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SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE
LITERATURE

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY

Jessica Ferraro

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

August 2021

BETHEL UNIVERSITY

SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE
LITERATURE

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AUGUST 2021

APPROVED

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Mr. Nathan Elliot for all the thought, time and advice provided to complete this paper. I would also like to thank those working in the Bethel Academic Resource Center, specifically Steve, for reading and assisting with edits of my paper. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my family, especially my husband and daughters, as well as close friends for their never-ending encouragement over the past few years to complete my Master's degree.

Abstract

Self-determination is an important skill for all students, but a necessity that students identified as having a disability and receiving special education skills develop throughout their lifespan and prior to leaving the comforts of high school for future success. Self-determination is the idea that an individual possesses the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that allow them to take on and engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviors. For students to gain these skills they need to be emphasized and taught by the different people in their lives, including but not limited to parents, general and special education staff and various other school staff. Once taught, students need to be provided opportunities to practice these skills in real-life situations to show what they know. This will also continue to build the students confidence in using their self-determination skills in the future when parents and other adult supporters may not be available.

Table of Contents

Signature Page..... 2

Acknowledgements 3

Abstract 4

Table of Contents 5

Chapter I: Introduction 7

 Context 8

 Theoretical Framework 8

 Rationale..... 9

 Research Focus 12

 Definition of Terms..... 12

Chapter II: Literature Review..... 14

 Literature Search Procedures 14

 Direct Instruction and Self-Determination Skills 14

 Roles of Parents and Educators 18

 Parents..... 18

 Teachers 22

 Paraprofessionals 25

 Administrators 30

 Similarities and differences among educators 31

 Student involvement in the IEP process 33

| | |
|---|----|
| Student-led IEP meetings | 6 |
| Student-led IEP meetings | 35 |
| Transitioning to post-secondary institutions | 38 |
| Importance of self-advocacy | 39 |
| Pitfalls of not learning self-determination skills post-high school | 42 |
| Chapter III: Discussion and Conclusion | 46 |
| Summary of Literature | 46 |
| Limitations of the Research | 49 |
| Implications for Future Research | 50 |
| Implications for Professional Application | 51 |
| Conclusion | 53 |
| References | 55 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Students, in general, want to do well and make the people in their lives proud. This is true for students receiving special education services, too, but too often these students have things done for them by their parents or school staff or have received the message that they are not good enough, so they avoid trying. If things are continually done for them, it can take out a person's want or drive to learn and do things on their own. Additionally, individuals may believe it is easier to live up to the preconceived notions that people in their lives (ie. parents, teachers, staff, peers) already have for them from the stigma of being a "special education" student rather than overcome obstacles that present themselves, which in turn can potentially hinder their future.

Special education students hear what they need to work on time and time again from the adults in their lives. This happens during Individualized Special Education Program (IEP) meetings, teacher/student conversations, parent/teacher conferences, phone calls home, etc. and without knowledge of the impact it may be having on the student. Parents and teachers alike should work to empower their child/student, no matter their disability presence, by teaching and modeling the skills of self-determination. These skills include, but are not limited to, speaking up for themselves, developing goals and learning the steps needed to obtain them, making age appropriate decisions (what to wear, what to eat, who to befriend, etc.), and how to problem-solve effectively so they feel more in control of their own lives.

Context

The goal of the educational system is to teach youth not only academics, but the skills needed to be successful young adults after leaving high school and the guidance it provides. To help make sure that this is happening for all students, they need to learn the skills that comprise self-determination. Research has shown that the skills related to self-determination are important to the success of an individual throughout the span of their life. The more opportunities that an individual has that allow them to develop their own goals, make their own decisions and continue to learn and grow their confidence in what they know the more success they will likely encounter (Carter et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 1994; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Additionally, Mithaug (1998) stated, “In every school in this country, a few children succeed regardless of the instruction they receive. Teachers identify these students early, because they have purpose in their lives. They know what they like, what they can do, what they want, and how to get it. They are self-determined” (p. 1).

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory is the concept that individuals can make their own choices and have a feeling of control over their own lives (Wehmeyer & Berkobien, 1991). Psychologists Deci and Ryan (1985) first introduced the theory of self-determination. The theory centers on the belief that when an individual possesses the motivation and autonomy to do something, they will experience a higher level of drive to have what they want come true, no matter what may be hindering them and without extrinsic reward(s) (ie. disability, lack of support, etc.).

The theory suggests that people need to believe they have the autonomy, competence, and connection to achieve growth in their lives. Autonomy is described as the need for oneself to feel in control of their life by making their own decisions on how to act and what goals to pursue based on their own values, thoughts and interests. Competence is the need for oneself to have control of their life by showing what they know to feel and be successful while continuing to learn new skills. Finally, connection is the need for oneself to feel a sense of belonging to individuals they are around.

When thinking of these three characteristics and putting them in action, we could think about a student who struggles with a math learning disability. If this student has a high amount of self-determination he or she may choose to continue to practice problems that are difficult and frustrating for them with or without direct support to obtain mastery of the task and improve his or her overall skills. However, if the individual lacks self-determination skills they may find ways to avoid the work because it is too hard or he or she does not feel the teacher(s) like them. This may cause individuals who work closely with the student to become frustrated with the situation and assume that the student is not motivated, being lazy or difficult which further hinders the relationship. The student may be exhibiting their skills with autonomy, but lack the other two characteristics needed for self-determination, competence and connection.

Rationale

Self-determination is an important concept that should be used with individuals throughout the progression of education, starting in as early as elementary school. It

should also be taught to all students no matter if a disability is present or not. However, according to research completed by Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2010), teachers in their study reported they did not feel their students with severe disabilities would benefit from instruction to promote self-determination because their students were not able to learn and practice self-determined behavior. Teachers should open possibilities for their students and research has shown that teaching self-determination skills has improved elementary aged students problem-solving, academic performance, leadership in IEP and reduced problem behaviors (Cho, Wehmeyer & Kingston, 2010, pp. 149-150). This is especially true as students' transition to post-secondary schools. All special education students should be granted the ability to learn how to control their own life before they leave the safety of their high school and home environments.

The idea of self-determination in education has had various definitions through the years. Ward (1988) provided one of the earliest definitions: "both the attitudes which lead people to define goals for themselves and to their ability to take initiative and achieve these goals" (p. 2). Others over the years have also defined self-determination, including Field and Hoffman in 1994 and Wehmeyer in 1996; however, they all agree that "self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that allow a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior" (Field, et al., 1998, p. 2). When an individual can have a general sense of both their strengths and limitations while also believing that those limitations do not define them, and they are capable no matter the circumstances, this leads to an increased ability to

make their own decisions regarding their lives and their impact in society (Field et al., 1998).

Self-determination skill building is an important component for all students, but especially students identified with a disability and receiving special education services through their school careers. It has been reported by various researchers time again that student success rate in post-secondary settings after high school are not as favorable for students that exhibit a disability (Fields et al., 1998; Newman et al., 2010). Wehmeyer (1995) stated, “From cradle to grave, people with disabilities are reliant upon dependency-creating systems—educational systems, rehabilitation systems, family systems—to meet their needs. As a result, many people with disabilities fail to reach their maximum levels of independence, productivity, inclusion, and self-sufficiency—outcomes that, ironically, are the main objective of most such systems” (p. 17).

According to Getzel (2014), the field of special education needs to address skills related to transitioning to post-high school endeavors for students with identified disabilities and receiving special education services in high school as noted in IDEA 2004. Getzel identifies that students who go on to pursue their goals of attending post-secondary education institutions after high school struggle to admit and reach out to the appropriate individuals that they have a disability and needs support(s). Therefore, these students are not receiving needed accommodations to help them be successful. Half of the students exiting special education enter postsecondary education indicate that they do not believe they have a disability (Getzel, 2014, p. 382). The students’

ability to acknowledge their disability and advocate for what they need is a direct correlation to the importance of teaching self-determination skills to all students, especially those with disabilities.

Research Focus

Research has been conducted over the years regarding self-determination and its impact in a person's life. When an individual has a disability, it is especially important that they gain these skills so that they are not relying on the other people in their life for things that they can do or learn to do on their own especially as they continue to grow and develop into young adults. Although research has been conducted and many understand its overall importance it is still a concept that is widely overlooked within the education system, specifically with students that have a disability as many adults continue to make decisions for students without their input. Therefore, the purpose of this research analysis was to answer the following questions: (1) What is self-determination? (2) Can self-determination skills be taught? (3) What role does an individual, their parents, and educators play in promoting self-determination skills in an individual identified with needing special education services?

Definition of Terms

To better understand the review of literature it is important to have some background knowledge of some select words that will be discussed throughout. First and foremost, a disability is an impairment or limitation of an individual's ability to complete certain tasks or activities of daily living, and/or participate in interactions due to a physical, mental, cognitive or developmental condition (*Dictionary by Merriam-*

Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary). The term special education refers to instruction that is specifically designed for an individual with a disability, up to the age of 21, to meet their needs (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2021*).

When someone changes or moves from one place to another, as in a student transitioning to college, they are in a state of transition (*Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary*). A paraprofessional is an individual who is trained to assist students identified as having a disability within the school system (*Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary*). When a student has been identified to need special education services an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed which is a plan developed for a specific individual with a disability to meet their needs in the educational environment (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2021*). Finally, direct instruction of material is the presentation of academic content to students by teachers, such as in a lecture or demonstration (*Direct Instruction Definition, 2013*).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two reviews the published literature on self-determination skills and students receiving special education services. It will examine the history and benefits of self-determination skills, the roles in which parents and teachers play, the barriers students with disabilities face with building these skills, and the importance of possessing these skills as they transition through life. This information should help in determining how to best support and build a student's self-determination skills, no matter their disability or ability. The literature used in this thesis was located through the data bases ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, EBSCO, SAGE Premier with publication dates from 1994-2019. These searches were narrowed using the following keywords: "self-determination in special education students," "self-advocacy," "postsecondary education and self-determination," "family, self-determination, and disability," "intellectual and developmental disabilities and self-advocacy," "self-determination, special education, and paraprofessionals," "self-determination, special education, and administration," and "self-determination theory."

Direct Instruction and Self-Determination Skills

According to Mason et al. (2004), there is a general trend that youth who are involved in self-determination activities have strengthened outcomes. Durlak, Rose, and Bursack (1994) attempted to develop and empirically validate a training program for teaching self-determination skills to high school students that were identified as having a learning disability by qualifying under local state and federal standards. The study consisted of eight students (7 male and 1 female) ages 15 to 17 from a large

Midwestern, suburban high school. To determine which skills would be addressed in the study, 15 experts (coordinators of special education programs, learning disability specialists at community colleges, 4-year colleges, or universities) were mailed a list of seven self-awareness and self-advocacy skills believed necessary for success in a post-secondary education. If 10 of the 13 experts who responded agreed that a skill was important, it was incorporated into the training program. The list of skills included the ability to (a) ask for clarification of lecture material from class, (b) tell a teacher that one has a learning disability, (c) make an appointment with a teacher to discuss needs and/or accommodations, (d) ask a teacher if a tape recorder may be used to record class lectures, (e) obtain teacher approval for another student to take notes or to copy another student's notes, (f) ask the librarian for assistance, and (g) make an appointment with a resource person (outside of the classroom) for academic assistance (Durlak, et al., 1994, p. 52).

In this study, Durlak, Rose and Bursack (1994) provided students with two individual training sessions prior to group training to review with the student their disability, accommodations, strategies they may find helpful, as well as review phrases or vocabulary that would routinely come up during the training sessions. Baseline data was collected for each self-determination skill by the trainer asking the students how a task could be met, such as "How would you ask a teacher to clear up something you did not understand in class? Show me the steps." Training was ended for a particular task when performance on the previous task sequence reached 90% accuracy or better.

Additionally, students were provided no corrective feedback on their performance during the baseline phase.

When training began, students met in groups of four. During training sessions, the trainer would define, demonstrate and rehearse the task. The trainer would also address and answer any questions from the students prior to them practicing the task(s) as demonstrated. These training sessions were videotaped to allow for group discussion and feedback, as well as provide additional examples for students to use during rehearsal. Positive feedback was provided to students for tasks completed correctly and corrective feedback was provided if tasks were not fully completed or inappropriate.

During the baseline assessment, the eight participants responded accurately, on average, to 42% of the needed skills previously discussed for success in post-secondary settings. After direct intervention training, students were able to respond accurately, on average, on 82% of the steps taught to obtain mastery of the skills presented following one training session. Students went through an average of 2.23 trials before meeting criteria for each of the seven. Furthermore, one week following training, all students completed a maintenance check with a performance rate of 100%. This study provides important information as it shows that students with a learning disability can acquire, maintain, and generalize skills that focus on self-determination skills of self-advocacy and self-awareness as a result of the direct instruction (Durlak, Rose, & Bursack, 1994). Once a student has mastered self-determination skills, is the student must be encouraged by those close to them to continue practicing to allow the student to

become more comfortable seeking out what they need with confidence and to have a higher probability of implementing learned skills in post-high school settings.

Another study that further supports the notion that direct instruction of self-determination skills to students with disabilities is critical for transition post-high school was conducted by Wehmeyer et al. (2010). Participants in the study included 493 middle and high school students (316 male and 177 female), and included students aged 18-21 that continued to receive special education services on the high school campuses that were chosen. The majority of the participants were serviced under the categorical area of learning disability (31%) or mental retardation (27%). Other disability categorical areas were also represented in the study but to a much lesser degree.

Students were separated into either a control group or an intervention group. Teachers in the intervention group were provided training and support to implement the *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* (WFA) Curriculums, while teachers in the control group were provided training on how to promote active parental involvement in the educational process. The WFA curriculum was originally designed for high school aged students to better promote their involvement in transition planning (Wehmeyer et al. (2010) p. 34). This direct instruction curriculum addresses various skills related to transition and transition planning over a period of 36 sessions. Based on the results, Wehmeyer et al. (2010) determined that there is causal evidence that students receiving direct instruction using the WFA curriculum showed improve self-determination, as well as transition knowledge. This builds upon previously discussed studies to show that interventions, including direct instruction, has a positive impact on self-determination

and overall student involvement in their transition planning. Furthermore, a study conducted by Carter et al. in 2008 found similar results where they were able to identify a strong relationship between teachers providing direct instruction on self-determination skills and a students' ability to gain these skills, whether provided by either regular or special education teachers.

In elementary, middle and high school the biggest areas of self-determination often surround self-advocacy, self-awareness, and goal setting. Therefore, teaching students across the different educational settings is imperative so they learn to identify when they may need something and speak up for themselves, as well as to teach them how to set goal(s), develop a plan to achieve said goals and evaluate their progress or achievement towards the goal(s).

Roles of Parents and Educators

There are numerous individuals that shape a young person's life and can range from parents, siblings, peers, as well as teachers and administrators at their school. These people help build and strengthen a young person's self-determination skills whether they know it or not, as well as for the better or not.

Parents

Parents are one of the major contributors to instilling self-determination skills in a child's life. When a child has not been identified as having a disability, they may experience more freedoms compared to their same-aged disabled peers. For example, parents of children that have a cognitive disability may be more likely to withhold providing experiences and teaching them skills to lead independent lives, such as

cooking on an open stove or learning how to use public transportation. All children need to learn through experiences to obtain various life skills; however, as Arellano and Peralto (2013) noted in their study only 19% of parents surveyed allowed their child to make a choice regarding things such as their clothes or food on their own. Additionally, 44% of parents stated they sometimes choose for their children because “they know them very well,” which removes the opportunity for the child to make their own choice (Arellano & Peralta, 2013).

The study aimed to determine how parents promote self-determination skills in their child with a cognitive disability. Arellano and Peralto (2013) concluded that children with greater limitations were less likely to develop the skills needed to grasp or come in to their own being, to control and regulate themselves, understand and adapt to their environment, and make life decisions. The reason for these limitations appear to be related to parents that have a child with a disability are more cautious and believe that they know what is best for their child rather than teaching them the skills needed to be autonomous.

It is important to note that parents play an even bigger role in building the self-determination skills in their children with physical disabilities. For example, a child with a physical disability may rely on a wheelchair to move around the environment, but if the living arrangement does not allow for easy accessibility, the child is limited in what they can and cannot do themselves, thus hindering their overall independence. This child may not be able to get a snack or drink on his/her own as their wheelchair may not be able to be maneuvered in a space. Also, even if they are able to move around the

space, items may be out of reach for the child to obtain without adult support. If this is a new handicap, a family/parent(s) may likely be ill informed on how best to support their child, thus, it is important that parents be provided with the most up-to-date information and accommodations to provide and foster self-determination skills within their child (Wehmeyer, 1995).

According to Chu (2018), for high school students and youths with disabilities it is important they learn self-determination to have a successful transition into adult life. However, these skills need to be encouraged and practiced when a child is growing up from a young age, as they do not occur naturally. In the early years of childhood it is critical for young children to develop skills specific to their age-level for the foundations of self-determination, as it is inappropriate to expect young children to develop the same self-determination skills as adults or adolescents (Chu, 2018).

Young children spend most of their time at home than with adults in any other setting, therefore, families play critical roles in promoting the fundamental skills of self-determination for adolescence with disabilities (Chu, 2018). Ankeny and Lehmann (2011) found that students/participants in their study identified the members of their family as the ones who most model goal-directed behavior and who also supported them the most with building their strengths and interests. They cited work completed by Trainor (2005) that suggested students' strengths and self-determination efforts are supported at home no matter cultural background (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2010).

Students come from vast and diverse backgrounds, whether it is race, culture, or socioeconomic status of their families; this does not make the role of the

parent/guardian any less important for developing self-determination skills in their children. Ankeny and Lehmann (2010) found that of the eight parents who participated in their study, only two attended and obtained any postsecondary education training. Additionally, parent income levels were noted to be low-middle income range, but still these parents promoted their children's self-determination skills, which further supports education and income levels may not play a big role. Therefore, when a family member (parent, guardian, etc) has been provided the tools (ie. information) on how to support the growth of their child's self-determination skills, they may be the most effective individual to assist the child with the preparation for their future and attaining their goals. Because of this the child may be more comfortable to take risks and be truthful with their wants and desires in their home environment (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2010). However, a limitation to Ankeny and Lehmann's findings is the small sample size of parents that participated in their study.

On the contrary, Chu's research found that socioeconomic status and education did play a factor in developing self-determination skills in children. Chu found that a families' education, income, and distress levels may affect access and time to opportunities that could boost self-determination skills in their children. In further support, a study conducted by Chen and Chao (2011) in Taiwan as cited by Chu's research, found that students with families who had higher socioeconomic status and lived with additional family members than just their parents exhibited higher self-determination skills compared to their peers who had a lower socioeconomic status and lived only with their parents. Another take away from Chu's research found that culture

does not play as big an impact. Although cultures and families may differ in their perspectives and methods of teaching and facilitating self-determination skills in their children, they all believe these skills are important for independence and success later in life (Chu, 2018).

Teachers

General and special educators take on a large role when teaching students about self-determination; however, many struggle with how to implement or run out of time with the numerous other duties assigned in a day. Therefore, according to Mason et al., (2004), many educators want to teach self-determination skills in their classrooms. One way to embed self-determination within the core curriculum while also maintaining high expectations for all students is to approach the teaching of self-determination skills within a school-wide framework (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Whether they have a disability or not, students need to plan for their future. This may include setting goals that are important to them, learning how to self-advocate for their needs and wants, and being able to regulate and monitor their emotions in various settings and situations (Mason et al., 2004). Bohanon et al. (2015, as cited in Wehmeyer, 1997) that “these skills are a component of self-determination, defined as the ability to be self-regulated (i.e., self-evaluate), autonomous (i.e., set goals), self-realized (ie. problem-solve), and psychologically empowered (i.e., express wants and needs)” (p. 204). Therefore, it is important that not just special education teachers promote this skill in students with disabilities, but that all teachers, including regular education teachers, provide self-determination instruction for their students.

For many, self-determination skills come naturally or with little need or support for improvement. However, individuals with disabilities often struggle to gain skills associated with self-determination. Policies have been implemented to assist youth with disabilities to gain the skills and supports in the area of self-determination through their school curriculum or Individualized Education Plan. But equally important are efforts to ensure that youth are equipped to direct those activities, align the activities with their personal goals, advocate for their preferences and needs, make informed choices, decide for themselves how they will achieve their goals, and assume responsibility for their own actions (Carter et al., 2008, p. 55-56).

In most cases, teachers note that building self-determination skills in their students is of high importance; however, many have not been instructed on how to best do this. Additionally, according to Thoma et al. (2002), teachers unknowingly engaged in behaviors that made it difficult for their students to demonstrate self-determined behaviors even though they (teachers) wanted to support this growth in their student(s). These barriers were noted to include interrupting students; asking questions that students were not prepared to answer; using prompts to ensure a preconceived answer from a student; not giving students an opportunity to share information until the end of the meeting, after everything was decided; not using information they knew about student preferences and interests to guide annual and/or transition goals; and not allowing students to have opportunities to experience employment or community living opportunities, for fear that they might make unwise decisions (Thoma et al., 2002, p. 83).

One study set out to determine whether general and/or special education teachers put in more effort to teach self-determination skills to their students in their high school classrooms (Carter et al., 2008). The researchers of this study predicted that special education teachers would find teaching self-determination skills more valuable and, therefore, direct more time in their classes to teach their students self-determination skills in all seven domain areas compared to their general education colleagues. Additionally, they believed that there would be fewer opportunities for students to receive skill instruction in this area in core academic classes in their general education classes (Carter et al., 2008).

The study by Carter et al. (2008) was conducted with 340 educators participating. The educators were comprised of 255 general education and 55 special education teachers. All participants worked at one of eight ethnically and economically diverse high schools located within the same state. Each teacher was provided a 6-point Likert scale survey that included the seven domain areas of self-determination. The participants were first asked to rate how important they believed teaching each of the different domain areas was in their classroom and, second, how often they currently teach each of the domain area skills in their classroom.

Based on the data gathered from the surveys, researchers of the study concluded that both general and special education teachers rated the same top three domains for self-determination. These domains were problem solving, self-management, and decision-making. Additionally, all educators believed that increasing

a student's self-determination skill set is important and could include these skills into their lessons/curriculum (Carter et al., 2008).

Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals play an important role in the lives of students with disabilities, especially those with educational disabilities in the autism or intellectual disability categories. According to Carter et al. (2011), paraprofessionals have the most direct contact with students with severe disabilities versus their general and special education colleagues. Therefore, it is important to address the way in which paraprofessionals shape and teach self-determination skills in the students they work with. According to Giangreco and Suter (2009) students receiving one-to-one paraprofessional supports may experience a number of various obstacles, but for the purpose of focusing on self-determination these students may form an unnecessary dependence and experience a loss of personal control or choices available to same aged-peers.

A study conducted by Carter et al. (2011) looked at gaining more information from a paraprofessionals perspective on building self-determination skills with students with severe disabilities or low incidence. The study consisted of 347 paraprofessionals, which was comprised mainly of women (92.5%) with an average of 9.7 years of experience in the field. Individuals were chosen from schools in three Cooperative Educational Service Agencies in Midwestern states as they had schools in urban, suburban, and rural communities. As part of the study, paraprofessionals were provided a study that was adapted from one used by Wehmeyer et al. (2000) and asked to rate the importance of seven different instructional domains (ie. choice making,

decision making, goal setting and attainment, problem-solving, self-advocacy and leadership skills, self-awareness and self-knowledge, and self-management and self-regulation skills) related to self-determination. They were then asked to rate how often they, themselves, taught these skills to the students they were working with, and finally, they were to report on their own knowledge of self-determination as discussed and taught through professional development activities.

Paraprofessionals believed that the seven instructional domains were important, with problem-solving and choice making rated significantly higher than the others. Additionally, of the paraprofessionals surveyed, they noted that they sometimes too often teach the skills in the seven domains. Less than 50% of the paraprofessionals indicated routinely teaching decision making, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy and leadership, self-awareness, and self-knowledge to the students they work alongside. Carter et al. (2011) noted this could be attributed to the paraprofessionals overall knowledge regarding the concept of self-determination as it relates to the limited professional development opportunities focused around this topic.

A second study by Lane et al. (2012) looked at paraprofessionals' involvement in self-determination instruction with students having high incidence disabilities (ie. learning disabilities, autism, emotional disturbance, etc.). Their study consisted of surveying 223 paraprofessionals from 115 public schools, 27 different school districts, randomly selected around the state of Wisconsin in either elementary, middle or high school settings. Consistent with their previous study, as mentioned previously, and with

national patterns, the majority of participants were females without a college degree, but having worked in the paraprofessional role on average of 10.10 years.

Paraprofessionals were asked to complete a printed, two-page survey that comprised of 23 total questions with two different sections. The first section sought out information around the seven instructional domains associated with self-determination for the students they work with during a typical school day. The second section sought to find basic demographic information, including years of experience and gender; information about their current work position; and the categories of students with disabilities that they support. The participants were also asked to provide information regarding their knowledge with the concept of self-determination in students with disabilities, as well as the training opportunities provided during in-service or other professional development opportunities that addressed self-determination strategies.

Results from the study found that paraprofessionals attributed high levels of importance to each of the seven instructional domains for self-determination. More than 80% of paraprofessionals surveyed rated choice making, decision-making, problem solving and self-awareness and self-knowledge as being of high importance relative to other instructional priorities for the students they worked closely alongside (Lane, et al., 2012). Additionally, high importance was also given to goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy and leadership skills, self-management and self-regulation skills by 70% of the participants in the survey. However, the three highest areas of importance were noted to be problem solving, choice making and decision-making. Decision-making was the only additional area noted in this study with high significance compared to their

previous study conducted with paraprofessionals working with students with low-incidence disabilities. Additionally, as in their previous study, paraprofessionals had little access to professional development opportunities for training on building self-determination skills in students.

With the evidence found in the study by Carter et al. (2011 & 2012) it is important that paraprofessionals are trained appropriately in helping the students they work with build their self-determination skills. If they are not trained they may inadvertently and unknowingly hinder students' self-determination. Students with disabilities also need to be brought into the discussion regarding paraprofessional support, as Giangreco (2009) noted that students with disabilities should be involved in the decision making portion for determining their own supports as it is a key element in self-determination. An example of this would be to ask the student with a disability where, when and how they need, and do not need, paraprofessional support throughout their school day.

In another study, Giangreco et al. (1997) further investigated paraprofessional support and the effects on students with disabilities. The basis for the study was to determine and increase research by identifying key issues that had previously been observed in general education settings where students with disabilities were supported by paraprofessional staff. The study collected data in 16 classrooms across 11 public schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Utah and Vermont during the 1994-95 and 1995-96 school years. Classrooms chosen were based on students' inclusion in the general education setting and students reported to have multiple disabilities. Seven female and

four male students were identified to be deaf-blind and ranged in age from four to 20 years old. All thirteen of the students were also noted to have significant cognitive delays and additional disabilities (ie. orthopedic impairments (91%), health impairments (64%), and behavioral impairments (36%)). In addition, there were 134 educational team members that participated in the study. Of the educational team members there were 123 females and 11 males, with 34 being related service providers (ie. speech/language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, etc). The other team members included 20 special education teachers, 17 instructional assistants (paraprofessionals), 16 general education teachers, 15 parents, and 9 school administrators.

Results from the study found that paraprofessionals were in close proximity to students identified as having a disability on a continuous basis. The researchers noted this by the paraprofessional maintaining physical contact with the student or their wheelchair, sitting right next to the student, the student sitting in the paraprofessionals lap when peers were seated on the floor, and finally the paraprofessional following the student around the classroom, building, or school grounds. Researchers noted that, at times, it is important and necessary to have direct contact with a student with disabilities; however, excessive adult proximity was not always needed and could be detrimental to the student(s) they are working with. Researchers were also able to identify eight problems related to paraprofessional support proximity, which included: (1) interference with ownership and responsibility by general education teachers, (2) separation from classmates, (3) dependence on adults, (4) impact on peer interactions,

(5) limitations on receiving competent instruction, (6) loss of personal control, (7) loss of gender identity, and (8) interference with instruction of other students.

The participating team members note that paraprofessionals play an important role in the classroom setting for students with disabilities; however, the proximity of supports needs to be drastically examined so that students with disabilities are not becoming dependent on the support. It is suggested that adults need to become more aware of the support they are providing and as time goes on, begin to slowly reduce the amount of support they provide so that students can achieve a greater amount of autonomy.

Administrators

As noted, general and special education teachers as well as paraprofessionals note the importance of teaching self-determination skills to the students in their classrooms or whom they work with, but administrators also play a vital role.

According to a study conducted by Carter et al. (2013), administrators rated the seven components of self-determination to be of high importance. Of the 333 administrators surveyed in elementary, middle and high schools in the state of Tennessee, more than 70% of them believe that decision-making, problem-solving, and self-management and self-regulation skills as having high importance compared to other instructional priorities to be taught to students in their school buildings. However, some educators may believe they are missing out on other important instruction related to academics and meetings standards. However, as Carter et al. (2013) note prior research has found that developing a student's self-determination skills may actually strengthen

their overall learning, including academically. Therefore, according to Denny and Daviso (2012) administrators should support their teachers in finding resources and ways to implement self-determination skills into their classroom lessons.

Mason et al. (2004) also looked at the role of administrators when it came to student's level of self-determination and their involvement in their own IEP meeting. Administrators were noted to respond more favorably to students participation in the IEP process and meeting(s) (i.e. communicating with others about their IEP, helping with developing goals, leading the meeting, identifying accommodations, and discussing transition planning). Administrators were also more likely than teacher respondents to report that their district provides informal instruction in self-determination skills and has an outlined plan for teaching these skills each year that students attend their school from kindergarten through grade 12 (Mason et al., 2004). They also felt that teachers were prepared to teach self-determination skills in their district compared to that of teacher respondents with a mean score of 2.06 compared to 1.67.

Similarities and differences among educators

According to Durlak et al. (1994), parents and special educators often encourage dependency in students with learning disabilities by doing for them what they can be taught to do for themselves, including protecting and advocating for them. Researchers and educators are often puzzled as to what they can do to promote self-determination skills in children, especially as they prepare to transition through various parts of life. This is especially true for students with disabilities. There is little information available that supports self-determination and interventions educators and parents can use to

promote it in children. “Family and school-level factors, such as beliefs of family members and teachers and the practices adopted at home and school to promote self-determination skills, can also impact the development of self-determination” (Shogren et al., 2014, p. 23). Therefore, since parents and educators believe that self-determination skills are influenced at home and school it is imperative to learn how to best support children with disabilities gain these skills in both settings.

Researchers wanted to determine to what degree the 16 constructs predict the three essential characteristics of self-determination (Shogren et al., 2014). They also wanted to determine to what degree key covariates play a part in self-determination in children. This study was a part of a larger study that has been gathering information for the past 10 years using the NLTS2. To gain a better understanding of how the constructs play a role in each of the 12 disability categories, the researchers gathered 1250 students to be a part of each wave for each disability category.

Through the research, students’ self-concept varied depending on the disability category. For example, children with cognitive disabilities showed “significant regression paths between inclusion and supports and self-realization,” whereas, children with sensory disabilities showed “a significant path from inclusion to self-realization” (Shogren et al., 2014, p. 27). Overall, if children were included, they were more likely to show psychological empowerment if they were a child with a sensory disability, and general parent involvement if they had a traumatic brain injury. Additionally, the research showed there was a correlation between students with a high self-concept and students with increased autonomy, self-realization, and psychological

empowerment (Shogren et al., 2014). The study also showed that there is a diverse outcome based on the covariates in the study, which included gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Finally, the research suggested that students who participate in the general education may have positive results if they are held to high expectations in those environments and have strong friendships or others they have connected with in that environment, too.

Student involvement in the IEP process

In today's society it is imperative that students receiving special education services be a part of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings when they are able to understand what is being discussed or by the age of 14. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, a student's IEP must be assessed for and include transition related services. Additionally, youth with disabilities should be invited to participate in meetings where their IEPs are discussed, and decisions about the students' interests and preferences are being made as soon as they can actively participate, but no later than age 14. If an IEP is developed with little to no involvement by the student, he or she will learn that their opinion is not essential and that important decisions are best to be made for them which downgrades or eliminates the importance of self-determination skills being taught (Hawbaker, 2007).

According to multiple scholars named in the Mason et al. (2004, p. 441-442) article, prior research noted that youth who were actively involved in their IEP meetings in relation to goal setting and planning were more likely to (a) achieve their goals, (b) improve their academic skills, (c) develop important self-advocacy and communication

skills, (d) graduate from high school, and (e) gain better employment and quality of life as adults.

Mason et al. (2004) conducted a study with an online survey placed on the Council for Exceptional Children's website over a 6-week period, as well as sent it via e-mail to a select group of members to examine the importance of student involvement in the IEP process and their self-determination. Researchers received 523 responses from the survey that they considered to be usable. Respondents included special education teachers (77%), general education teachers (12%), administrators (8%), related service providers (3%), teacher education students (1%), and staff at institutions of higher education (1%). Much like previous research has found, most respondents in this survey believed self-determination activities and student involvement in the IEP process to be important, but were not satisfied with current instructional activities and their overall preparation to be able to teach this skills to their student(s).

According to the results of the study, students who were more involved in the IEP process had an increased understanding of their accommodations (71%), disability (60%), and were reported to be more confident in seeking out and asking for their accommodations (59%). Results also indicated a statistically significant correlation between a student's involvement in the IEP process and the importance of self-determination skills as noted by respondents in the survey. The study also provided important data regarding how much time respondents felt they spent on preparing for the IEP meeting with the student, as 92% of them noted an average of 1 to 3 hours.

To best support students involvement in their IEP meetings they need to be informed prior to the meeting about what to expect when they attend. This can be an intimidating time, especially for doing it for the first time, as a table of adults surrounds them. It has been found that having a facilitator at the meeting, likely the students case manager/special education teacher, can increase participation from the student as they can ask the student direct questions to allow them to provide their input and avoid words/phrases and terms or slang that the student may not understand (Test, et al., 2004).

Student-led IEP meetings

When a student becomes comfortable attending their IEP meetings it is encouraged to allow them to lead the meeting. This provides a real-life opportunity for the student to be a large contributor to the meeting and to advocate for what they feel is most important to their success in the academic setting. In a research study by Hawbaker in 2007, it was noted that research suggested students who lead their IEP meetings have many positive outcomes.

According to Mason et al. (2004), "student-led IEPs teach students to take ownership for their own education and to demonstrate that ownership at an annual IEP meeting". They also reported that this process allowed students to learn and know more about their disability or disabilities, understand their legal rights as they continued to age, understand more about appropriate accommodations compared to their peers and gained increased self-confidence to advocate for their needs.

Mason et al. (2002) looked at the student-led IEP process and the reactions of student and teachers alike. In their study, they looked at the training and implementation of student-led IEPs in a culturally diverse urban high school. The high school had been introduced to student-led IEPs four years prior and of the participants 42% of the students selected and 40% of the teachers selected had prior experience with the model. The researchers looked at three different components: students who participated in interviews, teachers who participated in interviews, and students whose IEP meetings were observed. Results of their research supported the notion that students with mild disabilities were able to actively participate in creating and leading their IEP meeting. They also found that all participants found the process to be positive in many ways, which included general educators, special educators and students themselves. For instance, students believed they had increased self-confidence and self-advocacy through doing this process. They felt they were able to “ask for explanations” or ask teachers to “repeat things” when they didn’t understand it initially. Parent participation in student-led IEP meetings also increased (Mason et al., 2002); Mason et al., 2004). As student-led IEP meetings appear to be of great value to many involved, primarily the student and parent, this process should be implemented more by IEP teams and used with fidelity. Especially as students transition to high school to help prepare them for after.

Hughes et al. (2013) also looked at a student’s participation in their IEP meetings and relation to self-determination skills.; however, they wanted to extend the literature on self-determination by addressing limitations from previous studies in the schools.

Therefore, a high school serving a high poverty population, as well as having a majority of participants in the study coming from underrepresented ethnic groups (i.e. blacks and Hispanics). They also included participants with severe disabilities and interviewed the students to get their perspectives on their involvement and engagement in their IEP meeting.

Participants in the study came from three different high schools, also referred to as School A, B, and C located in large urban school districts in southeastern United States. Researchers purposely chose School A to obtain information on self-reported self-determination skills of students attending a struggling and economically challenged high school serving students in a high poverty community. The other two schools used in the study were identified to be from middle-income communities. There was a total of 19 participants from school A and a combined total of 28 participants from schools B and C. To be considered as an eligible participant students needed to have an IEP and receive special education services in classes for moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, receive moderate to extensive support needs as documented by school records, be able to respond verbally to spoken questions with at least four to five word phrases and follow one- to two-part directions, as well as receive parent and student consent. Participants had a median age of 17 and 25 of the 47 individuals were female.

Researchers in the study developed their own Student Self-Determination Survey (SS-DS) after extensive review of literature in self-determination and student involvement in the IEP process (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 7). The survey consisted of 18 questions that looked at the participant's involvement in the IEP process, use of self-

determination skills, and an open-ended question about future plans after high school.

Interviews were conducted on an individual basis using a script to maintain uniformity.

Results from the research found that there was minimal participation in IEP meetings reported across all schools. It is significant to note that less than half of participants across all schools reported knowing what an IEP was and with only five students reported leading their own meeting. However, 31 of the participants did state they had attended their IEP meetings. Although many of the students had attended their meetings, only 17 of the students stated they knew what their goals entailed and the rest of the students reported they had never read their IEPs. The research further reports that only 19 of the students reported ever talking about their IEP goals with parents or family and only 13 reported ever talking about them with their teachers.

These findings are important to make note of because IDEA notes the importance of the involvement, at least invitation to attend, for students in their IEP meetings when they reach 14 years of age. For students to want to attend and be an active participant in the meeting, they need to be instructed on what their IEP entails, including but not limited to the goals and objectives they are working towards. If they are unaware of these components a student's involvement in the IEP process will continue to be hindered.

Transitioning to Post-Secondary Institutions

Students with disabilities can be successful transitioning to post-secondary settings, but it is important they possess the needed skills to do well in those settings. Among those skills is the need to be able to self-advocate for themselves.

Importance of Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is an individual's ability to represent oneself by identifying and speaking up for what they want or need. It is an important characteristic needed for success throughout an individual's life whether in an academic setting, future employment or personal situation.

A study conducted by Lopez et al. (2019) aimed to replicate a study conducted by Walker and Test in 2011 regarding whether instruction provided to high school students with high-incidence disabilities could obtain the necessary skills to reach out and ask for academic accommodations using modified Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution (mSACR) instruction. The participants in the study consisted of five high school African American students (3 female, 2 male). To be considered for the study, the participants needed to be in either 9th, 10th, or 11th grade, enrolled in a general education course with a co-teacher, enrollment in a Learning Skills class, post-secondary education goal in their IEP for attending college, accommodations noted in the IEP, attendance rate of 90% or better, and no prior experience self-advocating for their accommodations. In addition, five regular education teachers participated (in which the students chose), as these would be the teachers the students requested their accommodations from.

Students were provided with ten intervention sessions, in which eight were instructional. During the initial meetings it was noted that most students were not aware of the term accommodations; and therefore, students were provided instruction from the researcher. Results indicated that the teachers selected believed their

students learned to self-advocate for their accommodations without assistance and that training in self-advocacy would benefit all students to prepare them for their futures.

The students selected as part of the study also believed that the training they received had a positive impact on their lives by allowing them to better identify their needs and make requests based on those, including asking for their accommodations. The biggest take away of the study though may be that students reported they would prefer to advocate for themselves in the future rather than have an adult/teacher do it for them.

Zhang et al. (2019) conducted another study supporting the importance of self-advocacy in students with disabilities. They wanted to examine the relationship between self-advocacy involvement and outcomes in adult life, including post-secondary education, independent living, and employment through the Texas Statewide Youth Leadership Forum (TXYLF). Their research was focused on former delegates (individual that attended the program one time) and mentors (individual attended as a delegate and returned a second time to serve in a mentoring role to new delegates) in the TXYLF program.

Students were required to be a high school junior or senior between the ages of 16 and 22 years to be considered as a delegate, as well as having received special education services. Additionally, to be considered, individuals were required to submit an application that included information such as volunteer and work experience, letters of reference, and a personal essay explaining why they wanted to improve their self-advocacy skills. A rubric was used in determining individual selection and the top 35 were invited to participate as delegates. The study contained 51 total participants,

which included 21 male and 30 females with the majority being white, non-Hispanic (57%).

Interventions provided in the study were conducted in an initial five-day training with a follow-up nine-month support phase. The first five days addressed skills around team building; self-advocacy, legislative advocacy and policy action, as well as leadership plan development. The participants returned home and were assigned an adult advisor who lived nearby and could support them with implementation of their previously developed leadership plans. Monthly reports of each participant's progress were sent to the TXYLF coordinators. If an individual successfully completed the program they were invited back to the camp for a follow-up training that allowed them to give a presentation on the challenges and successes they experienced through their journey. The results indicated that 31 (61%) of the TXYLF participants attended post-secondary education classes, 14 (28%) lived in residence other than their parents or guardian's home 29 (57%) had been employed after they attended TXYLF, and 24 (83%) of the 29 employed participants had been employed in inclusive settings (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 211). Of the participants in the study, those that took on the role as mentor reported higher rates of advocacy in all areas. This study provided some very important key details, with one of the most important being that the more time an individual has to work on their self-advocacy skills the high rates of success they may find when it comes to adult outcomes such as employment, postsecondary education, and independent living.

Pitfalls of not learning self-determination skills post-high school

Thousands of high school graduates attend post-secondary institutions each year to further their education and many of these individuals are students that received special education services while in high school. Studies have been conducted over the years about students with disabilities and their success in post-secondary settings. When students do not have the self-determination skills instilled in them prior to leaving high school their chances of success are greatly reduced. Research suggests that students with disabilities that receive self-determination and self-advocacy interventions in high school have better outcomes of success in post-secondary settings (Shogren et al., 2018).

A big take-away for students and families is the difference in services from high school to post-secondary institutions. When a student has been identified with a disability in the public education system (ie. pre-primary or K-12), their educational rights are protected and guaranteed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Schools are required to provide appropriate programming and accommodations to meet the needs of a student with a disability. However, when a student chooses to further their education they are no longer protected under this mandate rather it gets moved to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) to support students with disabilities. According to Pacer's website, a post-secondary program may not discriminate on the basis of a disability, but transfers much of the responsibility on to the individual to request their accommodations in post-secondary education settings.

Therefore, as noted previously, self-advocacy skills are essential for students planning to further their education after high school.

Janiga and Costenbader (2002) conducted a study on the transition from high school to post-secondary education on students with an identified learning disability. To conduct their research they developed and sent out a survey to coordinators of special services for students with disabilities at 174 colleges and universities in the state of New York. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and requested demographic information about their institution, the number of students with a learning disability, cost of services, as well as satisfaction with transition services provided during high school for students with a learning disability enrolled in their institution using a likert scale. The survey also provided three open-ended questions to get their insight on how they felt secondary schools could do better to prepare students with a learning disability for college, estimating the success/graduation rate of students with a learning disability, and a final opportunity that allowed respondents to address any areas they felt the survey failed to address. The results of their study found that professionals at post-secondary institutions were not very satisfied with the transition services provided in high school to best prepare students for their time at a college or university. Of the respondents, 13.9% stated that high schools should improve the documentation to support specific accommodations for students. Furthermore, their study supported the fact that self-advocacy skills are imperative for student's success in post-secondary settings. Per their research, "respondents noted that many students who come to college have relied to heavily on their parents and on special education teachers.

Students who are dependent on others may struggle when they enter college and are forced to take responsibility for their own educational services” (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002, p. 468).

Getzel and Thoma (2008) also looked at college students with disabilities and the importance of having well-established self-determination skills in post-secondary education success. They had 34 students participate (53% female, 47% male) in their study who ranged in age from 18-48, with 80% of the students being 18-23 in age. Participants were in good academic standing and were identified as having a disability from the Disability Support Services (DSS) office and who self-disclosed their disability and sought out services. Therefore, because they sought out services it was noted that the participants had some degree of self-determination skills. Participants were placed in focus groups that ranged from 4 to 10 individuals and followed a semi structured interview process. Through their research they found that students identified self-determination skills as important to their success in their post-secondary education. Through the interview process, students shared stories of not initially disclosing their disability to DSS, failing, and then making the choice to disclose their disability and receive supports needed to be successful. Each focus group identified key components of self-determination needed for post-secondary success, including being able to problem-solve, learning about themselves and their disability, goal setting and self-management. They also found that participants believed seeking out services from the DSS office, forming relationships with their professors and instructors, developing a support system on campus with friends, support groups, or the DSS office, and gaining a

self-awareness and understanding of themselves to persevere were essential to staying in college and getting the supports they needed.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

Self-determination has been defined different ways over the years, but many agree that it is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that allow a person to take on and engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviors (Field et al. 1998; Ward, 1988). It is considered an essential skill to be successful throughout life.

Direct instruction of self-determination skills should be widely discussed and considered throughout the entirety of today's educational system from pre-primary to post-high school. When direct instruction is provided on specific skills for increasing an individual's self-determination the individual is more likely to display increased confidence and have a higher likelihood to implement skills such as self-advocacy and goal setting throughout their educational journey, especially in transition planning (Carter et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 1994; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). This is especially true when the direct instruction of skills is provided when there is a strong relationship between a teacher and student. Therefore, teaching these skills is something that needs to be taken on by all staff and not just the special education team.

There are many different people that play a role in a student's educational journey and therefore, have a role in developing or improving their self-determination skills. Parents have an imperative role as students spend most of their time at home and not at school. Individuals with disabilities need to be provided in early childhood with experiences to build self-determination skills and be supported within the home

(Ankeny et al., 2011; Arellano et al., 2013; Chu, 2018; Clark et al., 2008; Erwin et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2013; Wehmeyer et al., 1995). Cultural factors were found not to play a role in developing these skills within the home (Ankeny et al., 2011; Chu 2018); however, socioeconomic status does play a role. Students from families with high socioeconomic status or that live with additional family members exhibit higher self-determination skills compared to peers from lower socioeconomic thresholds (Chen at al., 2011; Chu, 2018).

Educators across the board also play a vital role in building self-determination skills in students. Therefore, self-determination skills is important for all students, not just those with a disability so adding direct instruction into the general education system should be highly considered so all students have access to learn these skills (Bohanon et al., 2015; Carter, et al., 2008; Mason et al., 2004; Wagner et al., 2006). Both general and special education teachers identified the same top three domains for self-determinations skills as essential for their students to learn and know which included problem solving, self-management, and decision-making. Therefore, collaborating across all classes and programs within the school is important to teach these skills. However, for teachers to properly instruct and teach self-determination skills they need to receive appropriate instruction so they are not unknowingly hindering these skills in their students, such as interrupting their students or asking questions that the student may not be able to answer (Thoma et al., 2002).

Paraprofessionals play a vital role for many of our students with disabilities as they often have the most contact (Carter et al., 2011), but can also form dependence on

the adult and lose out on making choices that their same aged peers do (Giangreco et al., 1997; Giangreco et al., 2009). Much like research previously discussed with teachers, paraprofessionals need to obtain appropriate training related to self-determination, so they do not hinder a student's growth and provide the appropriate support to foster skills (Carter et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2012).

Parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals play a big role in developing these skills in students, but so do administrators in the building. Administrators identified decision-making, problem-solving, self-management and self-regulation skills with being of high importance compared to other instructional priorities (Carter et al., 2013).

Administrators need to share with their staff their belief regarding self-determination skills and its importance for students, as well as support their teachers and staff to find trainings and resources to successfully implement within their classrooms so that everyone feels confident in building these skills in students (Denny et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2004).

Parents and educators need to be conscientious to not hinder their students' progress with building their self-determination skills by doing things for them, especially when they are capable of doing it if taught and held to high expectations (Durlak et al., 1994; Shogren et al., 2014). To best support students with disabilities to continue to build their self-determination skills and see better outcomes they need to take on an active role with their IEP (Hawbaker, 2007). Students are more likely to achieve their goals, improve their academic skills, develop important self-advocacy and communication skills, graduate from high school, and gain better employment and

quality of life as adults when they are actively involved in the development of their IEP (Mason et al., 2004). Additionally, to get a student to be actively engaged school staff need to be talking with the student about their IEP and what to expect in a meeting so they are not taken off guard and intimidated (Hughes et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2004; Test et al., 2004). When IEP meetings are student led, many team members (ie. general and special education teachers, students, and parents) find the experience to be more positive and meaningful as students feel they can speak up more and advocate for what they believe they need (Mason et al., 2002; Mason et al., 2004).

Transitioning from high school to post-secondary can be an intimidating time for any student, but especially one with a known disability; therefore, it is of high importance that an individual is able to advocate for their needs prior to graduating high school. The more time and energy put forth on improving an individual's self-advocacy skills when they are younger or in high school the more likely they will achieve success in employment, post-secondary education, and independent living as they will not rely on someone else to advocate for their needs or ask questions for them (Lopez et al., 2019; Shogren et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this is an area that needs to be addressed more as many professionals in post-secondary settings do not see these skills from high school students (Janiga et al., 2002). Rather, students will not initially disclose their disability, fail a class and then make the choice to reach out and disclose their disability to receive supports needed to be successful (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Limitations of the Research

Research for this study was conducted using various academic search engines.

To narrow the results of the research, the searches focused on the history of self-determination and the role individuals in a person's life play to increase and improve these skills (ie. parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators). It also focused on how self-determination skills can be addressed through the IEP process to benefit a student while still in K-12 education, but to prepare them for their future endeavors whether in employment, post-secondary education, and life in general. The research also focused on self-determination skills within the K-12 education system and at home versus other settings to prepare students for success post-high school. Research did not look at incorporating these skills at specific grade levels, rather the importance of teaching these skills throughout K-12.

Overall, many articles were found that addressed the topic and specific areas being addressed regarding self-determination. However, information regarding the administrator's role was lacking. It was my belief that information in this area would be easily accessed as administrators play a large role in determining curriculum and trainings for staff in their buildings. Therefore, with information from teachers noting the importance of self-determination skills in their students it seemed like this would be accessible due to the top-down effect. However, it was difficult to find research about what administrators felt their role was in promoting self-determination in their students apart from them believing it is an important skill for students to have.

Implications for Future Research

Research on the administrator's role is an area that needs to be further researched. If administrators do not put a high emphasis on improving self-determination skills and provide time and training for their staff it will likely continue to be an area that falls flat. It would also be beneficial to conduct research on how schools can help parents' foster self-determination skills in their student. This is important so that both home and school are working together and not against one another and the student is hearing the same message. Another area that would be important to conduct research on is following a group of individuals with and without disabilities from pre-primary through post-secondary education that are provided with direct instruction on age-appropriate self-determination skills to see if there is a wide gap between the different groups of students as they age.

Implications for Professional Application

In my personal experience working with special education students for the past ten years I have seen a downward trajectory in my students and their self-determination skills. They struggle to tell me the things they are good at, but can quickly tell me three to five things they need to improve or at least what they have been told. I believe it is because special education students hear what they need to work on time and time again from the adults in their life. This happens during their Individualized Special Education (IEP) meetings, teacher/student conversations, parent/teacher conferences, phone calls home, etc.

Self-determination is a crucial skill for our students to learn and implement in their daily lives from an early age. Students need to know that even though they have

adults in their lives looking out for them they need to take an active role in setting goals that they want to achieve, make age-appropriate decision for their life, problem-solve situations that arise, learn how to handle conflict appropriately and so on. Too often these days students lose the drive to make simple decisions affecting their lives or to set future goals they want to achieve. They have lost their lack of motivation to do much of anything when it comes to their academics and quickly rely on the adults in their life to do things for them or fix things and are quick to point the finger at others rather than take responsibility. For instance, rather than raising their hand to ask a question when they are unsure of something they will wait for a staff member to approach them or they will say simply say, "it's too hard, I don't get it" and push it aside even when support is being provided. But, when parents see their child is performing badly the student will make comments such as, "no one helped me". Students need to start taking on a more active role in their education and overall life decisions and that starts with learning the components of self-determination.

The research studies mentioned throughout noted that when a student took on a more active role in their lives they felt more confident and were more likely to do things on their own without additional assistance from adults. There needs to be less focus on a student's disability and more focus on their abilities or what they can do with supports put in place.

Therefore, to best support students in developing these skills administrators need to put more emphasis on these skills and provide time for teachers and staff to learn the best ways to teach and support these throughout the school year. If emphasis

is not put on these from the top-down, it will continue to be pushed aside and not considered to be of high importance even though the research states that most administrators and teachers believe they are. Once lessons are provided there needs to be follow-up and modeling because if a student is only provided one lesson on a self-determination skill the likelihood of them carrying that over into life is slim.

To further support students in these skills, parents and schools need to be on the same page and open communication needs to take place. This includes having student-led IEP meetings from a young age so that they take on an active role in the meetings and know why they are receiving additional supports during the school day. There have been many times throughout the years where parents request that their child not be invited to attend the meeting because they don't want their child to be upset or find out they have Autism or a learning disability. This is not helping students in the long run, so there also needs to be teaching for parents to understand the importance of their child attending and how it will improve their child's self-determination skills.

If teaching the various components of self-determination in our students will benefit them in the long run we need to make it a priority. Teachers and educational staff need to empower their students by teaching and modeling how to become self-determined individuals, so that special education students learn how to control, set goals, ask for help, and make decisions regarding their own life before they leave the safety of their high school and home environments.

Conclusion

Self-determination is the idea that an individual possesses the combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that allow them to take on and engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviors. Various studies have proven that teaching self-determination skills is doable and is highly recommended for individuals across the lifespan as it teaches individuals how to do things such as set goals, advocate for their needs, and problem solve. It is a skill that all individuals benefit from, but especially those with disabilities so they do not fall back and blame their disability for not being able to do things rather finding ways to get what they need and meeting their goals. The roles of parents and school staff is to teach and instill self-determination skills to the students they work with. It is also to get the necessary training to teach these skills appropriately and not unknowingly hinder a student's progress by doing too much for them. Parents and school staff want to be helpers, but it is much more important to learn when and how to step back to allow students to take off and do things on their own as parents and staff will not always be around.

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