenced the creation of the interview questions. With participant permission, all interviews were audio-recorded.

The interview utilized open-ended questions to encourage participants to respond freely and openly (Spradley, 1979). Each interview included the same questions to limit interviewer effects and reduce the need for judgment on the part of the interviewer (Patton, 1990). Patton's (1990) and Spradley's (1979) recommendations guided the type of questions asked. For example, experience and behavior questions aimed to elicit a response about participant activities concerning the promotion of self-determination. Opinion and value questions attempted to garner responses about participant ratings of importance concerning self-determination. Opinion and value questions also aimed to explore participant beliefs about their teaching practices and about the potential of enhancing self-determination for students who have an IEP. Knowledge questions aimed to draw on participant understanding of the construct of self-determination (Patton, 1990).

The sequence of the type of questions also varied to encourage participant engagement, quick rapport building between the interviewer and the interviewee, and to solicit detailed and honest answers (Patton, 1990; Spradley, 1979). For example, interviews began with low-stakes questions, such as "Please briefly describe your current teaching placement (grade levels, disability categories, demographics)" and "Please describe your teaching philosophy and style." The limitation of fact-based questions attempted to keep participants interested and engaged. Fact-based questions, such as "please define self-determination in your own words," were followed with a survey that defined the keywords from the question. The end of the interview included potentially controversial questions to allow time to build trust and rapport throughout the interview. Examples of these questions include, "Do you think there is anything that can limit

someone from becoming self-determined in adulthood?’ and “Do you think the views you hold of your students influence your desire to teach self-determination skill?” (1979).

A limitation of 30 minutes intended to minimize additional stress and burnout experienced by many special education teachers (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014), mainly related to the demands on their time and resources (Adera & Bullock, 2010). Also, a 30-minute interview length attempted to decrease interviewer fatigue (Bolderston, 2012). The first interview occurred within the two weeks following the first observation, between October 1, 2019, and November 14, 2019. The second interview occurred within two weeks of the second observation and was completed by December 20, 2019. The interviews took place at the participant’s place of preference or via the video conferencing platform Zoom. Each interview was recorded by the researcher.

Each participant received a \$20 gift card to a retailer for participation in each interview, resulting in a total of \$40. The interviews are above and beyond the required work of an intern-teacher, so a small thank-you gift was appropriate. Participants received a review of the consent form before each interview.

Interview Question Piloting and Revision Process

As recommended by Yin (2003), pilot testing occurred before the finalization of the interview protocols. person interviews, and the use of Qualtrics software. In the end, Qualtrics software provided the

Table 6 lists the initially proposed interview questions for the first student/intern teacher interview. Below is a description of the iterative piloting and revising process completed before the start of data collection.

The original series of development and testing of the first student/intern teacher interview protocol took place with three people who did not meet the inclusion criteria for the study. These participants gave general feedback on the protocol. One of the goals of piloting was to test the average length of the interviews and to limit the final time to no more than 30 minutes. Modification to the order of the questions occurred during the revision process, as well.

Additionally, some of the original questions were too long and benefitted from revisions for conciseness and focus. Example questions included, “Do you think there is anything that can limit someone from becoming self-determined in adulthood?” and “Do you think this is true for everyone? Is there anyone for whom this is not true? Who? What makes you think that?” was described as too long of a line of questioning that resulted in little to no elaboration as the questioning continued. Therefore, this question became, “Do you think there is anything that can limit someone from becoming self-determined in adulthood? What makes you think that?”

Following the first iteration of interview question testing and development, three people who were similar to the intended participant group for the study participated in interviews. The participants were special education credential candidates enrolled in a different local California Bay Area university who were intern/student teaching at the time. The practice interview with this group also revealed changes to improve the protocol. For example, during this phase of testing, interviewees were not able to clearly and confidently define self-determination.

Therefore, the Component Elements of Self-Determination Questionnaire was created (see Appendix B). The questionnaire is based on the survey used by Wehmeyer et al. (2000) in a National Survey of Teachers’ Promotion of Self-Determination and Student-Directed Learning. The multiple-choice answers are the same for each question, although they are only displayed in question one to provide an example for this paper. The pilot interviews also tested a system of distribution for the questionnaire, such as using a Word document via email, by paper for in-person interviews, and the use of Qualtrics software. In the end, Qualtrics software provided the

Table 6

Initial Interview Questions: Student/Intern Teacher Participants Interview 1

Question Number	Question
1	Please describe your student teaching placement (probe for grade level(s), ages, demographics, involvement in IEPs, subjects, level of responsibility).
2	In your own words, how would you define self-determination for students with disabilities? (Probe for component elements of SD and their meanings)
3	What from your teacher preparation experience has been useful to you for learning about promoting self-determination with students? (Probe for ways in which their experiences with coursework, fieldwork/internship, and their cooperating teacher/mentor teacher in student teaching have influenced their approach to teaching)
4	Do you have any experience promoting self-determination for students with disabilities? (Probe for when and where this happened and where the student teaching learned about the topic).
5	How important is promoting self-determination skills for the students you will be teaching in your student teaching placement?
6	Can you give me some examples of how you can teach students self-determination skills?
7	Which self-determination skills do you think are most important for your students to learn? (Probe with a list of self-determination component elements).
8	How do you think you may want to support students in learning self-determination skills in your placement? Do you have any hopes or goals for implementing self-determination while you are student teaching?
9	What barriers do you think you might come up against when promoting self-determination for your students?
10	What supports do you think you may need to carry out your goals for teaching self-determination to your students?
11	How do you think your own experiences learning self-determination skills impact the ways you promote self-determination for your students?

Table 7

Interview Protocol Pilot Testing Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Job Title
Jose		Engineer
Courtney		Special Education Teacher
Tyler		Special Education Administrator
Desmond		Special Education Intern Teacher
Serena		Special Education Intern Teacher
Lucas		Special Education Intern Teacher

most user-friendly platform, the fastest way to distribute the questionnaire during the interview, and the most secure form of data collection.

Similar to the first iteration of question testing, some of the original questions were too similar to each other. For example, “do teachers have the opportunity to teach self-determination skills?” and “do teachers provide opportunities for practicing self-determination skills?” did not garner differences in response. Although the literature about the promotion of self-determination for students with disabilities is separated into learning and practicing skills, this was a not practical or useful distinction during interview piloting.

Table shows the final list of interview questions for interview one.

The development of the second set of interview questions followed the same process as interview one. The second interview addressed the following research sub-questions: (a) How do special education teacher candidates define self-determination for students with disabilities? (b) What level of importance do special education teacher candidates place on promoting self-determination? (c) What barriers do special education teacher candidates perceive that inhibit them from promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placement? (d) What supports do special education teacher candidates perceive as necessary for promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placements?

Additionally, information assembled from the first round of interviews guided the revision of the second interview protocol. The Qualtrics survey used during the first round of interviews was successful in providing a frame to participants for the term self-determination. Therefore, participants also completed a brief Qualtrics survey during interview two about their views of their current frequency and desired frequency of self-determination instruction. A revised definition accompanied each skill in the survey. The survey also included a question in which participants ranked the order of importance of each self-determination skill. Appendix C displays the questionnaire. The multiple-choice answers are the same for each question, although they are only displayed in question one for the purposes of this paper.

Finally, the first round of interviewing went beyond the allotted thirty minute timeframe during all interviews. Revisions for redundancy and length to the second interview protocol aimed to ensure a limit of thirty minutes. Table 9 lists the final questions for interview two.

Faculty interview protocol development. A similar process was used to develop the teacher credential candidate interview protocols guided the development of the faculty interview protocol. The purpose of the faculty interviews was to add to the information gleaned from the document analysis. Interview questions aimed to add to the understanding of the perceived importance of and experience with the promotion of self-determination from the perspective of relevant faculty. Table 8 shows the final faculty interview questions.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedures for this study followed Creswell's (2012) recommended coding process for the qualitative data set. Although the process includes six linear steps, qualitative data analysis is an interactive and iterative progression that makes the process dynamic and not static. Figure 7. A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research. Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: planning. Conducting and Evaluating.* represents the coding process used in the analysis of the qualitative data for the present study (Creswell, 2012). Using the qualitative statistical software, MAXQDA, the researcher analyzed the transcriptions of interviews and of video observations. The researcher also used MAXQDA software to organize the data from the documents and field notes. The survey data collected during interviews, as well as the demographic information, went through analysis in Qualtrics software and Microsoft Excel.

Table 8

Final Interview Questions: Student/Intern Teacher Participants Interview 1

Number	Question
1	To start, please tell me about yourself as a special education teacher.
1a	Please briefly describe your current teaching placement (grade levels, disability categories, demographics).
1b	Please describe your teaching philosophy and style.
2	In your own words, please define self-determination for students with disabilities means to you.
2a	May need to define and describe self-determination for students with disabilities here. "choosing and enacting choices to control one's life to the maximum extent possible, based on knowing and valuing oneself, and in pursuit of one's own needs, interests, and values" (Campeau et al., 1993, p.2.)
2b	Expand on participant definition of self-determination.
3	Please take a few minutes to complete a questionnaire about the component elements of self-determination, or self-determination skills.
3a	Administer paper/Qualtrics copy of rating scales of component elements of self-determination).
3b	Please ask if you have any questions.
4	Do you believe educators have a role in teaching self-determination to their students?
4a	If yes, how can teachers influence the self-determination of their students?
4b	If no, who do you think has this role? Who is responsible for promoting self-determination among students with disabilities?
5	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think it is to teach students self-determination skills during their K-12 education?
5a	One being the least important, ten being most important.
5b	Please describe your reasoning.
6	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think self-determination skills are for your students in adulthood?
6a	One being the least important, ten being most important.
6b	Please describe your reasoning.
7	Do you think there is anything that can limit someone from becoming self-determined in adulthood?
7a	What makes you think that?
8	Do you have any experience teaching self-determination skills?
8a	(Probe for when and where this happened and where the student teaching learned about the topic).
8b	Will you give some examples of how self-determination skills can be taught?
9	Regarding promoting self-determination for your students, has anything from your teacher preparation experience been useful?
9a	Anything from your coursework?
9b	How about from your fieldwork/internship?
10	Research in special education shows that teachers often think self-determination is important but rarely give instruction in it. Why do you think that is?
11	What supports, if any, do teachers need to teach self-determination skills?
12	What barriers, if any, have you experienced when promoting self-determination for your students?
13	Is there anything you would like to add?

Table 9

Final Interview Questions: Student/Intern Teacher Participants Interview 2

Question Number	Question
1	When reflecting on your teaching this semester, how was your overall experience?
2	In the last interview, we talked about self-determination. Has your understanding of self-determination for students with disabilities changed throughout your fieldwork? If yes, how has it changed? How would you define self-determination now?
3	Let's look at a brief survey. Please tell me your thoughts as you complete the questions in the survey.
4	Did your fieldwork teaching experience influence how you think about self-determination for students with disabilities? If yes, how so? Can you describe some examples of moments that make you say that?
5	Did you have the opportunity to promote self-determination with your student(s)? If yes, what self-determination skills did you focus on?
6	Can you give me some examples of how you taught students self-determination skills? Were there specific students you did this with? Why those students?
7	Did you have a school or university-based mentor that encouraged you to promote self-determination with your students? What was their role? How did they encourage you? If no, why do you think that is?
8	Do you think the views you hold of your students influence your desire to teach self-determination skills? Are there differences among individual students?
9	What, if any, barriers did you experience when promoting self-determination for your students?
10	Have you experienced any supports that helped you teach self-determination to your students? What supports might you still need in the future?
11	Is there anything you would like to add?

Table 80

Final Interview Questions: Faculty

Number	Question
1	Please describe your role in the Department of Special Education at (university). What is your title? What are your primary responsibilities?
2	In your own words, please define self-determination for students with disabilities.
3	Do you believe educators have a role in teaching self-determination to their students? If yes, what role do you think they have? How can teachers influence the self-determination of their students? If no, who do you think has this role? Who is responsible for promoting self-determination among students with disabilities?
4	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think it is to teach students self-determination skills during their K-12 education? One being the least important, ten being most important. Please describe your reasoning.
5	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think it is that students have the chance to practice self-determination skills? Please describe your reasoning.
6	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think self-determination skills are for your students in adulthood? One being the least important, ten being most important. Please describe your reasoning.
7	On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think it is for (university) special education credential candidates to learn about the promotion of self-determination during their coursework? One being the least important, ten being most important. Please describe your reasoning.
8	The promotion of self-determination is a part of the required curriculum for students enrolled in the mild-moderate support needs Program. When was this included in (transition planning course number)? Why is it included?
9	What do you believe are the Special Education department's expectations for intern and student teachers to promote self-determination for students with disabilities in their field placements?
10	Are the expectations you just spoke about transmitted to intern and student teachers? If so, how? If not, why not?
11	What, if any, barriers do you expect intern and student teachers to come up against when promoting self-determination for students with disabilities that they are teaching?
12	What supports, if any, do you expect intern- and student-teachers to need when promoting self-determination for the students they are teaching? Do you have a role in providing these supports? If so, how?
13	Is there anything we have not talked about that you would like to add?

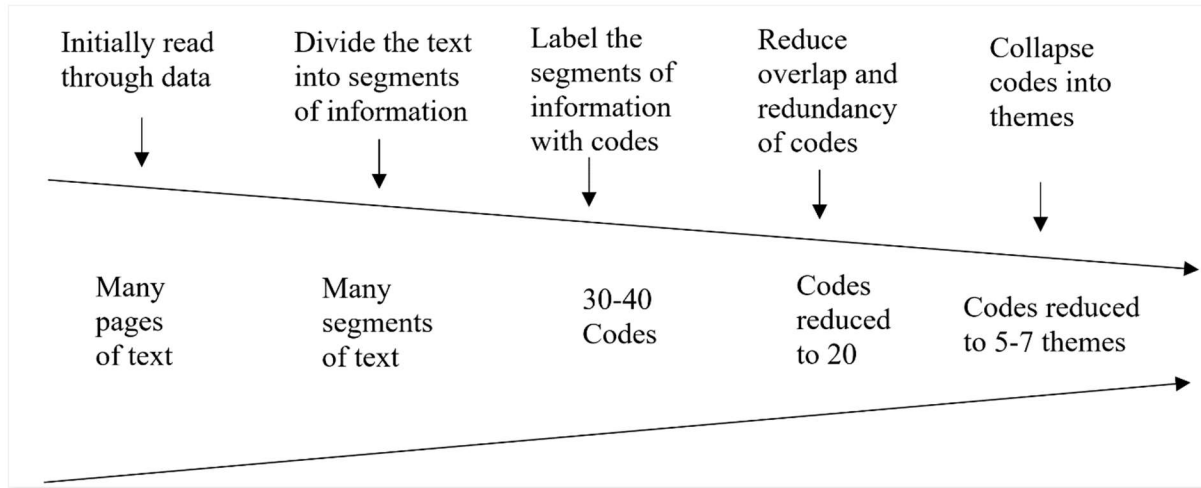


Figure 7. A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research. Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: planning. Conducting and Evaluating.*

Document Analysis

As recommended by Altheide and Schneider (2013), documents were analyzed using the following steps. The university participating in the study provided the documents. Next, the conceptual framework, literature review, and research questions of the present study informed the document analysis rubric. Table 91 illustrates the rubric. Next, the documents were coded for the key terms and constructs identified on the rubric. The rubric was completed for each document. Following examination of each document, the finalized rubrics were analyzed for applicability to the present study, as well as compared for similarities and differences. The results of the document analysis results provided a comparison to participant responses during interviews, namely the central research question for the study: What are special education teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP? The document analysis focused on the prior experiences and knowledge participants should have had exposure to before their participation in this study.

Interview Analysis

This study employed the recommended steps to qualitative data coding, as described by Creswell (2012). The researcher worked with an independent transcription company to transcribe all interviews verbatim and analyzed these transcriptions using MAXQDA software, coding for recurring themes using line-by-line analysis of the text as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Using a deductive method, and guided by the conceptual framework and pilot interviews, the researcher created a master list of descriptive codes before beginning data collection. The researcher completed an initial read of each transcript and then arranged text segments into the pre-determined first-order codes from the master list (Miles, Huberman, A.M., Huberman, M.A., & Huberman, M., 1994). Table 102 shows the master codebook for interviews.

During second-order coding, the researcher coded data in a Case-Level Meta-Matrix (Miles et al., 2014) to validate that the coded sections matched the definitions in the master codebook, evaluating the conceptual coherence. She also used this information to note emerging patterns of response and check the analysis plausibility. Frequency calculations of commonly used words and phrases were analyzed using MAXQDA software. The final themes and their subsequent subthemes presented in the results include: (a) definitions of self-determination, (b) perceptions of self-determination, (c) importance of self-determination, (d) supports, (e) barriers, and (f) frequency of self-determination instruction.

Additionally, the interviews included survey questions recorded on Berkeley's Qualtrics software. Likert scale survey questions were analyzed by collapsing categories into smaller subcategories. A description of collapsed categories is displayed in Table 113. Next, the averages for each subcategory were calculated. The researcher employed the use of pivot tables in Microsoft Excel to compare variables within and between interviews. For example, the average ranked importance of each component element of self-determination was analyzed comparing the responses from interview one to interview two. Additionally, the reported average current frequency of component element instruction was compared to the desired frequency of component element instruction.

Table 91

Document Analysis Rubric

Construct	Definition	Title of Document	
		Presence of Construct	Quotation from Document
Self-determination	“Acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24).		
Self-determined	Individuals who “act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life (Shogren et al., 2017, p. 258).		
Choice-making	the indication or communication of preference from among two or more options. Teaching choice-making skills involves teaching students to identify interests and preferences and to select an option based on those preferences and interests appropriately.		
Decision-making	a process of selecting or coming to a conclusion about which of a set of potential solutions is the best.		
Goal-setting	involves actions that enable a person to reach a specified preferred outcome.		
Problem-solving	the process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues		
Self-regulation	the human response system that enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses and to revise their strategies as necessary.		
Self-advocacy	the ability to assertively communicate or negotiate one’s interests, desires, needs, and rights.		
Self-awareness	comprehensive and reasonably accurate knowledge of one's strengths and limitations.		
Causal agent	Individuals “who make or cause things to happen in their lives, rather than others (or other things) making them act in certain ways.... the individual acts with an eye toward causing an effect to accomplish a specific end or to cause or create change” (Shogren, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2017, p. 258).		
Promotion of self-determination	The promotion of self-determination by teachers includes instruction in self-determination skills (see Table 2 for a list of self-determination skills) followed by opportunities for students to practice those skills.		

Table 10

Master Codebook for Interviews

Name of Code	Definition of Code
Self-determination Definition	Respondent provides information related to their understanding of the meaning of self-determination (“choosing and enacting choices to control one’s life to the maximum extent possible-based on knowing and valuing oneself, and in pursuit of one’s own needs, interests, and values” (Campeau et al., 1993, p.2.) <i>Choice, action, autonomy, competence, and relatedness</i> are considered keywords.
SD Component Skills	Respondent discusses or uses any of the 8 component elements of self-determination [(1) choice-making, (2) decision-making, (3) goal-setting and attainment, (4) problem-solving, (5) self-regulation/self-management, (6) self-advocacy and leadership skills, (7) self-awareness, and (8) self-efficacy].
Perception of SD	Respondent refers to their views, opinions, beliefs, and insights about how an individual is/becomes self-determined, the possibilities of teaching students with and without disabilities to become self-determined, and the circumstances that promote or limit a student from becoming self-determined.
Importance of SD	Respondent indicates their perception of the importance of promoting self-determination for students with disabilities, especially in their intern/student teaching placement.
Supports Needed for Promoting SD	Respondent refers to the structures, people, and information they perceive as necessary to reach their hopes and goals for promoting self-determination among the students they teach.
Barriers to Promoting SD	Respondent refers to the structures, people, and information they perceive that act as inhibitors to promoting self-determination among their students.

Table 113

Original and Collapsed Interview Survey Responses

Original Response	Collapsed Response
Frequency	
Daily	Frequently (1)
4-6 times a week	Frequently (1)
2-3 times a week	Occasionally (2)
Once a week	Rarely (3)
Never	Rarely (3)
Rank of importance (interview 1)	
1-4	Low (3)
5-7	Moderate (2)
8-10	High (1)
Rank of importance (interview 2)	
6-7	Low (3)
4-5	Moderate (2)
1-3	High (1)

Observation Analysis

To prevent the interpretive bias of a single researcher, the pilot phase of the present study included an establishment of an inter-observer agreement. The researcher and one additional observer scored observations before the start of the study. The observers reviewed five video recordings and each observer totaled the frequencies for each of the established seven component elements of self-determination delineated in the observation analysis rubric in Table 124. The video recordings used during piloting included prior student-teachers from the same university involved in the present study who have since graduated from the program. All recordings were used with permission from their source.

The observers compared all matching video clips that were recorded as the promotion of self-determination via instruction in or the opportunity to practice one of the component elements. The software program MAXQDA was used to record codes and timestamps. Conversations between the two observers led to an iterative process of coding and codebook generation until the observers reached 100% agreement, displayed in All rounds of observation coding and analysis considered each component element of self-determination one at a time. Each observation and observation transcript (observation one and observation two). Observation frequencies were then compared to the participant reported frequencies from the survey data collected in interview two.

Table . Pilot observations were conducted with one video recording until the observers reached 100% inter-observer agreement. The observers coded the final four recordings after reaching 100% agreement. Table 135 displays an example of the coding table used by the observers to establish inter-observer agreement. The inter-observer agreement calculated employed the following equation recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

$$\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

Table 124

Observation Frequency Analysis Rubric

Pseudonym:	Obs. Date:	Start:	End:	Total Time:
	Component Element of Self-Determination			
	Teach (yes/no)	Evidence (time)	Practice (yes/no)	Evidence (time)
Minute 1				
Minute 2				
Minute 3				
Minute 4				
Minute 5				
Minute 6				
Minute 7				
Minute 8				
Minute 9				
Minute 10				

Table 135

Example of Coding Table Used to Establish Interobserver Agreement

Timestamp	Code	Evidence	Coder	Date
0:17	Choice-making	“You can pick a card, pick any card you want.”	Coder 1	June 9, 2010
3:31	Choice-making	“Today, I need you to read this book. Would you like it at the beginning or end of class?”	Coder 1	June 9, 2010
12:23	Self-regulation	“I see you're having a difficult time focusing. What do you need to focus your mind on your work?”	Coder 1	June 9, 2010

Data analysis of observations took place as a list of frequencies that occurred in one-minute intervals. The generation of a master list of codes came from the literature review,

conceptual framework, and research questions (Miles, A.M. et al., 1994). The seven component elements that are identified as “teachable” (Wehmeyer & Shwartz, 1997) are defined in the codebook in All rounds of observation coding and analysis considered each component element of self-determination one at a time. Each observation and observation transcript (observation one and observation two). Observation frequencies were then compared to the participant reported frequencies from the survey data collected in interview two.

Table 6 and make up the content of the observation protocol. Observation data analysis consisted of (a) whether or not any of the component elements were taught during each one-minute interval, and (b) whether or not the participant provided a chance for students to practice any of the component elements during each one-minute interval. All rounds of observation coding and analysis considered each component element of self-determination one at a time. Each observation and observation transcript (observation one and observation two). Observation frequencies were then compared to the participant reported frequencies from the survey data collected in interview two.

Table 16

Observation Codebook

Choice-Making		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
The indication or communication of preference from among two or more options (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998); identification or preference and rejection of an option (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).	Teaching choice-making skills involves teaching students to identify interests and preferences and to select an option based on those preferences and interests appropriately; providing two or more choices/options; (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998)	Teachers allow the student to: identify awareness of preferences; identify that choices among preferences are possible; identify positive and negative aspects of choices; identify choices; selection of choices among options; identify the choice that more closely meets a goal (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).
Decision-Making		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
A process of selecting or coming to a conclusion about which of a set of potential solutions is the best (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).	Teaching decision-making skills involves teaching students to use problem-solving skills (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998)	Teachers allow the student to: assess situation demands; set goals, set standards; identify information to inform decisions; consider past solutions for new situations; generate new, creative solutions, consider options, choose the best option (Martin & Marshall, 1996).
Goal-Setting & Attainment		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
The process by which a goal is achieved; a goal is defined as the object or aim of an action, for example, to attain a specific standard of proficiency, usually within a specified time limit (Locke & Latham, 2002).	Teaching goal-setting and attainment skills involve teaching students to define and articulate a goal, identify current status concerning the goal, develop an action plan, and evaluate progress toward achieving the goal (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998)	Teachers allow the student to: develop a measurable, attainable goal and action plan, monitor goal attainment, redefine goals if needed (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).
Problem-Solving		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
A five-step process involving: (a) identifying and defining the problem, (b) listing possible solutions, (c) identifying the impact of each solution, (d) making a judgment about a preferred solution, and (e) evaluating the efficacy of the judgment (D'zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). A problem is defined as a specific situation or set of related situations to which a person must respond to function effectively in a given environment. A solution is defined as a response that alters the situation so that it is no longer problematic (D'zurilla & Goldfried, 1971).	Teaching problem-solving skills involves teaching students to identify and define a problem and to generate potential solutions; teaching students to evaluate possible solutions for negative and positive outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998); teaching students about tools and resources that can be used to learn about solutions; teaching a student to choose a solution; teaching a student to evaluate the problem after a solution is chosen and enacted on (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).	Teachers allow the student to: define the problem, discuss emotions associated with the problem, define alternative actions, consider consequences of actions, make a decision about the best alternative; role-play solution (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).

Self-Advocacy		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
Communicate or negotiate one's interests, desires, needs, and rights (Van Reusen, 1996).	Teaching self-advocacy and leadership skills involve teaching students about their basic rights and responsibilities (knowledge), how to use self-advocacy skills, and how to be effective team members (at an individual and system level) (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).	Teachers give the student the opportunity to: assertively state wants and needs; assertively state rights; determine needed supports; pursue needed supports; obtain and evaluate needed support; conduct own affairs (Martin & Marshall, 1996).
Self-Regulation		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
The human response system that enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses, and to revise their strategies as necessary (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).	Teaching self-regulation skills include teaching students to solve problems or employ self-management strategies (e.g., anger control); model self-regulation strategy; present self-monitoring tools (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998)	Teachers allow the student to: identify behavior to be self-monitored, identify a strategy to self-regulate behavior, role-play strategy; Identify and use self-monitoring tool (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007).
Self-Awareness		
Operational Definition	Teach	Practice
Comprehensive and reasonably accurate knowledge of one's strengths and limitations (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).	Teaching self-knowledge involves teaching students to identify common psychological and physical needs of people, recognize differences among people, and understand how one's actions influence others (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998)	The teacher allows the student to: identify needs and wants, identify interests; identify and understand strengths; identify and understand limitations; identifying values (Martin & Marshall, 1996).

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Document Review Results

The analysis of three key documents aimed to add to the understanding of the formal structures that address the promotion of self-determination within the mild moderate support needs program (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Document analysis aimed to address the first and central questions of the study, with a focus on the experiences of participants. Analysis of the student teaching handbook and the mild-moderate support needs handbook did not result in a representation of the constructs outlined in the document analysis rubric. However, the transition focused course syllabus mentions the term self-determination in seven instances. Additionally, two component elements appear as explicit instruction topics. Self-regulation appears once and self-advocacy appears three times. Three assigned readings out of 155 total assigned or recommended readings focus on self-determination.

Faculty Interview Results

The analysis of three faculty interviews aimed to add to the understanding of the expectations for the promotion of self-determination at the university level. The aim of the faculty interviews was similar to the intention of the document analysis. Results from the faculty interviews align with the results of the document review. The faculty members who lead the mild-moderate support needs program and the fieldwork program reported no emphasis on the promotion of self-determination at either the programmatic or fieldwork level. The instructor responsible for teaching the transition course placed a high value on the promotion of self-determination within the course. However, all faculty interview results showed a high level of importance placed on self-determination for students who have an IEP on a scale of 1-10, with ten being the most important and one being the least important. The importance rating questions including opportunities to receive instruction in and practice self-determination, as well as self-determination in adulthood. Faculty Member 3 commented that "...this is a real(ly) strong belief. Not just beliefs, it's there's empirical evidence that shows it [the importance of self-determination for students who have an IEP]." Faculty Member 2 noted that "so that's why I think it's a really high importance because it's a skill that they [students] need just to be able to get by in life. Students are headed to adulthood, no matter what we teach them."

$$\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

In addition to reporting a high level of importance, the faculty members also reported a belief that educators have a role in teaching self-determination. All three faculty members focused on skills students will need in adulthood as the premise for their strong beliefs about the promotion of self-determination during school.

Faculty Member 2 remarked that,
I think educators, in general, are really preparing students for post-secondary, even though they're maybe starting in elementary school and so...I think, trying to get students to understand how to take responsibility for their own learning and also how to take initiative. And I think for students with disabilities it's really important...

Faculty Member 3 asserted that she believes teachers must teach self-determination skills because

the students aren't going to make any progress. They'll be okay while they're in elementary schools, but they're not going to be successful when they have to move out of the school system into the adult service system and then it's just going to be a disaster if they can't self-advocate.

The third and fourth sub-questions aimed to address the central research question concerning participants' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP. Faculty were asked "What, if any, barriers do you expect intern and student teachers to come up against when promoting self-determination for students with disabilities that they are teaching?" In contrast, faculty were also asked "What supports, if any, do you expect intern- and student-teachers to need when promoting self-determination for the students they are teaching?"

Barriers

Similarly to current literature and the results of the credential candidate interviews, faculty participants described a mostly positive perspective for the positive benefits of enhancing student self-determination; however, faculty also believed there are a number of barriers intern and student teachers may face when promoting self-determination. For example, faculty members believe that intern and student teachers will likely experience resistance from their school communities. Faculty Member 2 commented,

I think if you want to spend too much time on instruction in something as seemingly unrelated to academics, then you get push back. So as long as you can link it, I guess, to academic tasks, then you're in better shape. But if you try and just do something that's considered maybe a soft skill or nonacademic skill, then you run into barriers there. I think teachers probably don't learn adequately how to do that.

Additionally, faculty members reflected on the high-intensity situations credential candidates experience. Faculty Member 2 observed that when she provides support for intern and student teachers during class at her university, most students come to her after a full day of teaching. They report feeling exhausted and overwhelmed trying to tackle the daily rigors of their jobs. Faculty Member 2 reflected,

I think that when I work with the credential support class, a lot of times they'll come in after having worked a full day...they're struggling against not knowing how to manage a classroom or manage some of the more intensive behaviors that they see in their day. They have no experience planning curriculum or just juggling the day in general. A lot of them struggle with dealing with paraprofessionals that are not properly trained... It's unfortunate, but sometimes with just the day to day operations other interventions get brushed to the back table, you know?

Supports

Above and beyond all other factors that may contribute to teacher promotion of self-determination, mentoring was the most significant support faculty participants identified. Faculty Member 3 remarked, "I think we need more mentors, and not just a supervisor that comes in and observes them once or twice. Because I did that for a while. I did supervision with state when they had the internship program... we'd go just two times and it wasn't enough." As part of

mentoring, Faculty Member 1 believed that learning to promote self-determination means observing others modeling strategies and interventions. She commented that, “I think they need to see it. A lot of them probably know what it is, understand it on some level, learn enough about it sort of theoretically, but they need examples of what it looks like in teaching practice to really wrap their head around having to do it.” Faculty Member 2 also commented on mentoring. “Honestly, I think a lot of this stuff is structural. Like I said, it's partly the working conditions. It's partly just the limitations of our program in general. But if we have better mentor teachers out in the field that we had stronger relationships with, that would help.”

Overall, the faculty members in the present study reported a high level of importance for student self-determination enhancement. They believe teachers are responsible for promoting self-determination skills and they think that credential candidates should learn to do so during their teacher preparation program training. However, the transition class was the only course identified as having self-determination integrated into the content. Due to competing priorities, the high-stress levels of special education credential candidates, and the California Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs), the university involved in this study does not emphasize self-determination in course or field work. Comparably to the credential candidate participant reports, faculty beliefs about the value and importance of self-determination are disconnected from the reality of application of the construct within the mild moderate support needs program.

Special Education Credential Candidate Results: Interviews

Perceptions

The exploration of participant perceptions about self-determination aimed to address the central research question for the present study: What are special education teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP? This exploration included perceptions about the meaning of self-determination and who, if anyone, is responsible for teaching self-determination. Additionally, participant views on possible limitations for becoming self-determined in adulthood were examined.

Definitions

The first sub-question asks: How do special education teacher candidates define self-determination for students who have an IEP? Participants provided a definition of self-determination in their own words. All eight participants defined self-determination in similar ways to the definitions commonly found in the relevant literature, such as the definitions in Table 3. However, six out of eight participants reported unfamiliarity with the term self-determination. For example, Muriel noted that “I haven't heard that term so much in the context of my education and programming.” In the second interview, Evelyn pointed out that “it just wasn't really on my radar and it wasn't really something I've been thinking about it.” Table 147 shows a list of the most frequently mentioned words used by participants to define self-determination in their own words for students who have an IEP.

Despite the uncertainty of many participants, commonalities emerged among participant definitions of self-determination. **Error! Reference source not found.** displays the top 10 most frequently used words by the percentage of use. The words included on the frequency list were part of at least half of all participants' responses. Ashley described her understanding of self-

determination as similar to “ownership.” Patrick stated his definition of self-determination as “I see it as a lot of self-

Table 147

Frequency of Words Used to Define Self-Determination

Key Words	N
self	330
own	71
choice	36
advocacy	27
determined	24
decisions	21
advocate	19
focus	16
choose	14
world	12
focused	8
responsibility	6
individual	5
motivation	5
determine	4
tools	4

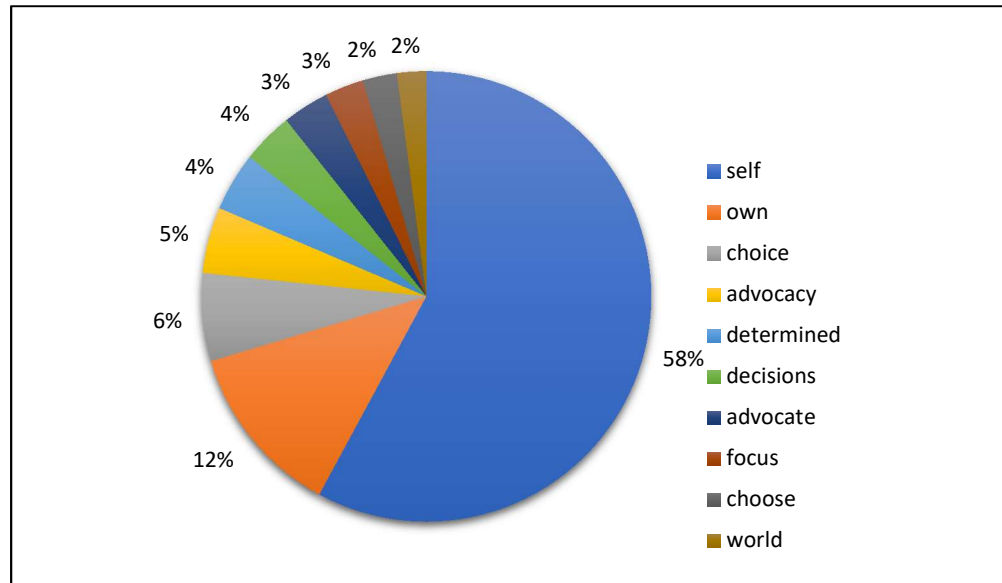


Figure 8. Percentages of top ten most frequently used words to define self-determination.

advocacy ...self-autonomy and making their own decisions and their own choices.” Common themes in the reported definitions included students asserting some control over their environments, having causal agency, and described as a dispositional, innate characteristic.

During interview two, participants responded to the question, “has your understanding of self-determination for students with disabilities changed over the course of your fieldwork at all?” Although the participants described similar definitions from interview one to interview two,

they emphasized their consideration of individuals more strongly in the second interview. Ashley noted, “if anything, it's taught me how much more important it is, especially when trying to work with a student who presents more challenging behaviors.” Beth reflected on her changing perspective throughout her semester of teaching.

I think, in a lot of ways, yes. I think specifically for my ELL learners, I think recognizing how big of a culture shock it is to not only learn a new language... just trying to be more aware and understanding that some of my students lack the confidence to speak up in class because of a language barrier, not because they don't understand.

Responsibility for Promoting Self-Determination

When asked about who should be responsible for teaching self-determination, participants believed that family has the most substantial impact potential. However, all participants acknowledged that most of their students need to learn non-academic skills at school, as well. They expressed beliefs that teachers have an essential and unique role in student lives and that self-determination enhancement is also the responsibility of the teacher. Muriel remarked that

I think teachers have a role in teaching everything, anything, and everything. And I think a student's self-determination is only going to be as good as the input from the teacher, as the role modeling from the teacher, as the parent concern, and in some cases, the actual love from the teacher.”

Patrick was firm in his belief that “... we have an obligation to introduce self-determination and to work on it opportunistically.”

Participants remarked that they believe all teachers should provide instruction for self-determination and that special educators have a greater responsibility than general education teachers. Gloria commented that

I think, and I don't know if this is right, but I feel like me as a special education teacher play a bigger role in those things versus I think the general education teacher focuses more on the academic concepts.

Beth expressed a similar perspective to Gloria.

I think for us, special education is part of the job, right? Because we have behavior class and we have to teach self-management and self-regulation....I think general education teachers still do it, but I don't think they have enough time in their lesson because they have so many students.

Limitations to Becoming Self-Determined

Participants described three main variables that may limit an individual from realizing their fullest potential for becoming self-determined. The first is a lack of opportunity for students to observe others displaying causal agency. Nora commented that “if you didn't have the opportunity, if you weren't exposed to people who modeled that [self-determination/autonomy/causal agency] to you, you might not have that [self-determination/autonomy/causal agency].” On the other hand, Ashley described a scenario in which students are exposed to self-determined adults, but never see a productive struggle.

If you have models who are extremely successful, but you've never seen them have any challenges or they don't talk about their challenges, then you might not develop that sort of

self-awareness and that resiliency and just kind of knowing that everyone has strengths and weaknesses.

Another limitation was the absence of opportunities for students to practice the component elements of self-determination. A lack of student application was often associated with the promotion of learned helplessness on the part of the adults in a student's life. Beth was honest in saying,

I think not practicing those skills early on, and I think that, and I was definitely guilty of this last year, is kind of babying students and being like, "Oh, I understand what you're saying, and I understand what you need, so I'm just going to do it for you."

Nora made a similar remark:

I think sometimes parents can hold a student back on self-determination by making them feel as though they are special needs rather than you need to do your best to fit into what we call this umbrella of society. Everybody is special, but I think in order to not be labeled in a bad way, my goal is to try to have... the students... be as accountable as possible with our societal structure either way.

Muriel described the limitations she experiences within family structures for her students.

Just not given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. Like when the parents are making the decisions for them [the student] and not letting the kid speak and not teaching the kid, like pushing the kid to get outside that comfort zone and say, 'I need you to say something.' That, and I think like also by example, by modeling these skills to them. If they don't see them [self-determination skills], then I don't know how much of it they can get. How much they can develop.

Finally, innate, individual disposition was described as a possible limitation. A number of participants believe that self-determination is something one is "born with" and that, as Evelyn put it, "I feel like before you come to us, it's [individual potential for self-determination] determined." In addition, she said that "some of my students that do have some self-determination. Maybe you could boost it by giving them some information or some tips. But to someone who has none, I don't know." Beth expressed a similar sentiment.

I think sometimes your view of yourself can kind of become crystallized. So if your ... view of yourself is as unsuccessful or as purely successful without the need for a struggle going into adulthood, that's kind of how you approach it and you might not see yourself as having that self-determination or the ability to self-determine what your path is.

Importance

The second sub-question asks: What level of importance do special education teacher candidates place on promoting self-determination? Participants rated their perceived importance of instruction in self-determination, self-determination in adulthood, and the importance of each of the component elements of self-determination. Overall, participants rated the promotion of self-determination at a high level. This was true for the importance of self-determination instruction during K-12 education, as well as in adulthood. Beth commented that

I think that some of those things we take for granted which come naturally to us, 'Oh, he'll naturally just...get it one day.' But I think it [self-determination] should be explicitly taught, and modeled, and embedded in your curriculum. I think it's very important.

Ashley, who teaches at a low-income school, commented that

because for my students, some of them are from low SES backgrounds, so...parents work maybe three or four part-time jobs. When they go home, they're taking care of their younger siblings, and so it sometimes really is up to the teacher.

Similar to the faculty responses, all participants placed emphasis on self-determination in adulthood. Nora commented that “it's just that foundational piece to make sure that you can go through life and manage and be successful.” Patrick related self-determination in adulthood to typical adult tasks, such as filing taxes and cleaning, without direction from someone else. Doris believes that “without understanding who they are [students] and being able to make their own choices and their own decisions...all of that will have an effect on their entire path through their life.” Muriel reflected on her own experience when she started college and remarked, “I think that the older you get, the more impactful it gets not having the skills [self-determination], not being able to make a choice for yourself to be assertive, to advocate.”

Importance of Component Elements

In addition to describing an overall importance rating of self-determination for students who have an IEP, participants ranked the importance of seven component elements of self-determination. Participants were asked to rank the importance of the component elements during each interview in two different formats. Interview one required participants to rank the component elements individually on a scale of one to 10, one being the lowest and 10 being the highest ranking. Interview two required participants to rank the component elements by order of importance from one to seven, one being the most important and seven being the least important. The scale rankings were collapsed into a scale of one to three. One represents the lowest level of importance and three represents the highest level of importance. All component elements received a ranking of moderate (1.1-2) to high (2.1-3). Figure displays the average component element importance rankings.

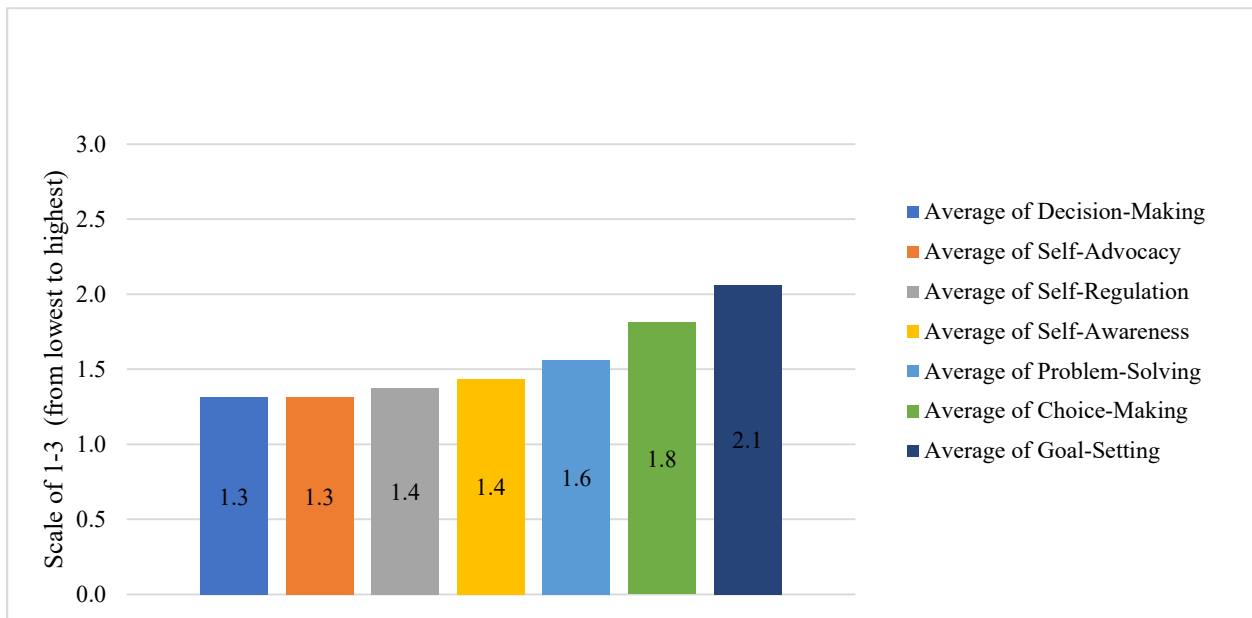


Figure 9. Average ranked importance of component elements of self-determination, calculated from interview one and interview two.

The average importance rankings of the component elements increased between the first and second interviews. Goal-setting and choice-making were closely ranked during interview one. Choice-making initially received the highest importance rank. However, average goal-setting importance received the largest increase, from 1.4 (moderate) to 2.8 (high) and became the most important item to participants in interview 2. Except for choice-making and goal-setting, all other component elements remained in the same order of importance. Figure 80 displays a comparison of the average component element importance rankings between the two interviews.

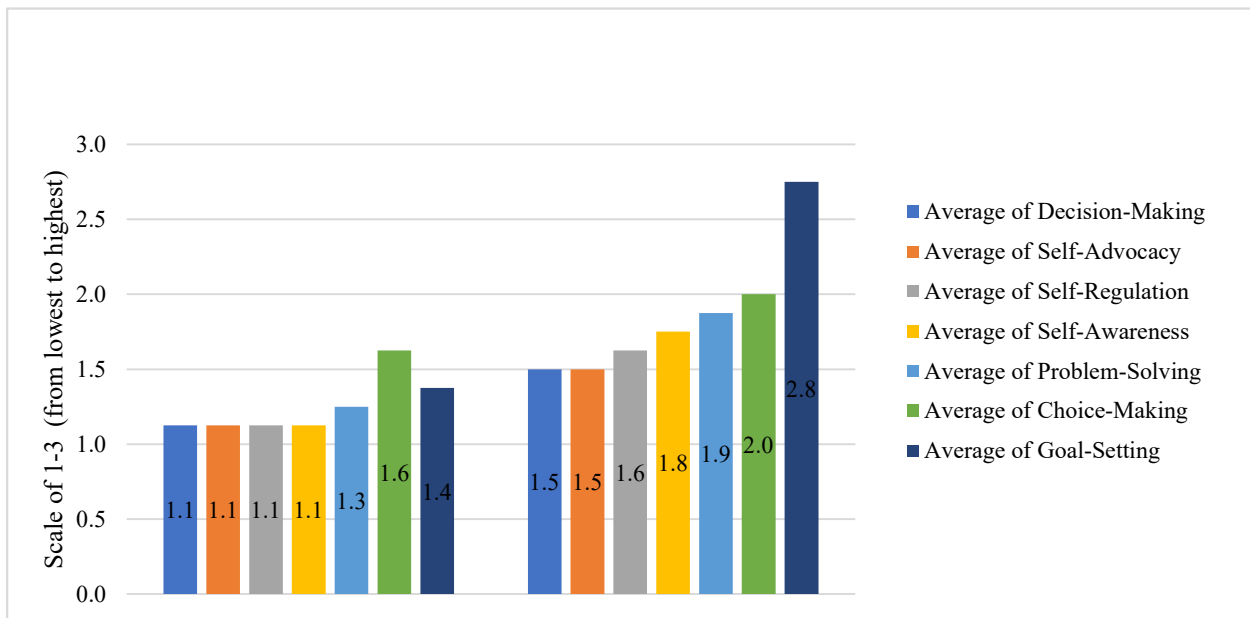


Figure 80. Average component element importance rankings comparing interview one data and interview two data.

Figure shows changes in rankings of the component elements between interview one and interview two by years of participant experience in special education. The average importance ranking of each component element remained the same or increased across years of experience. Goal-setting importance increased the most across years of experience while self-regulation held the most constant.

Figure shows changes in rankings of the component elements between interview one and interview two by years of participant grade level of instruction. Almost all average importance rankings remained the same or increased across grade levels, with the exception of a decrease in decision-making at the elementary level. Goal-setting importance increased the most across grade levels, while choice-making held the most constant.

Figure 13 shows changes in rankings of the component elements between interview one and interview two by socio-economic status (SES) of each participant's school site. Again, average importance rankings remained the same or increased across SES. Goal-setting importance increased the most across SES, while choice-making held the most constant. These results reflect the results displayed in Figures 13.

Figure 14 shows changes in rankings of the component elements between interview one and interview two by location of each participant's school site (suburban, urban, or rural). Zero participants reported teaching at a rural school. School setting resulted in the most decreases in average importance rankings, although decreases are only found among participants in urban

school settings. Once again, goal-setting importance increased the most across school settings, while decision-making held the most constant.

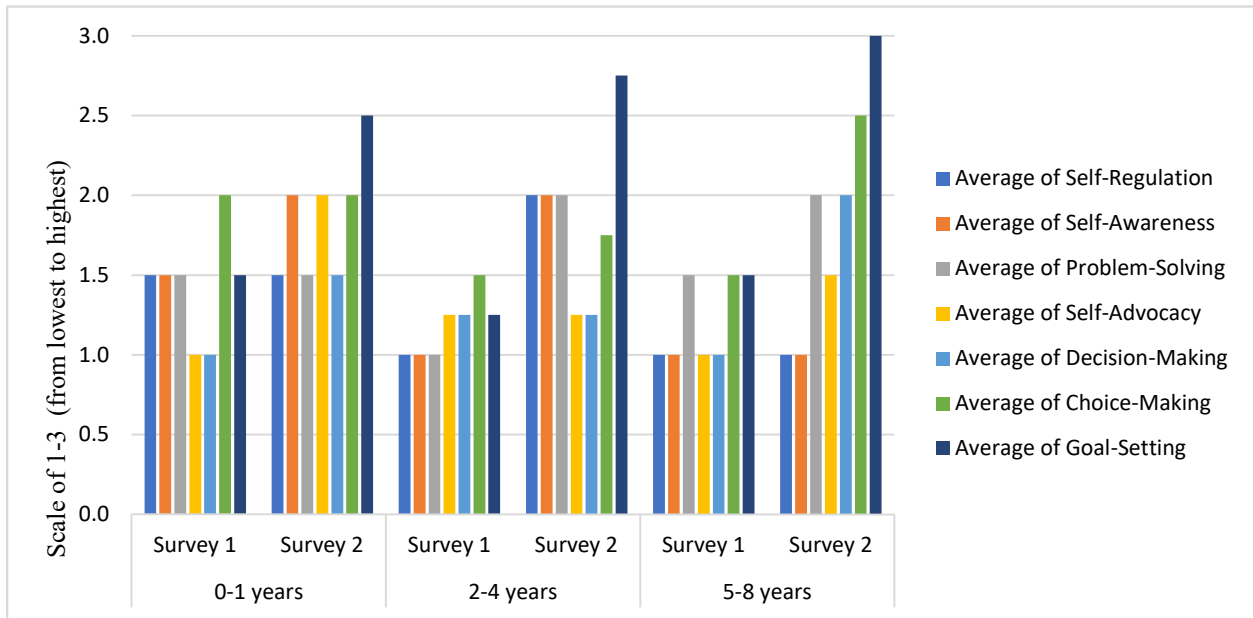


Figure 11. Change in importance rankings averages of component elements between interview 1 and interview 2 by years of experience in special education.

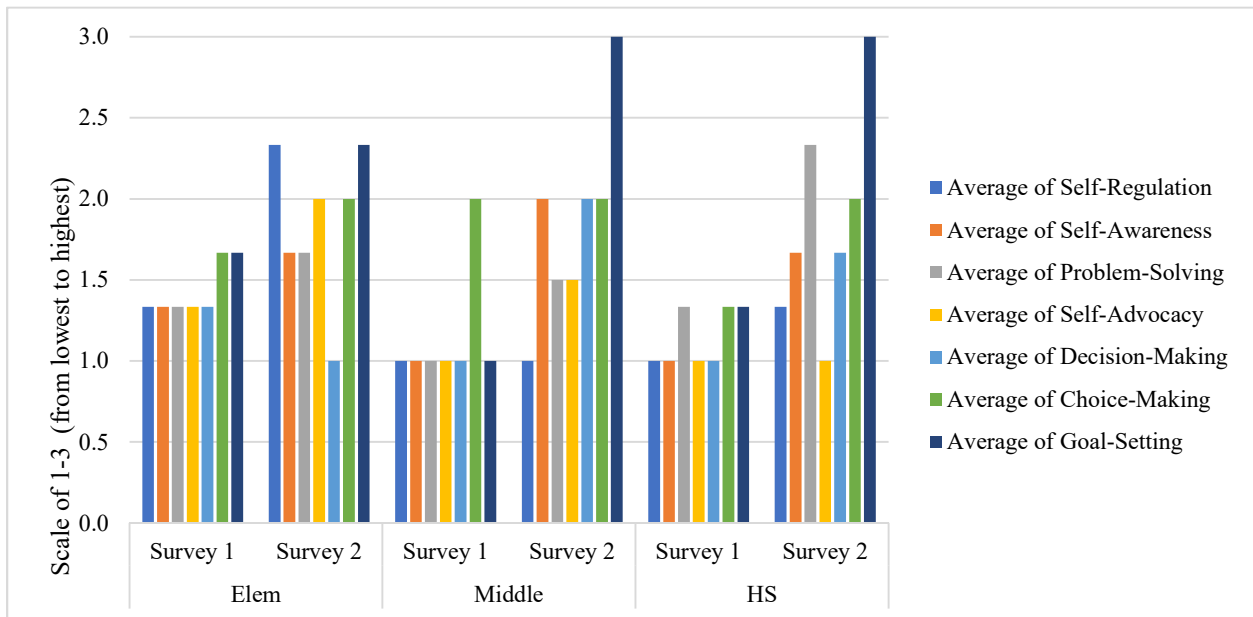


Figure 12. Change in importance rankings averages of component elements between interview 1 and interview 2 by grade level of instruction.

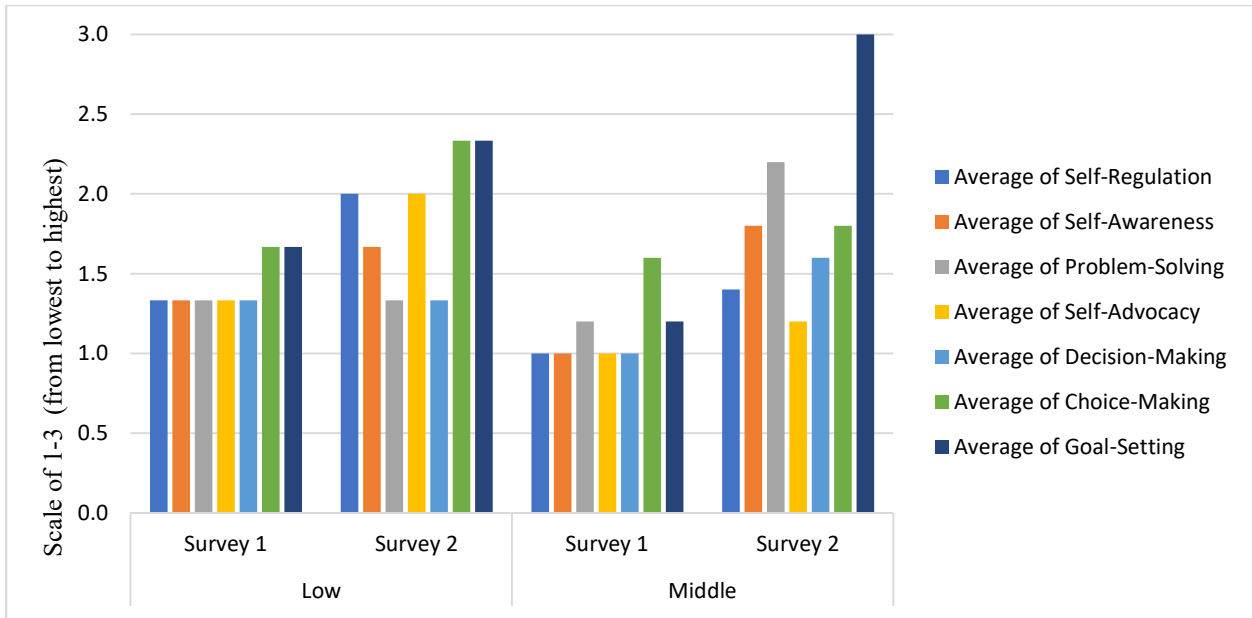


Figure 13. Change in importance rankings averages of component elements between interview 1 and interview 2 by school socio-economic status (SES) (low/middle/high).

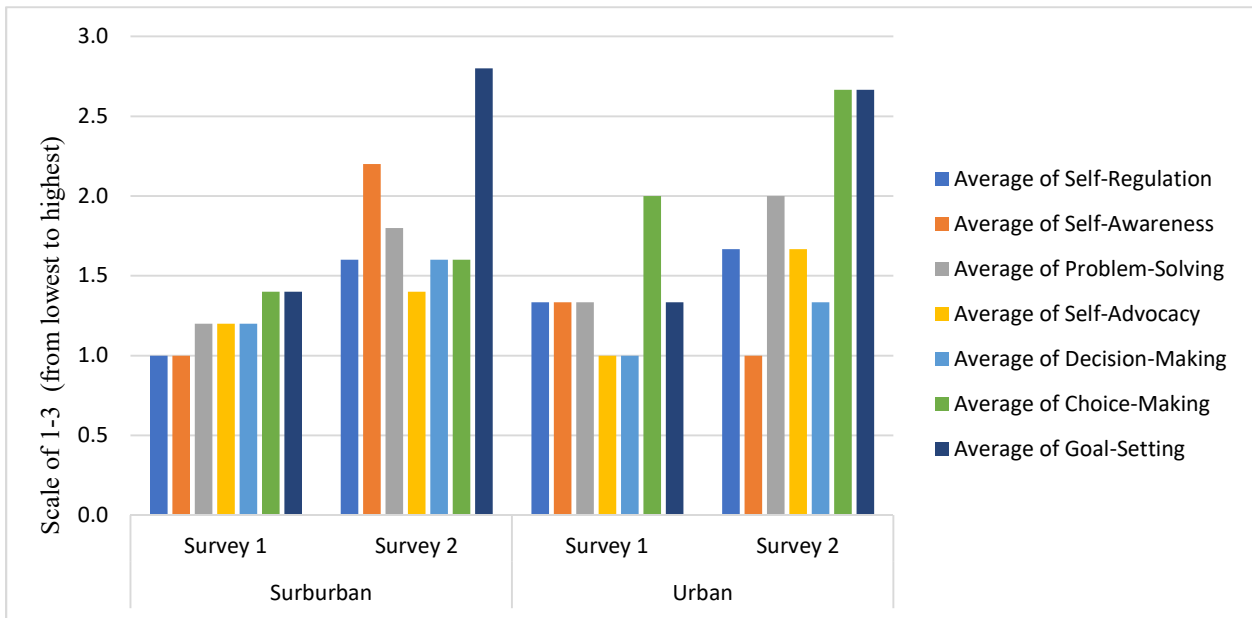


Figure 14. Change in importance rankings averages of component elements between interview 1 and interview 2 by urban/suburban/rural setting.

Participants reported their perceived current instructional and desired instructional frequency of each component element. The average frequency results are compared to the average importance rankings. Unlike the results of average importance rankings, the results varied by component element.

The importance rankings of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-advocacy are all less than the current and desired instructional frequencies. The desired instructional frequency is less than the current instructional frequency for choice-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and self-awareness. There are no results that show a desire to provide instruction in any of the component elements more than reported current frequency. Choice-making is the sole component element in which importance has the highest average rank. Decision-making is the only component element which held constant across all three measures.

Barriers and Supports

The third and fourth sub-questions aimed to address the central research question concerning participants' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP. The third sub-question "What barriers do special education teacher candidates perceive that inhibit them from promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placement?" was directly addressed by asking participants what barriers they face when promoting self-determination. They were also probed to address what barriers they believe other special educators may face regarding student self-determination enhancement. The fourth sub-question was also directly addressed by asking participants what support they currently experience when promoting self-determination. "What supports do special education teacher candidates perceive as necessary for promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placements?" The interview also included a probe for participants to hypothesize what supports they believe they may need in the future to promote self-determination.

Barriers. Participants described an overall sense of enthusiasm for the positive benefits of enhancing student self-determination; however, many barriers arose that educators felt may hinder the implementation of instructional practices. Time, including daily pressures and demands, was unanimously expressed as the most substantial barrier to implementing any new practice. Individual student qualities, such as learned helplessness and intrinsic motivation, were also described as barriers. Lastly, educator self-efficacy perceptions about their knowledge of and ability to teach self-determination were also identified as salient barriers.

Time. Educators in this study universally mentioned preparation time as the most critical barrier that inhibits the implementation of new practices. All participants expressed enthusiasm and placed a high value on self-determination, though no one felt they had enough time to learn about and implement practices surrounding self-determination. One barrier to time is the amount of individual attention viewed as necessary for the enhancement of self-determination. Evelyn remarked,

I would need to have maybe one on one time with each student because I do think sometimes they're not going to share with other students around. So to get them to open up, I would need quality time with each one.

The primary cause for stress about the need for more preparation time related to the daily demands and pressures of the minimum requirements for special education teachers. Gloria commented, "I think a lot of it is mostly pressure trying to keep up with everything that's expected." Although Muriel described self-determination as "more important than academics,"

she also described the pressure for academic achievement she feels every day. “I mean, I get resistance...about failing their [students] classes, from either administration or parents or students. I think I would have to be really smart about the way I present taking time away from academics to teach self-determination.” In reference to the daily demands she faces, Beth commented that “I don't have books. You think I'm going to have time to teach self-determination?”

Learned helplessness. All of the participants in this study expressed observations of learned helplessness in their students as a significant barrier to students enhancing their self-determination. From elementary to high school, participants viewed a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness from their students. Patrick described his opinion that “I feel like that too much support can lead to diminished returns on self-determination.” Ashley stated her belief that “Maybe they have a little bit of learned helplessness. They feel that everybody is just going to take care of their thing, especially some kiddos who maybe had IEPs or especially parallel support early on.” Nora felt that self-determination is an internal, innate characteristic and that becoming self-determined “is something that the students have to do themselves. You can't make a student have self-determination.” Gloria commented on a typical interaction she has with students who aren't doing well academically. “I'll be like, ‘you can study for that test and get a very good grade.’ And they're like, ‘No, I'm dumb.’ I see a lot of that.”

Intrinsic student motivation. Along the lines of learned helplessness, another barrier that emerged as a theme was student intrinsic motivation. Some participants described a feeling of hopelessness for students who they view as unmotivated. For example, Evelyn remarked that “Yeah, some of them do really put the effort in, and I feel like the ones who already have that little fire within them listen more to when you say you believe in them, but somebody who already is just addicted to social media and shows up just to socialize and doesn't care about work, words mean nothing.”

Muriel commented that “I think sometimes its [undeveloped self-determination] a lack of motivation.” Patrick believed that a lack of intrinsic motivation in his students is related to their belief that they have no control over their lives. “They aren't seeing further, and they aren't understanding what putting in the effort means and what it will give them later.”

Self-efficacy of teachers. When asked why current literature reports that special education teachers' value self-determination, but often do not provide instruction to promote it, participants commented on their insecurities. In part, the sum of needed supports and barriers that participants described contribute to their low self-efficacy. For example, Ashley commented on her insecurities about teaching unfamiliar constructs. “I know I'm struggling with giving a hard definition of exactly what self-determination is. And in teaching, sometimes we [teachers] try not to teach what we're not sure of.” Nora described a similar sentiment to Ashley.

Sometimes a lack of knowledge, really. You kind of vaguely understand the ideas, but you don't really know how to make them concrete for students, and maybe not having access to a specific program or curriculum, and then this is sometimes a problem for me.

Supports. In order to provide instruction in and give opportunities for practicing self-determination, there are many supports that participants viewed as necessary. Participants identified several supports they would like to see to increase their comfortability and confidence to enhance self-determination for their students. A multi-facet, long-term professional development program was one of the most common themes that emerged. Coaching and mentorship were reported as an equally important support to professional development.

Universal language about the construct was the final support theme that materialized in the interview data.

Professional development. Professional development was mentioned frequently as support required before implementing a self-determination intervention or curriculum. Participants identified professional development as an initial training need in which practical, easy to use materials and strategies are disseminated and practiced. Participants commented on a desire to receive training on the connections between academic and self-determination instruction. Evelyn commented that “I think teachers would need maybe a training on it, and understanding what we're asking, what's being asked of students, and how that can translate into academics, too.” Participants were also interested in district-wide or network-wide protocols that would help guide implementation. Muriel was enthusiastic about promoting self-determination; however, she commented that “I have no curriculum, so I'm grabbing parts from other curriculums. I'm not getting much coaching because my coach is overworked and overloaded as well.”

Part of the ideal professional development model participants described included modeling by veteran teachers, including release time from their instructional duties to observe other teachers at their school sites. Beth noted the expertise right across the school yard from her classroom.

Some modeling? Sometimes when you're in the job, you don't really get to see what other people are doing, and I even know there's a teacher... doing growth mindset stuff with her students. I don't have time to go in and really see what's going on, and so I think if you could watch and observe somebody deliver it really effectively, then it would kind of make more sense how to implement it in your own classroom.

Coaching and mentorship. In addition to ongoing and multi-faceted professional development, coaching and mentorship were identified as needed supports. Gloria mentioned a coach who would come to classrooms and model lessons.

So maybe once a week or something like that, where they come in and then they co-teach. Or they do teach one lesson, and then the rest of the week the teachers are the ones that are building upon that skill or that particular area.

Part of the coaching model described includes mentorship among colleagues and school/district level leaders. Comradery and connections with others seemed to be vital aspects of strategies for all participants. For example, Ashley commented,

I think that I would like to be more comfortable having a network where I would feel comfortable calling someone and saying, ‘hey, I'm doing this [new strategy] with my group... What have you done?’ I just haven't been able to build that yet.

Language. In respect to coaching and professional development, participants described the desire for universal, simple, and understandable language surrounding the construct of self-determination. Many participants described their unfamiliarity with the terms used during the present study. Direct, defined vocabulary is something they wanted so they could provide more instruction in self-determination. For example, Doris explained, “And we [teachers] don't identify it as self-determination. But if you broke it into those pieces [component elements], I think teachers would say that they are able to teach that.” When asked what supports he would need to promote self-determination explicitly, Patrick described his success implementing new ideas using exact phrasing from professional development trainings. He commented that he would like “concrete phrases... to create a culture of self-determination, anchor charts that support it.”

Special Education Credential Candidate Results: Observations

Frequency of Promotion of SD

Observation transcripts and recordings were analyzed using MAXQDA software. The purpose of the observation analysis was to address two research sub-questions. How frequently do special education teacher candidates promote self-determination for students who have an IEP in a school setting, including instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities to practice self-determination skills? Does alignment exist between the promotion of self-determination in classroom settings and the rated importance of each self-determination skill reported by special education teacher candidates? These two sub-questions aim to address the central research question concerning participant experience with the promotion of self-determination.

A total of 16 observations were recorded. The average length of recorded observations was 23 minutes and 38 seconds. Transcripts were coded for the use of specific language related to interview responses when defining self-determination during the first interview. Additionally, transcripts were coded for words related to the component elements of self-determination. Table 18 lists the words used to code observation transcripts along with their frequency of occurrence.

Table 18

Observation Transcript Coding Keywords

Word (Component Elements)	<i>f</i>	Word (Definition)	<i>f</i>
problem	18	choose	7
choose	7	choice	3
solve	6	self	2
monitor	4	world	2
choice	3	determined	1
progress	1	focus	1
regulate	1	motivated	1
advocacy	0	advocacy	0
advocate	0	agency	0
choice making	0	decisions	0
choice-making	0	determine	0
decide	0	empower	0
decision	0	empowering	0
decision making	0	focused	0
decision-making	0	individuality	0
goal	0	motivate	0
goal setting	0	motivation	0
goal-setting	0	responsibility	0
problem solving	0	tools	0
problem-solving	0		
self advocacy	0		
self awareness	0		
self regulation	0		
self-advocacy	0		
self-awareness	0		
self-regulation	0		

Observation analysis included frequency counts of instruction in and opportunities to practice the component elements. The frequency counts aimed to address the fifth sub-question: How frequently do special education teacher candidates promote self-determination for students who have an IEP in a school setting, including instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities to practice self-determination skills? The results of the opportunities provided to students to practice each component element are displayed in Figure 15. Total from all observations of frequency of student opportunity to practice each component element of self-determination. The results of frequency counts of explicit instruction in the component elements include self-regulation (n=1) and self-awareness (n=5). Four of the instructional episodes of explicit teaching of self-awareness were counted in one observation.

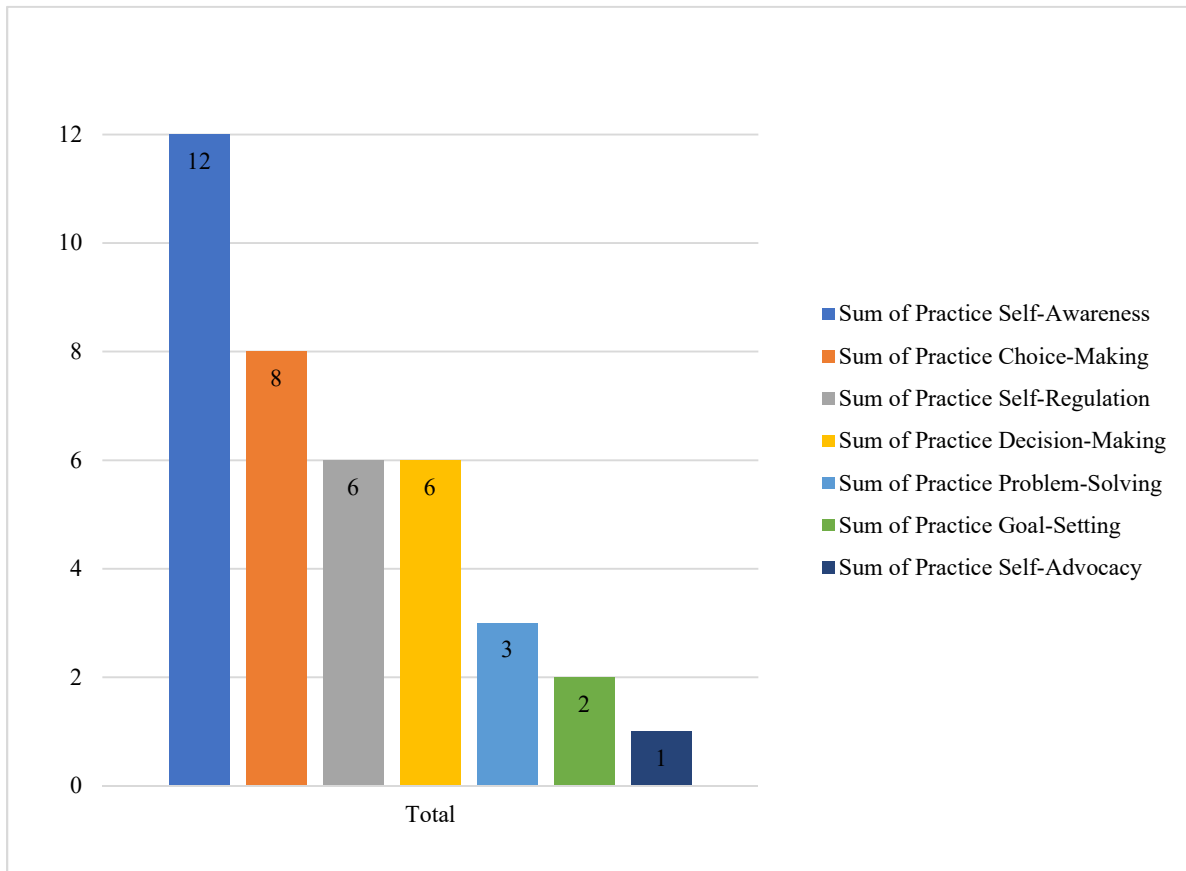


Figure 15. Total from all observations of frequency of student opportunity to practice each component element of self-determination.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

Educators, policymakers, and researchers alike recognize causal agency and autonomy as necessary facets of educational contexts. The authors of Causal Agency Theory (Shogren et al., 2015) posit that the promotion of self-determination encourages causal agency, which can lead to increased positive in-school and adult outcomes. Although self-determination is essential for all learners, it is considered a missing critical skill set for students who have an IEP (Stang et al., 2009).

The implementation of interventions to promote self-determination is a current trend in the research literature (Cho et al., 2012). Intervention recommendations often include assumptions about educator perceptions of and experiences with self-determination. Yet, there is limited recent research that examines if and how educators define, value, and teach self-determination skills.

The present study aimed to examine the relatively unexplored perceptions and experiences of special education teacher candidates concerning the promotion of self-determination. Promoting self-determination is one way teachers can better equipping students who have an IEP for life in adulthood. Enhancing the self-determination of students who receive special education services appear to be as critical as academic content knowledge. However, intervention approaches must be perceived as feasible and important by those who apply theory in practice.

Therefore, the central research question for the present study asks: What are special education teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences with promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP? To directly address the central research question, participants answered interview questions about their beliefs about self-determination for their students. Participants also described their beliefs about factors that can limit someone from reaching their full potential of becoming self-determined in adulthood.

Responsibility for Promoting Self-Determination

Across all demographic categories, participants reported feeling a responsibility to enhance student self-determination, but only second to parents and caregivers. Ideally, participants want their students to come to their classes with more self-determination. However, participants acknowledged the lack of self-determination they observe in their students and, therefore, feel responsible for teaching students the component elements. The reported belief of responsibility did not translate into observable behavior in the observation data included in this study.

Limitations to Becoming Self-Determined

Previous research in self-determination reveals that teachers believed that some students might not benefit from self-determination (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000). Formerly, teachers often associated self-determination as unimportant for students who have “more severe disabilities” (Wehmeyer, 2005, p. 113). More recent research shows that the mindset of the field of special education is shifting away from this perspective (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000). However, the participants in this study identified innate, individual disposition as a possible limitation that may prohibit students from developing and benefitting from enhanced self-determination. Teachers who believe their students cannot benefit from self-determination may

be unlikely to prioritize instruction in this area. Additionally, the rigor and demands of other instructional requirements take priority against nonobligatory instruction, such as self-determination.

One explanation of participant beliefs concerning the limitations of becoming self-determined may be a lack of participant exposure to a strengths-based model of disability. Under this model, disability is not considered a characteristic of an individual. Instead, disability is the “gap between a person’s capacities and abilities and the demands of the environment in which that person must function” (Wehmeyer, Shogren, & Thompson, 2018, p. 56). A strengths-based approach places great emphasis on a social-ecological model of disability, which is in contrast to a deficit perspective. It is possible that teachers who have a strengths-based mindset may provide more instruction in self-determination (Wehmeyer, Shogren, & Thompson, 2018).

Subquestions

Defining Self-Determination

The present study includes six sub-questions to address the central question. The first sub-question asks: How do special education teacher candidates define self-determination for students who have an IEP? The first hypothesis in this study speculated that special education teacher candidates have a basic understanding of the meaning of self-determination. Similar results are found within the field of literature of self-determination. A national survey of teacher promotion of self-determination revealed that 60% of respondents had familiarity with self-determination (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000).

During the first interview and the faculty interview, participants defined the term self-determination in their own words. Many participants reported feeling unsure of the exact terminology of the construct. However, all participants identified similar definitions to those found in the literature. All participants referenced becoming self-determined as students having autonomy and choice in their educational and adult lives.

The participants unanimously reported that they do not receive information or training for promoting self-determination during their teaching training program. They shared that a lack of instruction in self-determination contributes to their lack of knowledge of the self-determination construct. However, all participants completed the transition course before participating in this study. The course syllabus document analysis showed that 30% of that course focuses on self-determination and uses the term self-determination explicitly within the syllabus. Participant responses show a disconnect between course completion and course content internalization and application.

The first interview provided participants with a definition of self-determination, as well as each component element. The component elements generated a more confident response about the meaning of self-determination from participants—all participants related to the definitions of the component elements in a stronger way than the term self-determination alone. After being introduced to the component elements as skills related to promoting self-determination, participants referred to the terms throughout the remainder of each interview. The findings indicate that special education teacher credential candidates may explicitly and consciously promote self-determination for students who have an IEP more often given an explicit understanding of and guided practice applying the broader construct, including each component element.

Importance of Self-Determination

The second sub-question of the present study asks: What level of importance do special education teacher candidates place on promoting self-determination? The second hypothesis of this study presumed that special education teacher candidates place a high importance on the promotion of self-determination for students who have an IEP. The importance rankings of the component elements and the overall importance ratings of promoting self-determination suggest that teachers place a high value on enhancing self-determination.

Participants ranked the component elements compared to other instructional areas. Rankings of the component elements show a high value on each of the individual skills related to self-determination. Goal-setting had the highest average ranking of importance, followed by choice-making and problem-solving. Special education teachers focus on goal writing as a critical component of the IEP (Musyoka & Clark, 2017). The salience of the goal setting construct to this group of educators may explain the high average ranking goal-setting received. It is possible that other stakeholder groups, such as general education teachers, may perceive a different component element as more important than goal-setting.

Comparison of component element importance rankings between the two interviews reveal unexpected results. In nearly all instances, the average importance rankings increased from the first to second interview for all component elements. The increase is apparent across years of experience in special education, grade level of instruction, school SES status, and school setting. To address any possible changes in perceptions between the two interviews, participants described new experiences that may have impacted their thinking or behavior about self-determination. For example, the second interview included questions about university or school-based mentors who encouraged them to promote self-determination, coursework that emphasized self-determination, or individual students who shaped their thinking. The only theme that emerged concerning a change in perspective was that of participation in the present study.

The increase of importance rankings between interviews suggests that response bias affected the findings of this study. The participants gained information about the focus of the study during the first interview and this likely contributed to social desirability bias. The research design included strategies to mitigate response bias. For instance, the first observation occurred before the first interview. Additionally, both interviews included two different formats for participants to rank the importance of the component elements. The overall moderate to high importance rankings of the component elements from both interviews suggest that participants do value each of the component elements, despite the strong likelihood of social desirability bias.

Barriers and Supports

The third sub-question of the present study asks: What barriers do special education teacher candidates perceive that inhibit them from promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placement? The fourth sub-question of the present study asks: What supports do special education teacher candidates perceive as necessary for promoting self-determination for the students in their fieldwork placements? The third hypothesis of this study speculated that special education teacher candidates perceive barriers to implementing self-determination practices for their students, even when they place self-determination as a high priority for their students.

The barriers and supports reported in this study are similar to those that exist in other studies. Barriers frequently cited in the literature on this topic include more urgent instructional

needs, insufficient training, and insufficient time (Agran et al., 1999; Cho et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2012; Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003; Mason et al., 2004; Thoma, Nathanson, et al., 2002). Participants indicated that insufficient time and training are substantial barriers to promoting self-determination. Cho et al. (2012) recommend preservice coursework and later professional development about student interventions to address some of the identified barriers. The combination of the present study's conceptual framework, literature review, and results, provide evidence that coursework and professional development alone are not enough for teachers to overcome barriers. They also need ongoing support to increase their self-efficacy concerning instruction in self-determination. Support may include long-term coaching, mentorship, and the opportunity to observe veteran teachers.

Further, the perceived barriers did not align with the observation analysis. Participants unanimously expressed insufficient time as one of their most significant barriers. All of the classes included in observations are considered Resource Specialist Program (RSP) classes. RSP class time was often used for students to catch up on homework or missing work from other classes. RSP class time is an opportunity to teach students skills that make the general curriculum more accessible to students who have an IEP. Self-determination skills are linked to improved in-school effects and have the potential to be taught and practiced during RSP time (Seong et al., 2015).

To use RSP class time as homework help, tutoring, arts and crafts, or free time is a misuse of the opportunity to decrease the disparities between students who have an IEP and their peers who do not. However, the onus is not solely on the special education teacher, but on the entire school and system-wide teams to work in conjunction to build a school culture and climate of inclusion and equity. School leaders must acknowledge the role of special education teachers as professional educators. School leaders who recognize and validate the importance of educational equity for *all* students and the value of *all* teachers through school cultures, high expectations, and staff supports can create a learning environment in which all students have the possibility of reaching their full potential (Conley & You, 2017). RSP classes give students and teachers the opportunity to develop self-determination skills for increased student success in the general education curriculum and in adulthood.

Special educators who report feeling overwhelmed, inadequately trained, and isolated may benefit from the incorporation of reflective practices into their work (Mathew, P. Mathew, P., & Peechattu, 2017). Reflective practices that include consideration of one's practices, as well as the practices of colleagues, show benefits to teachers and students alike. Reflective practices can be a part of professional development and may contribute to the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of teachers (Deci & Ryan, 2017). When special educators have the opportunity for guided reflection on their professional practices, they may notice the mismatch between their beliefs and their practices. Coupled with professional development and mentorship, special educators should be encouraged to use RSP class time more productively and efficiently.

A combination of professional development, ongoing mentorship and coaching, preservice coursework and mentorship, and reflective practices have the potential to create a more desirable and sustainable career in special education (deBettencourt & Nagro, 2019). A more experienced, self-efficacious workforce means more highly-qualified teachers for students who have an IEP. In turn, there is an opportunity to increase positive in-school and adult outcomes for a historically marginalized population of students.

Frequency

The fifth sub-question of the present study asks: How frequently do special education teacher candidates promote self-determination for students who have an IEP in a school setting, including instruction in self-determination skills and opportunities to practice self-determination skills? Observational data included frequency counts of explicit instruction of the component elements of self-determination as well as opportunities to practice the skills. The high rankings of the importance of self-determination and the component elements do not seamlessly translate into classroom practices. Very few participants reported that they never provide instruction in any of the component elements. However, the reported frequency of instruction varied substantially from the frequency noted during observations.

Caution is necessary when interpreting these results. The sample size of this study is limited to eight participants. Additionally, the initial proposal for this study aimed to include both student and intern teachers. However, California has a 2:1 intern to student-teacher ratio (Darling-Hammond, Sutchter, & Carver-Thomas, 2018). This unequal balance means that all of the participants in this study have been teaching for at least one full year as uncredentialed special education teachers. Participants were trying to manage their classes while teaching full-time without mentorship or coaching.

Students who qualify for special education services are one of the most vulnerable, at-risk populations of students in U.S. schools. As seen in the Condition of Education Report (McFarland et al., 2019), students identified with a disability experience during and post-school success at lower rates than their typically developing peers. Although this varies by disability category and other confounding variables, such as socioeconomic status and race, it is true that on average compared to their typically developing peers, students identified with a disability graduate at lower rates, have lower employment rates, earn less money, go to college less frequently, have less self-determination, and experience a lower overall quality of life.

Students who have an IEP are up against many obstacles, even when they have a highly qualified, or at least a credentialed, special education teacher. Nevertheless, the high burnout rate of the profession, coupled with the national special education teacher shortage, exacerbated by the high-stress nature of the job, means that underqualified, uncredentialed teachers are serving the most vulnerable students. The participants of this study, and many other special education teachers, are managing caseloads, developing and implementing IEPs, often without training, and juggling the demands of meeting the academic, social, emotional, psychological, and behavioral needs of the unique learners in our schools today. The addition of new interventions and curriculum may be futile without the necessary supports in place.

Instructional Frequency and Importance

The sixth and final sub-question of the present study asks: Does alignment exist between the promotion of self-determination in classroom settings and the rated importance of each self-determination skill reported by special education teacher candidates? The fourth and final hypothesis of this study conjectured that misalignment exists between reported importance and practical classroom applications of promoting self-determination for students who have an IEP. The results of this study show discrepancies between the evaluations of importance and actual instruction in self-determination.

The most frequently, explicitly taught component element was self-awareness. Self-awareness received an average importance ranking of 1.4 out of 3, making this skill the fourth

most important of the seven options. Interestingly, participants reported teaching this skill an average of 4-6 times a week, but the desired importance ranking was an average of one time per week. The results of self-awareness made me realize that I subconsciously assumed that all participants would desire to teach all component elements more often than they currently do.

The observation data analysis shows that explicit instruction in self-determination is rare. Opportunities for students to practice self-determination is even more infrequent. The misalignment between “what I think” versus “what I think I do” versus “what I actually do” aligns with this study’s fourth hypothesis and with current research. Of course, beliefs about importance and aspirations are not the only factors that impact instructional practices. Several other competing variables likely influence the choices educators make for their students. For example, participants of the present study and numerous others have cited competing instructional requirements, inadequate resources, student resistance, low self-efficacy, and insufficient professional development (e.g., Wood et al., 2004; Thoma, Nathanson, et al., 2002; Wehmeyer, Agran et al., 2000).

Future Research Possibilities

One trend appeared throughout all of the observations that is worth noting for future research explorations. Observations revealed an array of missed opportunities for students to practice enhancing their self-determination. In part due to the relative newness of this area of research, validated and normed data collection measures are nonexistent to collect frequency data from observations. A deficiency of measurement tools presents a challenge when analyzing missed opportunities. The same challenges exist for measuring implicit instruction for the promotion of self-determination.

During the observation analysis of this study, I recognized missed opportunities as moments when a participant gave a direction to a student versus asking a question—most of the missed opportunities concerned behavior redirection. Behavior demands have the potential to be replaced with teacher observation and inquiry to guide students to redirect their behavior more autonomously (Martin et al., 2003). For example, one participant told a student, “Look in your notebook for the answer.” A noticing and a question may have led the student to practice self-awareness, self-advocacy, and problem-solving such as, “It looks like you are stuck. What are some resources you could use to solve the problem?”

The process of teacher observations, acknowledgment, and the provision of scaffolding is a process often implemented in Montessori classrooms. In turn, Montessori classrooms provide a high level of autonomy for students (Dhiksha & Suresh, 2016). Possibilities for future research may include training for preservice and practicing teachers framed around with Montessori practices.

An integration of Montessori principals and each of the component elements may provide a pathway for students to overcome cited barriers for promoting self-determination. Professional development accompanied by data collection may provide fruitful evidence for pathways teachers can take to promote self-determination amid the barriers they perceive that inhibit them from doing so. Furthermore, the development of an observation measurement tool may provide evidence to explain why students who have an IEP have less robust self-determination than their peers who do not have an IEP. The tool could measure explicit and implicit instruction, opportunities for student practice, and missed opportunities for the promotion of self-determination.

Conclusion

Everyone who participated in this study agrees that all students, specifically students who have an IEP, deserve an education that prepares them to experience success in adulthood. However, there is undeniable evidence of the disparities in adult outcomes for students who have an IEP compared to their typically developing peers (McFarland et al., 2019). Historically, students who receive special education services experience an educational model that relies on adults to make decisions for them. Adult-directed education is in opposition to the fundamental goals of education, to “promote the independence, active involvement, and commitment of students to their learning and self-development” (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999, p. 293).

Self-determination is an undoubtedly beneficial aspect for all students, and especially students who are identified as having a disability, to experience increased levels of causal agency. Active student involvement and student-led learning opportunities, are avenues in which students who have an IEP may experience enhanced self-determination. The participants of this study and previous research reveal that self-determination instruction, opportunities to practice, and importance in adulthood are highly valued by educators. Although current literature along with the present study support the promotion of self-determination in school settings, numerous barriers are identified that dissuade the implementation of autonomy supportive classrooms. Insufficient training, inadequate preparation time, limited or absent mentorship, and conflicting priorities surfaced as variables that inhibit educators from aligning their beliefs with their actions in practice. The participants of this study report feeling burnout, exhausted, and overwhelmed.

After the present documentation of the perspectives of the participants in this study, the promotion of self-determination seems substantially less critical for the field of special education than a number of other factors. I believe that researchers, mentors, administrators, policy-makers, and academics should come together to support special education teachers and to establish a profession that is both desirable and sustainable. A workforce of highly qualified, competent special education teachers has strong potential to positively impact in-school and adult outcomes for students who have an IEP.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Experience in the Field of Education

Q1 How many total years of experience do you have in the field of education, including, but not limited to PK-12, post-secondary, and higher education in any educational setting?

- 0-1 years
- 2-4 years
- 5-8 years
- 8-10 years
- More than 10 years

Q6 How many years of experience do you have in special education?

- 0-1 years
- 2-4 years
- 5-8 years
- 8-10 years
- More than 10 years

Q7 What, if any, roles have you filled in education before your current teaching placement?

- General Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- Paraprofessional
- School Leader/School Administrator
- Post-secondary Education
- Other (please describe):
- N/A

Q8 What, if any, education credentials do you currently hold?

- Multiple Subject
- Single Subject
- Special Education
- Other (please describe):
- N/A

Current Teaching Placement

Q10 Currently, what type of fieldwork you are doing?

- Intern Teacher
- Student Teacher
- Other (please specify):

Q11 What age group(s) do you currently teach?

- 0-3
- 3-5
- 5-8
- 9-11
- 12-13
- 14-16
- 17-18
- 19 years and older

Q12 Where is your current school assignment?

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Post-secondary
- Other (please specify):

Q13 What type of school are you teaching in?

- Public
- Private
- Public Charter
- Private Charter
- Non-public
- Magnet
- Other (please specify):

Q14 Your principal teaching assignment is with students identified in what primary disability category(ies)?

- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional Disturbance (ED)
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability (ID)
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBD)
- Visual Impairments (including blindness)

Q15 Students for whom you are primarily responsible for instruction receive their instruction in which of the following educational environment(s)?

(These categories are directly from IDEA and are defined below. Check only the most appropriate).

- Regular Class
- Separate Class
- Residential Facility
- Resource Room
- Separate School
- Homebound/Hospital Bound

Resource Room: Includes students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for at least 21% but no more than 60% of the school day. *Separate Class:* Includes students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for more than 60% of the school day. *Separate School:* Includes students who receive education in private and public separate day schools for students with disabilities for more than 50% of the school day. *Residential Facility:* Includes students who receive education in a public or private residential facility, at public expense, for more than 50% of the school day. *Homebound/Hospital Environment:* Includes students placed in and receiving special education in a hospital or homebound program.

Q16 Which setting best describes the location of your current teaching assignment?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural
- Other (please describe):

Q17 Which socioeconomic status (SES) best describes the setting of your current teaching assignment?

- Low Income
- Middle Income
- High Income

Q18 How many students are you directly responsible for teaching?

Q19 How many students do you manage on your caseload?

Q20 Which content or curricular area(s) are you primarily responsible for teaching?

- Academic
- Social Skills
- Functional Life Skills/Community-Based Skills
- Vocational/Transition
- Health/Physical Education

Q21 Rank the instructional strategies from most frequently used to least frequently by used you in your current teaching assignment.

- _____ One-to-one Instruction
- _____ Whole Group Instruction
- _____ Small Group Instruction
- _____ Independent Seatwork

Personal Information

Q22 In what year were you born?

Q23 Is English your primary language?

APPENDIX B: COMPONENT ELEMENTS OF
SELF-DETERMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE: IMPORTANCE

Take a look at the following component elements of self-determination below. Compared to other instructional areas, please rate how important you think each component is. Circle only one response for each component element.

1. Choice-Making

(Teaching students to identify interests, express preferences, make choices; Structuring instructional activities to provide students the opportunity to select preferences).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Low		Medium		High	

2. Decision-Making

(Teaching students to make effective decisions, providing opportunities to participate in making decisions about their education and postschool life).

3. Problem-Solving

(Teaching students to systematically solve problems, providing opportunities to participate in problem-solving activities).

4. Goal Setting and Attainment

(Teaching students to set and track goals, participate in goal-setting activities, develop plans to achieve goals).

5. Self-Advocacy and Leadership Skills

(Teaching students to know and stand up for their rights, to communicate effectively and assertively, to be an effective leader or team member).

6. Self-Management and Self-Regulation Skills (Teaching students to monitor and evaluate their behavior, select and provide their reinforcement, set their schedule, and to self-direct learning through strategies like self-instruction).

7. Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge (Teaching students to identify their strengths and limitations, to identify their preferences, interests, and abilities, and to apply that knowledge to their advantage).

APPENDIX C: COMPONENT ELEMENTS OF
SELF-DETERMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE: APPLICATION

Directions: In a typical school week, how often do you believe you teach each of the following self-determination skills? How often would you like to teach each self-determination skill?

(Self-determination refers to people acting based upon their own volition; making their own choices and decisions; solving their problems; setting goals, and self-regulating their actions. [Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000]).

1. Choice-Making

The indication or communication of a preference from two or more options; identification or preference, rejection of an option.

a. How often I currently teach choice-making:

- Daily
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Never

b. How often I would like to teach choice-making:

- Daily
- 4-6 times a week
- 2-3 times a week
- Once a week
- Never

2. Decision-Making

A process of selecting or coming to a conclusion about which of a set of potential solutions is the best.

3. Problem-Solving

A five-step process involving: (a) identifying and defining the problem, (b) listing possible solutions, (c) identifying the impact of each solution, (d) making a judgment about a preferred solution, and (e) evaluating the efficacy of the judgment.

4. Goal Setting and Attainment

The process by which a goal is achieved; a goal is defined as the object or aim of an action, for example, to attain a specific standard of proficiency, usually within a specified time limit.

5. Self-Advocacy

The ability to assertively communicate or negotiate one's interests, desires, needs, and rights.

6. Self-Regulation Skills

Teaching students to monitor and evaluate their behavior, select and provide their reinforcement, set their schedule, and to self-direct learning through strategies like self-instruction.

7. Self-Awareness

Teaching students to identify their strengths and limitations, to identify their preferences, interests, and abilities, and to apply that knowledge to their advantage.

8. Rank the following self-determination skills in order of importance for your students.

Choice-making
Decision-making
Problem-solving
Self-advocacy
Self-awareness
Self-regulation
Goal-setting and Attainment