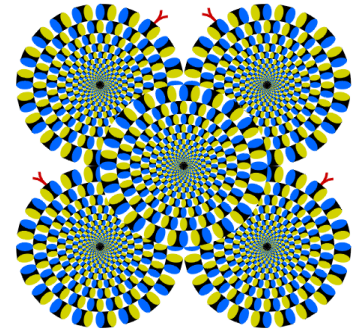# project10 transition education network

Transition Wheel

Self-Determination

Definition and Relevance

Self-determination means "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. Self-determined behavior refers to actions that are identified by four essential characteristics:
  (a) the person acted autonomously,
  (b) the behavior(s) are self-regulated,
  (c) the person initiated and responded to the event(s) in a psychologically empowered manner, and
  (d) the person acted in a self-realizing manner" (Wehmeyer, 1999, p. 56).

Self-determination is important to the successful transition of students with disabilities in a number of ways. A sampling of research and literature reviews found that:

- Self-determination/self-advocacy is a predictor of postschool success according to the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010, p. 61)
- "…people with self-determination skills have a better quality of life and … positive outcomes are associated with being self-determined" (Wood & Test, 2001, p. 1)
- "…abundant evidence that promoting the component elements [of self-determination] can result in more positive adult and transition outcomes, including improved employment, community living, and community integration outcomes for students with disabilities" (Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, & Shogren, 2006, p. 45)
- "…clear evidence that teaching students to self-regulate learning or teaching students to self-direct learning strategies such as self-monitoring or self-instruction has beneficial outcomes for students with severe disabilities in educational goal attainment, including goals linked to transition-related outcomes and to the general education curriculum" (Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2006; Agran, Wehmeyer, Cavin, & Palmer, 2008, 2010, cited in Wehman & Shogren, 2012, p. 48)
- "…the rationale that [self-determination] is a basic civil right, a legislative mandate, and a right to which citizens with disabilities are entitled and have demanded" (Wood & Test, 2001, p. 1)
- Teachers believe that self-determination and self-advocacy skills are important but could only identify a few teaching activities related to them, and very few reported some type of self-determination goal on the IEP according to a national survey of 1,200 teachers

working with transition-age students with disabilities (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000)

History/Legal Basis

Although federal law does not explicitly require the teaching or acquisition of self-determination skills for youth with disabilities, the 1990 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 101-476) required that "transition services must be based on student needs and take into account student interests and preferences. To accomplish this goal, students must be prepared to participate in planning for their future" (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003, p. 1). The importance of self-determination in student planning became clear in 1990 when the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs funded the first of what would eventually be "more than 25 projects to promote self-determination for youth with disabilities" (Wehmeyer, 1999, p. 53).

Overview

Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, and Shogren (2006, p. 43) have identified the "component elements of self-determined behavior" as:
- Choice-making skills
- Decision-making skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Goal-setting and attainment skills
- Independence, risk-taking, and safety skills
- Self-observation, evaluation, and reinforcement skills
- Self-instruction skills
- Self-advocacy and leadership skills
- Internal locus of control
- Positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy
- Self-awareness
- Self-knowledge

"The role of educators in promoting self-determination is to teach students the knowledge and skills they need to become causal agents" (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2012, p. 44).

"For professionals in transition education, the route to enablement is by providing opportunities and support that promote and enhance the self-determination of students with disabilities" (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2012, p.45).

A focus group study (Thoma & Getzel, 2005) of 35 postsecondary students identified the self-determination skills and behaviors that were important to their success as self-disclosure, problem solving, knowing themselves and understanding their disabilities, goal setting, and self-management (p. 237). They reported that they learned self-determination skills and information through "trial and error," from peers or mentors, from the Internet, and/or from their parents (pp.

238–239). They also said that high school students with and without disabilities should learn self-determination skills as early as possible, with some suggesting that learning should start "when you're a little kid" (p. 239). They also suggested using "all formats for all learning styles" to teach self-determination skills, including "practical and real life activities…interactive workshops…written information…[and] career and college exploration activities" (p. 239).

Fortunately, a growing number of assessments, curricula, classroom materials, and resources are available for assessing and teaching self-determination and its component elements. When selecting a curriculum or resource, it is helpful to review information on its appropriateness for the youth with whom it will be used, its intended use and outcomes, and any published articles or studies on its use. When selecting a self-determination assessment, review information on the assessment's reliability and validity, constructs that are measured, characteristics of the norm group and/or target group of youth, qualifications and/or training required for test administrators, and the instrument's practicality and accessibility. It is always helpful to speak to colleagues who have used the resources and/or assessments under consideration and who can provide tips, recommendations, and practical information on their use.

Information on a number of self-determination assessments, curricula, classroom materials, and resources is provided below.

Florida Self-Determination Resources

Standing Up for Me Curriculum for Teaching Self-Determination Skills
http://project10.info/Publications.php
The Standing Up for Me curriculum consists of a training manual, lesson plans, and developmentally appropriate materials for students with disabilities at the primary, intermediate, middle school, and high school levels. Educators who have completed Standing Up for Me training will be able to access curriculum materials through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS) Resource and Information Center (BRIC) and Project 10.

ESE 7963140 Self-Determination Course (Grades 9–12)
http://www.fldoe.org/ESE/esecourse/7963140.pdf
The purpose of this Florida Department of Education Career Education course is to enable students with disabilities to apply self-determination and self-advocacy skills in school, home, community, and employment settings. Students will increase self-awareness of personal abilities and develop an understanding of the impact of their own disability on learning and on other areas of life.

Navigating Your IEP: Are You on the Right Track towards Your Future?
http://www.floridayouthcouncil.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=7
Student-directed IEPs provide opportunities to learn and practice self-determination and leadership skills. This IEP guide, developed for youth by the Florida Youth Council, describes the IEP process and how to "take charge" of the IEP meeting.

Zarrow Center Resources

The Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment at the University of Oklahoma has compiled a number of evidence-based resources related to self-determination, including assessment tools, classroom materials, preference indicators, and professional development resources that are accessible on its website: http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow.html. The Zarrow Center has received permission from the authors and publishers for the following materials to be used free of charge unless otherwise noted below.

Self-Determination Assessments and Preference Indicators

AIR Self-Determination Assessments
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools/air-self-determination-assessment.html
The AIR (American Institutes for Research) assessments measure two components of self-determination. Capacity refers to the student's knowledge, abilities, and perceptions that enable them to be self-determined. Opportunity refers to the student's chances to use their knowledge and abilities. Information is collected from students, parents, and educators to develop student profiles, including level of self-determination, strengths, areas needing improvement, and specific educational goals that can be incorporated into the IEP. The student form is also available in Spanish.

ARC Self-Determination Scale
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools/arc-self-determination-scale.html
The ARC Self-Determination Scale assesses self-determination strengths and weaknesses of adolescents with disabilities, facilitates student involvement in educational planning and instruction to promote self-determination as an educational outcome, develops self-determination goals and objectives, and assesses student self-determination skills for research purposes. The resulting scores provide information in the areas of autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization in addition to a total self-determination score.

ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-assessment-tools/choicemaker-self-determination-assessment.html
The ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment measures student self-determination skills and progress in the ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Curriculum and is designed for use with middle and high school students with mild to moderate disabilities. The assessment focuses on choosing educational, vocational, and personal goals; student involvement in IEP meetings; and student attainment of IEP goals, including developing, implementing, evaluating, and adjusting student plans. The validity and reliability of ChoiceMaker have been determined with hundreds of students with learning disabilities, mental retardation, and behavior problems from four states as well as by a test-retest study. Choicemaker classroom and assessment materials may be purchased from Sopris West at http://www.sopriswest.com by searching on "Choicemaker" or one of the authors' last names (Martin or Marshall).

Child Preference Indicators (CPI)
http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/Education/documents/child-preference-indicators.pdf
CPI was designed by the Center for Learning and Leadership at Oklahoma's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) to be a user-friendly tool for developing individualized learning plans using information that formal assessments do not usually address. Family members and classroom professionals use the CPI to identify and communicate information about what motivates a child and to identify his or her preferences.

Personal Preference Indicators (PPI)
http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/Education/documents/personal-preference-indicator.pdf
PPI was designed by the Center for Learning and Leadership at Oklahoma's UCEDD to enable the planning team to identify and focus on interests and preferences connected to choice-making activities, person-centered planning, and self-determination instructional efforts. Family members, friends, knowledgeable professionals, and the young person with a disability use the PPI to develop education, transition, employment, or health management plans and to collect information that links personal preferences to competencies and strengths.

Materials for Teaching Self-Determination and Increasing IEP Involvement

ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Lesson Materials
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-education-materials/choicemaker-self-determination-materials.html
The ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Transition Curriculum teaches middle and secondary students the self-determination skills needed to be successful in school and adult life. It consists of three strands (choosing goals, expressing goals, and taking action) and six instructional packages that address topics such as student interests, skills, limits and goals; understanding and leading the IEP; and job choice assessment software. ChoiceMaker materials can be viewed and ordered from Sopris West at http://www.sopriswest.com. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs supported the development and field testing of the ChoiceMaker Curriculum materials.

IEP Team Education Module to Increase Student Involvement
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-education-materials/iep-team-education-module.html
This education module, based on a study at the Oklahoma School for the Blind, helps IEP team members learn their roles to facilitate student active participation in the Self-Directed IEP process. IEP team members watch and/or listen to a three-minute slideshow that explains their roles and responsibilities at the beginning of each meeting. The study found that the module increased student participation more than using the Self-Directed IEP alone; it will soon be submitted for publication.

It's Not Easy
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-education-materials/its-not-easy.html
The It's Not Easy automated PowerPoint was developed by Dr. Jamie Van Dycke, a professor at Oklahoma State University, to disseminate the results of interviews with Oklahoma high school

students. The slideshow is sequenced to play with the song, "Superman (It's Not Easy)," by Five for Fighting and is an effective tool for showing educators and parents the importance of providing students the opportunity to actively participate in their own IEP meetings. Teachers also use It's Not Easy with their students as a lead-in to the Self-Directed IEP process.

ME! Lessons for Teaching Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/trasition-education-materials/me-lessons-for-teaching-self-awareness-and-self-advocacy.html
The ME! Lessons were developed by Cantley, Little, and Martin (2010) to teach critical transition knowledge and skills to high school students with disabilities on topics such as the IEP, rights and responsibilities, communications, self-awareness, advocating for high school needs, resources, and assessing progress. Lessons include objectives, step-by-step lesson plans, pencil-paper activities, discussion and group activities, some PowerPoint presentations, and materials for developing student portfolios.

Student-Directed Transition Planning (SDTP)
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/trasition-education-materials/student-directed-transition-planning.html
Sylvester, Woods, Martin, and Poolaw (2007) developed eight Student-Directed Transition Planning (SDTP) lessons that teach students to actively participate in transition-focused IEP meetings and facilitate partnerships between students transitioning out of high school, their families, and educators. SDTP uses the Student-Directed Summary of Performance as a means for students to learn, organize and present transition information (Martin, Van Dycke, D'Ottavio, & Nickerson, 2007). Materials include presentation files (via an LCD projector or overhead transparencies), a step-by-step Teacher's Guide, and paper and pencil activities. Student activities will be available online soon, and the results will automatically transfer to a Summary of Performance Script that students can take to their IEP meetings. Pre/post exams and answer keys will be available when efficacy research has been completed. Teachers who need the exams now may email zarrow@ou.edu and request them.

Whose Future Is It Anyway? 2nd Edition
http://www.ou.edu/content/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/self-determination-education-materials/whos-future-is-it-anyway.html
Whose Future Is It Anyway? is a student-directed transition planning process that helps prepare students for their IEP meetings and gain self-determination skills through 36 lesson sessions on self-knowledge, decision making, community resources, goal setting, communicating, and meeting management. A Coach's Guide outlines the lessons and explains how to teach them, the roles of the students and teachers, and expected outcomes.

Additional Self-Determination Resources

Beyond High School Model
http://daddcec.org/Portals/0/CEC/Autism_Disabilities/Research/Publications/Education_Training_Development_Disabilities/2006v41_Journals/ETDD_200603v41n1p003-013_Infusing_Self-Determination_Into_18-21_Services_Students.pdf

Wehmeyer, Garner, Lawrence, Yeager, and Davis (2006) developed this multi-stage model of self-determination for students with significant disabilities who are served in 18–21 programs or in postsecondary education.

I'm Determined
http://www.imdetermined.org
I'm Determined is the Virginia Department of Education Self-Determination Project. Its website contains resources for educators, parents, and youth, including history and information modules, videos, lesson plans, literature promoting self-determination, and more.

Next S.T.E.P. (Student Transition and Educational Planning)
http://education.illinois.edu/sped/tri/nextstep.htm
This curriculum and instructional program is designed to teach students to engage successfully in self-directed transition planning. Next S.T.E.P. materials are available through ProEd, Inc.

Self-Advocacy Strategy for Education and Transition Planning
http://www.nsttac.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/SAS(moderate).final.pdf
This evidence-based motivation and self-advocacy strategy uses the acronym, "I PLAN," to describe five steps students can take to actively participate in IEP and other educational meetings.

Self-Determination Lesson Plan Starters
http://sdsp.uncc.edu/sd_lesson_plans.asp
Developed by Self-Determination Synthesis Project at University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC), these lesson plan starters for specific self-determination skills are research-based and include objectives, materials, content, procedures, evaluation methods, references, and information on published curricula, if any.

Self-Determination: Supporting Successful Transition
http://www.ncset.org/publications/researchtopractice/NCSETResearchBrief_2.1.pdf
This Research to Practice Brief (April 2003, Volume 2, Issue 1) from the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition provides an overview of self-determination, including resources and tips for promoting self-determination for families and professionals.

Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)
http://www.beachcenter.org/Research/FullArticles/PDF/SD9A_Promoting%20Casual%20Agency.pdf
The SDLMI is a research-based model with three instructional phases (setting a goal, taking action, and adjusting the goal or plan) that are teacher-directed and focused on student problem-solving. More recent information is available in Chapter 2 of *Life Beyond the Classroom* (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2012).

Final Thoughts

- Celebrate successes and learning opportunities.

- Students who learn self-determination and self-advocacy skills in primary and secondary education will be better able to manage decisions and responsibilities in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.
- The roles of parents, educators, and transition professionals in decision making will evolve as students acquire self-determination skills and learn to lead the decision making process and IEP meetings themselves.
- Opportunities for practicing self-determination and decision making outside the school setting should be provided, if possible.
- More information can be found on the Project 10 Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination page at http://www.project10.info/DetailPage.php?MainPageID=185&PageCategory=Taxonomy of Effective Practices&PageSubCategory=Student Development

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