

VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Self-Determination. Are we Teaching it to Students in Elementary  
Schools, and if Not, Why Not?

By

Ann Nicola Adam

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA

AUGUST, 2012

2010-2012

Challenges are what make  
life interesting, overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.

Joshua J. Marine

### Abstract

The ability to be self-determined is an important predictor of successful adult outcomes for students with exceptionalities. However, previous research on educator's attitudes to teaching self-determination has focused on large urban centres, primarily in the United States and the secondary school level. This study was carried out in a rural British Columbian school district and focused on the perspectives of elementary teachers towards teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities. Respondents were asked about their training, how they currently teach self-determination skills and whether they would like more professional development in this area. The results of this study show that there seems to be a correlation between respondents who received instruction on how to teach these skills during their education training and the number of self-determination components they taught. There does not seem to be a correlation between respondents having received self-determination training during their teacher training and whether they think elementary students should be involved in their IEP meetings. The study showed there is a discrepancy between the high value elementary teachers in this rural location place on these skills and how they are currently taught. Self-determination skills are taught through a combination of piecemeal programs that addressed a couple of skills and informal reactions to teachable moments in the classroom. This would suggest that there is a need for more professional development and/or resources on how to teach self-determination skills in this rural location.

*Acknowledgements;*

I have many people to thank. Without their encouragement this journey would have been much tougher and undoubtedly taken much longer!

I have a huge debt of gratitude to Mary Lindsay, the Program Coordinator. Without your flexibility, support and belief in me this journey would never have been able to be completed. I gained so much knowledge during the courses I did with you, both academic and about myself. Your high standards helped me to be the best I could be. Thank you.

I must also very sincerely thank Gail Krivel-Zack for being my supervisor and being so supportive. This was not an easy task to take on considering the distance involved, my crazy nomadic life and my habit of constantly overcommitting myself! Thank you for your understanding when my Master's could not always be the priority. Your flexibility when I was busy at work and facing report card deadlines was priceless. Thank you so much for your insightful comments, for the hours you spent editing and reading my work, for always encouraging me and helping me to see my project as "totally do-able." Somehow you always knew exactly the right response to get me thinking and propel me forward. Your enthusiasm and excitement towards the end was so infectious - just what I needed when I was tired and dragging my feet! Thank you -I appreciate it so much.

I must thank my classmates for their contributions. It has been great to have gone through this process together. I have valued your insights during discussions, learned so much from your presentations, gained so much knowledge from your wealth of special education experiences. I must also thank you for making me so welcome in the group. There was always someone to go for coffee with!

I am also very grateful to my work colleagues who were so supportive throughout this process and encouraging when the going got tough. Thank you to the Medici Crew, good companionship and heartfelt laughter were such an antidote to Master's stress. Thanks to Tammy and Kim who knew exactly how I felt as they'd been through this process. Your words of encouragement and wisdom were appreciated. Thank you also to everyone who generously gave their time when they were very busy to complete the survey.

I am very grateful for the encouragement from my family. I don't think words can ever fully convey how very much I appreciate all your support. Thank you Jason for your endless encouragement and trading of assignment war stories. Thank you Cameron for graciously agreeing to edit my work, being tough on me, and hosting me as a frequent guest. Thanks Kates for your encouragement and text companionship, you made all the travelling less lonely!

Lastly, a very special thank you goes to my husband, Colin. Thank you so much for putting your Okanagan life on hold so I could do this. I know it had a huge cost to you and I owe you many days of cross country skiing, biking, golf and companionship! Thank you so much for your generosity, belief and encouragement.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my father-in-law, Dave Adam.

You have truly inspired me with your courage, determination, and positive spirit. You are such an incredible role model for all the generations of our family. You have shown us that no matter how tough the path becomes, we need to be determined, set our sights on the summit of the next Munro and we will get there.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Quote.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Dedication.....	5
Table of Contents.....	6
List of Tables.....	10
List of Figures.....	12
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Background and Theoretical Framework.....	13
Definition of Self-determination.....	13
Conceptual framework.....	13
Statement of the problem.....	14
Research Rationale for Studying These Issues.....	15
Personal Rationale for Studying These Issues.....	17
Overview of the Study.....	19
Purpose of the Study.....	19
Research questions.....	20
Summary of the Study.....	20
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>21</b>
History of Self-determination as an Educational Construct.....	21
Definition of Self-determination.....	23
Theoretical Grounding of Self-determination.....	25
Issues Concerning Self-determination.....	26
Importance of Self-determination for Positive Life Outcomes.....	26

The Importance of Self-determination Interventions in Education.....	28
The Developmental Nature of Self-determination Skills.....	30
Where Should Self-determination Skills be Taught?.....	31
Barriers to Teaching Self-determination Skills.....	31
Conclusion.....	33
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	34
Methodological Understandings.....	34
Theoretical Framework.....	34
Research Study.....	35
Setting.....	35
Participants.....	36
Characteristics.....	36
Recruitment.....	36
Data Collection.....	37
Types of Data.....	38
Quantitative Data.....	38
Qualitative Data.....	39
Data Analysis.....	40
Quantitative Data.....	40
Qualitative Data.....	40
Ethical Issues.....	40
Security of Data.....	41
Validity.....	41
Triangulation.....	42
Generalizability.....	43

Potential Limitations..... 43

Educational Significance..... 43

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS..... 45

Demographic Information..... 45

Survey Results..... 46

    Did your Teacher Training Include any Information no how to Teach  
    Self-determination Skills to Students with Exceptionalities..... 47

    Effect of Education Level and the Likelihood of Having Received Self-Determination  
    Training..... 48

    Which Self-determination Skills do you Currently Teach?..... 48

    Correlation Between Teacher Training that Includes Self-determination and  
    Self-determination Skills Taught..... 49

    How Educational Position and Years of Experience Affect the Teaching of  
    Self-Determination Skills..... 51

        Category One Administration..... 51

        Category Two Classroom Teachers..... 51

        Category Three Special Education Teachers..... 52

    How do you Teach Self-Determination Skills..... 53

    Programs and Self-determination Skills..... 55

    Ordering Instructional Activities..... 56

    How Important do you Think it is to Teach these Components of  
    Self-determination to Students with Exceptionalities in Elementary School..... 57

    Do you Think it is Beneficial for Elementary Students with Special Needs to be  
    Involved in Their IEP Meetings or Educational Planning..... 58

    The Effect of Self-Determination Training, Experience and Position on Teachers’

Attitudes.....	59
Where Would it be Most Beneficial to Teach These Skills to Students with Exceptionalities at the Elementary School Level.....	60
Have you Participated in any Professional Development on Teaching Self-Determination Skills?.....	60
What Areas of Self-Determination Would you be Interested in Receiving Professional Development on?.....	61
Summary.....	62
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	63
Teacher Training.....	63
Post-Graduate Training and Self-Determination Skills.....	64
Self-Determination Skills Currently Being Taught in Elementary School.....	64
Factors that Affect the Teaching of Self-Determination Skills.....	65
Special Education Teachers and Self-Determination Skills.....	66
Self-Determination Skills Compared to Other Instructional Activities.....	67
Discrepancy Between High Value Placed on Self-Determination Skills and Reality.....	67
IEP Meetings.....	68
Limitations.....	69
Sample.....	69
Survey.....	70
Significance of Findings.....	71
Direction for Further Investigation.....	72
Implications.....	73
References.....	75
Appendix A Presentation Power point.....	79

Appendix B Survey.....	82
------------------------	----

### LIST OF TABLES

1. Comparison of Years of Teaching Experience and Teacher Training that Included How to Teach Self-Determination Skills.....	46
2. Comparison of, Years of Experience, Teacher Training Institute, Position and Self- Determination Skills Training.....	47
3. Self-Determination Skills Currently Taught.....	48
4. Respondents with Training in Teaching Self-Determination Skills and Skills Taught.....	50
5. Classroom Teachers, Years of Experience, Teacher Training in Self-Determination Skills and Self-Determination Skills Taught.....	52
6. Special Education Teachers, Years of Experience, Teacher Training in Self-Determination Skills Self-Determination and Number of Self-Determination Skills Taught.....	53
7. Programs Used to Teach Self-Determination Skills, Self-Determination Skills Addressed Number Using the Program, Grade Level or School-Wide.....	55
8. Likert Scale Ordering Instructional Activities.....	56
9. The Importance of Teaching Self-Determination Skills.....	57

10. Comparison Between Student Involvement in IEP Meetings, Teacher Training Experience  
and Position..... 61

11. Area of Professional Development, Workshop or On-line Format..... 61

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Respondents by Position..... 46

## **Chapter One**

### **Background and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Definition of Self-determination**

Wehmeyer (1996) defined one who was self-determined as “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p 24). A self-directed individual has the ability to interact with and respond to events in their environment and act in a self-realizing manner to affect the quality of their life.

“Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination.” (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998).

The goal for students with exceptionalities must be to support them to achieve a good quality of life. This has been defined by Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer (1998) as occurring when individuals possess the skills, knowledge and attitude that enables them to be in control of their own life decisions and be responsible for daily activities. Students with exceptionalities need to be explicitly taught these skills (Schreiner, 2007).

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of self-determination is grounded in several theories of motivation. Banduras’ (1997) self-efficacy theory of motivation highlights the major role that self-belief

plays in setting goals, activity choice and exertion of effort and persistence. This is especially important for students with exceptionalities as they have many challenges to face.

Recent research is advocating a social-ecological approach to promoting self-determination. This approach to studying interventions to enhance self-determination advocates teaching these skills in tandem with examining the individual's environment to see what modifications can be made to promote self-determination (Walker et al., 2011). A life-span approach that takes into account the developmental nature of self-determination skills is also being advocated. (Heller et al., 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Self-determination is an important predictor of positive life outcomes for students with exceptionalities (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Although research has shown that the acquisition of self-determination skills is developmental in nature and should be fostered during the elementary school years (Sands and Doll, 1996), in the current model of education these skills have typically been taught during adolescence due to the growth of independence and the desire to facilitate a smooth transition to employment.

Recent research has highlighted several barriers to teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities in elementary school settings. A Council for Exceptional Children's web survey found that despite elementary teachers placing a high value on self-determination skills, only 8% were satisfied with the way they were currently teaching these skills and 50% of respondents cited a lack of training in self-determination instruction (Mason, Field, Sawilosky, 2004). Studies have shown that there is a causal relationship between the growth of self-determination skills and the implement of interventions designed to foster self-

efficacy (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Dehm, Soukrup, 2010). Despite the fact that research has shown that in order for students with exceptionalities to benefit from self-determination instruction they need frequent practice in a variety of settings, there are few reports of district or school-wide initiatives to provide a cohesive program to teach these skills (Stang et al., 2009). As a result self-determination instruction was reported as being informal and haphazard (Mason et al., 2004).

Self-determination is one of the most important outcomes of the education system as it is a vital precursor to post-school success for students with exceptionalities (Wehmeyer, 1996, Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). A review of the current literature shows that the majority of research on this vital issue has been implemented in large urban centers, primarily in the United States and has focused on the perspectives of secondary school teachers. This is apparent in Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test & Wood's (2001) meta-analysis of research studies on self-determination. They noted that only 19.6% of these studies focused on 5-13 year old students. These studies fail to address the unique challenges faced by teachers in rural communities in British Columbia. This study was conducted in a rural British Columbian school district and examined elementary school teachers' perspectives on self-determination, how they currently teach these skills and factors affecting their ability to implement self-efficacy instruction. Teachers in these locations face additional challenges with limited opportunities for professional development, restricted access to specialists and difficulty in obtaining appropriate resources.

### **Research Rationale for Studying These Issues**

In order to help students with special needs move towards the goal of achieving their potential, it is vital to teach them the life skills associated with being self-determined.

Improvements in academic performance and class participation have been cited as a result of this instruction. (Wehmeyer, Agran & Hughes, 2000.) In addition, research shows that individuals with higher scores on self-determination measurements were more likely to be employed and have higher wages one year post graduation (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Linstrom, Doren and Mitch (2011) examined the career development and post-school employment outcomes for a group of youth with disabilities. They noted that 7 to 10 years after exiting high school the self-determination attributes of self-efficacy, motivation and coping skills clearly contributed to an individual's success in maintaining living wage employment over time.

Instruction in self-determination skills and transition programming has typically been left to adolescence. However, research has shown that “ [T]he acquisition of the capacity for and expression of self-determination is a developmental process that families and school professionals must foster in the earliest elementary grades if they are to adequately prepare students to be self-sufficient adults” (Sands & Doll, 1996, p.59). By not teaching these skills at the appropriate stage of development students' ability to acquire these skills may be curtailed. As a result students may become passive participants in their own education. Sands and Doll (1996) argue that “If the field of special education is committed to student's outcomes representing independence, it must act to establish policies and practices that integrate early support for the development of self-determination” (p. 70).

Surveys of elementary teachers in the United States have indicated that they place high value on the development of self-determination abilities, but self-determination instruction in the classroom is informal and a lower priority than other instructional activities. Furthermore, elementary teachers reported that they feel unprepared to teach self-determination skills with 50% seeking more training (Mason et al., 2004). This suggests there is a need to examine the

experiences of British Columbian elementary school teachers to assess the need for more resources and training in this area, particularly in light of the geographical expanse of the province and unequal access to professional development opportunities.

The movement of students with exceptionalities into general education classrooms has created blurred responsibilities surrounding the issue of who should teach self-determination skills. Teaching these skills in the general education classroom, resource room and as part of school-wide positive discipline programs could offer consistent opportunities to help students with exceptionalities. Stang et al. (2009) noted that when provided with systematic instruction and frequent practice opportunities students with disabilities can acquire “the knowledge, skills and attitudes that contribute to enhanced self-determination” (p.102). Environments have the ability to either support or restrict the growth of student empowerment and self-efficacy. (Sands & Doll, 1996).

### **Personal Rationale for Studying These Issues**

I chose this topic for my research because as a teacher I have seen the difference that teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities can make to their academic performance, self-esteem and resiliency. For example, breaking tasks into manageable pieces, setting realistic goals and teaching students with exceptionalities how to self-regulate their attention can have a very powerful effect on their academic performance. When I consider students with exceptionalities whom I have taught I have noted a vast difference in their social, emotional and educational outcomes depending on their levels of self-determination. For example, one student with exceptionalities required prompts to get out materials for lessons, needed significant levels of support and shut down when he started to struggle. A more self-

determined student with exceptionalities needed support only until he had grasped the concept, then he was able to self-advocate as he encountered difficulties. It is clear that the self-determined student is likely to be more successful.

I believe that in order for students with exceptionalities to achieve success they need a measure of self-efficacy and empowerment, both attributes of self-determination. A grade four student I taught with dyslexia, disliked school, and was struggling in academic subjects and suffered a great deal of anxiety. By providing him with choices, allowing him to demonstrate his knowledge through means other than writing, and setting goals with him, he became more engaged in lessons. This led to increased ownership of his learning and he experienced more success. This led to greater self-esteem, the belief that he could learn and motivation to persevere at those subjects he found hard. By explicitly teaching structured self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities we are giving them the tools for increased success, higher self-esteem and the potential for greater independence and better life outcomes.

Despite the fact that explicitly teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities brings many benefits, the teaching of these skills in elementary school is somewhat limited. I think this may be due to lack of teacher training as self-determination skills were not part of the curriculum when I did my teacher training. Individual teachers teach some of these skills as part of Health and Careers or have implemented the BC FRIENDS for Life Program sponsored by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Although this program includes some self-determination skills its main goal is to reduce anxiety and teach students about their feelings. Other skills, such as problem-solving, are addressed in a piecemeal fashion as a response to issues in the classroom rather than a well-planned program. In addition, at the elementary school level, few students are involved in their educational planning or goal

setting during the creation of their Individual Education Plan. Research has shown that the establishment of task focused goals has a significant effect on the performance of low achieving students. (Fuchs et al., 1997). If we exclude students from the planning process and do not share their goals with them this leads to students being disengaged in the learning process. I believe that in order for students with exceptionalities to be adequately prepared for adult life more instructional focus needs to be placed on teaching self-determination skills to students in elementary school.

### **Overview of the Study**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to add to the growing body of research knowledge on elementary teachers perspectives on the importance of self-determination, how they are currently teaching it and the difficulties they encounter. There have been several research studies on this topic in the United States. For example, Cho, Wehmeyer and Kingston (2010), conducted a comprehensive research study involving 407 elementary school teachers, across thirty states. However, little research has focused on elementary teacher's attitudes and experiences teaching self-determination in Canada, particularly in rural settings. This study aims to address this deficit by reviewing the perspectives of principals, and teaching staff to explore the value placed on teaching self-determination skills in a rural location in British Columbia. This study will explore how these skills are currently being taught and do a needs-based assessment to see whether more resources, teacher education or professional development in this area would be beneficial.

The focus of this research will be a rural school district as teachers in rural locations face unique challenges. Distance may preclude easy access to professional development

opportunities. As a result there may not be as much choice as in urban centers and professional development activities may be influenced by the District's focus or school learning plan goals.

### **Research questions**

1. Do principals, classroom and special education teachers working in a rural location in British Columbia believe that a high priority should be placed on self-determination skills instruction for students with special needs in elementary school?
2. What are some ways that self-determination skills are currently being taught?
3. What factors affect a teacher's ability to implement elementary instruction in self-determination skills in these locations?

### **Summary of the study**

Traditionally research on self-determination has focused on adolescents and been based in urban areas in the United States. This study will add information on the value that rural elementary school personnel, teaching in British Columbia, place on the teaching of self-determination skills for students with exceptionalities compared to other instructional areas. This study seeks to examine how different factors, such as prior training and access to professional development opportunities, affect a teacher's ability to implement self-determination instruction. It will seek to determine if there is a need for professional development opportunities and more resources in this area. The research method consisted of an on-line survey administered to classroom teachers, special education teachers and principals.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review is divided into nine sections. The first section is a review of the history of self-determination as an educational construct that can be traced back to societal changes within the last hundred and fifty years. The growth of social movements seeking rights for people with disabilities has led to increased choices and opportunities. To be able to take advantage of this, individuals with exceptionalities need to be explicitly taught self-determination skills as part of their education. The next section defines what it means for an individual to be self-determined. The theoretical grounding of self-determination in motivational theories is examined. In addition, recent self-determination theories are cited that advocate a social-ecological approach. This is significant for elementary school students with exceptionalities as it advocates a life-span approach to the development of self-determination skills that considers the effect of the school-wide, classroom and home environment on an individual. Research is discussed that highlights how vital self-determination skills are to increase positive life outcomes for students with exceptionalities and the effect educational interventions may have on the development of these skills. The developmental nature of self-determination skills and where these skills should be taught are also examined. Barriers to teaching self-determination skills in the elementary school setting are examined and the need for studies that examine the perspectives of Canadian teachers in rural settings is recognized. This chapter concludes with a delineation of the hypothesis of the present study.

#### **History of Self-Determination as an Educational Construct**

The roots of self-determination as an educational construct can be traced back to the societal changes that have occurred within the last hundred and fifty years. At the start of the 1900's disabled individuals were social outcasts. As Pennell (2001) states "They were abused,

mistreated and virtually ignored.” (p. 223). As attitudes gradually changed disabled individuals came to be regarded as trainable and were taught in separate schools or institutions. The growth of ideals of “normalization” led people to regard institutions as de-humanizing and degrading and promoted community involvement for people with disabilities (Pennell, 2001). The advent of the civil rights movement in the 1960’s and 70’s brought disenchantment with politics, the status quo and demand for change that focused on individual rights (Wappett, 2002). Over the course of several decades self-determination for individuals with disabilities has become a highly valued goal that has affected legislation and national policies, particularly in the United States. (Walker et al., 2011). This has been reflected in the protection of rights for the disabled in the Canadian Charter of Human Rights (1982) and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The change to the societal construct of disability is apparent in the language of the American Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 that states,

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the rights of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, pursue meaningful careers and enjoy full inclusion and integration.” (P.L. 102-569, cited by Field & Hoffman, 2002).

This is indicative of a shift in values where individuals with disabilities are presumed to be “able” and should participate as fully as possible in society.

The growth of social movements seeking rights for disabilities and self-advocacy led to a philosophy of self-determination. This created a shift in power to the individual enabling greater choices and control over life outcomes. This changes the role of professionals supporting those with disabilities, from decision-makers to consultants who lay out options and the person with disabilities has responsibility for making the decision (Pennell, 2001). However, the passive

roles and stereotypes often associated with individuals with disabilities directly conflict with typical expectations for autonomous adults (Field & Hoffman, 1994). “ If youth with disabilities are to be adequately prepared to maximize opportunities for self-determination in adulthood, they need to be equipped with the knowledge, beliefs and skills that lead to self-determination in their educational programs” (Field & Hoffman, 2002, p.114). This is essential if we consider that our present educational system has traditionally focused on categorizing students by their deficits while meeting individual needs through a system involving adult support. This may lead to students believing that they are not able to affect their own success, viewing it as dependent on adult support and may lead to an increase in passivity (Sands & Doll, 1996). Therefore, it is vital we explicitly teach these skills to students so that they are able to become self-determined young adults. The implementation of the IDEA and its mandate that students with exceptionalities must be involved in the transition process from the age of fourteen, led to an increase in research into self-determination during the 1990’s. This also ignited government initiatives, such as the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that focused on research and provided funding for projects that taught youth self-determination skills. This marked the start of the movement in special education to promote self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, 1999).

### **Definition of Self-Determination**

Wehmeyer (1996) defined someone who was self-determined as “ [A]cting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p 24). Wehmeyer (1999) developed the Functional Theory of Self-Determination as a way to identify self-determined behavior. The function a behavior serves for the individual is what classifies it as self-determined. Self-determined actions are identified by four characteristics.

- The individual acts autonomously.
- The behavior is self-regulated.
- The individual has to initiate the action.
- The individual responds to the event in an empowered and self-realizing way.

If individuals typically show these characteristics then they have a self-determined disposition. This means that in a given situation individuals would act in a similar, self-determined manner. A self-determined individual acts as a causal agent as they act, with intent, in a way that affects their life outcomes. Decisions and choices of a self-determined individual are made “free from undue influence” (p 24, Wehmeyer 1999). Self-determination includes a myriad of components and includes important life skills such as decision and choice making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment.

Self-determination includes components that bolster resiliency such as self-observation, self-instruction, self-advocacy and leadership. Wehmeyer (2007) notes that “Promoting self-determination as an educational outcome requires not only a purposeful instructional program, but also one that co-ordinates learning experiences across the span of a student’s educational experience” (p.8). If educators want to help students with exceptionalities have a good quality of life and successful adult outcomes they need to teach self-determination in a systematic way starting in early childhood. The majority of research on self-determination and promotion of skills that foster self-efficacy have been focused on the transition process, vocational programs and high school level students (Mithaug, Martin & Agran, 1987). Future research needs to address how to instruct self-determination in elementary schools and what skills teachers need to do this effectively.

**Theoretical Grounding of Self-Determination:**

Wehmeyer (1999) noted that prior to the concept of self-determination as an educational construct this term was used in the political, philosophical and psychological arenas. In the political arena self-determination corresponded with the ideals of independence, freedom and self-government. From the time of the ancient Greeks to modern times there has been much debate on determinism and the ability of man to act through his own volition to affect events (Todd, 2007). In psychology debate centered on whether a person's actions were caused externally and were other-determined, or internally and were autonomous and self-determined. These debates paved the way for self-determination as an educational construct that incorporates the idea of political rights and personal control (Wehmeyer, 1999).

The concept of self-determination is grounded in several motivational theories that have tried to explain human agency. Motivation involves the ability of individuals to take action, make choices and their reasons for doing so. Deci and Ryan (2008) developed their Self-Determination Theory of motivation. They proposed that human beings are affected by extrinsic (controlled motivation) and intrinsic (autonomous) motivation. The type of motivation an individual experiences is important in determining their life outcomes. If an individual is intrinsically motivated this has its basis in natural curiosity, the desire to succeed; you are self-motivated to take actions that lead to goal attainment. Intrinsic motivation meets the basic human psychological need for a feeling of competency and autonomy or self-determination. Extrinsic or controlled motivation is directed by others and can lead to amotivated individuals who are passive and resistant to taking action to reach goals. However, Deci and Ryan also recognize that extrinsic motivation may be internalized by an individual if it meets a basic need for interpersonal relatedness. Bandura (1997) proposed his Self-Efficacy Theory which stated that

individual's beliefs in how well they could accomplish a task had a direct bearing on the amount of effort and persistence they would employ and the type of goals they would set for themselves.

It should be noted that recent research is advocating a social-ecological approach to promoting self-determination. This approach to researching self-determination interventions aims to increase levels of self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities while also reviewing their environment to identify variables that have the potential to enhance self-determination (Walker et al., 2011). In tandem with the social-ecological approach a life-span avenue is currently being pursued to take into account developmental stages. (Heller et al., 2011). This work is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. It is "concerned with the processes and conditions that govern the lifelong course of human development in the actual environments in which human beings live" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.37). This theory considers the individuals and the effect that interaction with the environment has on their development. It is significant for self-determination during the elementary school years because it considers the home environment, school-wide and classroom environment as well as the individual.

### **Issues Concerning Self-Determination**

#### **Importance of Self-Determination for Positive Life Outcomes**

The ability of an individual to live independently and be able to financially support themselves are important adult outcomes that increase quality of life and personal satisfaction. However, individuals with disabilities typically face limited opportunities to find employment, may only be paid minimum wage and as a result may live close to the poverty line. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 showed that only 57% of youth with disabilities in the United

States were employed 1 to 4 years after graduation compared to 66% of non-disabled youth. In addition, it reported that a third of youth with disabilities were working in minimum wage jobs in the food service industry or as construction laborers. (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey & Shaver, 2010). These statistics are reflected in British Columbia where the 2006 unemployment rate for disabled individuals at 8.9% was significantly higher than for the general population at 5.7 % (Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2006).

However, research has shown that high self-determination levels are a predictor of positive life outcomes for students with disabilities. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) studied 80 students with cognitive disabilities and concluded that there was a marked difference in employment success for students with high self-determination. Eighty percent of this group were employed and earned an average of \$2.33 more per hour than their counterparts with lower self-determination scores of whom only 43% were employed.

This research is substantiated by the work of Lindstom, Doren and Miesch (2011). They studied post-high school employment and career development outcomes for students with disabilities over a seven to ten year period. They noted that components of self-determination such as self-efficacy, motivation, self-advocacy and coping skills enabled students to gain and sustain living wage employment over time. They maintain that it is important for transition training to focus on individual skills such as self-determination to bolster persistence and self-efficacy. Components of self-determination such as the ability to problem-solve and make decisions are life skills that affect other areas of life such as the ability to live independently and manage your personal finances. The ability to self-advocate is vital for the emotional and physical health of individuals. McDougall, Evans & Baldwin (2010) found self-determination to be a significant predictor of perceived quality of life in the realm of personal development and

fulfillment for individuals with chronic conditions and disabilities. Self-determination could arguably be cited as the most important outcome of the education system for individuals with disabilities as it affects their school success and is instrumental in securing living wage employment and independence (McDougall et al., 2010, Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

### **The Importance of Self-Determination Interventions in Education**

One of the goals of the British Columbian education system is to adequately prepare students to take on adult roles, gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to gain employment and participate in creating a sustainable economy (BC Ministry of Education, 2011). However, students with exceptionalities tend to be less self-determined than their peers. Schreiner (2007) studied 49 students with assorted exceptionalities and noted that they did not incidentally acquire self-awareness or self-realization like their typically developing peers. She concluded that students with exceptionalities would benefit from explicit teaching of self-determination skills. Educators need to give students with special needs lots of practice at making choices, problem-solving and goal setting to empower them and help them gain self-efficacy. This is supported by research that has demonstrated the efficacy of teaching components of self-determination to students with exceptionalities. Martin, Mithaug, Cox, Peterson, Van Dyke and Cash (2003) examined the use of daily contracts designed to enable students with severe behavioural problems to self-regulate the completion of academic tasks. They noted that teaching self-regulation led to a significant increase in academic task completion, and greater control over choices and behavior. The benefits of directly teaching self-regulation were also demonstrated by Reid, Trout and Schwartz's (2005) study on students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. They found that learning self-regulation skills increase time on task and work completion. Glago, Mastropieri and Scruggs, (2009) taught a problem

solving self-determination strategy to a group of elementary students with mild disabilities. Post-intervention these students outperformed the control students in the use of the strategies, self-determination skills and maintained their gains three weeks after the program ended. It is therefore apparent that explicitly teaching self-determination skills has positive effects on academic outcomes for students and should be a priority for educators.

It is significant that recent research has focused on longitudinal studies and demonstrates the positive effects of teaching self-determination over time. Wehmeyer et al., (2010) studied the causal relationship between interventions to increase self-determination levels and enhanced student self-determination over a three year period for 371 high school students who were receiving special education services. Students who received the interventions demonstrated significant changes in their self-determination scores compared to students who were in the control group. Wehmeyer et al. (2010) concluded that if students are involved in educational planning and receive explicit instruction to promote self-determination then students with disabilities can increase their self-efficacy. Long term academic and self-determination skill development is supported by the work of Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, (2010). They analyzed the Special Educational Elementary Longitudinal Study and determined that there was a significant positive effect on academic achievement over time if a student was involved in planning their Individual Education Plan. It can be concluded from this research that teaching self-determination skills over the course of several years leads to greater engagement in education and the growth of life skills that have the potential to support more positive life outcomes for students with exceptionalities. The significance of this is highlighted by Wehmeyer, (2007) who stated that “Promoting self-determination has become best practice in the education of students with disabilities” (p.3).

### **The Developmental Nature of Self-Determination Skills**

As self-development evolves over the course of an individual's formative years it is important to teach these skills from early childhood. Self-determination has been viewed as an integral part of the transition process in high school as these skills become more important as a young person goes through the individualization process involved in separating themselves from the family unit. As a result, a large portion of the research into self-determination has focused on the high school level. However, the basis for self-determination skills is laid during childhood (Heller et al., 2011). Self-determination is the adult outcome of earlier experiences that support and enhance self-sufficiency (Sands & Doll, 1996). The importance of teaching components of self-determination during elementary school is clear if we consider that an unexpected outcome of individualizing education, adult planning of IEP's, adult support may lead to a situation where students feel that adults manage the conditions that allow them to learn and their actions cannot affect their academic success. This may result in students becoming passive. Sands and Doll, (1996), believe that waiting until high school to teach self-determination skills is too late. If we want students with exceptionalities to become independent adults we need to teach these skills when it is developmentally appropriate. The developmental nature of self-determination skills is evident if we compare the limited ability to self-regulate and delay gratification of a toddler to the response of a ten year old. Wehmeyer (2007) noted that some of the skills of self-determination are more applicable to adolescent development while others such as self-awareness, problem solving and early goal setting can be taught in elementary school. It is only by early teaching and sustained practice of self-determination skills that students can be expected to leave school prepared to take on responsibility and independent adult roles (Sands & Doll, 1996).

### **Where Should Self-Determination Skills be Taught?**

The movement for inclusion has resulted in more students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom and this has created a blurring of boundaries and lack of certainty over who should be teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities. The importance of the environment to the teaching of self-determination is cited by Field and Hoffman (2002) who note that quality indicators of education that increased self-determination include role-modeling of self-determination skills by everyone in the community, family support, and school-wide support. “In order to promote self-determination competencies for students, schools need to create an environment that explicitly and implicitly teaches the knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to increased self-determination.” (p.115).

Current research is taking a social-ecological approach to promoting self-determination over the course of an individual’s lifespan. (Walker et al., 2011). In the United States, limited results for self-determination and the need to improve quality of life for disabled individuals has led to the creation of the National Training Initiative on Self-Determination. This research group aims to increase efforts to promote self-efficacy by introducing a conceptual model of intervention based on a social-ecological approach that takes into account the individual, variables that affect them and how they interact with their environment (Walker et al., 2011). The goal is to identify interventions that will promote self-determination and variables that have the ability to enhance the growth of self-determination in an individual. If we were to consider how this might look in a school setting, explicit teaching of problem solving might be the intervention and variables could be how much autonomy the classroom setting allows the individual with exceptionalities.

### **Barriers to Teaching Self-Determination Skills**

It is evident that to help students with exceptionalities reach their full potential we need to begin teaching them self-determination skills during elementary school. However, research has shown that there are several factors that affect a teacher's ability to implement instruction in this area. Elementary teachers believe that teaching self-determination skills are more relevant and useful in high school and don't recognize that teaching them in elementary school would lead to greater self-regulation, academic engagement and improvements in social interactions (Mason et al., 2004). In fact, of the 407 elementary teachers surveyed 33% of classroom teachers and 26% of special education teachers considered elementary students too young to be taught these skills. (Cho, Wehmeyer, Kingston, 2010). There is a discrepancy between the high value teachers place on self-determination skills and the time they spend teaching it. The researchers attributed this discrepancy to elementary teachers' beliefs that teaching students self-determination skills would be more helpful for transitioning to high school than in improving their current performance (Cho, Wehmeyer, Kingston, 2010, Stang et al., 2009). There is also disparity between the importance of self-determination skills and the fact that 70% of teachers choose an informal instructional approach to teaching these skills. This could be a result of the self-reporting and social desirability factors. To address these discrepancies Stang et al. (2009) emphasized the need for future research to use force-choice responses that make teachers rank the specific order of instructional priorities in their classroom. In Cho et al.'s study 35% of general educators and 27% of special educators cited lack of training as a barrier to teaching self-determination skills. This is supported by Thoma, Baker and Saddler (2002) who surveyed education programs designed to prepare special educators and discovered that only 54% of the lecturers included this important concept in their programs. This lack of professional training has resulted in teachers feeling unprepared to teach self-determination skills and reluctant to include

students in elementary school in educational planning. There is a distinct lack of research in Canada to examine the perceptions of elementary teachers towards teaching self-determination skills. Most of the research in this literature review has focused on densely populated urban centers in the United States. It would therefore be valuable to conduct research in Canada to examine teacher's perspectives towards teaching self-determination in elementary school.

### **Conclusion**

Research has clearly demonstrated that explicitly teaching self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities throughout their educational experience increases academic, behavioral and post high school success (Wehmeyer et al., 2010). However, it is evident that elementary teachers tend to lack professional preparation and knowledge of how to teach these skills in an explicit structured way (Mason et al., 2004, Thoma et al., 2002). There is limited research on how Canadian elementary teachers view the teaching of self-determination, their training and experience teaching these skills.

This study adds to the field by surveying the perceptions and experiences of self-determination by elementary teachers in a rural British Columbian location. This study identifies if there is a need for professional development opportunities focused on self-efficacy for students with exceptionalities. It is hoped that the research increases awareness of this important concept in this location and perhaps initiate conversations that eventually lead to a change and more priority being place on explicit, structured instruction of self-determination.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

#### **Methodological Understandings**

A significant goal of this study is to discover the perspectives of elementary school teachers towards teaching self-determination skills. The underlying constructivist ontological belief is that objective, quantitative knowledge does not give the whole picture. According to O'Hara, Wainwright and Kay (2011) to gain a greater depth of understanding what is needed is a phenomenological approach that “seeks to understand the motivations behind people’s actions and behaviors” (p.93).

The mixed-method of research has pragmatism as its philosophical underpinning and is based on the modern neo-pragmatists work such as Davidson and Rescher (as cited by Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism seeks the middle ground as it recognizes knowledge that comes from the physical reality and knowledge which emerges from the social, psychological and subjective thought (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, it allows for knowledge based on the “real” physical world and our interpretation of it.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The mixed methods research tradition is very suited to this project. This research tradition has been defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as the class of research where the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, approaches, techniques, concepts and data in a single study. The advantage of this method is that it enables researchers to offer comprehensive well-rounded research as they can use qualitative data to probe deeper into

an individual's perspective. The value of using qualitative data is evident if we consider the work of Edmonds and Crichton (2008). They used qualitative data in their research study on teaching students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Edmonds and Crichton's interviews and surveys of students with FAS gave insight into the participants' perspectives and concerns as individuals experiencing this disability. Qualitative research can add further evidence which substantiates the quantitative data. This is clear if we consider Campbell-Whatley's (2008) research study on self-determination. When analyzing the effect of a series of self-determination lessons, she noted that participants' anecdotal responses supported their test results on the Piers Harris Scale indicating an increase in self-awareness. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have argued, the mixed method of research is a needs based approach to research that allows the researcher to use the most appropriate tool. "Taking a non-purist or compatibilist or mixed position allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research questions" (p.15).

In this research study the mixed method research tradition was used in the survey distributed to participants. Quantitative data was collected in order to analyze the demographic and closed question information supplied by the participants. Qualitative data was obtained during the survey that enabled the individual views of elementary teachers to be expressed. This qualitative research focused on "...the perspectives of people who are most directly affected by the phenomena under study", (Rumrill, 2011, p.153).

### **Research study**

#### **Setting**

A primary aim of this research study was to provide information with respect to the attitudes of rural elementary school teachers. It should be noted that most Canadian research on self-determination to date has been carried out in large urban centres. Therefore a rural school district in the interior of British Columbia was selected for the location of the study. This school district consists of 6 rural communities and is experiencing declining enrollment due to demographic changes and the economy. In the 2011/12 school year there were 2278 full-time students of which 145 were ESL students and 320 aboriginal. Of the total student population 11% of students are identified as having special needs. The main sources of employment in this area are the vineyard or fruit growing industries. There are significant levels of poverty with the average family income being \$36,694 compared to the provincial average of \$54,840. In addition, 15% of families with children under the age of 6 are affected by unemployment compared to the provincial average of 9%. (SD53 Achievement Plan, 2011/12).

### **Participants**

**Characteristics.** In this school district, during the 2011/12 school year, there were 129 full time teachers and 32 part-time teachers; 105 were female, 56 male. The teaching staff had an average age of 44.3 years with 13.5 average years of experience. There are outreach programs from Gonzaga University as well as UBC Okanagan relatively close by. In addition, there are joint professional development activities with the next school district.

**Recruitment.** Access to participants was established through a three-phase process. The first step involved approaching the school board for permission to do the research. This approach is recommended by Festinger and Katz (1966) (as cited by Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). They believe that in a hierarchical organization there is an economy of effort in approaching

those at the top first when trying to gain access. Therefore, in the initial phase, the primary researcher approached the Superintendent and the goals and potential benefits of the research project were clearly explained and issues such as informed consent and confidentiality were also addressed.

Once school board permission was obtained three schools in the school district were initially approached to participate in the survey. The research study was explained and permission was sought to do a presentation to teaching staff at a staff meeting.

The final phase involved the primary researcher going to a staff meeting where the nature and scope of the research was clearly explained through a power point presentation that defined self-determination and explained some of the current research (See Appendix A). The practical applications and benefits of participating in the research were highlighted. The research survey is a needs test to determine if there is a need for professional development and more curriculum resources in the area of self-determination.

### **Data Collection**

As the mixed-methods research tradition is being used in this study, an online survey was created that enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix B). This survey was loosely based on the prior work of Cho, (2010), Weymeyer, Agran and Hughes, (2000).

The advantages of using an online survey were that each recipient receives the same information and explanation about the components of self-determination. The participants were able to complete the survey at their own convenience; as it was accessed through the school board email they had the option of completing the survey from home. The on-line survey also

had the advantage of ease of completion. It took under fifteen minutes to complete and the questions were clearly written to facilitate completion. Submission was efficient as the participant clicked on a button to submit compared to having to post their response for a mail survey.

After the staff meeting presentation the on-line survey was distributed to staff through the school district email system. The survey was forwarded to fifteen classroom teachers, three special education teachers and two administrators by email. This email contained a link that connected participants to the Fluid Survey website and the survey. The pre-amble to the survey contained information about the research project, contact information and consent.

### **Types of Data**

**Quantitative data.** The survey collected quantitative data that could be numerically analyzed. The researcher wanted to determine the demographics of the teachers who were responding to the survey. This included their years of teaching experience, information on current teaching position and type of training they had. This information was felt to be important as it would enable the researcher to determine if teaching position, recent teacher training or years of teaching experience were factors that influenced the amount and type of self-determination skills teachers were teaching. In their research study, Cho, Wehmeyer and Kingston (2010) noted that 78% of Special Education teachers were familiar with self-determination compared to 60% of classroom teachers. In addition, the researchers showed that lack of training on how to teach self-determination skills was cited as a significant barrier by 27% of special education teachers and 35% of classroom teachers. Stang, Carter, Lane and

Pierson (2009) recommended that future research should focus on the role educators' training plays in how much instructional priority is placed on self-determination skills

The survey also included a Likert Scale that directed respondents to order instructional activities from the most important to least important. The aim of this question was to try to determine how important teachers' actually saw self-determination skills for students with special needs in relation to other instructional activities. Stang et al (2009) thought that future research should analyze teacher's instructional priorities. "[F]uture researchers should use force-choice response formats in which teachers are asked to rank-order specific instructional priorities that they have for their classroom" (p.104). The survey created for this study included self-determination skills, study skills, art and creativity, academic skills, healthy living and social skills. An additional Likert Scale was created in order to determine how important elementary teachers saw the teaching of various components of self-determination such as decision making, choice making, self-awareness, goal setting, self-knowledge, self-advocacy and self-regulation in elementary school.

**Qualitative data.** The survey created for the present study included several qualitative questions. The researcher was trying to determine how self-determination skills are currently being taught in elementary schools in this rural location. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate what self-determination skills they were teaching, how they were teaching them and how exceptionalities they have encountered influence their teaching of these skills. Additional information was requested that asked teachers to indicate where self-determination skills should be taught, in the classroom, resource room or school-wide. The survey also asked teachers what their attitude was to students being involved in their IEP creation and educational planning at the elementary school level and whether they would consider this to be beneficial. As this research

was also a needs assessment to determine if there is a need for further professional development and resources in this area, respondents were asked about any professional activities they have participated in and any areas they would be interested in receiving professional development on.

### **Data Analysis**

**Quantitative data.** The quantitative data included the demographics of the sample, close-questions and the Likert scale questions were analyzed through the use of Fluid Surveys as the “Primary aim is to identify patterns and regularities in the data” (Fielding & Gilbert, 2006 as cited by O’Hara et al).

**Qualitative data.** Qualitative data included information gathered from the open-ended questions on the survey. These responses are coded to identify themes that arise. Each stage of the analysis process was clearly documented to provide an audit, verification trail. Every effort was made to ensure that my personal biases do not color the research.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues were discussed as part of the staff meeting presentation. The presentation included informed consent and the necessity to acknowledge the granting of consent prior to completing the survey. The right to withdraw was discussed, although it was noted that once the survey data is submitted via the Fluid Surveys website it is impossible to withdraw it as the surveys are anonymous. Therefore the researcher would not be able to identify the survey belonging to the participant requesting withdrawal.

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed. It was stressed that the results are anonymous as the survey is accessed through the Fluid Survey website and the author is not

able to know who did or did not respond. Furthermore, the researcher outlined how anonymity would be preserved as individuals would not be identified in any manner when the research was written up. However, the participants were also informed that it may be possible for the researcher to identify their responses by gender, position or educational information. The researcher affirmed her commitment to preserve anonymity and confidentiality.

As the researcher worked closely with a number of the individuals asked to complete the survey it was felt important to ensure that they do not feel coerced to respond in an effort to support her endeavors. I believe this issue can be covered off by stressing the right to withdraw at any point and asking them to only participate if they want to.

I was aware that I needed to be diligent to ensure that my own biases are not exhibited when I analyzed this qualitative data.

This study has been approved by Vancouver Island University's Research and Ethics Board. It was completed in accordance with the specifications set out in the application.

### **Security of Data**

It was noted that data provided by individuals is stored in Canada on the Fluid Survey's data base. This information will, in due course, be placed on a memory stick, kept in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed after three years. The only individuals who will have access to the data are the researcher and her direct supervisor.

### **Validity**

The importance of this issue is apparent if we consider the work of Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2000) who stated that "Validity is an important key to effective research" (p.105). To

ensure validity in this research study, content validity was addressed by ensuring that the questions asked on the survey were designed to elicit the desired information. To ensure this the survey was piloted prior to use in the study. Validity was furthered by the researcher basing the survey questions on prior research where the answers to the same questions were reported to have strong internal consistency, (Stang et al, 2009). In addition, the fact that this survey is based on prior work by others increased the validity of the types of questions used. The researcher attempted to address the deficiencies others have reported. For example, Stang et al., (2009) note that future research should examine the role prior training plays in increased instructional priority being placed on teaching self-determination skills. Therefore the current survey asked teachers to report any prior training or professional development they had received in this area.

Construct validity was addressed by ensuring that the researchers' concept of self-determination was based on Wehmeyer (1996) and his four principles of self-directed behavior. A short statement of what self-determination is was included at the top of the survey. Validity for the qualitative portion of this study was assured by analysis of the data that allowed "natural themes" to emerge as opposed to using pre-conceived themes. The researcher was also aware of her own bias as she dealt with the data.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation was taken into account in this research project through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. The data gathered through the different methods substantiated the results by being consistent. To ensure natural themes emerged and the researcher's bias did not affect the results of the qualitative data, a trained third-party who has educational experience

and was blind to the research questions was asked to review this data. He analyzed the data for common themes. This ensured that the researcher's bias did not color the results.

### **Generalizability**

As this research study had only a small sample and was descriptively analyzed the results are not able to be generalized. The results are specific and are the views of teachers in one specific rural school district. The data cannot be used to draw conclusions about self-determination at other schools or locations.

### **Potential Limitations**

A drawback of this survey is that as the survey is self-reported it is open to a social desirability effect where teachers consider it favorable to highlight the importance of self-determination instruction in their classroom when perhaps they do not teach it very much. This over-reporting may be mitigated by the promise of confidentiality, guarantees of anonymity and benefit to themselves to report it accurately. (O'Hara, Wainwright & Kay, 2011).

In addition the survey is being given to a small sample and there is a possibility of a low rate of return. It may emerge from the study that teachers do not consider the issue of self-determination to be an important topic; their focus may be directed towards other endeavors such as literacy.

### **Educational Significance**

This research is significant as the results of the needs assessment will demonstrate how teachers view self-determination and will provide information on whether it would be beneficial for the researcher to create and/or collect and distribute self-determination resources for the

school district including some research-based professional development. The study may heighten awareness about the importance of teaching self-determination to students with exceptionalities and precipitate gradual change in attitudes and classroom practices that may directly benefit students with special needs. More focused, informed instruction in the components of self-determination may lead to better life outcomes for these students. As noted earlier, if self-determination and its components were taught to all students in the general classroom setting this would benefit all students and may give them the tools to have greater engagement in their education. Potentially, this could be very significant in this rural school district as one goal of its accountability contract is to increase student engagement, lower the school drop-out rate and increase graduation rates. Self-determination could potentially be another tool to use in an attempt to reach these goals. This research will add to the growing body of knowledge about self-determination in elementary schools. It will supply information about Canadian teacher's perspectives, experience and professional development needs in more rural settings. This is significant as most of the studies to date have focused on the United States, urban centers, secondary students and transition issues. This study should throw light on how self-determination is currently being taught and understood at the elementary school level, in a rural setting in British Columbia and how educational decision-makers in this district view this important construct.

## Chapter Four

### Results

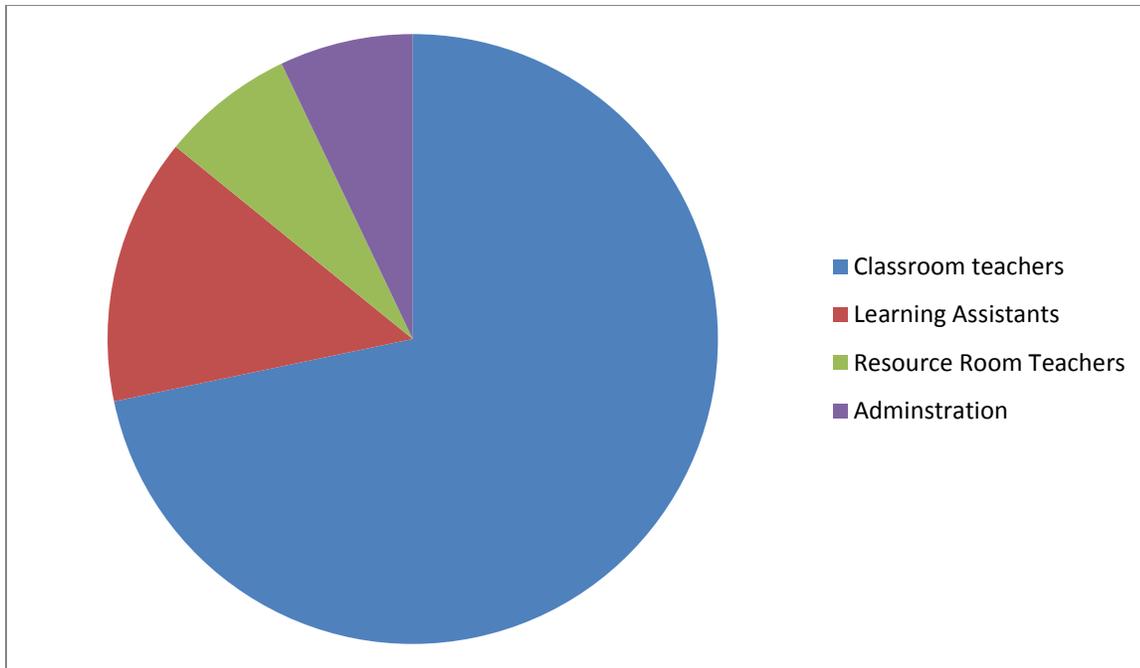
The description of the results of this study is divided into three sections. The first section presents the demographics of the study. The demographics of the population who completed the survey are analyzed by gender, position and by years of teaching experience. The second section presents the results of the analysis of the respondents training on how to teach self-determination skills, the components of self-determination skills they teach and how they teach these skills. The researcher also asked respondents to rate six instructional activities, including self-determination, on a Likert scale to determine how important they rated teaching self-determination skills in relation to other educational activities. Respondents were asked if they thought students should be involved in their IEP meetings and the reason for their choice. The third section of this chapter focuses on the importance of professional development to self-determination skills to try to determine if there is a need for additional resources and/or workshops.

#### **Demographic Information**

The first four questions on the survey were quantitative in nature and sought to determine the demographics of the respondents. It should be noted that 20 teachers were initially approached to participate in the survey. Of these, 15 responded and there were 14 complete responses for a response rate of 70%. Of those who responded, 21% were male, 79% female. Seventy-one percent of the respondents were classroom teachers, 14.29% were Learning Assistants, 7.14% were Resource Room Teachers and 7.14% were in administrative positions.

#### **Figure 1**

#### **Respondents by Position**



**Survey Results**

**Table 1**

**Comparison of Years of Teaching Experience and Teacher Training that Included How to Teach Self-determination Skills**

<b>Length of teaching experience</b>	<b>Frequency among respondents</b>	<b>Teacher training that included information on self-determination skills</b>
<b>0-5 years</b>	14.29%	50%
<b>5-10 years</b>	35.71%	60%
<b>10-15 years</b>	7.14%	0%
<b>15-20 years</b>	7.14%	0%
<b>20-25 years</b>	14.29%	0%
<b>More than 25 years</b>	21.43%	33%

Fifty percent of those who responded had been teaching for less than 10 years despite the fact that the average number of years of experience a teacher has in this school district was reported to be 13 years in 2011/12 (School District data, 2012).

**Did Your Teacher Training Include any Information on how to Teach Self-determination Skills to Students with Exceptionalities?**

Responses to this question were analyzed and coded by years of experience, position, and educational institution, in order to determine if any common themes emerged.

**Table 2**

**Comparison of Years of Experience, Teacher Training Institution, Position and Self-Determination Skills Training.**

<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Teacher training at UVIC</b>	<b>Trained at other Institutions</b>	<b>Classroom teacher</b>	<b>Special Education</b>	<b>Administrator</b>	<b>Received self-determination Training</b>
0-5 years	50%	50%	50%	50%	0%	50%
5-10 years	60%	40%	100%	0%	0%	60%
10-15 years	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
15-20 years	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
20-25 years	50%	50%	50%	0%	50%	0%
25+ years	33%	67%	67%	33%	0%	33%

It was apparent when analyzing the results of the present study that the common factor between teacher's education and courses that included how to teach self-determination was

whether teachers had trained through the University of Victoria in the last ten years. This also included outreach teacher training programs that were a joint venture between the University of Victoria and Okanagan College. In addition, respondents who had trained at the University of Alberta and completed a special education course reported having covered several components of self-determination skills although these were not specified. Respondents who had received their teacher training in the last 10 years in the United States had not received training in how to teach self-determination skills.

The responses were also analyzed to see if those who had Special Education experience or training were more likely to have taken courses that included how to teach self-determination skills. However, only 25% of the Special Education teachers who responded reported having taken courses that included information on how to teach self-determination skills. They had not taken courses that comprehensively covered self-determination skills but had learned how to teach students with exceptionalities about problem solving, goal setting and making choices.

### **Effect of Educational Level on the Likelihood of Having Received Self-Determination**

#### **Training:**

The responses were also analyzed to determine if having taken a Master's degree increased the likelihood of having received training in this area. Forty-three percent of those who responded to the survey had a Master's degree. However, 83% of those who held a Master's degree did not take a course during their training that included information on self-determination.

### **Which Self-determination Skills do you Currently Teach?**

Teachers were given a list of self-determination skills and asked to identify all those they currently teach.

**Table 3****Self-determination Skills Currently Taught**

<b>Self-Determination Skill</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents who teach this skill.</b>
Problem-solving	100%
Making Choices	86%
Decision Making	79%
Goal Setting and Attainment	86%
Self-advocacy and Leadership	50%
Self-management/self –regulation	71%
Self-knowledge	43%

The self-determination skills taught by more than 70% of the respondents were problem-solving, decision making, making choices and goal setting and attainment and self-management. Self-knowledge, self-advocacy and leadership were taught by less than 50% of the respondents.

**Correlation Between Teacher Training that Includes Self-determination Training and the Self-determination Skills Taught.**

The survey responses were also analyzed and coded to see if there was a correlation between having teacher training that included how to teach self-determination to students with exceptionalities and what aspects of self-determination teachers actually taught.

**Table 4****Respondents with Training in Teaching Self-Determination Skills and Skills Taught**

<b>SD skills trained in</b>	<b>Number of SD components trained in</b>	<b>SD Skills taught</b>	<b>Number of SD components taught</b>
Goal setting, problem solving, making choices, self-knowledge, self – advocacy, self-regulation	7	Problem-solving decision, choices, goals, self-advocacy	5
Goal setting, problem solving, making choices, self-knowledge, self – advocacy, self-regulation	7	Goal setting, problem solving, making choices, self-knowledge, self – advocacy, self-regulation	7
Goal setting Problem solving	2	Problem solving, choices, self-regulation	3
Problem solving, goal setting, self-regulation	3	Goal setting, problem solving, making choices, self-knowledge, self – advocacy, self-regulation	7
Goal setting, problem solving, choices	3	Goal setting, problem solving, choices, decisions, self-regulation	5

Respondents who had received comprehensive training on how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities taught 5 or more of those skills.

Respondents who reported having received training in three areas of self-determination also reported teaching 5 or more of these skills. Respondents who had only received training in how to teach goals setting and problem solving taught three components of self-determination.

### **How Educational Position and Years of Experience Affect the Teaching of Self-determination Skills**

The information gained from this question was also analyzed to determine if the educational position a teacher held, or their years of teaching experience affected the likelihood that they taught all seven components of self-determination.

**Category One Administration.** Respondents in this group typically had 20-25 years of teaching experience and had received no instruction during teacher training on how to teach self-determination skills. However, due to the nature of their position they taught all seven components of self-determination skills as part of social awareness in the school although this was not necessarily done using the language of self-determination.

**Category Two Classroom Teachers.** Respondents who were classroom teachers were placed in this category in order of years of experience to determine if there was a correlation between the number of self-determination skills they teach and their years of experience.

**Table 5**

**Classroom Teachers, Years of Experience, Teacher Training in Self-Determination Skills and Self-determination Skills Taught**

<b>Years of Experience Teaching</b>	<b>Percentage who Received Teacher training in SD skills</b>	<b>Average Number of SD skills taught</b>	<b>Percentage Teaching 5 or More SD Skills</b>
0-5 years	100%	5	100%
0-10 years	60%	5.4	60%
10-15 years	0%	3	0%
15-20 years	0%	7	100%
20-25 years	0%	4	0%
25+ years	0%	4	0%

The results indicate that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience were generally more likely to teach more self-determination skills in their classroom; 66% of teachers who had been teaching for less than 10 years taught 5 or more self-determination skills and 25% of teachers who had been teaching for more than 10 years taught five or more self-determination skills.

In the group of teachers who had been teaching for less than 10 years, 75% of those who had received some training on how to teach self-determination skills when attending university taught 5 or more self-determination skills. In comparison, only 50% of teachers in this category who had not received training taught 5 or more self-determination skills.

**Category 3 Special Education Teachers**

**Table 6**

**Special Education Teachers, Years of Teaching Experience, Teacher Training in Self-Determination Skills and the Number of Self-Determination Skills Taught.**

<b>Years of Experience Teaching</b>	<b>Teacher training in SD skills</b>	<b>Number of SD skills taught</b>
0-5 years	No	3
25 years	No	5
25+ years	Yes	5

Special education teachers, who had received teacher training in how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities, did not teach more self-determination skills than other special education teachers with the same amount of experience. The number of years of experience seemed to be a factor in the number of self-determination skills taught. Special education teachers with 25 or more years' experience reported teaching 5 or more of the component skills of self-determination. In comparison, a special education teacher with 0-5 years of experience reported teaching only 3 self-determination skills.

**How do you Teach Self-determination Skills?**

To analyze the responses to this question, the components of self-determination skills (problem-solving, making choices, decision making, goal setting, self-regulation, self-advocacy and self-knowledge) were used as categories then the individual responses from the survey were typed verbatim to see if any common themes emerged. Responses were also placed in three categories. 14% of the respondents reported only teaching these skills informally as a response to conflict resolution, while 29% reported that they only taught them formally as requirements of

the curriculum. One teacher noted that the Grade 6/7 Health and Careers curriculum covers goal setting and making choices. She used SMART goal criteria to instruct her students (goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, responsive and timely). Other teachers noted that goal setting is academically related and used to better writing skills or in Accelerated Reading. Other teachers planned a goal setting unit as part of New Year resolutions.

However, 57% of the respondents noted that they teach these skills in a formal, planned as well as an informal manner. As one respondent stated “I teach these both through the curriculum and when teachable moments happen.” This was a common theme especially for teaching problem solving and decision-making. The dual nature of how this teaching occurs was clearly expressed by one teacher who wrote, “I teach problem-solving through our class meetings as well as have students identify issues in the class that may be personal conflicts or problems related to other issues such as the environment. We look at both sides of the issue, ask questions to clarify, then come up with possible solutions.” She taught these skills in a planned way but also as a response to issues that arose in the classroom. It was apparent that a large proportion of self-determination skill teaching has an element of structure but is also very informal, unstructured and responsive to issues within the classroom. For example, another teacher stated, “I may address one of the skills as a result of some issue that has come up in a book or when one student has a problem and has raised it with me”.

The grade level a teacher taught may also affect the self-determination skills that they teach. For example, there were only two respondents who commented on how they taught self-regulation skills; one of these was a kindergarten teacher.

## Programs and Self-determination Skills

Table 7

**Programs Used to Teach Self-Determination Skills, Self-Determination Skills Addressed, Number Using the Program, Grade Level, or School Wide.**

Program Used	Self-Determination Skills Addressed	Number using program	Grade Level	School Wide
Sting – social responsibility program	Problem solving, making choices, decision making, self-regulation, self-awareness, self-knowledge	13 classrooms	K-7	school wide
Tribes Culture	Problem solving	9 classrooms	K-7	school wide
DARE (Drug and alcohol)	Several- making good choices, self-knowledge, decision making	1 teacher	5-7	
Friends	Anxiety, self-knowledge	1 teacher		
WITS	Problem solving	2 teachers	primary	
Care Kit	Self-advocacy	1 teacher	Grade 2	
EBS		1 teacher		
Reality Therapy		1 teacher		

The STING program was the only program that covered a majority of self-determination skills and was used on a school-wide basis. This social responsibility program was discussed at assemblies and posters were displayed in hallways and classroom. Classroom teachers were also expected to reinforce STING attributes in their own classroom. The Tribe's Culture was another

school wide program that dealt with problem solving. This program was used at the local First Nation School to teach and respond to problem-solving. Although 50% of the respondents reported using programs to cover aspects of self-determination no teacher reported how they planned to cover all the skills.

It is noteworthy that although 43% of teachers reported teaching self-knowledge no respondents explicitly reported how they taught these skills although they are addressed through programs such as DARE and the Friends program.

### **Ordering Instructional Activities**

Respondents were provided with a list of instructional activities and were asked to place them in order with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important activity.

**Table 8**

#### **Likert Scale Ordering Instructional Activities.**

<b>Instructional Activity</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social Skills	29%	29%	21%	14%	0%	7%
Self-determination skills	36%	14%	27%	7%	7%	7%
Academic Skills	43%	36%	0%	7%	7%	7%
The Importance of Healthy Living	7%	14%	29%	21%	21%	7%
Study Skills	8%	31%	8%	15%	23%	15%
Art and Creativity	0%	21%	14%	29%	7%	29%

The data gathered from this survey seems to indicate that the respondents placed a higher value on academic, self-determination and social skills. However, a close review of the data revealed several issues that compromise the results. Although the participants were instructed to order the items, several had given more than one category a score of 1.

**How Important do you Think it is to Teach These Components of Self-determination to Students with Exceptionalities at Elementary School?**

**Table 9**

**The Importance of Teaching Self-Determination Skills**

Self-determination skill	Vitally Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Goal Setting	57%	43%	0%	0
Decision making	93%	7%	0%	0
Problem solving	86%	14%	0%	0
Self-advocacy	50%	50%	0%	0
Self-knowledge	57%	36%	7%	0
Choice-making	79%	21%	0%	0
Self-regulation	64%	29%	7%	0

The results indicate that decision-making, problem solving and choice making were the highest rated self-determination skills that were vitally important to teach to elementary students with exceptionalities. Self-regulation was considered to be more important than goal setting with 64% of respondents considering self-regulation vitally important. The only two self-determination skills to be rated as somewhat important were self-advocacy and self-knowledge.

**Do you Think it is Beneficial for Elementary Students with Special Needs to be Involved in their IEP Meetings or Educational Planning?**

The responses to this question were placed in two categories, those who agree students should be involved in their IEP meetings and those who did not. Sixty-four percent of respondents agreed that students with special needs should be involved in their IEP meetings. Those who responded positively saw it as students taking ownership of their education. However, this was frequently qualified by the need for students to be able to benefit from the process. For example, 56% of respondents who agreed students should be involved in their IEP meetings qualified their response by indicating that involvement should be age appropriate and students should be old enough to benefit from participation and 56% of the positive respondents stated that it was important for students to know the goals of their IEPs. “It helps them to learn what their goals are and how these goals will be supported and what they need to be doing in order to help themselves in their educational and social journey through life.”

Of the 29% of respondents who responded negatively, 40% did not think students should be involved in their IEP meetings under any circumstances. One teacher stated “These meetings are a place to discuss matters by professionals with the students’ parents/guardians.” Another echoed these sentiments “I don’t think students should be a part of the IEP meeting because we need to speak very frankly and this may not be beneficial to the student.” However, 60% of those who opposed student participation in their IEP meetings qualified their responses. For example, one respondent stated “ There is not a black and white yes/no answer to this –depends on factors such as the students understanding and ability to contribute to the meeting as well as their level of self-awareness and what they require to move forward. For students that can constructively participate in determining the direction of their IEP, then yes, they should be involved. For others, involvement may not be desirable or beneficial. “Forty percent of respondents who had given a negative response to this question expressed concern about the current model of IEP

meeting being used as it is not ideal for student participation and advocated a more student-based approach. They expressed concern that “The IEP meeting as it currently runs is not the place for a student. In many cases the student would not understand the discussion and could possibly misunderstand and become discouraged. However, a student based IEP meeting is a good idea!”

### **The Effect of Self-determination Training, Experience and Position on Teacher’s Attitude**

The responses to this question were also analyzed to see if there was a correlation between a positive response to students participating in their IEP meetings and teacher training in self-determination skills, years of experience or position.

**Table 10**

#### **Comparison Between Student Involvement in IEP Meetings, Teacher Training, Experience and Position**

<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Percentage with Training in Self-Determination Skills</b>	<b>CT</b>	<b>LA</b>	<b>Admin</b>	<b>Positive Response to Student Participation in IEP Meetings?</b>
0-5 years	50%	50%	50%		50%
5-10 years	60%	100%			60%
10-15 years	0%	100%			100%
15-20 years	0%	100%			100%
20-25 years	0%	50%		50%	0%
25+ years	33%	33.33%	66.66%		100%

When the responses were analyzed 60% of respondents who had received instruction on how to teach self-determination skills during their training stated that students should be involved in IEP meetings. This was slightly lower than the positive response rate for the whole sample that was 64%. The number of years of experience a teacher had did not seem to affect

their response to this question. Fifty-seven percent of respondents with less than 10 years of experience and 60% of respondents with more than 20 years of experience thought students should attend IEP meetings.

An analysis of the results by position showed that 70% of classroom teachers and 67% of the Special Education teachers thought that students should be involved in IEP meetings. Interestingly, it was the most experienced Special Education teachers who made these statements. Respondents who were Administrator's gave a negative response to this question but all qualified their answer. They stated that it would be a good idea if it was beneficial for the students to attend.

### **Where Would it be Most Beneficial to Teach these Skills to Students with Exceptionalities at the Elementary School Level?**

When responding to this question 93% of teachers believed that these skills should be taught on a school-wide basis, 71% believed they should also be taught in the classroom. Seven percent of teachers thought that these skills should be addressed at high school and 21% thought they should be taught in the resource room only.

### **Have you Participated in any Professional Development on Teaching Self-determination skills?**

**Table 11****Area of Professional Development, Workshop or On-line Format.**

<b>Area of Professional Development</b>	<b>Workshop format</b>	<b>On-line</b>
MAPs course	yes	
Reality Therapy	yes	
Writing workshop, self-regulation workshop	yes	
Self-regulation training		Yes
Self-regulation training	yes	
Self-regulation training	yes	
WITS program		Yes
Engaging reluctant learners		Yes

Fifty-seven percent of the survey respondents had participated in some form of self-determination professional development activities while 43% had not. Self-regulation was the most commonly addressed self-determination skill with 50% of the respondents having attended a workshop on this. Sixty-two percent of this professional development was completed in a workshop format and 38% was completed on-line.

**What Areas of Self-determination Would you be Interested in Receiving Professional Development on?**

One aim of this research was to determine if there was a need for self-determination resources or professional development in this area. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents

requested professional development on self-regulation, 27% on problem-solving. Fourteen percent of teachers responded that they would like to learn how to help students with exceptionalities or lower cognitive abilities learn these skills. “Teaching decision making and problem solving skills to children with ODD, ADHD, FAS or others who fail to understand this concept.” Nine and a half percent requested professional development on teaching leadership and 9.5% on decision making. Twenty-seven percent of respondents requested professional development on strategies to teach all components of self-determination. One teacher reported that she is “very interested in self-determination and would like to build a toolbox of authentic ways to lead students into being more self-determined.”

### **Summary**

This chapter highlighted the demographics of the sample who responded to the internet survey. It examined the correlation between teacher training, experience, position and how this relates to the self-determination components that elementary teachers are currently teaching to students with exceptionalities. This chapter also examined the value placed on self-determination skills compared to other instructional activities and how teachers are teaching these skills to students with exceptionalities. This chapter also analyzed respondents’ perspectives to determine the importance they place on teaching different components of self-determination to students with exceptionalities at elementary school. Respondents’ perspectives on students with exceptionalities involvement in their educational planning and where these skills should be taught were examined. Past professional development on teaching self-determination skills was reviewed and respondents’ requests for professional development on self-determination skills noted. The final chapter presents discussion of these results, issues, limitations and areas for further research.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

The content of this chapter begins with a discussion of the present study. Information about teacher training in self-determination skills is discussed. Respondents' perspectives towards self-determination skills is discussed first and then the discrepancy between the high value they place on these skills and how they are currently taught in elementary school is addressed. Next the strengths and limitations of this study are considered. Finally the chapter concludes with directions for further research and some educational implications.

### **Teacher Training**

Previous research has cited lack of teacher training in how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities as a significant barrier to teaching these skills in the elementary school setting, (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Cho et al., (2010) note that 35% of general educators and 27% of special educators cited a lack of training in this area as a barrier to teaching self-determination skills. On initial review the present study supports these findings as 60% of classroom teachers and 67% of special education teachers reported having no training in this area. However, in the present study the respondents were not asked if they considered lack of training a barrier to teaching self-determination, but were asked if they had any teacher training in this area. It appears that respondents in the present study may not consider their lack of training a barrier to teaching self-determination skills. In order to make a direct comparison exactly the same question would need to be asked.

Cho et al.'s (2010) study took place in the United States with only 19% of respondents coming from rural areas. The present study took place in a rural location in British Columbia. It may be the case that due to IDEA initiatives in the states there is more awareness about self-

determination and this may account for the fact that 60% of general educators who responded were familiar with the construct. In comparison, in the present study, educators were not directly asked if they were familiar with this construct; several respondents anecdotally commented that they had never heard of self-determination before.

Increased awareness of self-determination as an ideal for individuals with disabilities may also translate into more teacher training programs that focus on how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities. Thoma, Baker and Saddler, (2002) found that 54% of faculty surveyed at universities in the United States included self-determination instruction in their teacher education courses. However, in the present study only 36% of participants had experienced training in this area during their teacher education programs. Of the 7 universities that respondents attended, 29% of the respondents reported that included self-determination instruction in their courses. In the present survey 60% of classroom teachers who had received this training attended the University of Victoria, or its outreach joint venture with Okanagan College, within the last ten years.

### **Post Graduate Training and Self-determination Skills**

In the present study 25% of Special Educators had some training in how to teach self-determination skills and this was limited to problem solving and decision-making. Forty-three percent of the respondents had a Master's degree. However, 83% of these post-graduate courses did not include instruction on how to teach self-determination skills.

### **Self-determination Skills Currently Being Taught in Elementary School**

The present study adds weight to previous research that has shown the self-determination skills most likely to be taught in the elementary classroom are problem solving, goal setting,

choices and decision-making. These skills were also rated highly by the respondents in the current study. This may be because they are skills that are taught by necessity in response to classroom issues or in the case of goal setting; they complement other areas of the curriculum. So, for instance, goal setting may be used to improve writing skills or to motivate students to read in the Accelerated Reader program.

In the current study 43% of respondents reported teaching self-knowledge and advocacy yet not one individual specified exactly how they taught this skill. Self-knowledge and self-advocacy were the least likely self-determination skills to be taught by respondents in this location. In addition, respondents did not consider this an important self-determination skill to be taught at elementary school. This substantiates the findings of Stang et al., (2009) that indicated the self-determination skills least often reported as being taught in elementary school classrooms were self-advocacy, and self-knowledge. However, it could be argued that this is a foundational skill that is needed to boost resiliency and helps students with exceptionalities to persevere when they meet obstacles. There may be several factors that affect teacher's attitudes to self-knowledge. They may not feel comfortable teaching students about their disability as they are concerned with the students feeling stigmatized in the regular classroom. It may be the case that they believe this is better dealt with by the school counselor if there is a perceived need, or by the resource room teacher. Elementary teachers may believe that students with exceptionalities develop self-awareness and self-realization as part of the typical development process their peers experience and that it doesn't need to be specifically targeted in instruction.

### **Factors that Affect the Teaching of Self-determination Skills**

The results of the present research study show that several factors affect how many self-determination components are taught by elementary school teachers. Seventy-five percent of teachers who had been teaching for less than 10 years, and had received instruction on self-determination skills during their training programs, taught 5 or more components of self-determination. In comparison, only 50% of teachers in this category, without training, taught 5 or more self-determination components. Only 25% of classroom teachers who had been teaching for more than 10 years taught 5 or more self-determination skills. None of them had received formal training during their teacher education. Therefore, this would suggest that there is a correlation between having received formal training in how to teach these skills and how many self-determination skills are taught. It appears that in order to improve the amount of self-determination skills taught in elementary schools, in this rural location, instruction in how to teach the components of self-determination needs to become an important aspect of local teacher training programs. It could also be argued that increased professional development opportunities in this area would support current teachers and increase the components of self-determination that are being taught.

### **Special Education Teachers and Self-determination**

In the present study 67% of special education teachers reported teaching 5 or more of the self-determination skill components. Special education teachers who had received training did not teach any more components than their colleagues in this group. The number of years of experience was a factor in the number of self-determination skills special education teachers taught. Those who had taught for more than 20 years taught 5 of the 7 self-determination skills, while less experienced colleagues only taught 3 skills. This may be a product of how closely they work with students with exceptionalities and their responsiveness to their needs.

### **Self-determination Skills Compared to Other Instructional Activities**

Respondents of the present study were asked to order a list of instructional activities, including self-determination skills, on a Likert Scale. The data gathered from the survey seemed to suggest that elementary school teachers place a higher value on academic, self-determination and social skills. However, these results appear to be compromised as several participants had given more than one activity the same value rather than putting them in order. It also appeared that some of the respondents had confused the order of the items. One individual had placed academic skills as the lowest priority and it is unlikely, although possible, that an educator would do this. This question may have also inadvertently led respondents. This became apparent when one individual anecdotally reported to the researcher that after she had completed the question she realized what the correct response should have been. As the study is centered on self-determination she intuited that this should have been given a high priority. Therefore, the results would need to be re-visited to substantiate potential findings.

### **Discrepancy Between High Value Placed on Self-Determination Skills and Reality**

Cho, Wehmeyer & Kingston, (2010) noted a discrepancy between the high value that elementary school teachers place on self-determination skills and the amount of time that they spend teaching them. In the present study teachers clearly place a high value on teaching self-determination skills. Respondents stated that it was either vitally important or important to teach 5 of the 7 self-determination skills at the elementary school level. In this study respondents were not directly asked how much time they spend teaching self-determination skills, however, it can be concluded or assumed from their responses about how they teach these skills that this discrepancy also exists. The present study found that 57% of respondents taught these skills both

in a planned proactive manner and as an informal reactive response to events in their classroom. Some skills, such as goal setting and decision making, were taught in a structured way in conjunction with other curriculum requirements. For example, goal setting was taught as an integral part of instruction aimed at improving writing or as part of the Grade 6/7 Health and Careers curriculum. Programs that were used to teach self-determination skills only addressed a few of the skills, such as the WITS program that deals with conflict. The exception to this was the STING program, a school wide program that is used to address social responsibility. None of the respondents indicated a structured plan to address all these skills.

In the present study 71% of the respondents noted that they also used an informal instructional approach to these skills. Problem solving, choices and decision making were frequently taught as a response to playground conflict and not in a structured manner. This supports the findings of Stang et al.,(2009), Mason, Field & Sawilowsky, (2004), who found a discrepancy between the high value elementary teachers place on these skills and how they are actually taught, with 70% of teachers choosing an informal, unsystematic instructional approach.

### **IEP Meetings**

Previous research has shown that there is a positive association between student participation in IEP meetings and achievement over time (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010). Despite the benefits, a third of teachers in a national survey did not include students in their IEP's (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000). Although examining student participation in their educational planning is beyond the scope of the current study, respondents were asked their opinion on whether students at elementary school should participate in IEP meetings. The primary researcher suspected that there could be a correlation between having received training

in how to teach self-determination skills, years of experience and a positive response. However, when the responses were analyzed, only 60% of respondents who had been taught about self-determination in their education courses stated that students should be involved in their IEP. This was slightly lower than the 64% positive response of the sample as a whole.

In the present study 64% of the respondents agreed that students with exceptionalities should be involved in their IEP meetings. Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated that this should be age appropriate and students should be able to benefit from the process. Fifty-six percent of elementary teachers who thought students should be involved in their IEP meetings stated that it was important for them to be aware of their IEP goals and involved in the goal setting process. Assessment for learning and goal setting is a school wide focus at the school where the majority of respondents teach and this may have been a factor in the responses.

In the present study 60% of those who gave a negative response to students attending their IEP meetings also qualified their response. They stated that if it was beneficial or the format of the IEP meeting was more student orientated then involvement should be encouraged. Therefore, it would appear that elementary teachers at this rural location would welcome student participation in their educational planning if the IEP system itself was modified to become more student centered. This is important as ownership and involvement in your educational program is an important aspect of being a self-determined individual.

### **Limitations**

The current study has several important limitations. As it was conducted in one rural school district in the interior of British Columbia the findings apply only to this location.

### **Sample**

The results of the current study are limited by the sample of participants that responded to the survey. Although it was hoped that three schools would participate in the survey, only one principal responded to approaches about the survey and invited the researcher to speak at a staff meeting. This can be attributed to several factors. A teacher's job action played a significant role in the timing of the survey with no staff meetings being held prior to April. This meant that there was a back log of items needing to be addressed and the researcher was not able to address the staff. This may have been a factor in reluctance to participate. The job action also meant that the survey had to be completed at a time of year when teachers were very busy preparing for the end of the year, report cards and field trips. This made it less likely that they would be keen to participate in a fifteen minute survey. Although it is hard to quantify, the job action also created an atmosphere of less participation and co-operation that was evidenced by initiatives such as only working bell to bell. As a result of the job action, Administrators may have been reluctant to ask staff to participate in the study in addition to their regular duties.

This resulted in the majority of participants being drawn from one school or being known by the researcher. Therefore, the sample was not random as it was composed of the researcher's colleagues whose response was more likely as they wanted to be supportive. Another factor that reduced the independence of the sample was the fact that a large proportion of respondents held Master's degrees themselves and may have been prompted to respond due to empathy. In addition the sample size was small with only fourteen respondents to the survey. Therefore, no generalizations can be drawn from this survey. It represents the unique views of a small group of teachers at one or more locations in a specific rural school district.

## **Survey**

The survey instrument itself proved to be a limiting factor. One question that included a Likert Scale did not have clear enough instructions, or they were not always followed. The intent of the researcher was to have respondents order instructional activities from most to least important. The goal was to see how important teachers believed self-determination skills to be relative to other instructional activities. However, several teachers gave more than one activity the same priority rather than ordering them or confused the order of the scale. As a result this question did not yield useful information about the priority teachers place on self-determination skills relative to other instructional activities.

The survey instrument also had some other limitations. In one of the questions, teachers were asked to name the exceptionalities they had taught but many of them did not answer the second part of the question that asked them how this affected their teaching of self-determination skills. Therefore, this question failed to yield any significant data.

It is possible that social desirability might have influenced teachers as they completed the question on which self-determination skills they taught. They may have believed that it is the “right thing to do” to teach these skills.

A further limitation of the survey is that its findings are not actually substantiated by teacher’s activities within the classroom. It would be interesting to observe how these skills are taught in reality as often what we plan may be altered to respond to the needs of the moment.

### **Significance of Findings**

This study is valuable for several reasons. It has achieved one of the initial objectives which was to increase awareness of self-determination skills. A common theme that emerged during discussions was that few of the respondents had previously heard of the term “self-

determination.” This resulted in several “water cooler” conversations, with the researcher and independently. Individuals noted that they became interested in the topic and searched for further information on the internet. Therefore, the study did have the effect of opening dialogue and increasing awareness about this very important issue in the elementary school setting. This may benefit elementary students with exceptionalities in the long term.

This study is significant as it adds valuable information to the growing research on the perspectives of elementary school teachers about the teaching of self-determination skills. Prior research has focused on the United States or large urban centers so a study on the perspectives of rural school teachers is important and may act as a catalyst to future research in rural locations.

The results of this study showed that self-determination skills, at this location, are taught in a somewhat haphazard way at the elementary school level. In addition, most respondents were keen to learn more about self-determination skills and noted that they would be interested in participating in professional development activities centered on how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities. Although respondents cited some programs that are currently being used to teach aspects of self-determination skills it may be beneficial to locate more resources to teach these skills at the elementary school level in tandem with a series of workshops. If students with exceptionalities could be taught self-determination skills within the regular classroom and encouraged to practice these skills this would undoubtedly benefit their educational outcomes as well as those of their typically developing peers.

### **Direction for Future Investigation**

It would be beneficial to extend the current survey, with the changes outlined above, to other elementary school teachers in the school district to gain information about their

perspectives and how they are currently teaching self-determination skills. This would ascertain if there is a district wide need and interest in more resources and professional development to teach self-determination skills to individuals with exceptionalities.

### **Implications**

The current study illustrates that elementary school educators, who responded to the survey, in this particular rural location, place a high value on self-determination skills. Many of them did not receive training on how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities. The present study indicates there is a correlation between having received formal training in how to teach these skills and how many self-determination skills are taught. Therefore, in order to improve the amount of self-determination skills taught in elementary schools, in this rural location, instruction in self-determination components needs to become an important aspect of local teacher training programs. It could also be argued that increased professional development opportunities in this area may also produce the same effect and support current elementary educators.

Despite the high value elementary teachers in this rural location place on self-determination skills, the majority teach these skills as an informal response to teachable moments that arise in the classroom in addition to using some unsystematic, planned activities. At present there is not a comprehensive resource being used at this location by a large number of educators, programs are unsystematic and address one or two skills. Wehmeyer, (2007) noted that for self-determination to be an educational outcome what is needed is a purposeful instructional program that co-ordinates learning experiences over the span of educational experiences. I think it would be valuable to develop a research-based, best practices scope and sequence to teach self-

determination skills during the elementary school years. It would be very beneficial if this was teamed up with a comprehensive resource package for each grade, professional development for teachers, and the creation of a student friendly IEP process. This would provide students with special needs the opportunity to develop the self-determination skills they will need as adults over the course of their education experience.

## References.

- Algozzine, B., Browder, D., Karvonen, M., Test, D., Wood, W., (2001). Effects of interventions to promote self-determination for individuals with disabilities. *Review of Educational Research, 71*, 219-277.
- Barnard-Brak, L., Lechtenberger, D., (2010). Student IEP participation and academic achievement across time. *Remedial and Special Education, Vol. 31, No. 5* pp. 343-349.
- BC Ministry of Education, Governance and Legislation Branch, Statement of Education Policy Order. Retrieved from [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/d/oic\\_1280-89.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/d/oic_1280-89.pdf)
- Bronfenbrenner, U., (1994). Ecological Models of Human Development. *International Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Oxford: Elsevier.
- Campbell-Whatley, G., (2008). Teaching students about their disabilities: Increasing self-determination skills and self-concept. *International Journal of Special Education, Vol. 23, No. 2*, p.137-143.
- Cho, H., Wehmeyer, M., Kingston, N., (2010). Elementary teachers' knowledge and use of interventions and barriers to promoting student self-determination. *The Journal of Special Education, XX(X)* pp.1-8.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education 5E*. Routledge. Retrieved from <http://lib.myilibrary.com.ezproxy.viu.ca/Open.aspx?id=32332&src=2>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Facilitating optimal motivation and psychological well-being across life's domains. *Canadian Psychology, 49*(1), 14-23.
- Eccles, J., & Wigfield, A., Motivational beliefs, values and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology, 2002. 53* 109-32.
- Edmonds, K., & Crichton, S. (2008). Finding ways to teach to students with FASD: A research study. *International Journal of Special Education, Vol. 23, No. 1*, p. 54-73.
- Field, S., & Hoffman, A., (1994). Development of a model for self-determination. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals. Vol. 17*, p 159-169.
- Field, S., & Hoffman, A., (2002). Preparing youth to exercise self-determination: Quality indicators of school environments that promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills and beliefs related to self-determination. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2*, p 114-119.

- Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M., (1998). Self-determination for persons with disabilities: A position statement of the division on career development and transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 21, 113-128.
- Fuchs, L., Fuchs, D., Karns, K., Hamlett, C., Katzaroff, M., Dutka, S., (1997). Effects of task focused goals on low achieving students with and without learning disabilities. *American Educational Research Journal*, Fall 1997, Vol. 34, No. 3 pp513-543.
- Glago, Mastropieri, Scruggs, (2009). Improving problem solving of elementary students with mild disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 30, No. 6, pp.372-380.
- Heller, T., Schindler, A., Palmer, S., Wehmeyer, M., Parent, W., Jenson, R., Geringer, W., Bacon, A., O'Hara, D., (2011). Self-determination across the life-span: Issues and gaps. *Exceptionality*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, pp. 31-45.
- Johnson, B., Onwuegbuzie, A.J., (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 33, No. 7, p. 14-26.
- Lindstrom, L., Doren, B., Miesch, J. (2011). Waging a living: Career development and long-term employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 77, No. 4, pp.423-434.
- Martin, Mithaug, Cox, Peterson, Van Dyke, Cash, (2003). Increasing self-determination: Teaching students to plan, work, evaluate and adjust. *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 69, Issue 4, pp. 431-447.
- Mason, C., Field, S., Sawilowsky, S., (2004). Implementation of self-determination activities and student participation in IEPs. *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 70, No. 4, pp. 461-451.
- McDougall, J., Evans, J., Baldwin, P., (2010). The importance of self-determination to perceived quality of life for youth and young adults with chronic conditions and disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 252-260.
- Mithaug, D., Martin, J., Agran. M., (1987). Adaptability instruction: The goal of transitional programming. *Exceptional Children*, 53, pp.500-505.
- Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., Knokey, A.M., & Shaver, D. (2010). Comparisons across time of the outcomes of youth with disabilities up to 4 years after high school. A Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.  
[www.nlts2.org/reports/2010\\_09/nlts2\\_report\\_2010\\_09\\_complete.pdf](http://www.nlts2.org/reports/2010_09/nlts2_report_2010_09_complete.pdf).
- O'Hara, M., Wainwright, J., Kay, J. (2011) *Successful Dissertations: The complete guide for education and childhood studies students*. Retrieved from Ebook library.  
<http://www.VIU.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=661022>

- Pennell, R., 2001. Self-determination and self-advocacy. Shifting the power. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 223-227
- Reid, R., Trout A., Schwartz, M., (2005). Self-regulation interventions for children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Exceptional Children*, 71, pp. 361-377.
- Rumrill, P. (2011). *Research in special education: Design methods and applications*. Charles C. Thomas. Retrieved from Ebook  
<http://www.VIU.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=631182>.
- Sands, D., & Doll, B., 1996. Fostering Self-Determination is a Developmental Task. *The Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 30, No. 1 p. 58-76.
- School District No. 53 (Okanagan Similkameen) District Achievement Plan 2011/12. Retrieved from <http://www.sd53.bc.ca/district/documents/Districts>.
- Schreiner, M., (2007). Effective self-advocacy: What students and special educators need to know. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp. 300-304.
- Stang, K., Carter, E., Lane, K., Pierson, M., (2009). Perspectives of general and special educators on fostering self-determination in elementary and middle schools. *The Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 94-106.
- Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, (2006). [Data file]. Retrieved from [www.statcan.gc.ca/imbd-bmdi/3251-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imbd-bmdi/3251-eng.htm).
- Thoma, C., Nathanson, R., Baker, S., Tamura, R., (2002). Self-determination. What do special educators know and where do they learn it? *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 242-247.
- Thoma, C., Baker, S., Saddler, S., (2002). Self-determination in teacher education. A model to facilitate transition planning for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 82-89.
- Todd, T., (2007). Increasing physical activity and self-determination for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Thesis submitted to McGill University.
- Walker, H., Calkins, C., Wehmeyer, m., Walker, L., Bacon, A., Palmer, S., Jesien, G., Nygren, M., Heller, T., Gotto, G., Abery, B., Johnson, D., (2011). A socio-ecological approach to promoting self-determination. *Exceptionality*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, pp. 6-18.
- Wappett, M., (2002). Self-determination and disability rights: lessons from the women's movement. *Journal of Disabilities Policy Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 120-125.
- Wehmeyer, M. (1996a.) Self-determination as an educational outcome: Why is it important to children, youth and adults with disabilities? In Sands, D. & Wehmeyer, M. (Eds) *Self-*

- determination across the lifespan. Independence and choice for people with disabilities* (p17-36). Baltimore,MD: Paul Brookes.
- Wehmeyer, M., 1999. A Functional model of self-determination: Describing development and implementing instruction. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, Vol. 14, No. 1, p 53-61.
- Wehmeyer, M., (2007). Promoting self-determination in students with developmental disabilities. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/viu/docDetail.action?docID=10201015>
- Wehmeyer, M., Agran & M., Hughes, C., (2000). A national survey of teacher's promotion of self-determination skills and student directed learning. *Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 34, p58-68.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Palmer, S.,(2003). Adult outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities three-years after high school: The impact of self-determination. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* Vol. 38, No. 2, p 131-144.
- Wehmeyer, M. & Palmer, S., 2003. Promoting self-determination in early elementary school: Teaching self-regulated problem-solving and goal-setting skills. *Remedial and Special Education*, 24: 115–126.
- Wehmeyer, M., Palmer, S., Shogren, K., Williams-Diehm, K., Soukup, J., (2010). Establishing a causal relationship between intervention to promote self-determination and enhanced student self-determination. *The Journal of Special Education*, XX(X), pp.1-16.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-Determination and Positive Adult Outcomes: A Follow-up Study of Youth with Mental Retardation or Learning Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 245-255.

## Appendix A

# SELF-DETERMINATION Power Point for Staff Meeting Presentation

### INTRODUCTION

- I am currently completing a Master of Education in Special Education through Vancouver Island University.
- To fulfill course requirements I need to complete a research project.
- My research project involves an on-line teacher survey.

### WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?

- Being self-determined means that an individual is able to independently take actions that affect their quality of life.
- Skills that support self-determination include

Goal-setting Self-regulation  
Problem-solving Self-advocacy  
Choice-making Decision-making

### THE GOALS OF MY RESEARCH

- To see how self-determination is currently being taught to students with exceptionalities in elementary schools.
- To determine if there is a need for more resources to teach self-determination skills.
- To determine if it would be beneficial to focus some professional development in this area.

### WHY I AM INTERESTED IN SELF-DETERMINATION

- High levels of self-determination are predictors of positive life-outcomes for students with exceptionalities (Wehmeyer and Schwartz, 1997)
- Goal of the education system is to enable students to gain employment and be independent. Students with exceptionalities show less self-determination skills than their peers therefore these skills need to be explicitly taught. (McDougall et al., 2010).

- Traditionally the focus has been self-determination at the high school level because of the transition to the work force. Research has shown it may be more appropriate to teach it throughout a student's school career. (Sands and Doll, 1996).
- Research has highlighted the fact that few teacher training programs prepare teachers to instruct self-determination skills, (Thoma, Baker, Saddler, 2002). I am interested to learn if there is a need for more professional development in this area.

## PARTICIPATION

- Principals, special education teachers and classroom teachers are being asked to participate in an on-line survey.
- The estimated completion time for this survey is under ten minutes.
- The information collected will include years of teaching experience, information on your teacher training, how you teach self-determination skills and professional development in this area.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE?

- The information you provide will be kept anonymous and confidential
- Only the researcher and my supervisor will be allowed to see the information.
- Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results
- The survey data will be protected by the terms and conditions of Fluid Surveys.
- All research data will be stored on a computer disk in a locked cabinet and destroyed three years after collection.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

How teachers will benefit:

- If there is a need for professional development or resources in this area it may be possible to create some workshops, resources to assist teachers.

How students will benefit:

- An aim of this study is to increase awareness about the importance of self-determination skills for students with exceptionalities.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Please don't hesitate to contact me or my supervisor if you require clarification or have questions.

Nicky Adam

250 488-1526

Mary Lindsay  
Vancouver Island University  
(250)753-3245 Ext 2690

You may withdraw from this project at any time.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

- An email will be sent to school personnel through the school district email system.
- This email consists of a letter of consent to participate in the survey.
- The email has a link that enables you to access and complete the survey.

## REFERENCES

- McDougall, J., Evans, J., Baldwin, P., (2010). The Importance of Self-Determination to Perceived Quality of Life for Youth and Young Adults With Chronic Conditions and Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 252-260.
- Sands, D., & Doll, B., 1996. Fostering Self-Determination is a Developmental Task. *The Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 30, No. 1 p. 58-76.
- Thoma, C., Nathanson, R., Baker, S., Tamura, R., (2002). Self-Determination. What Do Special Educators Know and Where do They Learn It? *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 242-247.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-Determination and Positive Adult Outcomes: A Follow-up Study of Youth with Mental Retardation or Learning Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 245-255.

## Appendix B Letter of Consent and Survey

# Self-determination

---

## Consent to Participate

### Terms and Conditions:

Faculty of Education,  
Vancouver Island University,  
Nanaimo Campus,  
900 Fifth Street,  
Nanaimo, B.C.  
V9R 5S5

Name of Researcher:

Nicky Adam  
Faculty of Education  
Vancouver Island University  
(250) 488-1526  
Email: [nickyadam@stumail.viu.ca](mailto:nickyadam@stumail.viu.ca)

Name of Supervisor:

Mary Lindsay,  
Faculty of Education  
Vancouver Island University Phone:  
Phone: (250) 753-3245 Ext. 2690  
Email: [Mary.Lindsay@viu.ca](mailto:Mary.Lindsay@viu.ca)

**Title of Project: Self-Determination: Are we Teaching it to Students with Exceptionalities in Elementary Schools, and if Not Why Not?**

This consent form is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The University of Vancouver Island Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how self-determination skills, such as goal setting, problem solving, decision-making and self-awareness are being taught to elementary school students with exceptionalities. This study is a needs assessment to determine if more resources or professional development are needed in this area. Classroom teachers, special needs teachers and principals are being invited to participate in the survey. Your input would be welcomed and valued.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Participants will be asked to complete a short on-line survey with twenty questions. The estimated completion time is under ten minutes. Participation by individuals is entirely voluntary, individuals may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study or may withdraw from the

study at any time. If you would also like to participate in semi-structured interview and provide more in-depth comments, please identify yourself on the survey.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

This is a needs based study that seeks to determine if there is a shortage of professional development and resources to teach self-determination skills to elementary school students with exceptionalities. The goal is to find out what resources teachers are currently using, how they are teaching self-determination in elementary school and eventually to create a series of professional development activities to assist teachers. This study will also benefit students with exceptionalities as it will increase awareness about the importance of self-determination skills to positive life outcomes.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The information you provide will be anonymous and confidential. No one except myself and my supervisor will be allowed to see the answers to the survey. There are no names on the survey. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. The survey data will be protected by the terms and conditions of Fluid Surveys. All research data will be converted to electronic data and stored on a memory stick, in a locked cabinet only accessible by myself and my supervisor. Three years after collection the data will be destroyed.

By agreeing to the terms and conditions you are indicating that you:

- 1) Understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project
- 2) Agree to participate as a research subject.
- 3) By completing the survey you are indicating your informed consent. Once individual survey responses are submitted they cannot be retrieved or removed from the data pool.

(Link to survey to be included here).

You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you have any concerns about your treatment please contact Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board at [reb@viu.ca](mailto:reb@viu.ca).

Questions/Concerns:

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact Nicky Adam (250) 488-1526 or Mary Lindsay (250) 753-3245 Ext: 2690.

I agree to the terms and conditions listed above.

## Self-Determination:

Self-determination involves an individual being able to independently take actions that affect their quality of life. Skills that assist someone to be self-determined include goal-setting, problem-solving, the ability to make choices and decisions, self-regulation and self-advocacy. The goal of this research is to examine how self-determination is currently being taught to students with special needs in your school and to determine if there is a need for more resources and professional development in this area.

## Personal Information

I am interested to know some information about you and your teaching experience. Are you

- Male
- Female

## How many years of teaching experience do you have?

- 0-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-20 years
- 20-25 years
- More than 25 years

## Please tell me about your current teaching position. Are you

- A Principal
- A Classroom Teacher
- A Special Education Teacher (Resource Room)
- Special Education Teacher (Learning Assistant)
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**When you became a teacher what type of training did you do? For example did you complete a Bachelor of Education, Professional Development program etc.?**

Which university or college did you attend?

**Did your teacher training include any information about how to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities? (Examples of self-determination skills include goal setting, decision-making, problem solving, self-advocacy, making choices, self-regulation.)**

Please give details.

**Which self-determination skills do you currently teach. Please check all that apply.**

- Problem-solving
- Making choices
- Decision making
- Goal setting and attainment
- Self-advocacy/ leadership
- Self-management/self-regulation
- Self-knowledge



Academic skills	<input type="radio"/>					
The importance of healthy living	<input type="radio"/>					
Study skills	<input type="radio"/>					
Art and creativity	<input type="radio"/>					

**How important do you think it is to teach these components of self-determination to students with exceptionalities at elementary school?**

	Vitally Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Goal setting and attainment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decision making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problem-solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-advocacy/leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-awareness/self-knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choice-making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-management/self-regulation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Where do you think it would be most beneficial to teach self-determination skills to students with exceptionalities at the elementary school level?**

Please check all that apply.

- These skills should be taught at high school
- Resource room only
- School-wide
- Classroom

**Do you think it would be beneficial for elementary students with special needs to be involved in their IEP meetings or educational planning?**

- Yes
- No

**Please explain why or why not**

**Have you participated in any professional development on teaching self-determination skills? Please provide details.**

**What areas of self-determination would you be interested in receiving professional development on?**