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***Self-Determination and Career Development:
Skills for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and
Employment***

Running Head: SELF-DETERMINATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

DRAFT

Self-Determination and Career Development:

Skills for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment

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ABSTRACT

President Bush's New Freedom Initiative strongly supports the integration of Americans with disabilities into the workforce. The demands of today's workforce include advanced training and high standards for productivity, problem solving, and teamwork. While several studies report that the enrollment rates of students with disabilities in postsecondary education is increasing, they are experiencing limited success. Numerous authors suggest that the poor post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities are due to their limited development of self-determination and career decision-making skills. This paper provides a brief review of the problems that arise from the lack of these skills, strategies for promoting the development of self-determination, internal locus of control and career decision-making skills, as well as recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

The New Freedom Initiative announced by President Bush in February, 2001 represents an important step in working to ensure that all Americans with disabilities have the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, and choose where to live and participate in community life. The goals of the President's Initiative include increasing access to assistive and universally-designed technologies, expanding educational opportunities, and integrating Americans with disabilities into the workforce (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/freedominitiative/freedominitiative.html>, February 6, 2002). The New Freedom Initiative supports the vision of many parents, professionals and students with disabilities. These stakeholders believe the promise of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Amendments of 1997 (IDEA) which states "children with disabilities should be ... living a full life, raising families, being part of their community" (PL 105-17, p. 1).

Yet, how do educators and parents assist students with disabilities gain the skills and supports to enter postsecondary education, the labor market, and raise their families and fulfill their vision? Numerous authors suggest that parents and educators must promote the self-determination of students with disabilities (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, & Wood, 2002; Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Izzo, Hertzfeld & Aaron, 2001; Wehmeyer, Morningstar & Husted, 1999; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug & Martin, 2000). Self-determination is defined as a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enables a person to engage in goal-directed self-regulated behavior (Field et al. 1998). Self-determined people know what they want and use their self-advocacy skills to get it. From an awareness of personal needs, self-determined individuals choose goals and then

doggedly pursue them. This involves asserting their presence, making their needs known, evaluating progress toward meeting their goals, adjusting their performance, and creating unique approaches to solve problems (Martin, Huber Marshall, & Maxson, 1993). According to Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1995), students who obtain self-determination skills while attending school have a greater chance for achieving positive post-school outcomes than students who do not acquire these skills.

In order to fully understand the significance of self-determination, it is necessary to explore the relationship between self-determination and locus of control. The concepts of self-determination and locus of control are highly correlated. Rotter (1975) stated that students must develop an internal locus of control, defined as a belief that you have the opportunity to choose, make decisions and act on your environment. Persons who fail to develop an internal locus of control lack self-determination. The positive relationship between the development of self-determination and locus of control indicates that as people have the opportunity to choose, make decisions and act on their environment, they develop an internal locus of control (Lefcourt, 1982). Halpern (1996) recommended that students have many opportunities to experience success on many levels, and over time, to enhance their internal locus of control. Students with disabilities may not learn to self-advocate or self-determine because parents and teachers are constantly controlling their environment to such an extent that students themselves do not have the opportunity to choose and act independently (Yuen, 2001).

Students could be given many opportunities to choose through career exploration activities. Students could choose to read some books about a preferred job, choose to interview adults with different kinds of jobs, choose to job shadow in different

businesses, or complete a career plan and take elective courses that will prepare them for entering a specific occupation. However, many students with disabilities are not receiving the career development they need to initiate and maintain employment following school (Farley & Johnson, 1999). The School-to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and IDEA of 1997 promote quality transition programs and services that empower students to make career and life choices that will enhance their employment outcomes. Students with disabilities need to establish career goals through self-directed career planning and learn to monitor their progress through the use of time-management strategies (Getzel, Stodden, & Briel, 2000). Career development services need to include instruction in career exploration, career self-management skills and self-advocacy skills (Hitchings, Lusso, Ristow, Horvath, Retish & Tanners, 2001). Educators and parents can teach self-determination skills and reinforce students who believe that they have control of career choices through a comprehensive career development program that includes both school and work-based learning.

Students with disabilities need to be empowered to act as causal agents towards their own future – that is, they need to be self-determined, acting with an internal locus of control on decisions such as where they want to go to school, work, and/or live in their community. This paper will provide a brief review of the problems that face youth with disabilities as they transition to adult life, strategies for developing self-determination, internal locus of control and career decision-making skills, as well as recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

Nature of the Problem

Sweeping changes in the workplace characterized by technological advances, intense competition, and high standards of productivity have created a gap between the skill demands of our nation's workplaces and the skills of the emerging labor force (Knowledge & Know-How, 1998; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; U.S. Department of Labor, 1992). The magnitude of this challenge for students with disabilities is emphasized by the findings of the National Longitudinal Transition Study. When compared to students in the general population, students with disabilities drop out of school at higher rates, have higher absenteeism, lower grade-point averages (GPA), and more prevalent feelings of poor self-esteem (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Other researchers agree that students with disabilities lag far behind their peers without disabilities on factors such as achievement, graduation rates, postsecondary attendance, and employment outcomes (Benz, Yovonoff & Doren, 1997; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman & Blackorby, 1992). The majority of these students have difficulty succeeding in high school, and only about a quarter of them pursue postsecondary education. Rifkin (1995) concluded that few of these students are prepared to face the demands of the technological workplace.

Federal legislation has emphasized the need for higher academic standards, including those for students with disabilities. IDEA of 1997 mandates that the IEP for students with disabilities include a statement indicating how the student's disability affects their involvement and progress in the general curricula. Most states have established academic standards for student achievement through state improvement plans funded by Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Ordovery & Annextein, 1999). Ohio has

implemented state-mandated proficiency test in five areas: citizenship, math, reading, writing, and science. According to data reported by the Ohio Department of Education, the percentage on ninth-grade students with disabilities who passed the proficiency tests range from .3 to 30% below their non-disabled peers (<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>).

Thurlow, Elliott and Ysseldyke (1998) have examined assessment data on a national level. They reported that “students with disabilities tend to perform lower than students without disabilities” (p. 92). Clearly students with disabilities are not gaining the academic skills needed to pass proficiency tests at the same rate as their non-disabled peers. The secondary education curricula and the related assessments must be aligned with career development and transition services to assist youth to achieve productive adult outcomes.

Though students with disabilities do not enroll in college at the same rate as their non-disabled peers, the college enrollment rates for students with disabilities is increasing. According to the Association of Higher Education and Disability students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education in increasing numbers from 2.6% in 1978, to 9.4% in 1995, to nearly 19% in 1996, primarily in community colleges. The most recent statistics compiled by Henderson (1999) in HEATH Resource Center’s Statistical Profile on College Freshmen reveal that the number of students with learning disabilities enrolling in higher education has increased 173% between the years of 1989 to 1998.

However, in spite of the increased access to higher education, students with disabilities have met with limited success in community college programs (Stodden, 2000). One major issue contributing to students with disabilities’ difficulty in the college

setting is the dramatic difference in the laws that govern their educational support. In a secondary school setting, special education teachers and paraprofessionals are mandated by IDEA of 1997 to provide and coordinate specially designed instruction and accommodations in both general and special education classes. Thus, students with disabilities transition from high school to college with limited skills in self-determination, self-advocacy, and internal locus of control because their high school service providers and parents have all too often taken the responsibility to negotiate and advocate for students' academic and social needs.

The need for adequate self-determination and advocacy skill development in high school is critical because in college, students with disabilities are expected to take responsibility for their learning by requesting needed accommodations to gain access to the academic content. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 only mandate access to higher education, not a vast array of support personnel to meet students' needs. Many college students with disabilities report that they are not comfortable requesting accommodations from faculty (Izzo, Hertzfeld & Aaron, in press). Often times the student must advocate for accommodations with faculty who may not understand the nature of specific disabilities, nor common accommodations that are appropriate. Many students with disabilities do not understand their strengths and limitations well enough to explain how certain compensatory strategies will "equal the playing field" but will not grant an "unfair advantage" (Gordon & Keiser, 1998). After conducting focus groups involving 52 college students and 24 faculty, Izzo et al. (in press) have concluded that students who approach faculty early in

the year to request accommodations have more positive learning experiences. A faculty member reported --

“I think that it is primarily a students’ issue. We would love to help. We are willing to cooperate. . . . To me it makes a big difference when they come to you at the beginning of the quarter and they are registered with ODS. In general, students need to be able to approach you. They also need to be an advocate for themselves” (Faculty Member, 2000).

The necessity for persons with disabilities to gain self-determination skills in high school also has serious ramifications within work settings. According to Wehman, Brooke, and Inge (2001), one of the major barriers that must be considered in the area of unemployment for people with disabilities is their lifelong inexperience of gaining control over the major events of their lives. The culture of America is strongly rooted in the individual's ability to exercise power, control, and influence within their community. Yet, people with disabilities throughout their educational experience and into their adult life are consistently limited or denied the opportunity to take risks and make decisions and therefore do not develop self-determination skills. Given that only 29% of person with disabilities ages 18-64 are employed (NOD, 1998), it is not unreasonable to assume that the lack of self-determination skills contribute to these poor employment outcomes. Although national experts, local service providers, faculty and students agree that self-determination, locus of control, and career development skills are critical skills needed for post-school success, lack of these skills continue to be identified as a major barrier to achieving positive post-school outcomes.

Need to Teach Self-determination and Career Development Skills

Wehmeyer (1998) has written extensively about the need for people with disabilities to become more autonomous and to learn how to make choices and advocate for their wishes and needs. Stodden (2000) writes that self-determination/self-advocacy or the ability to articulate one's needs and make informed decisions about the supports necessary to meet those needs is a critical skill required of students with disabilities in postsecondary education and employment. In order for educators to teach self-determination skills and create opportunities for students to apply these skills within the educational setting, educators need to understand the specific components of self-determination, locus of control and career development. These concepts are defined and discussed below.

Self-determination

Many researchers have defined the concept of self-determination. One of the most comprehensive definitions was developed by Martin and Huber Marshall (1995). They defined self-determination as seven components: self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, decision-making, independent performance, self-evaluation and adjustment (Martin and Huber Marshall, 1995). Each component is described as follows:

- Self-awareness begins with the ability to identify and understand needs, interests, strengths, limitations, and values.
- Self-advocacy refers to the ability to assertively state wants, needs and rights, determine and pursue needed supports, and conduct your own affairs.
- Self-efficacy often is referred to as self-confidence – the belief that you expect to obtain your goal.

- Decision-making is the complex skill of setting goals and standards, identifying information to make decisions and considering past solutions, generating new solutions if needed, and choosing the best option to develop a plan. Independent performance refers to the ability to initiate and complete tasks by using self-management strategies.
- Self-evaluation includes monitoring task performance and determining if the plan has been completed and the goal met.
- Adjustment – the process of changing goals, standards and plans to improve performance so that the person ultimately develops a better understanding to their needs, strengths and limitations. Thus, the self-determination process continues to cycle through a self-improvement process.

In sum, self-determination can be considered analogous to an “umbrella” consisting of several “spokes” or sub-skills that are interconnected and work together to form the whole object. All the spokes must be strong in order for an umbrella to function and serve its purpose, just as all of the sub-skills of self–determination must be strong in order for a person to function independently and achieve their personal goals.

Locus of Control

A critical factor related to the ability to become self-determined is the locus of control a person develops as they make decisions and interact with other people. Rotter (1975) defined locus of control as a belief of behavior-reinforcement contingencies that are likely to influence the actions a person chooses to take. Locus of control has to do with where one attaches the responsibility for their actions and the results of their actions. The place of control can be viewed as either external or internal. When one operates with

more of an external locus of control, they feel limited control over what happens to them and believe that outside sources are responsible for the outcomes they experience. They do not see themselves as causal agents, but passive recipients in the events of their lives. In other words, chance, fate, luck, and the bias of others, which are forces beyond their control, are perceived as the causal factors in their life experiences, rather than their own actions.

When individuals operate with an internal locus of control, they feel they have control over what happens to them and they can readily see the relationship between their actions and the outcomes. They assume the role of causal agent in their life, rather than passive recipient of others' actions. In order for a person to develop the self-determination skills described above they must operate with an internal locus of control, as this social construction is the foundation for becoming self-determined. People with a strong sense of internal locus of control can reflect on their strengths, limitations, and needs (self-awareness), learn to assert their needs and rights (self-advocate), develop goals, and make decisions. Furthermore, they develop an awareness of the outside forces that are potential barriers to their goals, as well as their own internal fears and anxieties that can potentially limit their success and take the necessary steps to minimize or eliminate them.

Some professionals assume that many students with learning disabilities have developed an external locus of control. However, Mamlin, Harris, and Case (2001) in their review of research on locus of control and learning disabilities caution professionals who hold this view. Their methodological analysis of the research in this area calls into question this common assumption about students with learning disabilities. They raise

serious concerns about the limitations in participant selection in these studies, as well as the measures used to assess students' disposition in this area. Whether all or some students with learning disabilities have a tendency towards a more external locus of control is an issue that needs further research. However, what Rotter's social learning theory on locus of control indicates is that individual's who have a stronger sense of internal locus of control are more apt to become self-determined.

Career Counseling and Development

All comprehensive guidance, career planning and counseling interventions have as their goal the expressed intent of enhancing the self-determination of youth, which strengthens their educational progress (Myrick, 1997). Specifically, these initiatives focus on the development of students' self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-advocacy, and decision making in relation to a student's career interests and abilities, which are four major components of self-determination. The hope is that when implemented, comprehensive guidance, career planning and counseling programs will significantly contribute to learning climates that promote academic achievement, self-determination, and social emotional growth (ASCA/NACAC, 1986; Herr, 1982). Initial research evaluating relationships between guidance programs and student achievement support the positive impact of these reform efforts (Whiston & Sexton, 1998). These findings have been replicated across special population groups, such as low achieving and/or students with learning disabilities (Borders & Drury, 1992). Two independent meta-analyses concluded that the integration of career interventions with academic subjects leads to consistent increases in student achievement across grades K-12 (Baker & Stanley, 1998; Evans & Burck, 1992). Lapan, Gysbers, Hughey and Arni (1993) evaluated the impact of an integrated guidance and

language arts unit for high school juniors. A clear positive relationship was found between mastery of guidance competencies and English grades.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Perkins Act Amendments of 1990 encourage teachers to link academic competencies to the real world of work. Providing students with understanding and experiences in how academic skills are applied in their chosen industry is essential to empowering students to make realistic career and life choices. Teachers should integrate theoretical learning with applied, experiential learning – that is they need to connect school and work-based learning. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act provides funds for states to develop and implement a state improvement plan which details how high schools will provide career guidance and integrate academic, vocational and work-based learning (Ordovery & Annexstein, 1999). Although a positive relationship exists among career development, academic instruction, and achievement, and the existing legislation mandates their integration in schools, many students with disabilities are exiting high school without the academic or career planning skills needed to enter postsecondary education and/or navigate the labor market (Getzel, Stodden & Briel, 2000).

In summary, self-determination, internal locus of control and integrated career and academic skills are essential for persons with disabilities to succeed in high school, postsecondary education and the workplace. Hitchings et al (2001), reported that a major attribute of highly successful adults with learning disabilities is a “strong sense of control over career-related events and a conscious decision to take charge of their life” (p.8).

Strategies to Integrate Self-Determination and Career Development into Schools

Educators and parents must become partners in assisting students with developing the skills of self-determination and career decision-making throughout their education, but especially at the secondary level. Over the last decade many materials and curricula have been developed to teach and promote self-determination skills (Agran, 1997; Algozzine, et al. in press; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; Serna, L. & Lau-Smith, J., 1995). Many of these products seek to supplement career, academic, social or life skill training activities. Given the newness of these self-determination curricula, few of these products have been experimentally tested; therefore, little research has been reported on the effects of the curricula (Eisenmann, 2001).

Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that students can become more self-determined and career-focused when given appropriate instruction and opportunities to practice self-determined behaviors. Educators and parents must restructure and expand their roles, infuse self-determination and career development into the general curricula, and create numerous opportunities for students to make choices and experience the consequences of self-regulated behavior with guidance from their support team. The questions that arise are:

- How can educators work in partnership with parents to reinforce these self-determination and career decision-making skills in school and at home?
- How can we restructure high schools to develop and guide students in practicing their skills in self-determination and self-advocacy, and develop a stronger sense of internal locus of control?

Rethink and Expand the Role of the Secondary Special Educator

Traditionally, secondary special educators embrace their role of teaching and supporting students through high school by assuring that they gain the credits necessary to graduate, with limited attention to the development of students' self-determination and career planning skills. Special educators spend time teaching academics and/or assisting general education teachers in modifying curricula, creating alternative assessments, and renegotiating assignments so students with disabilities can earn credit towards their diploma. While the efforts of special educators do assist students with disabilities in acquiring their high school diploma, does this diploma assure that students are prepared to become independent, responsible young adults? Hitchings, et al., (2001) indicate that some of the inordinate amount of time that secondary special education teachers spend on academic remediation of students with disabilities could be spent on facilitating their career exploration and preparation activities.

Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2001) agree that special educators need to expand their role by focusing on post-school preparation and promoting student self-determination through student-centered transition planning, career exploration, and paid work experiences. Special educators need to operate as change agents to reform high school programs to include career development, work-based learning experiences, and transition planning as integral parts of general education curriculum for all students. More specifically, special educators need to restructure their role from one of writing IEPs and remediating academic skills to providing systematic instruction on self-determination and creating opportunities for applied practice with career development activities. Eisenmann (2001) reports that career-oriented high schools have a positive

impact on students' self-determination and career planning, as evidenced by increased motivation, persistence and decision making among students enrolled in these career-oriented high schools.

However, expanding the role of the special educator to include the development of students' self-determination skills may prove to be more challenging than it seems. Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) conducted a national survey to identify if and how teachers promoted the development of self-determination and student-directed learning. Their findings suggested that 60% of secondary special education teachers are familiar with the concept of self-determination and between 90% and 98% indicated that providing instruction in elements of self-determination were either "moderately important" or "very important". Teachers also indicated that the development of self-determination skills in students would be "very helpful" to prepare students for transition to adult life. In spite of these findings, however, only a small number of teachers have moved beyond stating the importance of promoting student self-determination to the implementation of strategies that promote the development of these skills. In further analysis of their data Wehmeyer, et al. (2000) found that only 22% of teachers reported that all of their students had self-determination skills included in their IEP, and 31% of teachers reported that no self-determination skills were included in their students' IEPs. Clearly, more training and education on the significance of teaching self-determination skills needs to be addressed in teacher training and professional development programs.

Eight suggestions are presented to shift the focus of education from fostering dependence to encouraging self-determined independence that result in improved post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities:

- (1) empower parents as partners in promoting self-determination and career development skills,
- (2) facilitate student-centered IEP meetings and self-directed learning models,
- (3) increase students' awareness of their disability and needed accommodations,
- (4) offer credit-bearing classes in self-determination and careers,
- (5) teach and reinforce students' internal locus of control,
- (6) develop self-advocacy skills and support student application, and
- (7) infuse self-determination and career development skills into the general curricula, and
- (8) develop and implement work-based learning programs for all students.

Finally, the Youth Transition Program – a model for teaching self-determination, career development and transition skills that results in improved employment outcomes is discussed. By replicating programs that obtain improved outcomes and implementing the strategies and suggestions presented below, educators can empower students to gain the skills they need to navigate adult life.

(1) Empower parents as partners in promoting self-determination and career development skills. Parent involvement in transition planning has been cited as a critical component of transition planning (Kohler, 1993; Hanley-Maxwell, Pogoloff, Whitney-Thomas, 1995; Izzo, 1987; Weymeyer, Morningstar & Husted, 1999). Hanley-Maxwell et al (1998) reported that parents often remain passive participants in transition planning, an unfortunate situation given that family members know the student's interests, preferences and instructional needs and will likely be the student's primary support provider after graduation. Cutler (1993) stated that professionals may not believe that

parents are capable of teaching their children, although parents have most probably taught their children more skills than any other person, including teachers. Students themselves reported that their families were instrumental in influencing their career and job choices and they expected their families' ongoing support in helping them find jobs (Morningstar, 1997).

Given that a high level of self-determination is associated with positive post-school outcomes, parents need to encourage and support their child's acquisition of self-determination skills. As stated by Wehmeyer et al (1999 p. 40), "Families can create a supportive environment in which students can test abilities and limitations. They can help their child develop positive work habits and behaviors, self-determination skills and the self-confidence to succeed." Davis and Wehmeyer provided (as cited in Wehmeyer et al. 1999) a number of suggestions that parents can implement to promote independence and self-determination among their children, including modeling self-worth, self-confidence and self-determination; don't leave choice-making opportunities to chance; recognize the process of reaching goals instead of just emphasizing outcomes; provide honest, positive feedback; and allow your child to take responsibility for his own actions, both successes and failures.

In addition, Defur, Todd-Allen & Getzel (2001) reported that parents want professionals to engage in relationship building activities on a personal level, not a bureaucratic level, to engage them as partners in transition planning for their children. Parents identified the lack of respect for their contributions and frustration with a system that treats them as less than equal. Professionals who "communicate, collaborate, connect, care, and celebrate with families throughout this complex time ... can promote

active parent participation in the transition planning process” (p. 30). As Defur et al. stated, “the cycle of empowerment or dis-empowerment may be well established based on a long history of participation in the system. Changing the cycle to improve parental involvement in these instances will take perseverance and dynamic relational interactions with individual families to regain lost trust. The power and responsibility to initiate a change in this cycle lies with the professional more so than with the family” (p. 34).

One significant approach that has been reported to increase student self-determination and parent satisfaction with the IEP process is to prepare students to lead their own conference (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996, Martin, Huber Marshall, Maxon & Jerman, 1996). Countryman & Schroeder (1996) reported that student-led conferences provided family members with a better understanding of the student’s capacities and interests than teacher-led conferences. Several parents felt that their students provided a more honest report of their performance. Transition services need to build on the positive traits and characteristics of the student, instead of the deficits-approach that still drives the IEP process in many schools. Both parents and students need to be informed and prepared to participate in student-led conferences in meaningful ways.

(2) Facilitate student-centered IEP meetings and self-directed learning models.

The IEP/transition process can be used to guide students in practicing their self-determination skills. During the IEP process, the IEP team should assess the students’ abilities to: facilitate and participate in their IEP/transition meetings; articulate their academic and social strengths, challenges, and needs; outline strategies to advocate for the accommodations they need to be successful; and express their career interests and abilities and a plan to gain the skills needed to enter their post-school settings.

Throughout the career planning process, team members need to monitor that students' career/employment plans are based on their interests, aptitudes, and abilities. At the high school level, special/general education teachers and parents need to continually assess and support students with disabilities growth in self-efficacy and self-confidence. IEP/transition goals should include goals to improve the self-determination skills necessary to strengthen students' responsibility and independence.

In order for students with disabilities to become the facilitators of their IEPs, they need to start attending and participating in them by late elementary/middle school. They can begin by attending the IEP and sharing with the committee how their school year is progressing, sharing their successes and difficulties, and suggesting supports they think would be beneficial. Next, students should identify the IEP committee members with the support of their special education teachers. Special educators can assist students outline the goals they want to achieve, the steps to achieving these goals, and their desired annual and post-school outcomes. By high school, they should play a major role in determining their class schedule and be an active participant in writing the goals and objectives for their IEP. Throughout their four years of high school they should gradually take more responsibility to lead the discussion at these meetings on their academic progress, their transition goals and what supports they need to succeed. The role of the committee members is to listen to the student and ask guiding questions that facilitate their independence, responsibility, and accountability for their plans.

Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) expand upon student involvement in the IEP meeting and suggest implementing a student-directed instructional program. They acknowledge that the promotion of student self-

determination is a complex process that requires the student's participation in a variety of activities throughout their educational experience. These activities must include focused instruction in problem-solving, goal setting, decision making and self-advocacy, as well as authentic opportunities to conduct their IEP/transition planning meetings and to develop their class schedule so they have the opportunity to practice these skills.

According to these authors, the development of these skills is possible when practitioners shift from a teacher-directed instructional model to a student-directed teaching model.

They have developed and studied a promising model "The Self-Directed Learning Model of Instruction" to assist students with disabilities in planning and directing their own learning. The model consists of a problem-based approach that utilizes a three-phase instructional process: (1) What is my goal?, (2) What is my plan?, and (3) What have I learned? The results of the study indicate that the majority of students with disabilities have the capacity to manage their learning and enhance their self-determination skills.

According to Wehmeyer, et al. (2000), "The model provides a means of getting students actively involved in the totality of their educational program and, presumably, will promote a greater commitment to that program by the student" (p.450). One teacher in this study reported, "The students are very capable of setting their own goals and achieving them. The goals mean a lot more when they set them themselves" (p. 450).

(3) Increase student's awareness of their disability and related accommodations.

In order for students with disabilities to eventually lead their IEP they need to learn about their disability, their strengths, their challenges, and the accommodations and supports necessary for their success. There are several steps in developing this awareness. High school students with disabilities need to review their psychological reports and testing

results with the school psychologist and/or special educator so that they can gain an understanding of their strengths and challenges in the learning process. Traditionally, students are tested without ever knowing the results, which perpetuates a chronic state of anxiety and confusion about their performance and capabilities. Next, they need to review their IEP papers in order to understand how this document is intended to identify a plan of support services and goals to address their needs.

Additional activities to heighten awareness include reading information about their specific disability and reading about other people with similar disabilities and their successes and challenges. Participating in panel discussions with teachers, community members, and older students with disabilities can help them realize that many people have the same challenges in learning as they have. These interactions can increase their understanding and acceptance about the ways in which they learn and provide them with a sense of optimism for their future. By equipping students with knowledge of their disability at the high school level or earlier, students will be better able to transition to college life and communicate their needs with their college instructors (Lock & Layton, 2001).

(4) Offer credit-bearing classes on self-determination and career development.

Classes that focus on the development of self-determination and career decision-making can benefit all high school students as they prepare to transition to adult life, especially those students with disabilities. Thus, the creation of a class to teach these skills is an ideal place to launch school improvement initiatives on student responsibility and career planning. For example, in 1996 in a high school in mid-Michigan, two secondary special education teachers piloted a class with a small group of students with disabilities to teach

the self-determination skills necessary to succeed in high school, college, and the workplace. The class focused on five critical goals of self-determination and career planning:

- (1) Nurture students' independence and strengthen their self-advocacy by expecting them to actively participate in their IEP/Transition meetings with the intent of having them ultimately plan and conduct their own meetings.
- (2) Develop opportunities for students to learn about their disability, strengths, challenges, and the supports necessary for their success in school and the workplace.
- (3) Strengthen students' sense of internal locus of control so they begin to see themselves as causal agents in the outcomes of events, rather than passive recipients of the actions of others.
- (4) Promote the development of students' self-advocacy skills by expecting them to know and ask for what they need in an appropriate manner.
- (5) Provide students an opportunity to complete a career assessment and develop career exploration goals and activities.

At the conclusion, interviews were conducted with the 11 students and 7 secondary teachers who had these students in their academic classes. The interviews revealed that the students were more aware of how they learn and the accommodations they needed to succeed (Holub, Lamb, & Bang, 1998). One student reported, "I learned more about my disability personally, and I understand more about how it is affecting my grades and my attitude. When I am aware of my disability, I become frustrated. But this class has helped me to be more relaxed and comfortable. When I look at my report card I

feel proud of what I have accomplished” (p.192). Students also reported after their career exploration activities a greater understanding of their strengths and limitations in the workplace, a stronger career focus, and a greater sense of their responsibility for their future. All seven of the teachers agreed that it is extremely important that students share the accommodations they need. Two dominant themes of the teachers’ responses were that (1) “the students in the self-determination class became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as learners and more confident in sharing their needs and problems,” and (2) “all high school students need to become self determined and learn how to self advocate,” (p.192).

Similar outcomes were reported from a study of a self-determination class piloted at an urban high school in Madison, Wisconsin. One major school improvement goal was to include students with disabilities in general education classes. To prepare students for their inclusion, a ninth-grade course in self-determination was developed. One student reported in her post class interview, “It wasn’t easy for me to talk about my disability. The teachers and my mom had always whispered when they talked. It was like some dirty secret. Then all of a sudden my teacher wanted me to talk about it. They had me reading my IEPs ...to tell you the truth, I thought the whole idea [was bad]” (p. 203, Holub, Lamb & Bang, 1998).” In a follow-up interview after high school graduation, this same student reported, “If I have any set of skills that matters to me it’s these [advocacy skills]. I know who I am, where I want to be, and how to get there” (p. 203).

Ideally these skills are best developed in a class on self-determination or in a resource room in which students with disabilities can engage in activities towards this

end with the support of their peers and professionals in the earlier grades. However, their development will need to continue on an individual basis through strategic interactions between educators and students, and/or infused into general education classrooms. The development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills will be greatly enhanced if both educators and parents develop them in partnership. District sponsored workshops for parents on transition and self-determination are one way to encourage these types of partnerships.

(5) *Teach and reinforce internal locus of control.* The development of students' understanding of the concept of internal and external locus of control can begin with a discussion about these terms and their definition. As stated previously, internal locus of control is developed more readily in environments where students are given the opportunity to make choices that are age appropriate and are held accountable for the outcomes of those choices. Teachers can begin to nurture an internal sense of locus of control in a classroom setting by promoting a positive, supportive classroom atmosphere where expectations are clearly delineated and students assume responsibility for meeting course requirements. Students can gain greater understanding of the concepts of internal and external locus of control by reading and analyzing the behaviors of both historical figures and/or characters in the literature and deciding which type of control the character is operating. Classic literature such as "The Giver," where characters are not given the opportunity to choose their jobs, can be used as exemplars of lack of control. Watching a movie or television show and analyzing the main character's behavior for types of control can help students begin to understand and construct a stronger sense of internal locus of control. Students can discuss how the characters might change their behaviors to depict a

more internal locus of control. Students can role-play their own vignettes of different types of control and ask classmates to decide what type of locus of control is operating. They can maintain a journal throughout a semester and analyze their own locus of control. Teachers can have discussions with parents about their students' experiences in making choices and their ability to be accountable for the choices they make. Including students in these conversations may prove very beneficial in strengthening the communication between parent, student, and teacher and foster the development of an internal sense locus of control leading to more student responsibility.

The process of transferring responsibility to the student may well mean that a student will make the choice to not complete assignments, study for tests, coordinate accommodations, and ultimately, fail a class. Failing a class can serve as an important learning experience if students understand how they failed at completing the necessary requirements on a daily or weekly basis. Students must be aware of the tools and supports available to complete requirements, but taking responsibility for accessing these supports is the students' choice. This process of allowing students with disabilities to experience the consequences of their actions can be a very uncomfortable experience, especially for students who have been overprotected in school and at home.

If high school is the first time students encounter the consequences of their choices, it can be a rude awakening. However, the more they are buffeted from experiencing the outcomes of their actions in high school, the more difficult their postsecondary educational experience will be when they have minimum supports and maximum responsibility. In postsecondary education failing a class for the first time is not only traumatic, but also financially costly. Failure in college classes can be so

discouraging for students with disabilities that they dropout from college. Within employment settings, failing to complete responsibilities often results in termination.

(6) Teach self-advocacy skills and support students' advocating for their own accommodations. It is critical that students with disabilities develop an awareness of their disability, what learning strategies help them learn, and what accommodations and assistive technology devices may help them compensate for their disability. Once students understand their personal learning style and needed accommodations, special educators can provide them with opportunities to self-advocate with their general education teachers. Having a conversation with a teacher about their difficulties in learning can create anxiety for many students with disabilities. Thus, several steps are necessary to prepare them for this conversation. A first step for the student is to write a personal self-advocacy plan describing their disability, their strengths and challenges as a student, the type of teaching style or classroom activities they find helpful, and the accommodations including assistive technologies that are necessary for them to be successful. They also need to outline their responsibility as a student, as this reinforces the development of internal locus of control. Through the process of writing a self-advocacy plan, students think about their needs as a learner as well as the responsibility they must take to be successful. This plan also provides students with a script to use with their teachers.

Students with disabilities will need to practice sharing their plans before they make an appointment with their classroom teacher. They can engage in role-play and discuss various options of discussing their self-advocacy plans with teachers. Students can compare a passive, soft-spoken, timid approach versus a loud, demanding aggressive

approach. Since neither of these approaches is very effective in achieving their goal of communicating their needs as a learner to their teachers, the student will have to learn that the most effective method of advocacy is a polite but assertive one, i.e., introducing yourself, stating your needs, sharing what you do to accommodate your disability, and requesting accommodations that the teacher can do in a strong but pleasant tone (Rumrill, Palmer, Roessler, & Brown, 1999). Students can begin practicing their self-advocacy skills by sharing their written plan with a peer, then with a small group of peers, and then with their parents and special education teacher. These alternatives give them several opportunities to become comfortable with the process. If they have several teachers to meet with and share their self-advocacy plan, it is helpful if they select the teacher with whom they feel most comfortable. In some instances, students with disabilities are so anxious about taking the first step that the special education teacher may need to attend their first appointment for support and guidance.

Lock and Layton (2001) assisted a group of college students with learning disabilities to develop self-advocacy plans, detailing their learning characteristics and necessary accommodations. These plans were used as a guide for discussing their disability and accommodations with their college instructors. They conducted informal interviews with the students and their instructors about the value of these plans. The majority of students reported that they gained a greater understanding of their disability and the accommodations they need to be successful. Their instructors reported similar findings about the types of accommodations that students with disabilities need in a college setting.

(7) Infuse self-determination and career development skills into the general curricula.

Self-determination and career development instruction has been successfully integrated into the general education curricula in over 20 school districts across three states.

Through a federal demonstration grant, 20 inclusive teams piloted a self-determination and transition curricula called NEXT S.T.E.P. The NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum has been designed to provide guided practice for students to set goals, implement plans to meet their self-directed goals, evaluate their actions and adjust their goals. Numerous goals and activities are suggested to assist students gain skills to enhance their transition from school to adult life. This curriculum helps students learn how to take charge of their own transition planning process. As students progress through the curriculum they:

- learn about the nature and purpose of transition planning
- participate in self-exploration and self-evaluation activities
- develop and implement their own transition plans
- present their transition plans to others in an individualized transition planning meeting.

The NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum has been infused into inclusive classrooms such as English, career classes, information technology or applied sciences classes. Students' take career inventories and personality assessments and complete self-directed assignments related to transition (e.g. completing a writing assignment about careers and/or selecting a college). Two English teachers commented:

We had students write a five-paragraph paper in which they described the goals they developed in NEXT S.T.E.P. and how they were going to complete their

*goals. This assignment was incorporated as one of our assignments for English.
(General Education Teacher, English Class)*

We really tried to tie the content of NEXT S.T.E.P. with the content we were doing in our English class. Lesson 4 of the curriculum suggests students write a paragraph about their hopes and dreams and how their hopes and dreams influence their future plans. We used this writing activity to satisfy one of our English assignments” (Special Education teacher, English class.)

The final activity that many teachers required students to complete was to summarize their vision for the future, strengths, challenges, and actual plans to reach their vision through a Powerpoint presentation. These presentations were presented to their peers and/or presented at their IEP meeting. Many youth disclosed that their disability was a challenge and outlined strategies to compensate for their learning differences. Since we all have strengths and challenges, all students outlined their personal plans regardless of whether they had a disability or not. Many of the students shared goals they accomplished during the current year, as well as their plans for the upcoming school year. Through the development and accomplishment of their personal self-selected goals, these students demonstrated that they could reach their goals with careful planning and support from their teachers, peers and parents. Both general and special education teachers have seen improvements in the abilities of both students with and without disabilities to set a goal, develop a plan, and meet their goals and objectives.

(9) *Develop and implement work-based learning for all students.* Work-based learning provides a structured opportunity for students to observe and use academic skills within a worksite. Work-based learning benefits students, teachers and employers. Students’

benefit by experiencing increased opportunities for integrated, hands-on, work-related learning in academic instruction. These work-based learning experiences often result in increased motivation to learn academic subjects, an opportunity to reality-test careers so students can make informed career choices, and potential contacts that may broaden employment options (Bidwell, 1997). Teachers benefit from the opportunity to utilize the professional expertise available at worksites and use it in developing real-world examples that connect academics to work tasks and projects. Employers benefit by having an active role in demonstrating to students the academic competencies needed to be successfully employed at their worksites and providing input that may result in student growth and the production of good citizens.

Bidwell (1997) outlined a number of principles to guide successful school-to-work partnerships. For example, top worksite and education leaders need to be committed to the program and programs should be coordinated by people with leadership ability who have access to top decision-makers. The desired outcomes of the program should have measurable criteria and be monitored to evaluate, improve upon, and report program outcomes to school officials, teachers, employers and parents. Coordinating worksite experiences for students is a time intensive responsibility, therefore worksite coordinators must have adequate time to match students to appropriate worksites based on student expressed interests. Students need to gain worksite experiences that are based on their interests and abilities to assure that their career goals are validated and they can pursue an education that results in the skills they need to enter appropriate careers.

The Philadelphia's School-to-Careers program reported that students who were involved in work-based learning had higher Grade Point Averages (GPA) than students

not involved (www.stw.edu.gov/products, 3/5/99). Seniors in New York's School-to-Work initiative took more advanced science, math and computer science courses, and maintained comparable grades. School-to-Work programs have reported that attendance rates improve and drop-out rates decrease for all students involved (www.stw.edu.gov/products, 3/5/99). Overall, school-to-work prepares all students for careers and college.

Youth Transition Program: A Model For Teaching Self-Determination And Transition Skills

One successful model transition program that incorporated many of the above strategies is the Youth Transition Program (YTP) operated collaboratively by the Oregon Department of Education, the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Division, the University of Oregon and local schools. This model incorporated several predictive factors that are associated with secondary and postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities (Benz et al, 2000). These factors include:

- participation in vocational education or career development classes at the junior and senior level;
- participation in paid work experience;
- competence in basic academic skills, money management, getting along with others, and self-determination/self-advocacy skills.

This program was piloted in seven schools in 1990 and is now operating in 80% of all high schools in the Oregon. YTP serves students with disabilities who need support beyond the traditional educational and vocational programs offered in their high schools in order to complete their high school program and transition to employment or

postsecondary education. They have additional barriers to achieving these goals, (i.e., negative job experience, parenting responsibilities, and unstable living situations).

A three-member team consisting of a special education teacher/coordinator, a transition specialist, and a rehabilitation counselor from the rehabilitation agency implement the YTP Program. This team provided services to students during the last two years of high school and two years beyond if necessary. YTP students received transition planning focused on post-school goals and self-determination; instruction in academic, vocational, independent living, and personal-social skills; paid job training while in the program and help in securing employment beyond high school; and follow-up support services for up to 2 years beyond high school completion.

An independent evaluation conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (Horne and Hubbard, 1995; Rogers, Hubbard, Charmer, Fraser, and Horne, 1995) reported these major findings:

- 90% of YTP students receive a high school completion document.
- 82% secured a competitive job, postsecondary education or some combination at their program exit.
- YTP completers maintained a rate of employment or education consistently above 80% for 2 years after the program.

Based on these findings it appears that when transition programs include instruction on career development, basic academic skills, self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and participation in paid work experiences, that students with disabilities who are at-risk of dropping out can successfully complete their high school education, secure competitive employment and participate in postsecondary education and training. A

critical component of the YTP program is the continued support two years beyond high school which is often the time that these students find most difficult to navigate and negotiate successfully their life challenges.

Recommendations and Implications

Many researchers have made numerous recommendations for practitioners and policymakers to integrate and infuse training on self-determination and career development into the educational programs for students with disabilities. The authors of this paper are expanding upon existing recommendations to focus not only on the self-determination and career development needs of students with disabilities, but all students enrolled in the general curricula. As more students with disabilities are enrolled into general education courses, the need to individualize the education for all students is critical. Increasing opportunities for all students to make choices so their curricula is relevant and related to their post-school vision is critical. Given the need for all students to find rigor and relevance within the general curricula, the following recommendations for practice are suggested.

Recommendations for Practice

While teachers agree that developing self-determination and career development skills among students is important, very few teachers have incorporated these skills into IEP goals of students with disabilities. One barrier frequently identified by teachers to providing instruction in self-determination was that they did not have sufficient training on promoting these skills (Wehmeyer, Agran & Hughes, 2000). Thus, there is a continued need for teachers to learn strategies to teach self-determination and career development through pre-service and in-service education. To strengthen preservice and

inservice teacher preparation programs, the following competencies need to be integrated into special and general education teacher certification programs:

(1) Integrate training on self-determination and career development into teacher preservice and inservice programs that provides direct instruction on how general and special educators must work with parents, students, administrators and guidance personnel to:

- Focus high school graduation requirements on the acquisition of academic and transition skills that are relevant to the student's self-determined future vision;
- Promote curricular relevance and self-determination through student-centered planning that occurs both within the general education curricula, as well as through individualized career guidance, transition and IEP meetings;
- Expand internships, work-based learning and community-based experiences so teachers can assist students to better match their interests and abilities with the academic skills needed to complete the work requirements of their chosen career;
- Develop collaborative relationships between secondary special education teachers and rehabilitation counselors from community agencies as a mechanism for transition planning and programming;
- Extend secondary school reform efforts to include career development, applied learning in the community, and transition planning as a regular part of general education for all students.
- Include students in transition planning by preparing them to be active partners in their own educational and transition planning;

- Provide instruction on information literacy and technology so students can connect school and work-based learning through career exploration on the Internet.

(2) Provide training and support for parents and community representatives on self-determination, career development and transition services:

- Coordinate training sessions for parents, students and community representatives that review legislation, rights and responsibilities, program options at the local level (including postsecondary options), and interagency eligibility and program options.
- Schedule individualized meetings with students and parents at the convenience of parents, and compensate educators for their participation through release and/or flex time.
- Base transition services from a student-centered approach that is outcome-oriented and builds on individual student strengths, versus the traditional deficit model of educational planning.

Recommendations for Policy

Federal and state legislation has often been the catalyst to program improvements at the local level. In this spirit, the following policy recommendations are suggested.

- (1) Increase funding for transition services and assistive technology programs that integrate self-determination, career development and work-based learning into the general curricula and other specialized transition programs.
- (2) Increase financial incentives for businesses who collaborate with schools to provide work-based learning opportunities for all students.

- (3) Collect national data on post-school outcomes of all youth, including postsecondary enrollment and retention rates, employment outcomes such as earnings and career advancement, and independent living outcomes.
- (4) Establish certification programs for transition specialists at the state level that are based on national standards and implemented through local colleges and universities.
- (5) Establish certification programs for disability service counselors who work in postsecondary institutions that include competencies in self-determination, career development and assistive technology.
- (6) Establish state guidelines that promote a reasonable ratio of college counselor-to-student so that the counselor can provide career guidance, assistive technology, and self-advocacy instruction.
- (7) Extend transition services beyond high school graduation that is coordinated with adult service agencies and that provide on-going supports to assure that students gain and maintain employment commensurate with their interests, abilities and skills.
- (8) Increase funding for transition services for youth delivered by disability services counselors and staff who work at rehabilitation and workforce development agencies.
- (9) Hold schools accountable for improving the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities, while integrating self-determination, career development and academic skills within the general curricula.

Recommendations for Research

- (1) Fund research to develop models that teach self-determination/self-advocacy and career development skills through the disability services offices within postsecondary education institutions.
- (2) Fund research to develop models of career planning and exploration activities that are jointly offered through college career planning counselors and disability counselors.
- (3) The Norwicki –Strickland (1973) and the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire (Crandall, Katkovsky, and Crandall, 1965) need to be further developed and renormed with current representative norming groups.
- (4) Further research is needed in motivation and the self-evaluation of both normally achieving students and students with learning disabilities.
- (5) Research on differences in the career-decision making process between students with mild and severe learning disabilities.

Summary

As educators, we must restructure our role to assure that the skills students need to succeed in their chosen post-school environments are indeed highlighted in their IEP, and then taught through both the general education curricula and special education supports. Students' educational program must include content on self-determination, self-advocacy and career development skills. To the extent possible, students themselves need to coordinate the accommodations they need in high school and post-school settings such as college, employment and independent living.

In the final analysis, the real test of the value and necessity of fostering self-determination is when professionals and parents take time to hear the voices of young adults with disabilities who have acquired self-determination and self-advocacy skills and a more internal sense of locus of control. A high school student who was part of an experimental self-determination class wrote in her final reflective journal and quoted in (Holub, Lamb & Bang, 1998):

I would never choose the weaknesses that I have, but without them I would not have the strengths that I have. Learning disabilities are with me for life. By acknowledging them and accessing the help others offer, I don't have to suffer by the title I have branded myself.... "stupid." I can begin to trust that I am as talented as others.

In sum, by listening to the voices of youth with disabilities, rethinking our roles as professionals and parents, and by providing them with opportunities to develop the skills of self-determination and exercise their rights to choose throughout their educational process, youth with disabilities will have the essential keys to open the door to success in postsecondary and employment settings.

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