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Best in Class: Self-Determined College Students With Learning Disabilities

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**Best in Class:
Self-Determined College Students
with Learning Disabilities**

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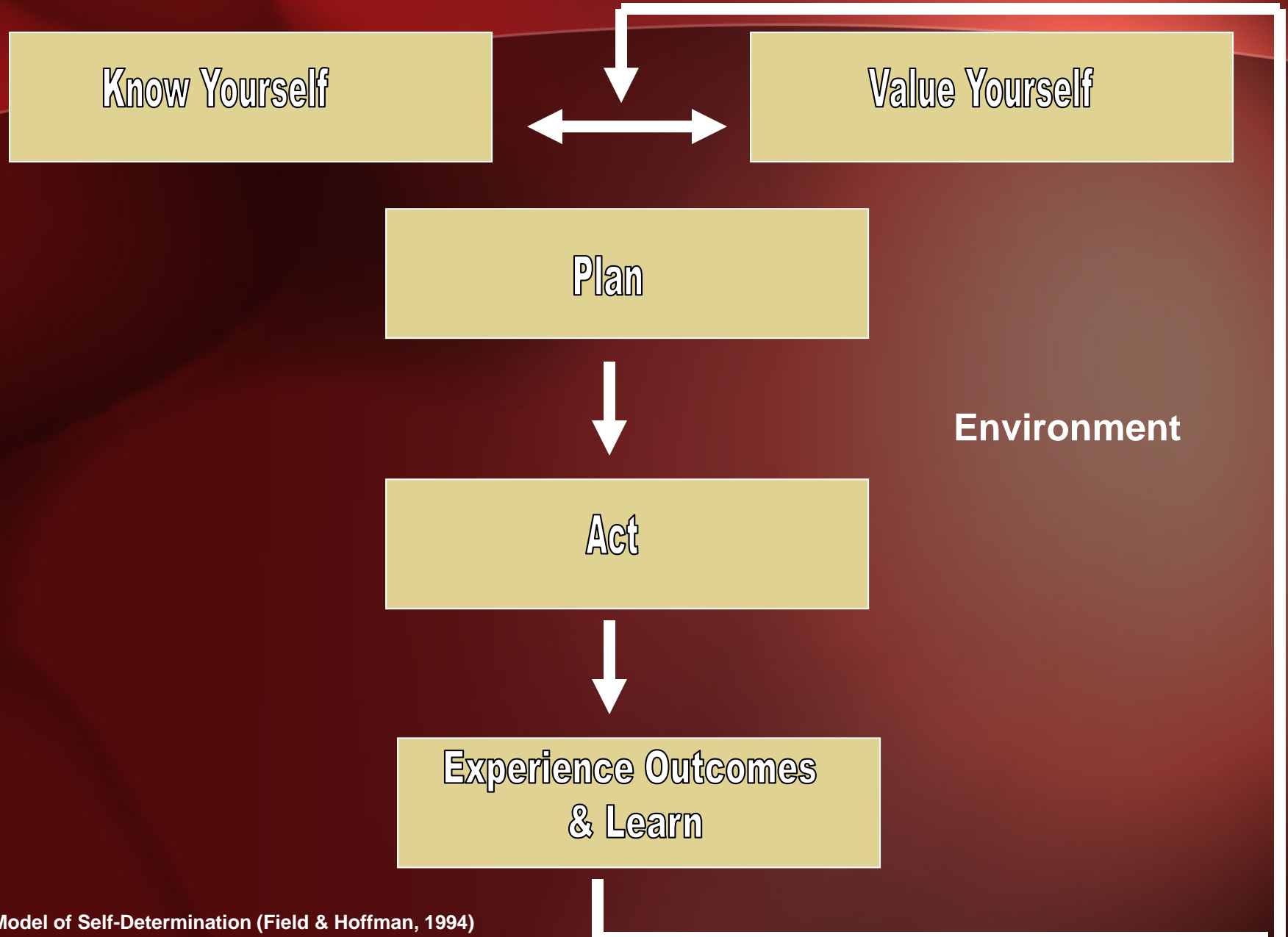
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Research Questions

What are the factors that supported the development of self-determination during secondary education?

What are the factors that supported the transition from high school to college?

Self-Determination



Model of Self-Determination (Field & Hoffman, 1994)

Basic Psychological Needs

Competence

Relatedness

Autonomy

Optimal
Functioning

Self-Determination Theory

Growth &
Integration

Constructive
Social
Development

Personal
Well-Being

Deci & Ryan, 2004

Participants: College Students with Learning Disabilities

- **10 males and 9 females attending a 4 year land-grant research intensive university in the Northwest**
- **17 Caucasian students; 1 Latina student; 1 multiracial student**
- **Average Age: 21 years old (SD=2.7)**
- **100% of participants received special education services in secondary school**

Participants

- **Average GPA: 3.10 (SD= .43)**
- **Time of diagnosis**
 - **Elementary School (68.4%)**
 - **Middle School (10.5%)**
 - **High School (10.5%)**
 - **College (10.5%)**

Self-Determination Scores

- **Student Self-Determination Scale**

(Hoffman, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004)

- **Mean = 76.16**

- **Norm Mean = 31.86 (age 19)**

- **Self-Determination Scale**

(Sheldon & Deci, unpublished)

- **Mean = 3.97**

- **Norm Mean = 3.91**

Qualitative Themes

- **High Parental Involvement**

- Modeling Advocacy
- High Expectations

- **Supportive relationships**

- Peers
- Adults
- Teachers

- **Persistence**

- **Overcoming Obstacles**

- **Extracurricular Activities**

- **Self Awareness**

- **Acceptance from Others**

High Parental Involvement

“Well, the middle school their thing was to pull out you and put you in a special Ed class. My mother—at that time, she had more knowledge—she was opposed to that because it was isolating and in a sense it was degrading.”

“My mother is very, very instrumental and she’s always done it all for me all the way up to like college and then me out on my own, I just kind of took that spot.”

“My mom always enlightened me on my rights as an individual with the disability, and has always been [an] advocate along with me. [I] started advocating myself. About probably junior highish or so, I started to get a grasp of all of that stuff and my mom has always influenced that, me knowing what my rights are and making sure that I know how to fight for my rights.”

Positive Teacher Interaction

“He noticed that in Calculus, I was doing just great, I had all A’s on my test and I had a C on one test and he was like, something happened, I think it was because were doing word problems now. He noticed I was bad in spelling and I was impressed. So he’s the one who told me to get tested.”

“The other professor, she found. . .that my dad was dying with cancer and she keep me behind classes and to make sure that I understood. She would sit me down before exams in her office and wouldn’t let me take it in the regular classes. . . I don’t know how she knew I had ADD, but I guess she just recognized it ”

Persistence

“Before with all of my failures, it was really hard to accept myself. I knew that the only way that I would be able to accept myself was if I succeeded in one of my failures, so I just keep trying. That is what keeps me going.”

“You get a test back and you’re like oh my god, I worked thirty hours and on this test alone, I got a C. Why did I spend all that time to get a C, but you do what you have to, so what if I had to work thirty hours to get that grade, it is just something you do. It has never been a question of why. . . just doing it.”

Overcoming Obstacles

“I’ve had to confront a lot of teachers, I guess about my disabilities which is something that was really tough for me in high school. . . . In college I just don’t worry about confronting people so much, but just what it’s going to do for me in the future. . . . and how much easier it’s going to make things for me.”

“The biggest obstacle is my self-esteem and just having the diagnosis and the support systems that I have, help me get over that. [Knowing] that it wasn’t my fault, that was the biggest thing.”

Extracurricular Activities

"I've been in 4H since I was nine. I was given the extraordinary opportunity to show cattle's and to take that money and save it for college that is part of how I'm paying for it. I also have my own small herd that pays tuition from the cash crop that I get every year."

"I was captain of the football team. . .and ASB vice president too. That was another way, I think I needed a lot of things to make me feel normal then I guess it balanced. Nobody really saw me as [learning disabled], I'm just like whatever, they don't notice."

Significant Relationships

“And so, it’s just been really, I don’t know, refreshing to know you have someone there that is helping you out, willing to be there for you when you need it.”

“I met with [my psychologist] and I saw hope in that. . .I started to see that learning disabilities can be a benefit.”

“My best friend who actually helped out a lot, he has a different form of dyslexia and was actually with me the whole entire time, with the [special education] aide too.”

Acceptance from Peers

“My boyfriend. . . he’s totally fine with it, he’s just like ‘you’re great at so many things, there is just one or two things that you sometimes need help with which we all need help with one or two things.’ We’re not great at everything and to him, I am great at everything, even in my small suits, I’m still really good at everything.”

Self-Awareness

"I look at it. . .that it's a part of me, but its only a part, it's not who I am and I don't let it control my life and I do know people who do that—who allowed themselves, 'oh I have dyslexia, I have ADD', well yeah, you have ADD but move on! What do you have to do to adapt your life because you have that? Let's not worry about that, let's not use that as a crutch. Let's find out how it can benefit your life. What can we do to equalize the playing field, that is how I look at it, not as a crutch. . ."

Implications

- **Support inclusion to minimize stigma experienced in k-12**
- **Increase parent advocacy training**
- **Extracurricular activities may promote competence and self-awareness**
- **Relationships mediate and foster self-determination**