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Self-Determination and Career Planning Model for Students with Disabilities:

An Analysis of Evidence-Based Practices

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by

Elizabeth Fussell

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ABSTRACT

Self-Determination and Career Planning Model for Students with Disabilities:

An Analysis of Evidence-Based Practices

by

Elizabeth Fussell

This study investigated the capacity of a self-advocacy curriculum implemented in Tennessee schools. The purpose of the study was to establish evidence that: (1) the curriculum contained 4 suggested components that make up the conceptual framework of self-determination curriculum, (2) school-wide intervention had occurred, (3) self-determination goals were included in individualized education programs (IEPs) and transition plans, and (4) there was awareness of the curriculum capacity among Tennessee educators.

This study employed descriptive and comparative statistical methods to establish assumptions regarding the curriculum's effectiveness. Educators were grouped based on their teaching role (i.e., special education, regular education, and administration) and whether or not they received training and technical assistance from the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment. An on-line survey provided data necessary to determine educators' perceptions of the curriculum's capacity to provide students opportunities to learn and practice self-advocacy skills. Seven major findings evaluated the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model as evidence-based.

- Educators agreed the curriculum helped students demonstrate self-advocacy skills.
- Educators who received training to implement the self-advocacy curriculum were better prepared to observe students' demonstration of self-advocacy skills.

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- Self-advocacy goals were included in IEPs and transition plans.

- Attendance at IEP meetings did not bias educators' opinions of students' skills.

- The self-advocacy curriculum contained 4 recommended curriculum dimensions.

- Tennessee educators have a high awareness of self-determination curriculum capacity.

- Educators indicated an increase in student IEP participation.

These findings evaluated the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model as evidence-based. Suggested curriculum improvements should be implemented and accountability of school districts to implement the curriculum should be communicated to all educators.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to students with disabilities who have learned and practiced self-advocacy skills in the effort to create successful transitions from school to adult life. It is my dream that you will find success in your careers and pave the way for other students to follow in your footsteps.

This study is also dedicated to my parents who have patiently waited for this day to come. I know we missed a lot of outings on the Saturdays that I spent working on this "paper". Now we can begin writing new chapters in our excursions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Demonstration of self-determination skills such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization is a predictor of quality of life (Chambers et al., 2007; Lachapelle et al., 2005). Self-determination is a process developed in the last few decades that has provided an avenue for students with disabilities to become empowered to advocate for themselves and to plan for productive lives in society. Chambers et al. (2007) and Lachapelle et al. (2005) suggested that students with high levels of self-determination have a correlation to high quality of life that has been associated as an indicator of successful vocational outcomes. Although self-determination has been a hot topic of legislators, educators, and employment organizations for almost 4 decades; Agran, Blanchard, Wehmeyer, and Hughes (2001) and Chambers et al. contended that self-determination has not yet become a common practice in all schools.

Tennessee's New High School Diploma Project, implemented in 2009, stipulated the development of a focused program of study that allows students to identify accommodations deemed necessary to be successful (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2007). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts (IDEA) of 1997 and 2004 indicated the need for interventions (i.e., problem-solving) and the inclusion of students' interests, preferences, and skills in transition plans and individualized education programs (IEPs; Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2006; Konrad, Walker, Fowler, Test, & Wood, 2008). For students with disabilities to be empowered to fully participate in their transition planning, research has suggested that schools incorporate a self-determination curriculum for students to demonstrate self-determination skills (Agran, Blanchard, Wehmeyer, & Hughes, 2002; Stang, Carter, Lane & Pierson, 2009;

Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Wehmeyer, Gragoudas, & Shogren, 2006; Wood, Fowler, Uphold, & Test, 2005; Zhang, Wehmeyer, & Chen, 2005). These skills are intended to enable students to: (1) identify interests or self-knowledge, (2) explore options for postsecondary education or vocational training (Test, Fowler, Brewer, & Wood, 2005), and (3) actively participate in these planning processes (Copeland, Hughes, Agran, Wehmeyer, & Fowler, 2002; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Assor, Kaplan, and Roth (2002) suggested that teachers should have the responsibility to ensure student autonomy in planning and identifying self-knowledge.

In 2004 the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment introduced the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model (Fussell, Jones, & Stults, 2004) to two Tennessee schools districts in pilot programs. As indicated by Thoma, Baker, and Saddler (2002) curriculum resources for self-determination were not readily available to teachers. The intent of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model was to provide curriculum modules to educators through professional development and technical assistance to address the need of Tennessee schools to incorporate self-determination skills as an avenue of student self-discovery. These curriculum modules were designed for students to: (1) identify their interests, preferences, and skills; (2) build self-esteem; (3) practice decision making skills; (4) plan and implement goal setting skills; and (5) develop resumes (Fussell, 2008). This curriculum correlated with school standards as recommended by Agran et al. (2006). A culmination of the curriculum modules should provide the information necessary to complete the Summary of Performance as suggested by Bassett and Kachhar-Bryant (2006) and required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) when the student exits school.

Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) suggested a need for "research involving component analyses of intervention packages" (p. 121). Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) suggested a conceptual framework for self-advocacy curriculum that included four components: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership. They purported this "proposed conceptual framework of self-advocacy provides a starting point for developing instructional strategies" (p. 52). Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. and Wehmeyer et al. (2000) have suggested that more information is needed regarding teachers' awareness of curricular techniques and the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in student transition plans and IEPs. Given that, Agran et al. (2006) purported that school-wide interventions require more in-depth investigation. This study will broaden the research areas in self-determination.

Background of the Problem

Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) indicated that research in the area of evidence-based self-determination curricula is very limited. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Acts of 1997 and 2004 stipulated that evidence-based curricula are to be used to enhance student academic achievements (Rathvon, 2008). Rubin (2007) described evidence-based practices as ensuring through rigorous evaluation that interventions or curricula effectively provide the intended results. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) recommended a student-centered curriculum approach to instruction in order to align transition and general education standards. Could the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model be a bridge that assists students with disabilities to actively participant and enhance their learning opportunities in general education classrooms?

Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) indicated the need for further exploration of curricula and evidence-based practices in the area of self-determination. Of particular interest have been

the perceptions of teachers regarding the availability and implementation of curricular resources (Stang et al., 2009; Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005). Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) recommended that self-determination curricula evaluation be based on a conceptual model.

Significance of the Problem

Wood et al. (2005) examined several self-determination curricula and determined these curricula to be effective in successfully conveying self-determination skills for students to actively participate in a rigorous course of study and plan for postsecondary education and training opportunities following high school. However, the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model curriculum has not yet been determined as evidence-based. In addition an investigation of the suggested self-determination curriculum may help determine if educators agree or disagree that students in Tennessee schools have the resources necessary to demonstrate self-determination skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine if the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model included the components of the recommended conceptual framework for self-determination curriculum. This study investigated the capacity of a self-determination curriculum implemented in Tennessee schools to promote student demonstration of self-determination skills. The purpose of this study was to establish evidence if: (1) the curriculum contained the four curriculum dimensions that make up the conceptual framework of self-determination curriculum, (2) school-wide intervention had occurred, (3) self-determination goals were included in IEPs and transition plans, and (4) there was awareness of the curriculum capacity. In addition, this study determined if there were significant differences in the perceptions of: (1) special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators; and

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(2) participants who were trained and participants who were not trained regarding the observation of self-determination skills in students with disabilities.

The effectiveness of this curriculum was determined through a three-part investigation as suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000). These areas were: (1) analysis of the conceptual framework of the curriculum, (2) participant awareness of curriculum capacity, and (3) incorporation of self-advocacy goals in student transition plans. First, this study compared the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model used in 57 Tennessee school districts to the recommended conceptual model components of: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership as suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. Second, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the importance of implementing self-determination skills in Tennessee schools based on their awareness of curriculum and implementation of self-determination goals in students' IEPs.

Assumptions

Assumptions of this study included the need for participation on the part of educators to complete the survey in a thought provoking manner. There was the assumption that educators would take the time to participate in the survey. Although 750 educators had been trained over the past 5 years, many of the educators may have relocated or changed positions. The ability to reach educators via email was also assumed. However, many school districts block outside electronic contacts. Therefore, it was necessary to identify a contact (e.g., transition coordinator) on a local level to ensure that participants were identified and received the survey information. There was the assumption that transition coordinators would identify teachers to complete the survey. Based on frequent contact with educators, there was the assumption that this curriculum had been implemented in some school districts as a school-wide intervention.

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This study focused on the four research questions listed below.

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores of how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators?

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores on how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students do develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence among participants who were trained and participants who were not trained?

Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship between the participants' survey scores of the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning in participants who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive on-site technical assistance?

Research Question 4

Is there a significant relationship in the participants' survey scores of student competence among participants who attend IEP meetings with students and participants who do not attend IEP meetings with students?

Definitions

- Conceptual Framework of Self-Determination Curriculum: A guideline that includes recommended instructional components such as knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, and leadership skills to establish an effective curriculum.

- Deinstitutionalization: State and federal legislative mandates to provide services to individuals with disabilities in a community setting rather than an institutional setting.

- Evidence-based Curriculum: Instructional content that has been proven through empirical research to incorporate scientific practices.

- Focused Program of Study: A 4- to 6-year plan intended to assist middle school students to identify a rigorous course of study in preparation for high school.

- Individualized Education Program: A federally required planning process for students with disabilities to set annual educational goals to ensure students receive a free and appropriate public education including accommodations.

- Postschool Outcomes: Successful or unsuccessful life situations of students after exiting the school system (i.e., employment, independent living, etc.).

- Self-Advocacy: The act of speaking up for oneself to obtain desired outcomes.

- Self-Determination: The process of knowing your interests, preferences, and skills in order to become a self-advocate.

- Self-Determination and Career Planning Model: A curriculum developed by the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment. The model includes training and technical assistance for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively.

- Self-determination Skills: Personal abilities such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization that empower individuals to speak up for themselves.

- Supported Employment: A recognized program to promote employment of individuals with significant disabilities in employment opportunities in the community given a place and train methodology.

- Summary of Performance: A federally required document that all special education students receive upon exit from high school indicating the student's interests, preferences, and skills related to postsecondary education and employment.

- Transition Plan: A federally mandated planning process for students with disabilities beginning at the age 16 to set goals for postsecondary educational, employment training, etc. upon exit from high school.

Limitations of the Study

Some factors that may have limited the quality of responses of participants are:

- There was participation from only 28 of the 57 school districts.

- Administrators had been replaced after the training was provided. The new administrators had no knowledge of that the curriculum was in place or that training was available.

- Teachers who were trained were no longer in the same school or position.

- Teachers did not implement the curriculum.

- Administrators did not ensure that the curriculum was implemented.

- There were changes in email addresses, making it difficult to contact teachers who were trained.

- The small number of regular education teachers available to participate in this study was considered unreliable.

Delimitations of the Study

This study included special education teachers and regular education teachers from school districts that had received training or technical assistance from the University of Tennessee Center's on Disability and Employment on the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model. Teachers who were trained may have shared the information with their coworkers, thus creating situations where survey participants were not involved in the training or technical assistance opportunities. Other school districts may have had an interest in the curriculum or may have used other resources. However, this study focused on the specific self-advocacy curriculum.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized in the following approach. Chapter 1 provides an overview and significance of the problem to be investigated. Chapter 2 explores research literature related to techniques of establishing evidence-based self-determination curriculum and educators' perceptions of the benefits of self-determination as a necessary school-wide intervention. Chapter 3 identifies the research design to develop the on-line survey, gather information from educators, and to analyze the data to address four main research questions. Chapter 4 presents the demographic and statistical findings of an on-line survey of 56 educators representing 28 Tennessee school districts. Chapter 5 summarizes the study and provides implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sydney Harris, a syndicated journalist and former teacher said, "The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows" (Thinkexist, 2010, para 3). This statement illustrates the concept of self-determination. Bandura (1986) and Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) maintained that students should have the opportunity to envision their individual roles and purposes as successful adults. Education reform has escalated the roles of both educators and students to be actively engaged in directing educational paths toward successful postschool outcomes. While educators have selected evidence-based interventions for curricula or programs proven through rigorous research to promote successful outcomes (Rathvon, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2003); students have been encouraged to take an active, autonomous role in developing the knowledge and skills that will enhance their opportunities to become productive, contributing adults in the community. Stang et al. (2009) reported self-determination skills such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization to effectively facilitate "improved in-[school] and post-school outcomes" (p. 94).

Self-esteem, self-advocacy, self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-determination have been referred to as the inner understanding of oneself (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1990). These terms stem from activities in the field of self-determination that are effective for people to validate personal worth to others in their lives. Substantial literature has claimed that self-determination skills empower individuals to know who they are, what they like, and how to communicate their preferences to others (Carter, Owens, Trainor, Sun, & Swedeen, 2009; Erwin et al., 2009; Pennell, 2001; Shapiro, 1993; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2006; Wood et al., 2005).

What do you want to be when you grow up? is a common question in our society. Yet, many high school students have not been equipped to answer that question. This lack of self-determination skills has become a conflicting issue in middle schools and high schools today. Agran and Martin (2008) and Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) stated that students are required to plan for careers after high school, yet with particular attention to specific curriculum dimensions (i.e., decision-making and problem-solving) students have not been taught the skills to develop concrete plans. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006), Carter et al. (2009), and Thoma et al. (2002) have agreed that this problem is intensified for students with disabilities. Konrad et al. (2008), Stang et al. (2009), and Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. have suggested that self-determination has been correlated to improved student outcomes. Yet, Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008) indicated that students with disabilities "lack the critical skills that can enhance their self-determination" (p. 56).

Literature (Agran et al., 2001; Agran et al., 2002; Assor et al., 2002; Chambers et al., 2007) has suggested that self-determination has not been incorporated in schools to the extent necessary to provide students with disabilities the opportunities they need to be successful. In fact, it has been argued that self-determination has often received low priority in instruction. Bandura (1986) suggested that schools do not succeed in the purpose of promoting social validation in students' self-efficacy. Therefore, Erwin et al. (2009) suggested that schools should incorporate self-determination curriculum as "an intentional and ongoing process" to promote self-determination skills effectively (p. 28).

Self-determination, often synonymous with self-advocacy, has been endorsed by legislators (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006), educators (Wehmeyer, 1995), and employment organizations, (Devlin, 2008). Individuals with disabilities have the right to make informed

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choices in relation to their daily lives, education, careers, etc. Literature has purported the need and benefits of self-determination skills for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, Thoma, Williams, and Davis (2005) reported that only 14 out of 155 articles on self-determination published between 1995 and 2002 addressed self-determination curriculum models.

Literature (Agran et al., 2001; Agran et al., 2002; Wehmeyer, 1995) has supported that self-determination and self-advocacy instruction benefits students with cognitive or developmental disabilities. Likewise, the skills associated with self-determination such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization (Lachapelle et al., 2005; Wehmeyer, 1995) benefit all students in planning successful lives. Bandura (1986) suggested that students attain self-efficacy skills through individualized instruction and self-knowledge. A blending of these skills contributes to students becoming self-determined (Erwin et al., 2009). Thoma et al. (2005) suggested that self-determination is "a critical component of effective transition planning" as students exit school and enter adulthood (p. 104).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 indicated a need for school-wide interventions in self-determination (Agran et al., 2006). The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) put an emphasis on the inclusion of self-determination and self-advocacy in transition plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Encouraged by this legislation, the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education strived to improve the incorporation of self-advocacy goals and employment goals in transition plans through professional development for special education teachers.

Thoma et al. (2002) suggested that professional development in self-determination is necessary because coursework in self-determination is not available in most teacher preservice

programs. As recommended by Carter and Hughes (2006), Chambers et al. (2007), and Copeland et al. (2002), Tennessee teachers have been offered, upon request, professional development to facilitate self-determination goals for students to assist in transition from high school to postschool activities. In addition, the Tennessee State Board of Education (2007) included a detailed focus on professional development for teachers to incorporate modified curricula and active learning for all students to encourage student participation in transition planning and IEP development. These actions were intended to maximize opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in general education programs as part of a rigorous course of study (Agran et al., 2006).

Historical evidence has indicated that individuals with disabilities have had less opportunity for independence than their peers without disabilities (Agran & Martin, 2008; Pennell, 2001; Shapiro, 1993). While changes in our society have reflected more respect and value for people with disabilities, there has continued to be some residual attitudes by educators that students with disabilities do not have the skills to succeed in life as do their peers without disabilities. Awareness of this issue has led grass-roots groups and the United States legislature to encourage the incorporation of self-determination skills for students with disabilities (Pennell, 2001; Shapiro, 1993).

Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) found that self-determination skills are critical for students with disabilities to be empowered to know their interests and express those interests to others. Without self-determination skills, many students are pressured by peers, family members, friends, educators, and support personnel to take jobs or live in housing arrangements that may not reflect the students' interests. However, literature has strongly supported the idea that when people are self-determined and can advocate for themselves, it is more likely they will make their

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own choices regarding their lives (Agran et al., 2001; Agran et al., 2002; Agran & Martin, 2008; Chambers et al., 2007; Erwin et al., 2009; Miner & Bates, 2008; Thoma et al., 2002; Ward, 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000; Wood et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2005).

History of Self-Determination

Individuals with disabilities have not always had opportunities to exercise their rights to make decisions about where they lived, what they learned, or how they were treated. At birth doctors were quick to inform parents of babies born with disabilities they could not learn and would be best served in an institution. Thinking that the doctors knew best, parents sent their children to state run schools and institutions (Shapiro, 1993). Scotch (2009) reported that self-determination and self-advocacy movements have been influenced by many groups including the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) in 1880, the League of the Physically Handicapped in the 1930s, the National Federation of the Blind in 1940, and the National Association for Retarded Citizens (The Arc) to promote the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Shapiro (1993) explained that the self-advocacy movement began in 1968. Bengt Nirje, an administrator in Sweden, was attempting to make living conditions for individuals with disabilities align with other people in the community. This concept became known as normalization. The notion of normalization was that people with disabilities "could and should have a role in their own choices" (p. 193). The normalization movement influenced the United States in 1969 to promote the closure of institutions and create inclusion for individuals with disabilities. While grassroots efforts pursued self-advocacy through The Association of Retarded Citizens, Centers for Independent Living, and People First Chapters, it would in the 1970s that the concept gained the attention of policy makers. In the 1980s the concept of self-advocacy was

introduced as people with disabilities and the people supporting them encouraged others to view them as people first, not their disability or limitations (Pennell, 2001).

Components of self-determination have been found in federal legislation since the 1970s (Shapiro, 1993; Wood et al., 2005). However, Wood et al. mentioned that federal programs in the 1980s such as supported employment and deinstitutionalization were implemented without the benefit of self-determination mandates. The philosophy of self-determination was introduced in the 1990s to advocate that the power and control of life should be shifted to each individual (Pennell, 2001). People First chapters led by individuals with disabilities organized throughout the United States under the support of The Arc. The Association for Retarded Citizens name was changed to The Arc in 1991 when individuals with disabilities asked to be known as people first. The self-determination movement gave individuals with disabilities a forum to express their desire to make choices and have control of their own lives (Shapiro, 1993). Together with disability service leaders and researchers self-advocates moved the self-determination movement forward (Wood et al., 2005).

Self-advocates, through People First, developed the Principles of Self-Determination in 1989 that represented the choice of individuals with disabilities for respect and support for their individual choices (Ward, 2005). Disability researchers have reported that positive life outcomes and increases in quality of life indicators for people with disabilities are associated with the incorporation of self-determination skills in daily school instruction. As the practice of self-determination continued, disability organizations recognized the impact of self-determination on the lives of individuals with disabilities (Stang et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2005).

The United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Secondary Education and Transition Services Bureau adopted the construct of self-determination

in 1990 with an emphasis on enhancing the learning experiences and life outcomes for students

with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1995). As the self-determination movement continued to progress,

the practice of implementing self-determination in schools was initiated (Pennell, 2001). In 2004

specific mandates of the IDEIA implied the incorporation of self-determination skills (Konrad et

al., 2008). Students need self-determination skills in order to actively participate in the

development of IEPs in middle school and high school including goals related to work and

postsecondary education (Agran & Martin, 2008; Miner & Bates, 2008). The self-determination

movement has changed the way people with disabilities are respected for their abilities to gain

independent lives, take responsibility for their choices, and increase their quality of life (Agran &

Martin, 2008; Chambers et al., 2007; Lachapelle et al., 2005; Pennell, 2001; Scotch, 2009;

Wehmeyer, 2007).

Self-Determination Theory

In the past some physicians have indicated that individuals with disabilities could not and

should not make their own choices, thus, requiring permanent placement and supervision for

their actions. Thankfully, other practitioners had other thoughts regarding the capabilities of

individuals with disabilities to be responsible for learning and behaviors. Bandura (1986)

explained the Social Cognitive Theory as a relationship between behavior, knowledge of self,

and environmental variables. He further stated that people learn through awareness of the

behavior, active involvement, and awareness of the consequences associated with their

behaviors. Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) found in the meta-analyses of 25 interventions that

the studies they examined "provide preliminary evidence" (p. 120) that individuals with

disabilities could learn to be responsible for their behaviors given awareness of options,

knowledge of self, and support in their surroundings. Agran and Martin (2008) proposed that

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self-determination and its associated skills prepare students to plan successful transitions from school to adult life. In addition Stang et al. (2009) found these skills to serve as a means for students to be more independent and responsible for their actions as adults.

Definition of Self-Determination

T. J. Monroe, a self-advocate, defines self-advocacy in a letter to President George H. Bush on the day of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Shapiro quoted T. J.'s definition of self-advocacy as follows:

> Self-advocate means knowing your rights and responsibilities. Self-advocate means standing up for your own rights. Self-advocate means speak for yourself and make your own decisions, being more independent, standing on your own two feet and sticking up for your rights as a self-advocate (Shapiro, 1993, p. 209).

Self-determination has been defined as the ability and opportunity to make choices (Agran & Martin, 2008). Yet, Wehmeyer (2007) indicated that this can be a complex effort. Due to the work of the grassroots efforts of The Arc, Centers for Independent Living, People First Chapters, and many other groups, the development of self-determination skills has been recognized as essential curricular needs for students with disabilities to learn the options available to them and how to take responsibility for their actions. Curricular components that enable students with disabilities to have more control over their lives have been identified as expressing preferences, problem-solving, and choice-making (Agran & Martin, 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2006) as well as "goal setting, self-regulation, and self-advocacy" (Thoma & Wehmeyer, 2005, p. 54).

Principles of Self-Determination

Self-advocates active in People First organizations across the United States developed principles of self-determination. Five of the principles have served as the foundation for self-determination literature: Freedom, Authority, Support, Responsibility, and Confirmation (Nerney

& Shumway, 1996; Pennell, 2001; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2006). The emphasis on these specific principles stemmed from the heartfelt desire of individuals with disabilities to be seen as people first. Individuals with disabilities explained if people treated them in a considerate and respectful manner, they would learn to make choices for themselves based on their individual dreams (i.e., freedom); maintain control of their lives through supports (i.e., authority); and arrange for necessary support to assist them to be successful in their work, home, and community (i.e., support). In addition, self-advocates indicated they were valued and contributing members of society through their active participation in work and community organizations (i.e., responsibility). Finally, confirmation was added as a principle as self-advocates implemented self-determination. Turnbull and Turnbull reported that the concept of the fifth principle (i.e., confirmation) indicated the recognition of others to be accepted as an integral part of change in their lives and to celebrate their accomplishments.

Mandates for Self-Determination Goals in Transition Plans

The IDEA of 1997 indicated a need for school-wide interventions (e.g., problem-solving skills) that would enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum (Agran et al., 2006). The 2004 reauthorization of the IDEIA put an emphasis on the inclusion of students' interests, preferences, and skills in transition plans and individualized education programs (IEPs; Konrad et al., 2008). These mandates strengthened the significance of free and appropriate public education (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006). Thoma et al. (2002) have encouraged teacher in-services to include strategies whereby IEPs would "be based on student preferences and interests" (p. 83). The Tennessee Division of Special Education focused on improving the incorporation of self-determination goals (e.g., student responsibility for learning) and employment goals in transition plans through professional development in transition planning

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(Tennessee Department of Education, 2000). Thoma et al. stated that professional development for educators in these areas is necessary as training in self-determination is not typically available in most teacher preservice programs.

Student Participation in IEP Process

The principles of transition services, as stated in the IDEA 1997 and IDEIA 2004, have indicated specific benchmarks for planning and implementing academic courses of study, vocational skills, and community participation. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) reported that these principles require that the groundwork for transition services should begin in the elementary and middle school years. The IDEA 1997 required that students be invited to the IEP meetings at age 14. The IDEIA 2004 changed this age to 16 (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006). However, Tennessee chose to invite students to the IEP meeting at age 14 (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2008).

The student invitation to the IEP meeting was intended for the student to fully participate in the academic, social, and vocational planning for the high school experience, leading toward the transition from school to postsecondary education or the workforce. Legislation and self-determination best practices indicated that students should participate to the fullest capability possible. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) purported that the student's participation in the IEP process increased student responsibility in the planning for postsecondary education or careers. Agran and Martin (2008), Miner and Bates (2008), and Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) have agreed that students should be included in the planning process as early as possible to empower students to enhance leadership skills. They have also agreed that student involvement promotes student and family responsibility and commitment to the plan, leading to more positive

postschool outcomes. Therefore, Tennessee's decision to keep the invitation age at 14

emphasized the importance of middle school student participation in the transition process.

IEP Based on Student Needs, Interests, and Preferences

Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) stated that principles of transition planning include

the incorporation of students' individual needs, interests, preferences, and linkages to community

services. They argued that adults and students alike must realize the importance of student

participation in the IEP process. To fully participate, students must be empowered (e.g., by

adults and peers) to: (1) realize their interests and preferences, (2) demonstrate effective

communication skills to speak up about their interests and preferences, and (3) explore their

career options with peers and adults to adequately plan meaningful transition plans (Miner &

Bates, 2008).

Least Restrictive Environment

The IDEIA 2004 emphasized the concept of least restrictive environment. This concept

mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the same classrooms as general education

students. Three common terms have come from this legislation: mainstreaming, inclusion, and

full-inclusion. These terms have reflected the philosophy of educators when placing students in

general education classes. Spence-Cochran and Pearl (2006) defined that mainstreaming is the

"selective placement" of students with disabilities in particular classes (p. 138). Inclusion, they

said, indicates a greater commitment from educators for students with disabilities to be included

in classes for longer periods of time. Inclusion, they argued, emphasizes the need for schools to

provide a continuum of services for students with disabilities. Educators respond to the term full-

inclusion by including students with disabilities in general education classes on a full-time basis

providing needed accommodations or modifications (Spence-Cochran & Pearl, 2006).

Falvey, Rosenberg, Monson, and Eshilian (2006) reported that the concept of least restrictive environment is beneficial for all students in that students with disabilities develop friendships with all their peers and learn appropriate social skills among their peers. They said students with disabilities performed better in both social and academic realms and are likely to be more successful in employment and postsecondary opportunities. In addition, Falvey et al. insisted that full inclusion allows students in general education to understand the rights and capabilities of students with disabilities. They argued that these learning opportunities have contributed to the development of a more caring and competent society.

Student Supports. Spence-Cochran and Pearl (2006) have pointed out that there are three types of supports required by students with disabilities in the general education classroom. These supports include: personal supports, curriculum accommodations and modifications, and assistive and instructional technology. They stated that adhering to least restrictive environment mandates required collaboration between the general and special educators. Differentiated instructional practices were required and the role of the special educator revolved around the individual needs of the students within the given content, process, or products of the class. Falvey et al. (2006) and Spence-Cochran and Pearl suggested that all students benefit from supports in the classroom through the implementation of universal design. McDonnell et al. (2006) recommended embedded instruction as an effective instructional strategy. Falvey et al. recommended another effective instructional strategy, that is both least intrusive and engages students, is cooperative grouping. This strategy allows for student participation as well as teacher team teaching.

Summary of Performance

The IDEIA 2004 stated that transition planning should culminate in a Summary of Performance provided to each student with an IEP upon exit from high school. The summary of performance includes the student's interests, preferences, and skills as well as academic, social, and vocational training (Agran & Martin, 2008; Bassett-Kochhar-Bryant, 2006). Agran and Martin have purported that the Summary of Performance should be student directed rather than educator directed. When developed in the student directed style, the final product served as another self-determination tool that provided the student with greater awareness of the activities planned for successful postschool outcomes.

Standards-Based Education

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 mandated that students with disabilities are to be included in regular education classroom as well as to meet the regular education curriculum standards (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006; Wehmeyer, 2007). A concept behind the NCLB Act was to align curriculum standards across school systems and states to ensure that all students exit school prepared for postsecondary education or the workforce. This legislation has held educators accountable for student graduation rates based on more rigid instructional practices. The NCLB has emphasized "standards-based education…as a catalyst for improved educational results" (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006, p. 4). In addition, the NCLB and IDEA legislations have stipulated that evidence-based curricula are to be used to further enhance student academic achievements (Rathvon, 2008).

Educators have struggled with the NCLB Act mandate to hold students with disabilities accountable for meeting general curriculum standards. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) reported that this concern has led to the call for collaboration between middle and high school

educators to ensure that transition planning and inclusion in general education courses begin early. However, this strategy alone has not been enough to ensure that all students are included and thrive in regular education classes. To comply with the NCLB requirements, there is a need for a school-wide reform at the local level where educators understand and accept their role in differentiated teaching strategies to ensure all students learn and demonstrate curriculum standards. Rathvon (2008) has suggested that the NCLB Act "highlighted the importance of classroom strategies that can enhance the capacity of teachers to meet student needs and the capacity of students to respond to instruction" (p. 4). Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant recommended a student-centered curriculum approach to instruction in order to align transition and general education standards.

Tennessee's New High School Diploma Project

Tennessee's New High School Diploma Project became effective at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year. This project increased the minimum number of required credits to 22 for students to earn a high school diploma. Students are now required to complete 4 years of English, math, and science courses (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2007). Until the 2009-2010 school year Tennessee students with disabilities had the option of receiving a Special Education Diploma in lieu of a Regular High School Diploma. However, the new high school diploma project has eliminated the Special Education Diploma. Students with disabilities now have the option of earning a Transition Certificate, IEP Certificate, or a Regular High School Diploma.

Transition Certificate. A Transition Certificate is awarded to students with disabilities who in their 4th year of high school have: (1) participated in regular education classes attempting to earn the required 22 high school credits but failed to earn a required grade of 70 or above on

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end-of-course exams, (2) satisfactorily completed the IEP goals, and (3) received good conduct and attendance records. Students earning a Transition Certificate may return to school up to their 22nd birthday to continue working toward a Regular High School Diploma (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2008).

IEP Certificate. An IEP Certificate is awarded to students with disabilities who in the year of their 22nd birthday have: (1) satisfactorily completed the IEP goals, (2) developed a portfolio, and (3) received satisfactory conduct and attendance records. The IEP Certificate replaced the Special Education Diploma (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2008).

Regular High School Diploma. A Regular High School Diploma is awarded to students who have: (1) completed at least 22 required high school credits and (2) received satisfactory conduct and attendance records (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2008).

A concern about the new high school diploma program has been reported that the dropout rate for students with disabilities will increase given the fact they will not earn a diploma. Stang et al. (2009) reported that students with disabilities "become disengaged" with school and dropout of school (p. 95). Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) reported that nationally the top five reasons that students drop out of school are: (1) classes were not interesting, (2) missed too many days and could not catch up, (3) people around them were not interested in school, (4) had too much freedom, and (5) was failing classes. They continued to report that parent involvement came too late to prevent student dropout. Of the dropouts surveyed, 71% indicated the school should have done more to make school more interesting. Bridgeland et al. surveyed a number of dropouts and reported 74% of them would have not dropped out of school had they known how difficult it would be for them to achieve successful employment. Activities that would have kept these students in school included were: (1) opportunities for real-world learning

(e.g., service learning), (2) teachers to keep the classes interesting, and (3) better communication between parents and school (e.g., parental involvement).

A second concern has been established that students with disabilities have a greater disadvantage of gaining competitive employment without a diploma than students who earn a regular high school diploma. Wehman and Thoma (2006) suggested that the students who drop out of school are typically unemployed or underemployed throughout life. There was a time when a high school diploma was necessary to secure a good job in the community. More and more we are seeing that a college degree or specific vocational training is required to meet the demands of the employment arena. Employers generally ask if students have a high school diploma. Yet, Murray (2008) has shown that employers look for personal characteristics such as work ethic and interview skills rather than the type of diploma presented. Employers' perspectives toward diploma types showed little difference. Employers have accepted a Certificate of Attendance for entry level positions and an Occupational Diploma and the General Education Diploma (GED) for any positions. If students drop out of school without the benefit of a diploma or certificate, can they demonstrate the expected personal characteristics of work ethic and interview skills to be successfully employed of establish careers?

Importance of Self-Determination Skills for Students Transitioning from School to Adult Life

Wehmeyer (2007) suggested that the initial step to promoting self-determination skills is to infuse a self-determination curriculum into "day-to-day instruction" (p. 21). Self-determination was originally implemented in schools for the purpose of improving students' active participation in the transition process (Wehmeyer et al., 2006). Erwin et al. (2009), Pennell (2001), and Wehmeyer et al. argued that learning to speak up for yourself and your rights is a process that requires real-life experiences and practice to implement.

Agran et al. (2002), Stang et al. (2009), Wehmeyer et al. (2000), Wehmeyer et al. (2006), Wood et al. (2005), and Zhang et al. (2005) have indicated that teaching self-determination skills to students with disabilities promotes academic success; successful transition from school to work; and improved social skills related to employment, independent living, and positive relationships in the community. Thus, self-determined students have more positive outcomes as adults. Ward (2005), Wehmeyer et al. (2000), and Wehmeyer et al. (2006) purported students who display self-determined behavior are more likely to be employed, earn more money than their peers, receive benefits, and live independently. Given the evidence to support positive outcomes, it is accepted that self-determination is vital to the success of the transition from school to adult life process for students with disabilities.

The process of self-determination has been found to enable students to acquire the skills necessary to adequately participate in educational planning and subsequently gaining ownership of those plans. Active participation in the IEP and transition processes has been determined to have a potential impact on a student's demonstration of self-determination skills (Agran & Martin, 2008; Miner & Bates, 2008; Shogren et al., 2007). However, Stang et al. (2009) and Thoma et al. (2002) indicated that student participation in the IEP and transition processes has not increased and is lacking in many schools. In addition, Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) and Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) reported that self-determination goals have been found to continue to be lacking in IEP and transition plans.

School-Wide Interventions in Self-Determination in Tennessee

In 2004 the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment introduced the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model (Fussell et al., 2004) as pilot programs to two Tennessee schools districts. As indicated by Thoma et al. (2002) curriculum resources for self-

determination were not readily available to teachers. In correlation with school standards as recommended by Agran et al. (2006) the intent of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model was to provide curriculum modules to educators through professional development and technical assistance to address the need of Tennessee schools to incorporate self-determination skills as an avenue of student self-discovery. These curriculum modules were designed for students to identify their interests, preferences, and skills; build self-esteem; practice decision making skills; plan and implement goal setting skills; and develop resumes (Fussell, 2008). A culmination of the curriculum modules should provide the information necessary for educators to complete the Summary of Performance required when the student exits the school system as suggested by Bassett and Kachhar-Bryant (2006).

Rathvon (2008) suggested that a best practice in classroom intervention is to understand the situation from the teachers' perspective. She reported that the teacher needs to appreciate the resource materials provided in the intervention and realize how the intervention will affect student learning. Rathvon added that classroom or school-wide interventions should include all school stakeholders including teachers, administrators, and parents regarding the rationale or related theory and expected outcomes of the intervention provided. Embedding instruction of self-determination in the general education classroom, she said, will ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity to apply decision-making skills to their current situation. McDonnell et al. (2006) reported that embedded instruction in general education classrooms was as successful for students with disabilities as the self-contained special education class. They further stated that embedded instruction enhances student learning outcomes and accommodates individual student needs.

Conceptual Framework and Evidence-Based Practices of Self-Determination Curricula

Research conducted by Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) suggested a need for "research involving component analyses of intervention packages" (p. 121). The conceptual framework for self-advocacy curriculum developed by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) included four components: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership. They purported this "proposed conceptual framework of self-advocacy provides a starting point for developing instructional strategies" (p. 52). They argued that practitioners need to embrace the need for a conceptual framework for curriculum coupled with the need for evidence-based curricula to develop school-wide interventions that will increase student achievement in the general education curriculum as well as preparation for postsecondary education and employment (Rathvon, 2008; Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., 2005).

Stang et al. (2009) and Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) suggested that more information is needed regarding teachers' awareness of curricular techniques. Wehmeyer et al. (2000) advocated for the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in student transition plans and IEPs. Agran et al. (2006) purported that more in-depth investigation of school-wide interventions is required to determine the successful implementation of self-determination skills. Chambers et al. (2007), Thoma et al. (2002), and Thoma et al. (2005) have all suggested that preservice teacher training and continuous professional development for teachers is necessary to ensure that the construct of self-determination becomes an integral part of the development of IEPs and transition plans.

Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) suggested that the transition process should have a conceptual framework. IDEA legislation now requires the alignment of transition services and general education curriculum standards. This alignment can occur when educators consider the

components of transition services as a coordinated plan to include a blending of system planning, individual planning, and community linkages. Agran and Martin (2008) purported that the IEP and transition plan can become tools for teaching self-determination and leadership skills. Therefore, self-determination should be the foundation for transition planning. The foundation of self-determination empowers students with skills and information to be active participants in planning their lives.

Agran and Martin (2008) suggested seven key components of implementing self-determination strategies. These components focus on the student learning and incorporating responsibility for behaviors. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) referred to this as a student-centered approach. The fundamental components have been described as: (1) explain the purpose of self-determination to the student, (2) ensure student awareness of behaviors, (3) establish a realistic performance level, (4) determine the degree of student support needed, (5) decide on specific instructional strategy, (6) provide instruction incorporating levels of decision making and supports, and (7) monitor and evaluate student performance (Agran & Martin, 2008).

The conceptual framework of curriculum has been found to be important to the future success of the student. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) suggested that students are more likely to become engaged in curricular activities and transition planning when the content relates to their interests and preferences, as well as directly relates to their individual lives. Similarly, Agran and Martin (2008), Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant, and Miner and Bates (2008) claimed that when curricular activities including IEP development and transition planning are based on the individual student's interests and preferences, students and families alike have become more involved in the process and taken more responsibility for postschool outcomes. Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant suggested that "authentic learning practices offer viable means by which to

mediate academically challenging content and skills by illuminating their relevance to real-life tasks" (p. 11).

<center>*Perceptions of Teachers on Incorporation of Self-Determination Curricula*</center>

Tennessee teachers are offered, upon request, professional development in developing self-determination goals for students as they transition from high school to postschool activities as recommended by Carter and Hughes (2006), Chambers et al. (2007), and Copeland et al. (2002). In addition, the Tennessee State Board of Education (2007) included a detailed focus on professional development for teachers to incorporate modified curricula and active learning for all students that leads to student participation in transition planning and IEP development. These actions were intended to maximize opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in general education programs as part of a rigorous course of study (Agran et al., 2006). Each student's focused program of study should include accommodations deemed necessary for the student be successful.

Conflicting results are reported from teachers' perceptions of the implementation of self-determination curriculum in schools. Chambers et al. (2007) reported a meta-analysis of teachers' perceptions suggesting that students would benefit from self-determination skills in school activities and postschool outcomes. However, many of the same teachers reported that teaching self-determination skills would not benefit their students. This perception has been further emphasized through the lack of IEP goals linked to self-determination and the lack of student involvement in the IEP process (Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., 2005).

One reason teachers have offered for their lack of self-determination instruction is time constraints in their instructional schedules. However, Chambers et al. (2007), Konrad et al. (2008), Thoma et al. (2002), and Thoma et al. (2005) reported that many teachers do not have the

knowledge or skills necessary to teach self-determination skills because this construct was not included in their preservice training. Thoma et al. (2002) found that teachers were not aware of curriculum or had access to curriculum to teach self-determination skills. Additionally, teachers reported a lack of professional development and administrative support to implement self-determination curriculum (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Carter et al., 2008; Konrad et al., 2008; Stang et al., 2009). Devlin (2008) and Zhang et al. (2005) stated that it is evident that the teacher's role in promoting self-determination is vital. Chambers et al. explained that although teachers consider self-determination skills to be helpful, they do not necessarily offer to implement self-determination curricula in their classrooms. In addition classroom observations have indicated a lack of teacher promotion of self-determination skills in curriculum instruction as well as in IEP and transition planning processes (Thoma et al., 2002).

Purpose of Self-Determination Skills

For students to be empowered to fully participate in their transition planning, IEP development, and subsequent academic or vocational course of study, it is considered best practice for schools to incorporate a self-determination curriculum for students to learn, practice, and demonstrate self-determination skills that will help them: (1) identify interests or self-knowledge, (2) explore options for postsecondary education or training (Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005), and (3) actively participate in these planning processes (Copeland et al., 2002; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Assor et al. (2002) suggested that teachers are responsible to ensure student autonomy in planning and identifying self-knowledge. Agran and Martin (2008), Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006), Miner and Bates (2008), and Wehmeyer et al. (2006) have suggested that teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills (e.g., knowledge of self-determination, personal values assessment) and resources (e.g., curricula,

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worksheets, access to IEP goals) to facilitate self-determination skills to empower students to be active participants in their educational and transition planning. These actions are intended to ensure that school systems are meeting the mandates of present legislation and promoting best practice for students to achieve positive academic, social, and postschool outcomes.

Educator Skills to Implement Self-Determination Skills

Given the challenge to provide students with disabilities access to general curriculum and to be accountable for student academic success, many educators are confronted with time constraints to implement new strategies. Konrad et al. (2008) created *A Model for Aligning Self-Determination and General Curriculum Standards*. Their model recommended that teachers must first have an awareness of the self-determination construct. Next, teachers had to decide: (1) what to teach, and (2) how to teach, followed by (3) evaluation and adjustment. This model provided "planning worksheets (to) guide teachers through the process and can be applied to instructional decision-making for an individual student" (p. 53-54).

Educator Responsibility

Research has indicated that teachers do not always take the responsibility of infusing self-determination skills into their curriculum seriously. Agran et al. (2001) argued that the opportunity to facilitate increased positive outcomes for students is "at best, underutilized" (p. 321). Agran et al. and Hughes et al. (1997) argued that often not a high instructional priority. Hughes et al. explored the perceptions of special education teachers throughout Tennessee to actually implement "empirically-derived strategies" in transition best practices (p. 202). The results of their study indicated that while teachers were receptive to strategies introduced, they were more likely to implement the strategies in various forms, ignoring the original intent of the curriculum. Thus, consistency of instruction or support was lacking from teacher to teacher as

well as situation to situation. Unfortunately, Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) reported that teachers surveyed had little or no knowledge of resources and materials for self-determination instruction. Teachers have reported that they are less likely to provide self-determination to students with significant disabilities because of their varying beliefs regarding the effectiveness of self-determination (Agran et al., 2006; Chambers et al., 2007).

Agran and Martin (2008), Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006), Miner and Bates (2008), and Wehmeyer et al. (2006) suggested that to confidently teach self-determination skills, teachers need to participate in professional development focusing on the philosophy of self-determination and how self-determination skills promote increased student academic and postschool outcomes. This professional development should occur in both teacher preservice training and school in-services emphasizing self-determination skills and instructional techniques to facilitate increased implementation in the classroom. Chambers et al. (2007), Shogren et al. (2007), Thoma et al. (2002), Thoma et al. (2005), and Wehmeyer et al. (2000) argued that teachers need awareness of curriculum, philosophy, expected outcomes, and instructional strategies in order to implement teaching strategies to connect students' needs to curriculum standards and employ continuous assessments to determine student progress and areas where students need more assistance. Rathvon (2008) stated that teachers need the knowledge and skills to incorporate classroom strategies that will blend academic and social skills instruction in a group setting. She added that there is a need for teachers to know "the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions" in a classroom of diverse students (p. 4). Additional suggested instructional strategies included differentiated instruction (Spence-Cochran & Pearl, 2006), universal design, cooperative grouping (Falvey et al., 2006), and embedded instruction (McDonnell et al., 2006).

Professional Development

Professional development for teachers and preservice training for teaching students have been found to be imperative to promote the consistent implementation of self-determination as a "critical component" (Shogren et al., 2007, p. 507) of the transition process (Chambers et al., 2007; Shogren et al., 2007; Thoma et al., 2002; Thoma et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Thoma et al. (2002) suggested that if teachers are to lead this critical process of transition, it is vital they receive comprehensive training in the complexities of self-determination and core skills of transition services. In addition Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) suggested that teachers explore their personal values toward self-determination of students with disabilities in an attempt to increase the teachers' self-awareness of their perceptions toward self-determination. Assor et al. (2002) found that students sense the teacher's value of self-determination and will respond more positively to teachers who demonstrate positive attitudes toward empowerment and the student's capability to be self-determined. Shogren et al. (2007) suggested that "methods to promote self-determination across educational activities and settings must be developed, evaluated, and shared with teachers" (p. 507).

Indicated Need for More In-Depth Research of Teacher Implementation

of Self-Determination Curriculum

Self-determination, often synonymous with self-advocacy, has been endorsed by legislators (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006), educators (Wehmeyer, 1995), and employment organizations (Devlin, 2008) as a right of individuals to make informed choices in relation to their daily lives, education, career, etc. Literature has supported the need for and benefits of self-determination for students with disabilities. A total of 155 peer reviewed articles on self-determination were identified between 1995 and 2002 by Thoma et al. (2005). Of these articles

only 9% addressed curriculum models. Yet, researchers (Agran et al., 2002; Agran et al., 2006; Carter et al., 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Wehmeyer et al., 2006) have continued to contribute empirical studies supporting the benefits of self-determination in the classroom.

While research has supported that self-determination instruction benefits students with cognitive or developmental disabilities (Agran et al., 2001; Agran et al., 2002; Agran & Martin, 2008; Wehmeyer, 1995), it is noteworthy to mention that the skills associated with self-determination such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization (Lachapelle et al., 2005; Wehmeyer, 1995) have benefitted all students with the ability to plan successful lives (Konrad et al., 2008). Bandura (1986) suggested that students attain self-efficacy skills through individualized instruction and self-knowledge. A blending of these skills has contributed to students being self-determined (Erwin et al., 2009). Self-determination has been found to be a key component of transition as students exit school and enter adult life (Agran & Martin, 2008; Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006; Miner & Bates, 2008; Thoma et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

Further research on the implementation and impact of self-determination skills for students with disabilities has been advocated by numerous researchers (Agran et al., 2002; Agran & Martin, 2008; Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006; Hughes et al., 1997; Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Some aspects regarding the implementation of self-determination skills merited local investigation to student outcomes in Tennessee. Particular elements of self-determination included the extent to which students are invited to and participate in their IEP and transition planning processes, the effectiveness of current self-determination curriculum, as well as the actual implementation of curriculum provided by educators in Tennessee. In addition it has been of particular interest to determine the status of

Tennessee educators' perceptions in preparing students to transition from school to adult life and to enter postsecondary education programs or the workforce related to the work of Hughes et al. (1997).

Summary

Legislative mandates require student participation in the IEP goals planning process based on student needs, interests, and preferences. In addition students with disabilities are to be included in general education classrooms and be held accountable for their academic achievements as well as to develop plans that will facilitate their transition from school to adult life. Transition plans are required to include goals related to postsecondary education or employment and connections to adult community supports when necessary.

Self-determination skills are known to effectively assist students with disabilities to achieve greater postschool outcomes (e.g., employment, benefits, quality of life). Researchers have recommended a conceptual framework for self-determination curricula as a means of meeting both the needs of students and legal mandates. Given that self-determination skills are the recommended tools and teachers are the key instructors of these skills, there are specific questions related to the incorporation of self-determination curriculum in Tennessee schools. Does the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model include the components of the recommended conceptual framework? Do Tennessee teachers implement the curriculum? Is there a need for professional development in the area of self-determination to better increase the success of students with disabilities in the general educational curriculum? Awareness of the educators' perceptions of self-determination skills and curricula implementation strategies will reveal the need for professional development and school-wide interventions that will enhance the incorporation of self-determination skills.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Self-determination skills such as autonomy, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization empower individuals to know who they are, what they like, and how to communicate their preferences to others. Without self-determination skills many students are pressured by peers, family members, friends, educators, and support personnel to take jobs or live in housing arrangements that may not reflect the students' interests. When students are self-determined and can advocate for themselves, it is more likely they will make their own choices regarding their lives. However, research in the area of evidence-based self-determination curricula is very limited. Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) have indicated the need for further exploration of curricula and evidence-based practices in area of self-determination. Of particular interest are the perceptions of teachers regarding the availability and implementation of curricular resources (Stang et al., 2009; Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005). Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) recommended that self-determination curricula evaluation should be based on a conceptual model. This study compared the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model used in 57 Tennessee school districts to the recommended conceptual model components of: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. Second, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the importance of implementing self-determination skills in Tennessee schools based on their awareness of curriculum capacity of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model and implementation of self-determination goals in students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Research Design

This nonexperimental study employed descriptive and comparative statistical designs to present data gathered from 56 educators in 28 school districts throughout Tennessee that have implemented the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model. Participants including special education, regular education teachers, and administrators were asked to complete an on-line survey pertaining to curriculum effectiveness, school-wide intervention, incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEPs, and awareness of curriculum capacity. Survey data were used to describe participants based on nominal attributes such as gender, teaching credentials, experience with curriculum (number of years implementing the curriculum), type of school (middle school or high school), type of classroom (inclusive, pull-out, or special school), type of school environment (rural or urban), and type of teacher training (intensive coaching or technical assistance). In addition to demographic dimensions the survey asked participants to respond to seven dimensions related to the curriculum's impact on students': (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication skills, (4) leadership skills, (5) support in the environment, (6) competence, and (7) participation in IEP and transition planning.

Participants

Since 2005 more than 750 Tennessee teachers in 57 school districts have completed training to incorporate the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model. These teachers, their co-instructors, and administrators were asked to complete an on-line survey beginning in September 2010. Transition coordinators at each of the 57 school systems were asked to select two special education teachers and two regular education teachers to complete the survey as part of this study. A total of 96 special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators (i.e., transition coordinators or special education directors) were identified to

participate in this study. Teachers were grouped by: (1) teaching role (special education teacher, regular education, or administrator) and (2) trained or not trained. Teachers completed the on-line survey containing 30 questions regarding the perceived benefits of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model and the student outcomes they have observed after: (1) teaching self-determination skills and (2) incorporating self-determination goals in students' IEPs.

Data Collection

Special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators were asked to complete an on-line survey using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Survey data were analyzed to evaluate curriculum to determine if based on participants' survey scores the curriculum provided adequate information for students to demonstrate self-determination skills. Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., (2005) suggested four components in their conceptual framework for self-determination: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, and leadership skills. Two open-ended questions allowed participants to report student outcomes.

Development of the Survey Instrument

The survey incorporated a 5-point Likert-type scale to measure the six dimensions of knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, leadership skills, student competence, and student participation in IEP and transition planning. In addition open-ended questions were used to collect input regarding self-determination goals and student outcomes. The survey was developed using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) DimensionNet (2006) survey software called mrInterview. The participants completed the survey on-line. The survey contained 30 questions intended to capture information related to: (1) demographic information, (2) conceptual framework for self-determination curriculum, and (3) secondary transition support strategies. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.

Validity in this study was established with the intent to expand on the research efforts of previous studies (Hughes et al., 1997; Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Reliability was established through the efforts of: (1) quality in design and (2) the replicating reliable instruments used in previous studies. Written permission was granted from the researchers to tailor questions from previous studies to the specific curricula and practices in Tennessee schools. See Appendixes B and C for copies of the letters.

Survey questions related to the conceptual framework were modified from the Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) study using their suggested components. These components were originally developed from a meta-analysis of literature and input from stakeholders including individuals who research in the disability field, teachers, parents, and curriculum developers. The framework was then used to review 20 curricula to establish these components as effective strategies for self-determination (Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., 2005). Survey questions related to secondary transition support strategies were modified from a study conducted by Hughes et al. (1997) on practitioner validated secondary transition strategies. The original questionnaire was validated through a review of literature and pre-established criterion for empirical validity as well as a social validation through a national survey of 54 applied researchers in the area of transition (Hughes et al., 1997). Thus, these survey questions had been proven to have both validity and reliability.

Methodology

This study investigated a self-determination curriculum implemented in Tennessee schools. The effectiveness of this curriculum was determined through a three-part investigation suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000). These areas are: (1) analysis of the conceptual framework of the curriculum, (2) participant awareness of curriculum

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capacity, and (3) incorporation of self-advocacy goals in student transition plans. This study compared the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model used in 57 Tennessee school districts to the recommended conceptual model components of: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership as suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. Second, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the importance of implementing self-determination skills in Tennessee schools based on their awareness of curriculum and implementation of self-determination goals in students' IEPs.

Descriptive and comparative statistical methods were used to establish assumptions regarding the curriculum's effectiveness. The first step to implement this study was to develop the survey instrument ensuring that valid and reliable questions and procedures are incorporated. The on-line survey was developed using the statistical software package, SPSS mrInterview, based on the capacity of this service to be easily made available to and completed by participants (SPSS Statistics Software, 2006). Second, the participants and their contact information were determined. Contact information was collected via phone and email contacts to each transition coordinator in each school district.

Participants received an email requesting their participation in this study. The email contained an explanation of the study, how and why they were selected to participate, confidentiality of their responses, and timeline for completing the survey, and appreciation for their input. See Appendix D for a copy of the email. An incentive for participation was offered. Participants who completed the survey were added to a drawing to win a $50 pre-paid Visa card. Participants had a 2-week period to complete the survey. Reminders were sent to potential participants allowing an additional week to complete. Frequent contacts to participants were a strategy to ensure response rate of the survey.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

This study focused on the four research questions listed below.

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores of how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators?

$Ho1_1$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of self among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

$Ho1_2$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of rights among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

$Ho1_3$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate communication skills among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

$Ho1_4$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate leadership skills among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

$Ho1_5$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

Ho1₆: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores on how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students do develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained?

Ho2₁: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of self among participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

Ho2₂: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of rights among participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

Ho2₃: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate communication skills among participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

Ho2₄: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate leadership skills among participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

Ho2₅: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the

curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment among

participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

Ho2₆: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the

curriculum increases the students' competence among participants who were

trained and participants who were not trained.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship between the participants' survey scores of the

incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning in participants who received

on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive on-site technical assistance?

Ho3₁: There is no significant relationship in the participants' survey scores of the

incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning in participants

who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive on-

site technical assistance.

Research Question 4

Is there a significant relationship in the participants' survey scores of student competence

between participants who attend IEP meetings with students and participants who do not attend

IEP meetings with students?

Ho4₁: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores of student

competence among participants who attend IEP meetings with students and

participants who do not attend IEP meetings with students.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to describe participants' perceptions related to the benefits of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model. The Predictive Analytics Software (PASW; 2009) was used to analyze the data. Two statistical measures were used, the independent-samples *t* test and the analysis of variance (ANOVA), to describe demographic variables among the participants and answer the research questions.

To answer research questions 1, 3, and 4 ANOVAs were employed to determine if participants agreed or disagreed that the curriculum incorporated the six dimensions listed. An independent-sample *t* test was employed to determine if training on the curriculum made a difference in participants' perceptions of the curriculum components in research question 2. Statistical measures determined the extent to which participants demonstrate awareness of curriculum capacity as indicated by (1) number of years teaching curriculum and (2) teaching curriculum each semester.

Summary

Researchers have suggested that self-determination curriculum follow a conceptual model that includes four instructional components including: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, and leadership skills. This nonexperimental study gathered data from 56 special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators from 28 Tennessee school districts employing a 30 question survey. The purpose of the study was to determine if the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model included the components of the recommended conceptual framework for self-determination curriculum. The survey was developed with permission from researchers to modify questions used in published research articles. The survey was accessible on-line for convenience and ease of completion.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This study investigated the capacity of a self-advocacy curriculum implemented in

Tennessee schools to promote student demonstration of self-determination skills. This study

determined if there were significant differences in the perceptions of: (1) special education

teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators and (2) participants who are trained and

participants who are not trained regarding the observation of self-determination skills in students

with disabilities.

The effectiveness of the self-advocacy curriculum was determined through a three-part

investigation as suggested by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000).

These suggested areas are: (1) analysis of the conceptual framework of the curriculum, (2)

participant awareness of curriculum capacity, and (3) incorporation of self-advocacy goals in

student transition plans. First, this study compared the Self-Determination and Career Planning

Model used in 57 Tennessee school districts to the recommended conceptual model of: (1)

knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership as suggested

by Test, Fowler, Wood et al. Second, this study explored teachers' perceptions of the importance

of implementing self-determination skills in Tennessee schools based on their awareness of

curriculum and implementation of self-determination goals in students' Individualized

Educational Programs (IEPs).

Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Variables of Study Participants

Educators in 57 Tennessee school districts were asked to participant in an on-line survey

to evaluate a self-advocacy curriculum provided by the University of Tennessee's Center on

Disability and Employment. Emails were sent to 57 administrators (i.e., transition coordinators

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or special education directors) requesting the identification of two special education teachers and two regular education teachers in each district to participate in this study.

One school district required an independent internal research approval process before administrators or educators could be contacted. The school district provided approval for me to contact principals. Therefore, 13 high school principals and two supervisors in that school district were contacted via email to request permission to contact teachers.

Once the administrators responded with educators' names, 96 educators received emails requesting their participation in this study. Table 1 shows the demographics of participants and school locations. Fifty-six Tennessee educators from 28 school districts responded to the on-line survey providing a 58% return rate. As indicated in Table 1, participants represented 49% of the 57 school systems. Seventy-three percent of the schools were located in urban areas and 27% of the schools were located in rural areas throughout the state.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	*n*	%	Schools	*n*	%
Pool	96			57	
Respondents	56			28	
Male	5	9	Urban	41	73
Female	51	91	Rural	15	27

The on-line survey consisted of 30 questions that required the participant approximately 20 minutes to complete. A 5-point Likert-type scale, Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, was used to collect respondent scores. The questions were created to collect participants' opinions of the self-advocacy curriculum capacity to affect their students' self-advocacy skills that would

provide statistical results for four research questions. Research questions focused on six curriculum dimensions including knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, leadership skills, support in the environment, and competence related to the opinions of educators' roles and experiences with the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model. A seventh dimension, IEP participation, was included to determine educators' opinions if students participate in IEP meetings. Each of the seven dimensions was characterized by 3-5 levels.

Three groups of educators participated in the on-line survey: (1) special education teachers at 57%, (2) regular education teachers at 11%, and (3) administrators (i.e., transition coordinators or special education directors) at 32%. Respondents were grouped based on their teaching role (special education teacher, regular education teacher, and administrator), whether or not their received training to implement the curriculum, and whether or not they received on-site technical assistance.

Survey respondents reported whether or not they had received training and on-site technical assistance from the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment. A significant 66% of respondents reported having received training and 43% reported having received on-site technical assistance as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Training and Technical Assistance Status of Respondents

Training	*n*	%	Technical Assistance	*n*	%
Yes	37	66	Yes	24	43
No	19	34	No	32	57

The age of survey respondents ranged from 24 to 64 ($M = 46$, $SD = 11$). The mean age of the respondents was 46 years old. Approximately 71% (40) of the respondents were 40 to 64

years old. Respondents who were 24-39 years old accounted for the remaining 29% (16). Eighty-two percent of these educators reported teaching in high schools and 18% taught in middle schools. The respondents reported 100% agreement that self-determination skills are critical to student success.

Educators reported a wide range of educational experience with the greater percentage (67%) having a Bachelor's Degree. Other degrees are listed in Table 3. Educators' experience in the education field was spread over a range of years including: 1-3 years (27%), 4-7 years (32%), with a larger percentage of respondents teaching 8 or more years (41%). Respondents also listed additional qualifications including highly qualified to teach in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Government and Economics, and Language Arts as well as experience in Curriculum and Instruction.

Table 3

Educational Experience of Respondents

Degree	*n*	%	Years in Position	*n*	%
Associate's Degree	1	1	1-3	15	27
Bachelor's Degree	37	67	4-7	18	32
Master's Degree	10	18	8+	23	41
Education Specialist	5	10			
Doctorate	2	4			

Almost half of the respondents (46%) reported having taught the self-advocacy curriculum for 0 years as shown in Table 4. Respondents reported reasons for not teaching the curriculum as: (1) just received training and not yet implemented, (2) no time to implement given new academic standards, and (3) would like additional training to teach the curriculum. The

remaining respondents (53%) reported teaching the curriculum from 1 to 5 years. Twenty percent

of the respondents had taught the curriculum for 1 year. Only 40% (22) of the respondents

reported they taught the curriculum every semester. However, 88% (49) of the respondents

reported they have support from their administration to use the self-advocacy curriculum. In

addition, 96% of the respondents reported they attend IEP meetings with their students.

Table 4

Years Teaching Self-Advocacy

Teaching Curriculum	*n*	%
0 Years	26	46
1 Year	11	20
2 Years	6	11
3 Years	5	9
4 Years	4	7
5 Years	4	7

Of the respondents, 77% reported that special education students are taught the self-

advocacy curriculum. Importantly, 23% of the respondents report they teach the curriculum to all

students (both special education and regular education students). The pull-out classroom (57%)

was reported as most used type of classroom where the curriculum is taught. Inclusive

classrooms accounted for 30% of the responses with the remaining 13% reported to be in special

school situations of incorporating the self-advocacy curriculum.

Analysis of Curriculum Variables by Teaching Roles

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores of how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators?

Ho1$_1$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of self among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents rating of how students express knowledge of self. The factor variable, teaching role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of how students express knowledge of self as described by: express personal interests, identify strengths and preferences, develop goals, and know their support needs. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 53) = 1.16$, $p = .322$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho1$_1$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role and the students' expressing knowledge of self as assessed by η^2 was small (.04). The results indicate that the mean scores of three groups of educators for how students express knowledge of self were similar as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Knowledge of Skills

Teacher Role	n	M	SD
Special Education	31	13.39	3.58
Regular Education	6	15.50	2.74
Administrator	19	13.53	2.39

$Ho1_2$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of rights among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents rating of how students express knowledge of rights. The factor variable, teaching role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of how students know knowledge of rights as described by: know personal rights, express educational rights, and are aware of community resources. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 53) = 1.86$, $p = .166$. Therefore the null hypothesis $Ho1_2$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role and the students' expressing knowledge of self as assessed by η^2 was small (.07). The results indicate that the mean scores of three groups of educators for how students express knowledge of rights were similar as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Knowledge of Rights

Teacher Role	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Special Education	31	8.55	2.97
Regular Education	6	11.00	2.76
Administrator	19	9.11	2.73

$Ho1_3$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate communication skills among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents rating of how students demonstrate communication skills. The factor variable, teaching role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of how students demonstrate communication skills as described by introduce themselves, demonstrate assertiveness, demonstrate listening skills, and use compromise and negotiation skills. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 53) = 1.26$, $p = .293$. Therefore the null hypothesis $Ho1_3$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role and the students' demonstration of communication skills as assessed by η^2 was small (.05). The results indicate that the mean scores of three groups of educators for how students demonstrate communication skills were similar as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Communication Skills

Teacher Role	n	M	SD
Special Education	31	12.84	3.76
Regular Education	6	15.33	4.28
Administrator	19	12.68	3.56

Ho1$_4$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how

students demonstrate leadership skills among special education teachers, regular

education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of

respondents rating of how students demonstrate leadership skills. The factor variable, teaching

role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education teachers, and

administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly

disagree, of how students demonstrate leadership skills as described by participate in team work,

actively participate in transition and IEP planning, and advocate for others. The ANOVA was not

significant, $F(2, 53) = .95$, $p = .393$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho1$_4$ was retained. The

strength of the relationship between the teacher role and the students' demonstration of

leadership skills as assessed by η^2 was small (.04). The results indicate that the mean scores of

three groups of educators for how students demonstrate leadership skills were similar as shown

in Table 8.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Leadership Skills

Teacher Role	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Special Education	31	10.23	2.54
Regular Education	6	11.83	2.57
Administrator	19	10.32	2.65

$Ho1_5$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents rating of how students develop support in the environment. The factor variable, teaching role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of how students develop support in the environment as described by identify and provide social support from employers, co-workers, peers, and family; identify environmental support and provide needed changes within the environment; and promote acceptance in their environment. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 53) = 1.08$, $p = .348$. Therefore the null hypothesis $Ho1_5$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role and the students' demonstration of leadership skills as assessed by η^2 was small (.04). The results indicate that the mean scores of three groups of educators for how students develop support in the environment were similar as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Support in the Environment

Teacher Role	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Special Education	31	10.71	2.88
Regular Education	6	10.83	2.14
Administrator	19	11.79	2.07

Ho1$_6$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the

curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers,

regular education teachers, and administrators.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of

respondents rating of how the curriculum increases the students' competence. The factor

variable, teaching role, included three levels: special education teachers, regular education

teachers, and administrators. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree

to strongly disagree, of how the curriculum increases the students' competence as described by

observe and identify opportunities for choice, provide opportunities for choice making, identify

strengths and areas needing support, learn self-management, and provide opportunities to learn

and practice social skills. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 53) = 1.17$, $p = .318$. Therefore

the null hypothesis Ho1$_6$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role

and how the curriculum increases students' competence as assessed by η^2 was small (.04). The

results indicate that the mean scores of three groups of educators for how the curriculum

increases students' competence were similar as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Student Competence

Teacher Role	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Special Education	31	19.39	3.94
Regular Education	6	20.33	4.27
Administrator	19	21.05	3.29

Analysis of Curriculum Variables by Training Status

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores on how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained?

Ho2_1: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of self between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of how students express knowledge of self differ for participants who received training on the self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test variable was mean scores of the curriculum dimension, knowledge of self that included four levels: students express personal interests, students identify strengths and preferences, students develop goals, and students know their support needs. The grouping variable was participants who received training and those who did not receive training. The test was not significant, $t(54) = .40, p = .688$.

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Therefore the null hypothesis Ho2$_1$ was retained. The η^2 index was .003 which indicated a small effect size. Educators who received training ($M = 13.78$, $SD = 2.97$) tended to rate how students express knowledge of self about the same as educators who did not receive training ($M = 13.42$, $SD = 3.56$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.44 to 2.16. Figure 1 shows the distributions of the two groups.
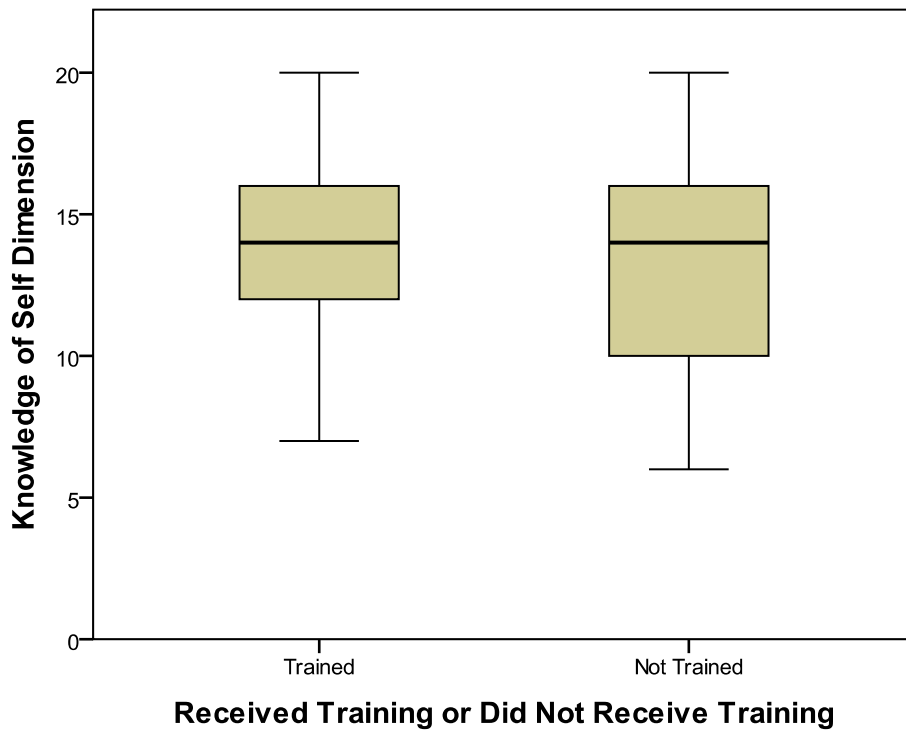

Figure 1. Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Knowledge of Self

Ho2$_2$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students express knowledge of rights between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of how students express knowledge of rights differ for participants who received training on the self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test variable was

mean scores of the curriculum dimension, knowledge of rights that included three levels: students know personal rights, students express educational rights, and students are aware of community resources. The grouping variable was participants who received training and those who did not receive training. The test was not significant, $t(54) = 1.27$, $p = .210$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho2$_2$ was retained. The η^2 index was .03 which indicated a small effect size. Educators who received training ($M = 9.35$, $SD = 2.58$) tended to rate how students express knowledge of self about the same as educators who did not receive training ($M = 8.32$, $SD = 3.43$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.603 to 2.67. Figure 2 shows the distributions of the two groups.
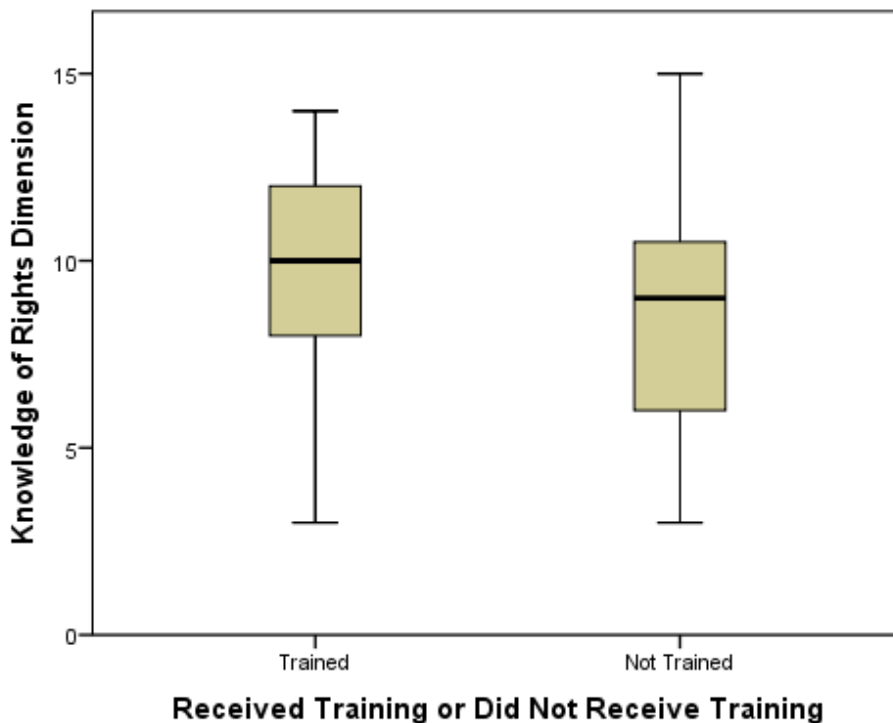

Figure 2. Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Knowledge of Rights

Ho2$_3$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how students demonstrate communication skills between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of how students demonstrate communication skills differ for participants who received training on the self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test variable was mean scores of the curriculum dimension, communication skills that included four levels: students introduce themselves, students demonstrate assertiveness, students demonstrate listening skills, and students use compromise and negotiation skills. The grouping variable was participants who received training and those who did not receive training. The test was significant, $t(54) = 2.01$, $p = .05$. Therefore the null hypothesis $Ho2_3$ was rejected. Educators who received training ($M = 13.76$, $SD = 3.35$) tended to rate how students express knowledge of self slightly higher than educators who did not receive training ($M = 11.68$, $SD = 4.22$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .002 to 4.14. The η^2 index was .07 which indicated a medium effect size. Figure 3 shows the distributions of the two groups.
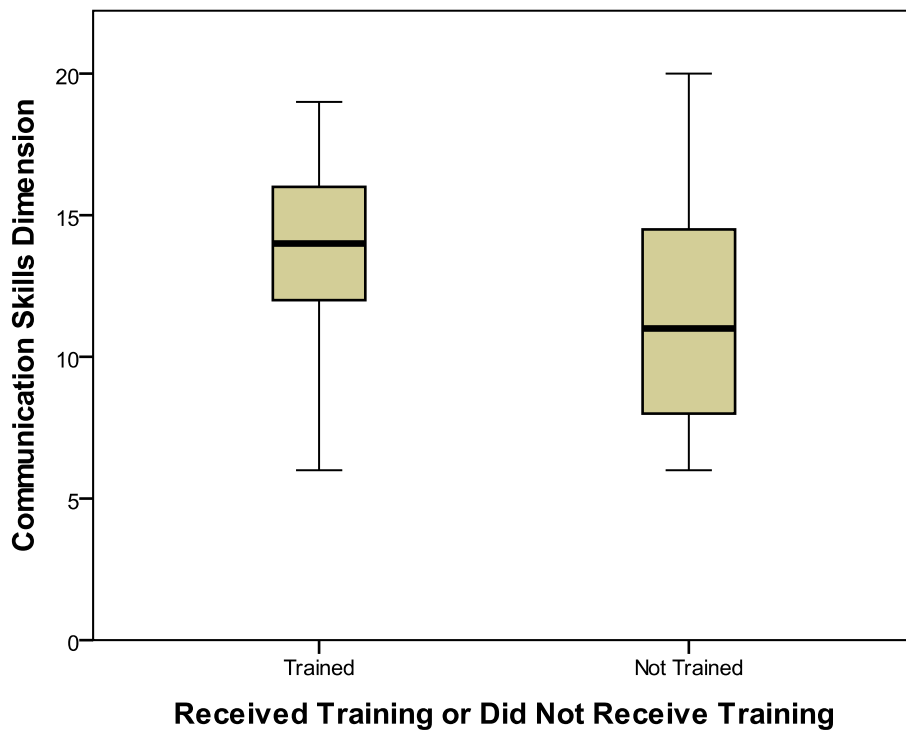

Figure 3. Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Communication Skills

Ho2$_4$:   There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how

students demonstrate leadership skills between participants who were trained

and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of

how students demonstrate leadership skills differ for participants who received training on the

self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test variable was

mean scores of the curriculum dimension, leadership skills that included three levels: students

participate in teamwork, students actively participate in transition and IEP planning, and student

advocate for others. The grouping variable was participants who received training and those who

did not receive training. The test was not significant, $t(54) = 1.56$, $p = .133$. Therefore the null

hypothesis Ho2$_4$ was retained. The η^2 index was .04 which indicated a small effect size.

Educators who received training ($M = 10.81$, $SD = 2.25$) tended to rate how students express

knowledge of self about the same as educators who did not receive training ($M = 9.68$,

$SD = 3.23$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.354 to 2.61. Figure 4

shows the distributions of the two groups.

Figure 4. Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Leadership Skills

      Ho2$_5$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the

           curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment between

           participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of

how students develop support in the environment differ for participants who received training on

the self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test variable was

mean scores of the curriculum dimension, support in the environment that included three levels:

students identify and provide social support from employers, co-workers, peers, and family,

students identify environmental support and provide needed changes within their environment,

and students promote acceptance in their environment. The grouping variable was participants

who received training and those who did not receive training. The test was significant, *t*(54) =

1.99, $p = .05$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho2$_5$ was rejected. Educators who received training ($M = 11.57$, $SD = 2.22$) tended to rate how students express knowledge of self slightly higher than educators who did not receive training ($M = 10.16$, $SD = 2.99$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.005 to 2.83. The η^2 index was .07 which indicated a medium effect size. Figure 5 shows the distributions of the two groups.

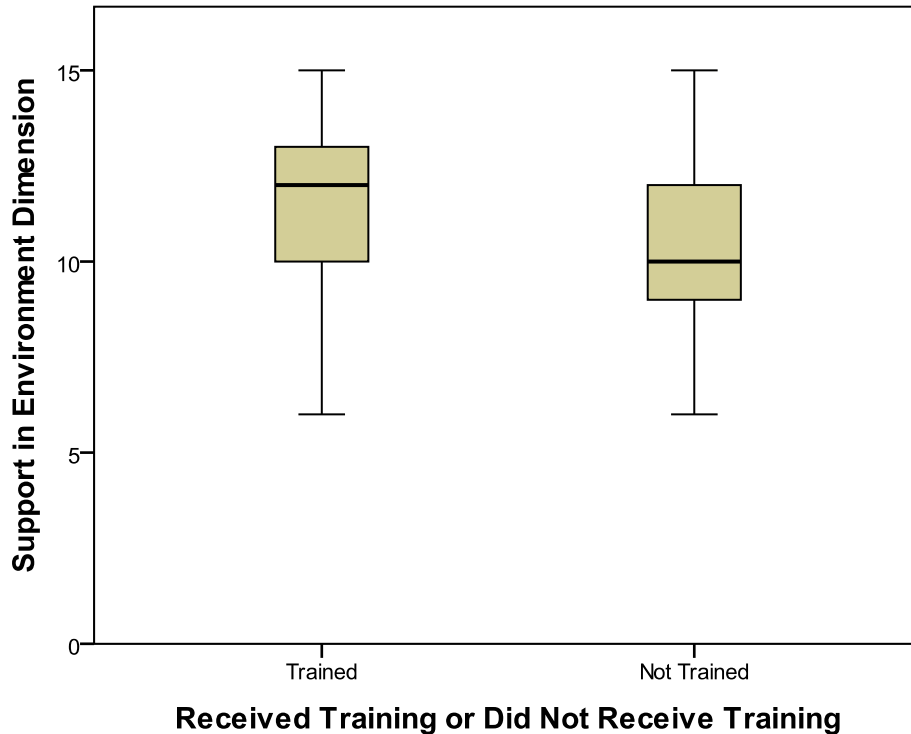*Figure 5.* Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Support in the Environment

Ho2$_6$: There is no significant difference in the participants' survey scores on how the curriculum increases the students' competence between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean amount of how the curriculum increases the students' competence differ for participants who received training on the self-advocacy curriculum and participants who did not receive training. The test

variable was mean scores of the curriculum dimension, competence that included four levels: students observe and identify opportunities for choice, curriculum provides opportunities for choice making, students identify strengths and areas needing support, and curriculum provides opportunities for students to learn and practice social skills. The grouping variable was participants who received training and those who did not receive training. The test was significant, $t(54) = 2.16$, $p = .04$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho2$_6$ was rejected. Educators who received training ($M = 20.81$, $SD = 3.03$) tended to rate how students express knowledge of self slightly higher than educators who did not receive training ($M = 18.58$, $SD = 4.67$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .162 to 4.30. The η^2 index was .08 which indicated a small medium size. Figure 6 shows the distributions of the two groups.
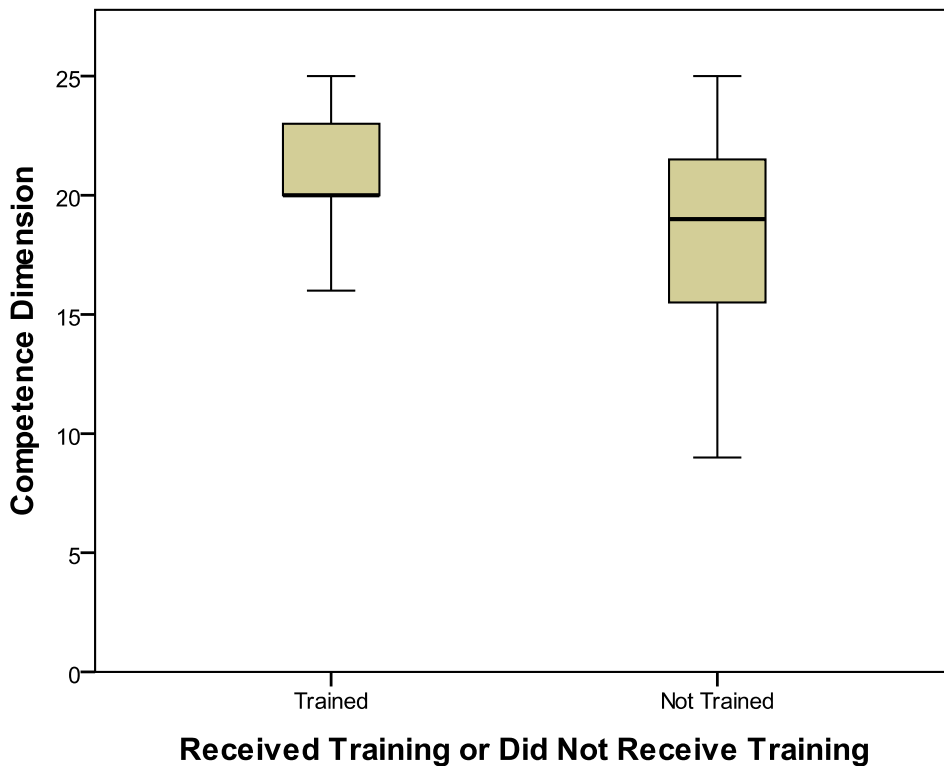

Figure 6. Distribution of Scores of Trained and Not Trained Groups for Student Competence

Analysis of Curriculum Implementation by On-Site Technical Assistance Status

Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship of incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning in participations who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive technical assistance?

Ho3₁: There is no significant relationship in the participants' survey scores of the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning in participants who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive on-site technical assistance.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents' ratings of the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning. The factor variable technical assistance or no technical assistance included two levels: participants who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive on-site technical assistance. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(1, 54) = .69$, $p = .410$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho3₁ was retained. The strength of the relationship between receiving on-site technical assistance and not receiving on-site technical assistance and the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning as assessed by η^2 was small (.01). The results indicate there is no relationship between receiving on-site technical assistance and educators' mean ratings of the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning as shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Student IEP Participation

Technical Assistance	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Yes	24	4.25	.79
No	32	4.03	1.09

Analysis of Curriculum Variables by IEP Attendance

Research Question 4

Is there a significant relationship of student competence between participants who attend IEP meetings with students and participants who do not attend IEP meetings with students?

Ho4$_1$: There is no significant relationship in the participants' survey scores of student competence between participants who attend IEP meetings with students and participants who do not attend IEP meetings with students.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of respondents rating of how the curriculum increases the students' competence. The factor variable, IEP attendance, included two levels: attend IEP meetings with students and do not attend IEP meetings with students. The dependent variable was the respondents' ratings, strongly agree to strongly disagree, of how the curriculum increases the students' competence as described by observe and identify opportunities for choice, provide opportunities for choice making, identify strengths and areas needing support, learn self-management, and provide opportunities to learn and practice social skills. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(1, 54) = .30$, $p = .584$. Therefore the null hypothesis Ho4$_1$ was retained. The strength of the relationship between the teacher role and how the curriculum increases students' competence as assessed by η^2 was small (.006). The results indicate there is no relationship between attendance at IEP

meetings and non-attendance at IEP meetings on educators' mean ratings of how the curriculum

increases students' competence were similar as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Ratings for Student Competence

Attend IEP Meeting	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Yes	54	4.11	.98
No	2	4.50	.71

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the demographic and statistical findings of an on-line survey of 56

educators representing 28 Tennessee school districts. These findings conveyed that survey

respondents agreed or disagreed on how students demonstrate self-advocacy skills as described

by six curricular dimensions. Results were described for four research questions that explored the

evidence of curriculum dimensions based on three factors: role of the educator (i.e., special

education teacher, regular education teacher, and administrator); whether or not the respondent

had received training; and whether or not the respondent had received technical assistance to

implement the self-advocacy curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLEMENTATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

This study investigated the effectiveness of the self-advocacy curriculum introduced through the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model to 57 Tennessee school districts. Over the past decades legislation around educational recommendations for students with disabilities has steadily progressed toward the incorporation of self-determination curriculum. For students with disabilities to be empowered to fully participate in their transition planning, research has suggested that schools incorporate a self-determination curriculum for students to demonstrate self-determination skills (Agran et al., 2002; Stang et al., 2009; Wehmeyer et al., 2000; Wehmeyer et al., 2006; Wood et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2005). In 2004 the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment introduced the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model (Fussell et al., 2004) as pilot programs to two Tennessee schools districts. Since that time the self-advocacy curriculum has been extended to 57 Tennessee school districts.

This study surveyed 56 educators (i.e., special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators) in 28 Tennessee school districts to examine the effectiveness of the self-advocacy curriculum. This study identified the evidence of curriculum dimensions as recommended by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000).

While over 750 teachers were trained on this curriculum in the past 5 years, it was found that teacher and staff changes within the school districts and changes in academic standards created a lower eligibility pool of participants who were incorporating this curriculum. Reasons for lack of participation in this study were consistent across the state including: (1) relocation of

teachers (teachers trained to implement the curriculum had transferred to other school districts),
(2) no time for curriculum given curriculum standards, (3) change in administration with no
awareness of the curriculum in place, or (4) staff preparing for monitoring. Although the
participation in this study seemed low, information provided by participants confirmed evidence
of curriculum benefits, demonstrated educator awareness of curriculum usefulness, and identified
areas in both curriculum and training and technical assistance dimensions of the Self-
Determination and Career Planning Model.

Conclusions

Information provided by Tennessee educators through the on-line survey helped
determine the evidence of curriculum dimensions in the self-advocacy curriculum. Areas that
need improvement were identified that would help make the curriculum more effective. The
conclusions of this study were beneficial to the continued success of the self-advocacy
curriculum being implemented in Tennessee school districts. First, there were some barriers to
conducting the survey. Some of those barriers are listed below.

- Administrators were aware of the curriculum and training.

- Teachers who were trained had changed positions or relocated.

- No one was accountable for implementing the curriculum.

- The change in academic standards interfered with the implementation of self-
determination. Teachers perceived if students were included in inclusion classes, the
self-advocacy curriculum would be difficult to implement.

- Teachers were not willing to devote 25 minutes of their time to complete the on-line
survey.

- In some cases it seemed the administrator was not involved with the curriculum did not promote the incorporation of the curriculum.

While these barriers to conducting the survey existed, the information collected from the 56 educators was beneficial to the success and future implementations of the self-advocacy curriculum. Survey results provided demographic and statistical results, discussed in Chapter 4. Additional conclusions were identified for the study research questions and the overall study conclusions.

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores of how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence among special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators?

Research question 1 compared educators' scores of six curriculum dimensions of the self-advocacy curriculum. There were no differences found among the opinions of special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators on how students demonstrate self-advocacy skills.

Conclusion 1

Educators agreed on the evidence of the six curriculum dimensions. Special education teachers tended to have lower mean scores than the regular education teachers and administrators in all six dimensions. This outcome could be due to the special educators' roles in that they implement the curriculum more frequently than the other two groups and they are more familiar with the curriculum capacity across all six dimensions.

The reality that these educators rated the capacity of the self-advocacy curriculum indicated that Tennessee educators exceed in awareness of self-determination materials and resources. Compared to the participants mentioned in the study by Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al. (2005) who had little to no knowledge of resources and materials for self-determination instruction, survey respondents exceeded this previously reported viewpoint. These teachers seemed to agree with Rathvon (2008) that the teacher needs to appreciate the curriculum and realize how the intervention will affect student learning. It is inspiring that these educators take the responsibility to ensure student autonomy in planning and identifying self-knowledge as suggested by Assor et al. (2002).

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences in participants' survey scores on how (1) students express knowledge of self, (2) students express knowledge of rights, (3) students demonstrate communication skills, (4) students demonstrate leadership skills, (5) the curriculum helps students to develop support in the environment, and (6) the curriculum increases the students' competence between participants who were trained and participants who were not trained?

Research question 2 evaluated educators' scores on six dimensions of the self-advocacy curriculum based on those respondents who received training and those who did not receive training from the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment to implement the self-advocacy curriculum. Differences in educators' scores were found in three of the six curriculum dimensions: students demonstrate communication skills, students develop support in the environment, and the curriculum helps to increase students' competence.

Conclusion 2

Training to implement the self-advocacy curriculum may have helped educators to better observe the demonstration of student self-advocacy skills. The training provided special education teachers the skills to be more aware of the communication skills, support in the environment, and competence skills that students should obtain to successfully transition from school to adult life. This finding corresponded to the suggestion of researchers (Agran & Martin, 2008; Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006; Miner & Bates, 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2006) that to confidently teach self-determination skills, teachers need to participate in professional development focusing on the philosophy of self-determination and how self-determination skills promote increased student academic and postschool outcomes.

In the communication skills dimension it seemed that all respondents tended to agree that student introduced themselves. However, special education teachers and administrators seemed to disagree more that students demonstrate assertiveness, develop goals, and know their support needs. These are areas in the curriculum that may need to be improved. The feedback from respondents implied agreement with Erwin et al. (2009), Pennell (2001), and Wehmeyer et al. (2006) that learning to speak up for yourself and your rights is a process that requires real-life experiences and practice to implement.

It seemed that regular education teachers and administrators marked the Not Sure choice regarding the three levels of the curriculum dimension, develop support in the environment: identify and provide social support from employers, co-workers, peers, and family; identify environmental support and provide needed changes within their environments; and promote acceptance in their environment. This outcome could be interpreted that regular education teachers and administrators are not as involved with the students as they explore community

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opportunities. Self-determination was originally implemented in schools for the purpose of improving students' active participation in the transition process (Wehmeyer et al., 2006). This information implied a need for school-wide intervention and the application of effective instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction and embedded instruction as suggested by McDonnell et al. (2006) and Falvey et al. (2006), respectively.

Special education teachers indicated that the self-management skills listed in the competence dimension may not be as prevalent. Self-management skills are critical for students with disabilities to succeed in the regular classroom. This perspective suggested agreement with Rathvon (2008) for the need for professional development for teachers to know "the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions" in a classroom of diverse students (p. 4). However, this area of the curriculum should be improved.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant relationship of incorporation of self-advocacy goals in Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition planning in participations who received on-site technical assistance and participants who did not receive technical assistance?

Research question 3 evaluated the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning based on the opinions of educators who received technical assistance from the University of Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment and those who did not receive technical assistance. No differences were found between respondents who received technical assistance and those who did not receive technical assistance.

Conclusion 3

Survey results indicated that the incorporation of self-advocacy goals in IEP and transition planning is occurring. On-site technical assistance provided by the University of

Tennessee's Center on Disability and Employment did not bias educators' opinions in this area as all educators seemed to agree. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) mandates that self-advocacy goals be included in students' IEPs. However, there was some disagreement by special education teachers and administrators that self-advocacy goals are being included in IEPs.

This issue might be explained by a comment from a participant that more training is needed for educators to develop meaningful goals related to self-advocacy. Another comment indicated that students might speak up about their interests, yet their requests are not necessarily acknowledged by members of the IEP. This reflection of special education teachers concurred with the viewpoint of previous studies that self-determination goals have been found to continue to be lacking in IEP and transition plans (Test, Fowler, Brewer, et al., 2005; Test, Fowler, Wood, et al., 2005). Although 100% of the survey respondents agreed that self-determination is critical to the student success, Chambers et al. (2007) and Thoma et al. (2002) implied that educators do not necessarily offer to implement self-determination practices.

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship of student competence between participants who attend IEP meetings with students and participants who do not attend IEP meetings with students?

Research question 4 explored the evidence of a relationship between educators' opinions of students' competence based on whether or not the educator attended IEP meetings with students. There was no difference found between educators who attend IEP meetings and those who did not attend IEP meetings with students. Ninety-six percent of the respondents reported that they attended IEP meetings. Therefore, this question may not have been relevant to this participant pool.

Conclusion 4

Attending IEP meetings did not bias educators' opinions regarding the evidence of student confidence. Based on survey results, there was evidence that the curriculum has increased students' confidence. This conclusion was indicated by high ratings in all five levels of the competence dimension as indicated in Table 13.

Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) purported that the student's participation in the IEP process increased student responsibility in the planning for postsecondary education or careers. Active participation in IEP and transition processes has been determined to have a potential impact on student's demonstration of self-determination skills (Agran & Martin, 2008; Miner & Bates, 2008; Shogren et al., 2007). If educators agreed that students demonstrate increased confidence, then the possibility of increased student IEP participation implies the self-advocacy curriculum provided effective instructional resources.

Table 13

Educator Ratings of How the Curriculum Increases Student Confidence

Curriculum Level	*n*	Strongly Agree to Agree	Not Sure	Disagree to Strongly Disagree
Observe and identify opportunities for choice	56	45	5	6
Provide opportunities for choice making	56	46	5	5
Identify strengths and areas needing support	56	46	5	5
Learn self-management	56	37	11	8
Provide opportunities to learn and practice social skills	56	47	4	5

Conclusion 5

The conceptual framework and evidence-based practices of self-determination curricula was confirmed in the self-advocacy curriculum. This study confirmed evidence of curriculum benefits in the self-advocacy curriculum. The intent was to explore the following four areas: (1) the curriculum contains the four dimensions that make up the conceptual framework of self-determination curriculum, (2) school-wide intervention has occurred, (3) self-determination goals are included in IEPs and transition plans, and (4) there is awareness of the curriculum capacity. This four-part conclusion is explained in the following descriptions.

Conclusion 5a

Survey data indicated that the self-advocacy curriculum contained the four suggested curriculum dimensions. The study results provided the evidence that the self-advocacy curriculum contained the four dimensions that make up the conceptual framework of self-determination curriculum as recommended by Test, Fowler, Wood, et al. (2005) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000). The four curriculum dimensions are: (1) knowledge of self, (2) knowledge of rights, (3) communication, and (4) leadership as rated by the educators are outlined in Table 14.

Table 14

Dimensions of Self-Advocacy Curriculum

Curriculum Dimensions and Levels	Strongly Agree to Agree	Not Sure	Disagree to Strongly Disagree
1. Knowledge of Self			
Students express personal interests.	51	2	3
Students identify strengths and preferences.	36	6	14
Students develop goals.	22	12	22
Students know their support needs.	23	11	22
2. Knowledge of Rights			
Students know personal rights.	29	10	17
Students express educational rights.	24	8	24
Students are aware of community resources.	22	8	25

Table 14 (Continued)

Curriculum Dimensions and Levels	Strongly Agree to Agree	Not Sure	Disagree to Strongly Disagree
3. Communication Skills			
Students introduce themselves.	36	4	16
Students demonstrate assertiveness.	23	10	23
Students demonstrate listening skills.	39	7	10
Students use compromise and negotiation skills.	20	12	24
4. Leadership Skills			
Students participate in team work.	48	2	6
Students actively participate in transition or IEP planning.	40	4	12
Students advocate for others.	19	13	24

As indicated in Table 14, Tennessee educators rated the curriculum categories agreeing that all four dimensions were present. They also indicated that some levels were more evident than others. This study fulfilled the research suggested by Agran et al. (2006) that more in-depth investigation is required to determine the successful implementation of self-determination skills. Survey respondents confirmed the evidence of the four curriculum dimensions.

Recommendations for curriculum improvements are presented below as an implication for practice. This conclusion should lead to continued curriculum develop and improvements.

Conclusion 5b

Data indicated that school-wide intervention occurred in pockets of excellence throughout the state. School-wide intervention of the self-advocacy curriculum had not occurred throughout the state. However, there appeared to be pockets of excellence evident in school districts that have implemented the curriculum. Some factors that contributed to school-wide intervention are: (1) administrators were aware of the curriculum and its benefits, (2) administrators ensured that the curriculum was available, time was allotted, and teachers were trained to teach the curriculum, (3) teachers were aware of the curriculum and its benefits, and (4) teachers found ways to incorporate the curriculum in the midst of required curriculum standards. Two contrasting statements from administrators are included below.

> I am happy to work with you on this request. I already know the teachers I will recommend in special education and regular education. I hope this is helpful to you in your work. If for some reason these names do not work out feel free to call me and I will try others.

> The teachers who were trained at the high school level have either retired or moved into new jobs. The middle and elementary teachers are involved in inclusion. So it is difficult for them to implement the self-determination curriculum while in the general education classroom. They are working on preparing students for the new academic standards.

In order for school-wide intervention to have been in effect, the responses should have resembled the first response above. It seemed that the new academic standards interfered with the implementation of the self-advocacy curriculum in the second response. The administrator in the first response had found a way to implement the self-advocacy curriculum within the new academic standards. It seemed that the process of this survey helped to remind some administrators that the self-advocacy curriculum was available and critical to student outcomes. One administrator had the following comment when asked about the type of training needed.

Some of our middle schools may need a refresher course. I met with them all this past week to discuss transition requirements and urged them to get back into teaching self-determination.

The statement above confirmed the fact that the school had taught the curriculum in the past and realized the benefits of the curricular information. It also indicated that it is possible to teach the self-advocacy curriculum even with the incorporation of the new academic standards.

The perspectives of survey respondents confirmed the suggestion of Erwin et al. (2009) that schools should incorporate self-determination curriculum as "an intentional and ongoing process" to promote self-determination skills effectively (p. 28). Without the intentional and ongoing process schools are assigning low priority to self-determination instruction and not succeeding in the purpose of promoting social validation in students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Conclusion 5c

Data indicated that self-determination goals are included in IEPs and transition plans. Over 80% of the educators agreed that self-determination goals are included in IEP and transition plans. Examples are self-determination goals were provided by the educators.

The student will self-regulate and self-manage day to day activities.

Student will participate in meetings, give input and help plan for post-secondary placement after graduation from high school.

Student will demonstrate appropriate ways of stating his/her preferences in various situations.

Students will have meaningful input in determining elective choices based on their interests rather than schedule allowances.

To prepare for life beyond graduation, student will increase her social communication by interacting with peers on a daily basis, making choices in leisure activities, and spontaneously verbalizing her wants and needs.

The list of reported self-determination goals substantiated the incorporation of self-determination goals in students' IEPs. Survey respondents have shown evidence that IEP and transition planning can be used as tools for teaching self-determination and leadership skills, as suggested by Agran and Martin (2008).

Conclusion 5d

Awareness of the curriculum capacity was justified by the comments provided by survey respondents. The incorporation of the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model has helped to increase teacher awareness of the curriculum capacity. While 66% of the respondents reported they had received training on the curriculum, it was noted that 50% of the respondents requested additional training. Their additional training requests, listed in Table 15, indicated that they were interested in increasing their effectiveness in delivering the content to facilitate student growth as self-advocates. The desire to improve their knowledge of self-determination and transition concurred with the suggestion that teachers need awareness of curriculum, philosophy, expected outcomes, and instructional strategies in order to implement teaching strategies to connect students' needs to curriculum standards (Chambers et al., 2007; Shogren et al., 2007; Thoma et al., 2002; Thoma et al., 2005; and Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

Table 15

Additional Training Requested by Respondents

Additional Training Requested	
Assistive Technology	Inclusion
Beginning Self-Advocacy Training	Leadership Skills
Behavior	Transition
Community Agencies	Writing transition and postsecondary goals

Conclusion 6

The perceptions of Tennessee teachers on the incorporation of self-determination curricula have seemed to increased from the 1997 study conducted by Hughes et al. While there may continue to be a gap between the recommended practices and implementation of practices, as suggested by Hughes et al., this study indicated there was demonstrated educator awareness of the self-advocacy curriculum capacity. Study results indicated that teachers who were trained to implement the self-advocacy curriculum identified areas of strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum dimensions: demonstrate communication, develop support in the environment, and increase student competence.

Survey respondents indicated awareness of potential training needs that would promote student self-advocacy. All three groups of educators similarly rated the curriculum dimension of develop support in the environment characterized by three levels: students identify and provide social support from employers, co-workers, peers, and family; students identify environmental support and provide needed changes within their environment; and students promote acceptance in their environment. Finally, one educator indicated a perception that the curriculum should be viewed as a foundation to be added to as a teaching strategy to meet specific student needs.

> I have added to the original self-advocacy program that was presented to me. I try to meet the current needs of my students as they pass through my class.

While some teachers had not implemented the curriculum and reported reasons such as time constraints, survey data indicated that Tennessee teachers' perceptions for the most part refute the reports of researchers (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Carter et al., 2008; Konrad et al., 2008; Stang et al., 2009) that teachers lack awareness of curriculum resources and lack professional development and administrative support to implement self-determination curriculum. Sixty-six percent of the respondents reported having received training, 43% reported having received

technical assistance, 88% reported having administrative support, and 40% report they taught the curriculum every semester.

Conclusion 7

An increase in student IEP participation was indicated by educator ratings of student IEP participation. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents agreed that students participate in IEPs meetings. There was a 95% agreement that students participate in transition planning. Some of the respondents' statements regarding participation in IEP or transition planning provide in-depth information as to the situation of increase student IEP participation.

> I attended an IEP meeting where a family wanted the student to graduate as soon as possible. The student was aware that by law he could stay several more years. He clearly stated his intention and reasons for wanting to continue his K-12 education for a couple more years to gain skills in areas related to expanded core.

> Students began to confidently, but politely, articulate their interests, particularly regarding elective choices.

> We have begun a self-advocacy program in our school. Students are learning how to appropriately express themselves during conflict, how to participate in IEP and transition meetings, and to use community resources available to them.

> Students exhibit more self-esteem and are willing to cooperate with teachers and others to meet goals of the IEP. They speak up for themselves and help others in their class to learn how to be their own advocates.

These statements indicated that Tennessee educators have responded to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) to participate in the IEP process. As the statements indicated, students not only participated in IEP but also made decisions related to planning their lives. This information indicated that confirmation with Bassett and Kochhar-Bryant (2006) proposition that student participation in the IEP process increased student responsibility in the planning for postsecondary education or careers.

Implications for Practice

In the attempt to continue improving the incorporation of self-advocacy curriculum and promote effective transition from school to work strategies, the following implications for practice are recommended.

1. School districts should commit to the incorporation of the self-advocacy curriculum.

2. The Department of Education should hold school districts accountable for implementing the self-advocacy curriculum.

3. Educators and parents should encourage self-directed IEPs.

4. Educators and parents should encourage student selection of elective courses regardless of scheduling options.

5. Educators and parents should have higher expectations for students with disabilities.

6. Educators and parents should support postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

7. Educators should continue to persist in their ambition to promote self-advocacy skills and continue to add to the original curriculum as needed to meet the student needs.

In addition, this study identified several areas of weaknesses in the self-advocacy curriculum. The curriculum dimensions are identified in Tables 13 and 14 as rated as Not Sure or Disagree to Strongly Disagree by survey respondents. It is suggested that these curriculum dimensions be improved to provide stronger learning objectives and activities for students in such areas as developing goals, awareness of community resources, using compromise and negotiation skills, and advocating for others.

Implications for Future Research

Further research on the incorporation of the self-advocacy curriculum will benefit the framework of self-determination and transition from school to adult life with regard to the academic standards in Tennessee's new high school diploma program. Some potential areas of investigation include the impact of self-advocacy instruction on: (1) student-led IEPs, (2) student academic success under Tennessee's New High School Diploma Project, and (3) student enrollment in postsecondary education programs. Another suggestion is a longitudinal study of Tennessee students to determine if students who demonstrate self-advocacy have greater success (i.e., better jobs, training, and work benefits) in their adult lives.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Self-Determination and Career Planning Model Survey

Self-Determination and Career Planning Model Survey
Self-determination skills have been correlated to improved student outcomes. The purpose of this survey is to determine your perceptions of the Self-Advocacy curriculum taught at your school.
Please answer the following questions with students who have an IEP in mind. Your time and input are greatly appreciated. This survey includes 30 questions and should take about 25 minutes to complete. Please complete the entire survey to the best of your knowledge.

To what extent do students express knowledge of self?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students express personal interests.	○	○	○	○	○
Students indentify strengths and preferences.					
Students develop goals.	○	○	○	○	○
Students know their support needs.	○	○	○	○	○

Do students have knowledge of rights?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students know personal rights.	○	○	○	○	○
Students express educational rights.	○	○	○	○	○
Students are aware of community resources.	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do students demonstrate communication skills?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students introduce themselves.	○	○	○	○	○
Students demonstrate assertiveness.	○	○	○	○	○
Students demonstrate listening skills.	○	○	○	○	○
Students use compromise and negotiation skills.	○	○	○	○	○

To what extent do students demonstrate leadership skills?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students participate in team work.	○	○	○	○	○
Students actively participate in transition/IEP planning.	○	○	○	○	○
Students advocate for others.	○	○	○	○	○

Develop support in the environment: The self-advocacy curriculum helps students to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Identify and provide social support from employers, co-workers, peers, and family.	○	○	○	○	○
Identify environmental support and provide needed changes within the environment.	○	○	○	○	○
Promote acceptance in their environment.	○	○	○	○	○

Increase students' competence: The self-advocacy curriculum increases students' competence to:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Observe and identify opportunities for choice.	○	○	○	○	○
Provide opportunities for choice making.	○	○	○	○	○
Identify strengths and areas needing supports.	○	○	○	○	○
Learn self-management.	○	○	○	○	○
Provide opportunities to learn and practice social skills.	○	○	○	○	○

Student Participation in IEP and Transition Planning

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Self-advocacy goals are included in transition plans.	○	○	○	○	○
Students participate in IEP meetings.	○	○	○	○	○
Students participate in transition planning.	○	○	○	○	○
Self-determination goals are acknowledged.	○	○	○	○	○

Provide, in your opinion, the ultimate self-determination goal you have seen written in your students' IEPs.

_____

_____

Describe student experiences related to communicating their interests, rights, or leadership skills (which may or may not be a result of the self-determination skills learned).

_____

_____

My name is: _____

The school district where I teach is: _____

My gender is: ○ Male   ○ Female

My age is: _____

May teaching credentials include:

_____

_____

My primary teacher role is:
- ○ Special Education Teacher
- ○ Regular Education Teacher
- ○ Administrator (Transition Coordinator or Special Education Director)

I received training from the University of Tennessee Center on Disability and Employment to implement the Self-Advocacy curriculum.

        ○ Yes   ○ No

The year I received training was: (1996 – 2010): _____

The number of years I have taught in my current position is:
        ○ 1 – 3 years
        ○ 4 – 7 years
        ○ 8 or more
        years

The number of years I have taught the Self-Advocacy curriculum is:
        ○ 0 Years   ○ 3 Years
        ○ 1 Year   ○ 4 Years
        ○ 2 Years   ○ 5 Years

The school I teach at is a:
        ○ Middle School   ○ High School

My school is located in a/an:
        ○ Rural area   ○ Urban area

The type of students I teach are:
        ○ Special Education Students
        ○ Regular Education Students
        ○ All Students

I provide instruction on the Self-Advocacy curriculum each semester.
        ○ Yes   ○ No

The number of students with disabilities in my Self-Advocacy class is: _____

The type of class for which I provide the Self-Advocacy curriculum is a/an:
        ○ Inclusive Classroom
        ○ Pull Out Class
        ○ Special School

I received on-site technical assistance to incorporate the Self-Advocacy curriculum.
        ○ Yes   ○ No

I attend IEP meetings with my students.
     ○ Yes   ○ No

I would like additional training on the Self-Advocacy curriculum.
     ○ Yes   ○ No

I believe self-determination skills are critical to student success.
     ○ Yes   ○ No

I have support from my administration to expand the use of the self-advocacy curriculum.
     ○ Yes   ○ No

Other types of training and resources I need are:

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

Letter of Permission from David Test

UNC CHARLOTTE
College of Education
Department of Special Education and Child Development

9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
t/ 704.687.8772 f/ 704.687.2916 www.uncc.edu

April 1, 2010

Ms. Elizabeth Fussell
308 Conference Center Building
Knoxville, TN 37996-4132

Dear Ms. Fussell:

I have reviewed the survey questions you developed based on our article titled "*A Conceptual Framework of Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities.*" As a result, I believe that your survey questions reflect the components of the conceptual framework of self-advocacy described in our article and I grant you permission to use the modified questions you have developed. Good luck with your study. It is always reinforcing to see that other people find our work useful.

Sincerely,

David W. Test

Professor

Letter of Permission from Carolyn Hughes

Department of Special Education

VANDERBILT V **Peabody College**

April 7, 2010

Elizabeth Fussell
308 Conference Center Building
Knoxville, TN 37996-4132

Dear Liz,
I have reviewed the survey questions you developed using a research project my colleagues and I conducted in 1997 entitled *Practitioner-Validated Secondary Transition Support Strategies.* Your survey questions reflect our research conducted on educator perceptions of curriculum and resources for self-determination. I grant you permission to use the modified questions you have developed.

Carolyn Hughes, Ph.D.
Professor of Special Education 615-322-8189

Hughes, C., Kim, J., Hwang, B., Killian, D. J., Fischer, G. M., Brock, M .L., Godshall, J. C., & Houser, B. (1997). Practitioner-validated secondary transition support strategies. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities,* 32, 201-212.

APPENDIX D

Email to Survey Participants

Request to participate in a research study titled "Self-Determination and Career Planning Model: An Analysis of Evidence-Based Practices"

As part of my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, I am conducting research on the self-advocacy curriculum incorporated in your school. You are cordially invited to participate in a research study to define the components of the self-determination curriculum used in the Self-Determination and Career Planning Model in which your school has participated. The purpose of this research study is to establish evidence that: (1) the curriculum contains the four components that make up the conceptual framework of self-determination curriculum, (2) school-wide intervention has occurred, (3) self-determination goals are included in IEPs and transition plans, and (4) there is awareness of the curriculum capacity.

Data for this research will be gathered through your input using a 3-part survey. You will find the link to a 30-question survey below. The time required to complete this survey is approximately 25 minutes. The survey questions relate to your knowledge of or perceived functions of the curriculum. Your responses will be used in a descriptive means to determine if the curriculum is, in fact, evidence-based. Your participation is voluntary. The deadline to submit the survey is September 15, 2010. Attached, please find a letter from Mr. Steve Sparks with the Division of Special Education, approving this study to be conducted in your school.

The survey can be completed on-line or by use of a paper copy depending on my ability to meet with you in person. There are no perceived advantages to you or your responses if your input is provided on-line or via a paper copy. As well, there are no perceived possible risks or discomforts to you as a project participant. However, a possible benefit of the project could include additional opportunities for your students to have available resources to become self-advocates.

As an incentive to you, a drawing for $50 Visa gift card will be offered. When your completed survey is received, your name will be added to the drawing. The drawing will occur on September 30, 2010. The winner will be notified by phone or email. If you choose to be anonymous, you can add Jane Doe or John Doe in the name space. However, there is no risk involved, your privacy will be protected.

Included in this packet is an informed consent form. Please read this form closely before you begin. If you choose to participate in this study, you are freely agreeing to participate in this study. If at any time you have questions or concerns related to this study, please contact me at 865-974-9176 or lizfuss@utk.edu.

To complete the survey, go to:
http://survey.utk.edu/mrIWeb/mrIWeb.dll?I.Project=SELFDETERMINATI1.
Thank you for your participation.
Sincerely,
Liz Fussell

VITA

ELIZABETH FUSSELL

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: April 5, 1963
	Place of Birth: Picayune, Mississippi

Education: Ed.D. Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2010

M.S. Rehabilitation Counseling, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1992

B.S. Rehabilitation Counseling, Louisiana State University Medical Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1985

Public Schools, St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana

Professional Experience: Director, Center on Disability and Employment, College of Education, Health & Human Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2008 – 2010

Adjunct Instructor, Educational Psychology & Counseling Department, College of Education, Health & Human Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2007 – present

Director of Projects, Center on Disability and Employment, College of Education Health & Human Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 2006 – 2008

Human Resource Development Consultant and Training Coordinator, Center on Disability and Employment, College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1991 – 2006

Publications: Petty, D. M., & Fussell, E. M. (Spring, 1997). Employer attitudes and satisfaction with supported employment. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 12 (1) 15-22.

Petty, D. M., Kregel, J., & Fussell, E. M. (1996). *Customer satisfaction with supported employment programs in Tennessee*. The University of Tennessee.

Fussell, E., Petty, D. M., & Henderson C. M. (1995). *Dreams of a better future become reality*. The University of Tennessee.

Honors and Awards: Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education