

TENNESSEE'S ELEMENTARY SPECIAL EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-
DETERMINATION IN STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PROMOTING SELF-DETERMINATION

by

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I dedicate my dissertation work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I have come to realize through this process that “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” I would also like to devote this work to my family.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine Tennessee's elementary Special Educators' perceptions of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities. There is an increased emphasis for students with disabilities to exit high school with skills that will enable them to be college, career, and community ready (Davis, 2015b). An essential component of this emphasis falls on the students' ability to be self-determined. Students who possess self-determination have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence (Davis, 2015a). This research supports the view that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The need for students with significant cognitive disabilities to attain self-determination skills has gained precedence among researchers and educators in the field of Special Education. This research study reports the survey results of 72 Tennessee Elementary Special Educators who teach students with disabilities, and the general knowledge Special Educators in Tennessee possess concerning self-determination. Additionally, the study discloses the level of importance that Tennessee Elementary Special Educators placed on self-determination and if the same value is consistently held for all components of self-determination. The survey revealed how often individual components of self-determination are taught, and the strength of the relationship between the level of importance and the time spent teaching the individual components of self-determination. The researcher examines perceived usefulness of teaching self-determination, and perceived barriers to its instruction. Lastly, the researcher discloses the strength of the relationship between the amount of time Special Educators read educational literature and

the general level of importance placed on self-determination. Discussions include the relevance of the research findings for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD). Implications for future research and educational practice are revealed.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to determine Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' (TESE) perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD). Currently, there is an increased emphasis for students with disabilities to exit high school with skills that will enable them be college, career, and community ready (Davis, 2015b). An essential component of this emphasis falls on the students' ability to be self-determined. Wehmeyer & Schwartz (1997) report that students who possess self-determination have a better chance of being successful transitioning to adulthood, including employment and independence. Additionally, their research supports the belief that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes. Davis (2015) expressed that self-determination must be an educational objective if these students are expected to achieve this measure. The importance of promoting self-determination for students with disabilities is evident by the manifestation of self-determination in Special Education policy, research, and advocacy.

Self-determination in Special Education Policy, Research, and Advocacy

Beginning in 1983, funding for research focusing on transition was approved with the amendment to the Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Studies conducted in the early 1990s revealed less successful employment, life satisfaction, independence, and quality of life for person with disabilities (Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, & O'Reilly, 1991; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992). Additional amendments to IDEA in 1990 actually defined "transition services" and specified that students' preferences and interests be included in development of these services. These amendments also stated that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) needed to address students' transition plans beginning at the age of 16. However, although

these improvements were significant, they were not sufficient to ensure successful post school experiences for students with disabilities.

The most monumental amendments for transition services came in 1997 and in 2004 with the reauthorization of IDEA. This federal policy stated that the emphasis of education for students with disabilities must focus on their post school objectives, as well as mandating provisions for transition planning. The directive made possible the findings of Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, and Little (2015), who assert that the self-determination status of individuals leaving high school impacts adult outcomes. Their findings reveal that instruction in self-determination must be taught at school if students are to meet their post-school goals.

The ultimate goal for students with disabilities is to function independently, contributing to society to the maximum extent possible. Self-determination is a means to this end. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) provide evidence of the necessity for self-determination to be an educational outcome for students with disabilities in order to ensure positive adult outcomes. The extent of success for students with disabilities is dependent upon their ability to operate as independently as possible in the community. Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, and Little (2015) found that a high self-determination status of students exiting high school could serve as a predictor of high levels of community access and employment one year post-school. If expectations for students with disabilities are to be college, career, and community ready, self-determination must be an elementary educational priority, and its implementation and effectiveness must be assessed.

To measure the extent of self-determination in post-school students, Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) completed a study of 94 students with cognitive disabilities one and three years after high school to establish their involvement in employment, independent living, or

community integration. These students were separated into groups based on self-determination scores gathered in their last year of high school. At the end of one year post-school, the group with high self-determination was extremely more likely to have moved from their high school residence. Likewise, at the third year the prospect remained significantly probable that they were living independently. Indicators within the high self-determination group revealed the likelihood of maintaining a bank account at year one and independent purchasing of groceries at year three. This study also revealed that students in the group with high self-determination were disproportionately likely to hold a job for the length of a year post high school, and were working full or part-time by the third year post high school. Lastly, students with higher self-determination scores who were employed made statistically higher gains in obtaining job benefits than their lower scoring self-determination peers. These findings reveal the advantages of equipping students with disabilities to be self-determined, and the need for an empirically based instructional approach. Self-determination instruction and assessment of its effectiveness must become an educational focus in elementary public school systems if students are expected to enter adulthood equipped for independence.

Efforts to reform Special Education within the public school system can be seen with the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and 2002 (IDEA Partnership, 2015). These acts make a conscious effort to connect accountability with student achievement in all academic areas. More recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was enacted to revamp the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The ESSA seeks to focus on full preparation of all students for success in college and careers. These acts lay the groundwork for self-determination in

education and establish autonomy as a priority in instruction of self-determination skills for SWSCD.

The components of self-determination can also be seen in education standards and instructional approaches that secondary educators are required to possess (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009). These stringent standards for educators are catalysts that enable teachers to support students in realizing aspects of self-determination such as goal setting and monitoring progress toward goals. However, support for the initiation of self-determination instruction has pertained mostly to students at the secondary level. Researchers are now calling for the promotion of self-determination to begin at earlier ages due to research supporting the premise that self-determination is a developmental process, progressing in individuals at a variety of stages in life.

One effort to reform the instruction of SWSCD is the promotion of the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). Davis (2015b) reported that The National Governors Association and Council for Chief State School Officers introduced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, which seek to prepare students for college and career readiness. Likewise, Davis (2015b) advised that states are allowed to develop an Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (AA-AAS) for SWSCD. The NCSC received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a new AA-AAS for SWSCD (The National Center and State Collaborative, 2014). As a result, the Learning Progressions Frameworks (LPF) were developed for use with the CCSS. The LPF describe how understanding of core concepts in English Language Arts and Mathematics typically develop over time when students have the benefit of high quality instruction (Davis, 2015b). The LPF offer educators a guide to instruction and support in lesson planning. In addition, the NCSC has developed an

Instruction Schema for educators to link instruction to CCSS through Core Content Connectors (CCC). According to the NCSC (NCSC WIKI, 2010) CCC identify the most important grade-level academic content in English Language Arts and Mathematics found in the CCSS. The CCC establishes the necessary knowledge and skills that are needed in order to reach the learning targets that are within the LPF and the CCSS. Implementation of the curriculum resource schema is thought to assist students with disabilities in the achievement of higher levels of learning because the CCC is based on the CCSS derived from students' grade level. The CCSS have been rejected by the State of Tennessee but have been replaced by "TN Ready," which began with the 2015-2016 academic school year. These two sets of standards are similar in scope and sequence. Therefore, adjustments to CCC will not have to be made. The TN Ready standards will produce the higher levels of achievement needed for students to acquire self-determination skills that are warranted in preparation for college and career readiness. Fortunately, NCSC is recommended to begin during elementary years, thus allowing the initial point of self-determination instruction to begin at the early age sought by researchers.

It is important to note that in the fall of 2016, the federally funded NCSC project will come to an end. The project partners support the transition of all NCSC resources to the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA). MSAA utilizes and will continue to utilize the curriculum, instruction, and professional-development resources of the NCSC platform. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, MSAA and NCSC will be considered one in the same, and will be referred to as MSAA/NCSC.

Within the public education system, student access to the general education curriculum to maximum extent possible is mandated, but this mandate continues to be problematic for many SWSCD. Self-determination instruction provides students with disabilities an additional

component with which to access the general education setting. When self-determination is taught in accordance with standards, students are able to show significant gains on targeted skills (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004). Additionally, these researchers state that promoting self-determination provides students with disabilities an “entry point” with which to access the general education curriculum. Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, and Agran (2004) noted that SWSCD enhance the likelihood of generalization of skills as they significantly improved their ability to problem solve and plan as a result of receiving instruction in self-determination. Becoming self-determined offers more academic and social opportunities within an environment that is more inclusive. The advantages of a self-determined life can benefit students while in the academic setting, but can also carry over into their post school life. These benefits include, but are not limited to, overall quality of life, independent living, and employment opportunities. In order to ensure access to these benefits, educators need an empirically based instructional approach with which to educate SWSCD. In addition, self-determination instruction meets the qualification to be considered research based.

Two instructional approaches aimed to improve the self-determination of students with disabilities were found to be beneficial, and were found to be particularly advantageous when used together: the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (McGlashing-Johnson, Agran, Sitlington, Cavin, & Wehmeyer, 2003) and the GO 4 IT ... NOW! (Konrad & Test, 2007).

Self-determined Learning Model of Instruction

The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) is a model of teaching that aims to assist educators in teaching students to become self-regulated and self-directed in the progression of learning, and accordingly become self-determined in the process. This instructional model is beneficial for students aged 5-21 (National Gateway to Self-

Determination, n.d.), and is effective for use with individuals with moderate to severe disabilities for improving their work skills (McGlashing-Johnson et al., 2003). In order for individuals to become self-determined, they must develop the ability to be self-regulated problem solvers and function as causal agents in their own lives. The SDLMI has demonstrated its ability to assist students in goal attainment, greater self-determination, and the ability to communicate their approval in their progression toward becoming causal agents (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000).

GO 4 IT... NOW!

Another instructional approach to assisting students to become more independent in respect to setting goals on Individual Education Plans (IEP) is GO 4 IT ... NOW! This model is designed to help students improve writing skills for paragraphs as well as aiding in the completion of IEP goals (Konrad & Test, 2007). Rowe, Mazotti, and Sinclair (2015) found that using the GO 4 IT ... NOW! along with the SDLMI, was effective for teaching self-determination skills in conjunction with CCSS. A clearly defined instructional approach to self-determination is necessary. Therefore, a deliberate curriculum that facilitates development of self-determination skills is imperative.

Equally significant is the perceptions teachers' hold regarding SWSCD to be self-determined individuals. Most teachers are aware the benefits of developing self-determination in students. Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) found that teachers working with secondary students generally have a respectable knowledge of this concept and feel that it is valuable for students while in school and in preparation for their post school life. Various researchers have established that teachers do feel that teaching self-determination is an important aspect of their job (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011, 2012). While the

research concerning self-determination for secondary students is promising, few studies exist regarding self-determination in elementary age children.

Rather, self-determination instruction has primarily been the focus of secondary education settings. On this subject, researchers contend that self-determined behavior is a progression of skills that emerge over time as an individual develops. Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer, and Palmer (1996) examined the progression of self-determination skills and found that school and family based interventions assist the development of self-determination across various ages. Students with cognitive disabilities often times benefit from repeated exposure to concepts and ideas in natural environments. Therefore, an early introduction to self-determination instruction could benefit SWSCD. Palmer and Wehmeyer (2003) confirmed this notion by demonstrating, with the SDLMI, that students as young as 5 are capable of setting goals and succeeding. Exposure and repetition are fundamental to learning self-determination; the time to begin research in this domain in the elementary settings is now.

Summary

Research reveals that the overall quality of life for students with disabilities is enriched from instruction in self-determination. This instruction promotes increased independence, involvement in IEP meetings, social interactions, academic progress, and post-secondary school outcomes. Furthermore, research reveals that employment opportunities are more favorable for individuals who are self-determined. Current practices tend to focus on self-determination instruction at the secondary level of students' academic careers. The call for self-determination instruction and research at the elementary is being made. It is imperative that TESE evaluate their perceptions and promotion of self-determination in order to offer the best services for SWSCD.

Problem Statement

Many studies have investigated teachers' perceptions of self-determination and the impact these perceptions have on instructional practices. The majority of these studies have focused on teachers who instruct transition age and secondary students. To date, a mere five studies have been conducted that focus on elementary school teachers perceptions of self-determination (Cho, 2009; Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011, 2012; Mason, Field, Sawilowsky, 2004; Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2009). Furthermore, none of these studies focus primarily on teachers' perceptions and promotion of self-determination practices within the State of Tennessee. The study herein proposed will serve as the initial investigation of the perceptions of self-determination utilized by TESE who teach SWSCD. The research will encompass a survey of elementary Special Educators within the state of Tennessee. The survey will assess teacher knowledge of self-determination, perceived benefits, and implementation of practice. Additionally, the survey will determine perceived barriers to self-determination. It is hoped that the information gained from the study will be used by TESE to promote self-determination among SWSCD.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the state of affairs in the field of Special Education prior to the implementation of self-determination, followed by an historical examination of self-determination including legislation that has impacted Special Education instruction. Instructional and assessment models of self-determination are subsequently introduced. Previous research concerning self-determination is then examined to determine perspectives in the field of Special Education as they relate to the questions posed in this research. At the end of the chapter, a statement of the problem is given, and the significance of this study is stated.

Early Instructional Practices of Special Education

The instructional practices of Special Education have been greatly influenced by social forces and historical events that have shaped the construction of numerous cultural perspectives about people with disabilities. Initially, attempts within the U.S. to provide services for students with disabilities proved to be primitive and dismal. However, as societal views have begun to change, people have begun to understand and appreciate the abilities and potential of students with disabilities within our culture, leading to a change in instructor perceptions regarding this portion of the population.

The history of American Special Education can be divided into four time periods, starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century and progressively advanced into present day practices of self-determination. Prior to the French and American Revolutions, persons with disabilities were primarily cared for in asylums. These institutions were established to house and protect the insane, but also to protect society from them. However, the mindset of society began to change

to match the ideologies of democracy and egalitarianism that emerged as a result of the revolutions. At this time, physicians, clergymen, and other crusaders attempted to rehabilitate and educate children with disabilities (Hallahan & Sayeski, 2010).

French physician Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1775-1838) is recognized as the creator of the basic instructional principles used to educate students with disabilities. Itard was a physician who specialized in the treatment of people with deafness. The knowledge gained by working with individuals with deafness led to his work with Victor, “the wild boy of Aveyron.” Itard was attending to a patient at the National Institution for the Deaf when Victor was brought for treatment because he was assumed to be deaf. At this point, Itard seized an opportunity to demonstrate that intense instruction would result in meaningful educational gains even with the most difficult learning problems. Itard’s inability to cure Victor seemed a personal failure, but actually led others to expand on his work and build a foundation for Special Education.

One of Itard’s successors, Eduoard Seguin (1812-1880), developed newer instructional approaches that he used with students with disabilities that continue to be utilized today. Some of these approaches include individualized instruction, integration of sensory input, organization of educational environment, a system of positive reinforcements, instruction in functional skills, and the belief that all children with disabilities can make progress. Other contributions by Seguin include establishing the first known school to serve persons with mental retardation in France and publishing *Idiocy: And its treatment by the physiological method*, which is considered the first textbook on instruction for persons with mental retardation.

Several other reformers worked to establish educational programming for persons with disabilities. Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876), who had been inviting Seguin to the United States, assisted in the establishment of the Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts in

1832. Additionally, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787-1851) founded the first residential school for the deaf in the United States after he visited educators of the deaf in Europe. Then, in 1841, Dorothea Dix petitioned state and federal legislatures to contribute funding to asylums for the insane (Hallahan & Sayeski, 2010).

The momentum for quality care for individuals with disabilities began to diminish during the late nineteenth century. The period following the American Civil War (1860-1865) brought economic hardships, an influx of immigrants, and rapid industrial and urban development. These societal changes resulted in a decreased interest in the rehabilitation and education of persons with disabilities. Despite the declining responsiveness and support for persons with disabilities during this time, several advances were made for this population of students. First, Congress established the U.S. Department of Education. Next, day schools and special classes were developed for children who were deaf. The Department of Special Education was subsequently added to the National Education Association. Finally, Special Educator training programs were instituted in institutions that served persons with disabilities. While these strides in Special Education were being made, a negative view concerning options for the mentally retarded was emerging. The predominant belief at this time was that persons with mental retardation could not benefit from instruction and that the most effective treatment for them was to be housed in large institutions.

This continued until the early twentieth century, which was generally a time of positive developments for students with disabilities. Public schools officials who were more open-minded offered Special Education classes and resource rooms for students with various disabilities (Hallahan & Sayeski, 2010). One early Special Educator from New York City, Elizabeth Farrell (1870-1932), advocated for Special Education classes for students with disabilities. She later

helped to create the Council for Exceptional Children, which continues to serve as a professional resource for Special Educators. The work of these programs helped to transform the views and opinions of services for students with disabilities. Special Education began to be viewed as a part of the curricular services of the school system, bringing forth a progression of change in Special Education that has continued into the 21st century. Some of the changes included the shift in mindset to mainstreaming students with disabilities, early identification and prevention of disabilities, and increased federal funding for Special Education services. These advances began to shape the societal views of Special Education, and Special Education has come now to be viewed as a focused discipline and a legitimate academic field of study.

The late twentieth century saw the emergence of parental advocacy groups for children with learning disabilities. Two of these groups are the National Association for Retarded Children (later known as the Arc), and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (later referred to as the Learning Disabilities Association of America). These groups, along with other professional organizations, were influential in petitioning legislatures for services to benefit students with disabilities. This period is recognized as one of increased research in Special Education, in which the federal government provided funding to expand research into best practices for identification and interventions for students with disabilities. Additional funding assisted in filling the need for Special Education instructors in school and university settings.

History of Special Education in Nashville, Tennessee

A review of the history of Special Education in Nashville, Tennessee (1940-1990) was written by Sherman (1999) focusing on two issues: First, Sherman examined the ways in which advocacy and researched changed Special Educational practices after World War II; secondly, he examined internal mechanisms of Nashville schools shaped Special Education practices during

this time. Sherman examined successful long-term impacts, influences that were unable to prove their success, and success of pilot programs that were initiated outside the public school setting.

As early as the 1930s, Nashville schools started a sight-saving class for students with visual impairments. Then, encouraged by the superintendent, Nashville schools initiated ungraded classrooms (later to be called Educable Mentally Retarded classrooms). In the early 1950s, students with disabilities were limited as to where they could attend school. The state of Tennessee allowed education for students with mild mental retardation, but did not support the education of students with moderate to severe mental retardation or more involved disabilities. At this time the Council for Retarded Children began the Edgehill School to serve this population of students. Initially, high school teachers with no Special Education training provided instruction and parents offered other support as needed. In 1955, prompted by parents around the state, the Tennessee legislature created legislation that supported subsidies for classrooms for students with moderate disabilities. Eventually, parents who resided in the Nashville area persuaded Nashville City Schools to incorporate the Edgehill School into the regular school program. Parental subsidies were still crucial to the success of this integration into public schools. While parents were thankful, they were not completely satisfied and continued to advocate for their children. The start of these classrooms for more involved disabilities was an extension of the services originally started for students with visual impairments and was the development of Special Education in Tennessee.

In 1962, Nicholas Hobbs, from the Vanderbilt Peabody College of Education, crafted a program to re-educate emotionally disturbed children. The program was named Re-ED and two demonstration schools were opened to serve children from the ages of 6 to 12 who were deemed to have normal academic abilities apart from behavior issues. One school resided in Nashville

and the other in North Carolina. The students that attended the Nashville school spent weekdays engaging in school activities and weeknights in small group homes in middle class Nashville neighborhoods. On weekends, most students went home to their families. Summer programming included a camp-like setting where students participated in academic and recreational activities and lodged in campsite settings. Project Re-ED was one of the first programs in the southern United States to attempt to educate children with behavioral problems that did not involve psychiatry or psychotherapy. Most students were able to return to their families and regular school settings within six to nine months. The Re-ED program made two contributions to Tennessee schools: first, the project encouraged new programs for children with behavior problems within the school system; second, the project assisted in training people who would later serve as resources for the local school funded programs. State programs deteriorated in the 1980s and became more like psychiatric hospitalization. These changes were due to students with comparatively mild behavior problems being able to be served in public school programs, the pursuit of Medicaid funding to support the program, and state judges using the program as holding facilities for juvenile offenders.

In the 1970s, another Peabody faculty member, John Ora, began The Regional Intervention Program (RIP). This program focused on parents of preschool children with behavior problems or developmental delays. The behavior modification program experienced unexpected demand and began to require parents to “pay back” time spent in the program. The consequence of this program structure led the state to adopt the program when federal funding expired. This program persisted into the 1990s with the same structure entirely outside of the public school system realm. However, once federal Special Education law required the service of preschoolers in public schools, RIP primarily served children with behavior problems.

In the history of Special Education in Nashville, there have been influences that have not proven to have clear success. Tennessee began a “sight conservation” class in 1938. These classes provided instruction in Braille in order to conserve the limited sight students with visual impairment possessed. At this period in time, the predominant belief was that using a limited sense of sight would further a person’s disability and result in increased blindness. Natalie Barraga conducted a dissertation study in 1964 utilizing students at the Tennessee School for the Blind to assess if training utilizing their residual vision weakened or enhanced their visual performance. Barraga found that children who were taught to use their residual vision improved their performance on sight-related tasks. The results produced a movement of change in conventional wisdom about children with limited vision. However, Barraga neglected to share her results with the Tennessee School for the Blind, so teachers failed to structure their classrooms to encourage such practices. The start of these classrooms for more involved disabilities was an extension of this process and was the development of Special Education in Tennessee.

Sherman (1999) concluded that the larger lesson of the history of Special Education in Nashville is that public schools need to be more permeable and allow for the piloting of programs to address the educational needs of students with disabilities. The relationship between public and private schools is one of evolution. This evolution is seen in the integration of projects, such as the Edgehill School, the Re-Ed schools, and RIPS that began as private initiatives and were later adopted by public school systems. This reciprocal relationship has led to the success of many private Special Education schools because public schools contract their services for students. Sherman revealed a troubling pattern in the history of permeable boundaries in Nashville’s Special Education program. He attested that the limited influence of

research and advocacy to the development of programs were detrimental. This in part was due to programs being easily absorbed and possessed substantial backing from outside the public school system. Sherman indicated that Nashville public schools have lost what had been, after World War II, the most expansive Special Education program in the state and one of the most innovative ones in the Southeast.

History of Quality Instruction and Teacher Training

In 1955, the state legislature agreed to grant the request for state funding of local programs, separate from the states support of other educational programs (including other Special Education programs). In 1957, the Davidson County for Retarded Children and its state organization, the Tennessee Association for Retarded Children, were blocked by Davidson County's school system when they requested a classroom for severely mentally retarded children. Advocates were outraged and elicited the help of the local media. One parent of a child with developmental disabilities made the explicit claim that the low expectations of children with developmental disabilities were unacceptable. This moment served as an opportunity to recommend an official standard for the expectations instructors have of students with learning disabilities. The advocates were successful, and the school system offered its first classroom for children with developmental disabilities.

Sherman (1999) states that the period following World War II has witnessed great change in the programs and services for children with severe disabilities. However, the same transformation has not been observed in the expectations for teachers of students with severe disabilities and the quality of instruction they provide. It is much easier to implement new programs than it is to change the practices of existing ones.

Special Education teachers have historically been drafted from the general education setting. A few teachers pursued additional credits for coursework in Special Education, but most were simply transferred out of general education classrooms. In fact, descriptions of hiring Special Education teachers for Nashville school in the 1940s often noted that teachers were relocated to “ungraded classrooms” (Sherman, 1999).

Beginning in the 1950s, however, the state of Tennessee began offering certification requirements for Special Education teachers and even offered higher salaries for focusing in Special Education. The Nashville City and Davidson County school systems encouraged new Special Educators to take several courses in Special Education subjects in order to qualify for Special Education certification. Unfortunately, recruiting general education teachers for Special Education classes continued into the 1960s. By 1966, 54% of teachers in the educable mentally retarded classrooms in Metropolitan Nashville were certified in Special Education.

Long before Special Education laws came into effect (Sherman, 1999), Special Educators were in short supply and training in Special Education became crucial. Fortunately, federal law required states to have a comprehensive system for professional development of teachers. Professional development has traditionally been at the discretion of school administrators. These educational leaders play a significant role in setting curricular priorities and establishing the vision for instructional objectives that receive priority in their schools. Therefore, their perceptions of self-determination are vital for its promotion in instruction. Mason, Field, and Sawilowsky (2004) reported that half of the administrators who responded to their survey specified that their districts offered informal instruction in self-determination. Furthermore, the researchers noted that most administrators reported having a district plan for teaching self-determination and felt that their districts were prepared to teach self-determination skills.

In an effort to conduct a more in-depth study of administrator's prioritization of self-determination, Carter et al. (2015) conducted a survey of 333 school-level administrators in Tennessee. These researchers reported that their staff would likely access self-determination professional development opportunities through in – and after – school workshops. Nevertheless, these administrators reported that quick “good practice” guides would be an effective way to share information about self-determination. Administrators also stated that the collaborative work of professional learning circles would be efficient for sharing information.

The ability to deliver effective self-determination instruction hinges upon Special Educators receiving appropriate resources and sufficient training. Carter et al. (2011) reported that paraprofessionals' awareness of self-determination varied. Specifically, 19.7% of respondents stated that they were not familiar with self-determination, 54.3% reported they were somewhat familiar, and 26% said that they were familiar with the concept of self-determination. Furthermore, these researchers revealed that 44.5% said that self-determination strategies had never been addressed, 47.8% stated they were sometimes addressed, and 7.7% reported they were frequently addressed. Moreover, Wehmeyer et al. (2000) surveyed 1,219 and found that district in-service training for self-determination was the least reported source for gaining information about self-determination.

Research has established the necessity of professional development opportunities within the education setting concerning self-determination, and school districts must exceed prior attempts to educate Special Educators in this domain. Recent history has seen significant advancements in Special Education services. Now, greater strides in teacher training and professional development must be taken if we are to ensure teachers are equipped to prepare students with disabilities for positive post school outcomes.

History of Self-determination

Self-determination first became apparent to individuals with disabilities in 1969 when Benget Nirje identified the principle that persons with disabilities deserved the right to experience respect as any other human being. Specifically, Nirje (1972) defined the principle as “making available the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream society” (Kugel & Wolfensberger, 1969, p.181). In his writings, he argued that the personal choices, desires, and aspirations of persons with disabilities needed to be central in our thinking about people with disabilities. Nirje’s ideas are more germane today than ever for those with severe disabilities. Another voice for individuals with severe disabilities was Robert Perske. Perske vocalized that people with severe disabilities had the right to experience the “dignity of risk” accorded non-disabled individuals in our society. According to Perske (1972, p. 199) typical individuals experience risk every day, which requires them to pull from internal resources. Perske considers these opportunities for risk to be a facilitator of growth further suggesting that to deny individuals the experience of risk is to further distance them from a life of societal normalcy.

Even as late as the early 1970s, persons with disabilities were referred to as deviants of society and this classification by the public influenced their treatment. These deviant individuals were viewed as a sub-human organism that was to be dreaded and pitied. The deviant was seen as diseased and often ridiculed. The most harmful aspect of these beliefs came evident when individuals with disabilities began to believe these accusations. Society, in its efforts to assist these deviants, took four basic approaches: destruction of the deviants, segregation, reversal of their condition, or prevention thereof (Wolfensberger, 1972, p. 24). In the past, the deviant was seen as evil and needed to be destroyed in order to protect society. This ideology can still be

witnessed in today's society with the legal right of mothers to abort a fetus who is at risk of physical or genetic abnormalities, even when the pregnancy is not a risk to the mother's health (Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA. v. Casey, 1992). As a more humanitarian approach emerged, the deviant was segregated to the outskirts of society by placing them in institutions that protected the culture from the unpleasantness and offensiveness that these deviants wrought. The next approach to handling deviants in society was to reverse their condition by providing education, training, or treatment. Inadvertently, the approach of reversal leads to the final treatment of prevention. The last two methods of deviant management lead to the concept of normalization. This new concept was defined by Bank-Mikkelsen as "letting the mentally retarded obtain an existence as close to normal as possible" (Wolfensberger, 1972). These initial phases of change began the campaign for a more humane treatment of persons with disabilities.

At this early stage of change, researchers were working to assist students who have severe disabilities in expanding their own senses of personal control over their lives. There was also an increased effort to teach self-regulatory behaviors. These behaviors included identifying and setting goals, improving self-monitoring, evaluating performance based on an existing standard, and adjusting goals based on failed attempts. These methods of instruction were in line with Wehmeyer's (1998) notions of self-determination that implied individuals should have control over their own lives. The increased focus on teaching self-regulatory behaviors was the precursor to the self-determination initiative that would begin in the late eighties.

Leaders in Special Education supported the movement for the creation of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) self-determination initiative in 1988. One of the highlights resulting from this initiative is a report that outlined 29 recommendations for promoting self-determination across Federal agencies (National Conference on Self-

determination, 1989). Fundamental to this initiative was that over half of the planners had disabilities. Although there were personal differences, they all agreed on several points. First, they were tired of being pushed to the outskirts of society. Second, they were sick of people treating them as if they were not whole people. Lastly, they collectively were weary of having others make decisions for them. Analysis of these recommendations reveal a need for curriculum dedicated to skills intended to improve self- advocacy, decision-making and goal setting, as well as empowerment and social independence (Ward, 2005). All keynote speeches focused on self-determination, and a fire of hope for independence was ignited.

Definitions of Self-determination

Many definitions of self-determination exist in the field of Special Education. The National Gateway to Self-determination (n.d.), defines the term as a characteristic of a person that leads them to make choices and decisions based on their own preferences and interests, to monitor and regulate their own actions and to be goal-oriented and self-directing (Davis, 2015a). According to the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (2015), self-determination is a fusion of attitudes and abilities that allow individuals make their own choices, learn to solve problems, and take control of their lives. Additionally, self-determination is defined as:

... a system of attitudes, skills, and relationships that develop over time, and consist of interdependence, self-regulation, knowledge and acceptance of self, the ability to learn from experiences, internal motivation to learn and utilize skills such as communication, goal-setting, decision the perception of control and choice in one's life (Anderson et al., 1995, p. 2-3).

In 1992 Wehmeyer began defining self-determination as the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices regarding one's

actions free from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007, p. 3). In 1996, Wehmeyer sought to redefine self-determination to emulate different types of self-determined behavior. He asserted that a misinterpretation of the definition was a limiting factor for persons with disabilities. In essence, Wehmeyer (2005) wrote that other’s understandings of self-determination and the way it applied to people with severe disabilities restricted the opportunities for those individuals to become self-determined. Wehmeyer noted the original definition missed the proclamation that self-determined behaviors contribute to one’s quality of life.

The first misconception, according to Wehmeyer (2005), was in thinking that self-determination is a process. This perception would lead others to feel that self-determination was just another program to be implemented instead of the self-determined characteristics that an individual displays. The second misconception was that self-determination was seen as a set of skills that an individual acquired which enabled them to be self-determined. This idea of a checklist of skills to be acquired limited the opportunities that an individual had to become self-determined. Rather, self-determined behaviors should be understood as intentional actions that enable one to cause things to happen in their life.

The next misconception noted by Wehmeyer (2005) was that self-determination was viewed as an “independent performance of self-reliance or self-sufficiency.” According to Wehmeyer (2005), self-determination is not dependent upon being self-reliant or self-sufficient. The fourth misinterpretation was that self-determination is something you do. Self-determination is not something someone can “do” or have “done” to them. It must be a characteristic of an individual that allows them to act in a volitional manner and permits them to be causal agents in their own lives. The fifth and final misconception was that self-determination was merely choice-

making. In order for someone to act volitionally, one must make decisions based on his or her preferences. Simply put, Wehmeyer iterated that being self-determined is more than just making choices.

Subsequently, Wehmeyer adjusted the definition to state that self-determined behavior is defined by “acting as the causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life, free from undue external influence or interference “(Wehmeyer & Field, 2007, p. 3). Wehmeyer proceeded to further perfect his definition in 2006 to include that self-determined behavior resulted from volitional actions.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the definition of self-determination by Wehmeyer that describes self-determination as a composite of “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (Wehmeyer, 2006, p. 117). Wehmeyer and Fields (2007, p. 3) expounded upon this definition to identify the meaning of this class of behaviors by providing four characteristics of self-determined behaviors. First, an individual must act autonomously. An individual acts autonomously when their actions are in accordance with personal preferences and free from external influences. Second, individual behaviors must be self-regulated. According to Whitman (1990, p. 373), self-regulation “enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses for coping with those environments to make decisions about how to act, to act, to evaluate the desirability of the outcomes of the action, and to revise their plans as necessary.” Third, an individual must initiate and respond to the event. Fourth, an individual must act in a self-realizing manner. The examination of these four characteristics will determine if the individual’s behavior is self-determined or not.

Self-determination emerges as individuals develop and attain the component skills of self-determination (Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 1996). These component skills are the learned skills and attitudes that are vital to the acquisition and progression of self-determination. The component skills of self-determination are (a) choice-making; (b) decision-making; (c) problem-solving; (d) goal setting and attainment; (e) self-regulation/self-management; (f) self-advocacy and leadership; (g) self-awareness and self-knowledge. In order to encourage a better understanding of these components, Wehmeyer and Field (2007) provide a description of each component and suggestions for implementation into classroom instructional practices.

The first component, choice-making, is the ability for an individual to express a preference between two or more options, and is an important component to begin in the early elementary years (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). An individual who is able to exhibit choice-making, will realize the potential to exert more control over life. Choice-making opportunities can be incorporated into daily activities within the classroom setting. The next component, decision-making, is an ability that is usually developed with age. However, simplifying the steps of the decision-making process will enable younger individuals to engage in this element. The steps to the decision-making process, as stated by Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003), include identifying alternative actions and probable consequences, assessing the likelihood that each of the consequences will happen, choosing the best alternative, and acting upon the decision. While this process is mastered at the adult level, choice-making and problem-solving skills are antecedent behaviors that younger individuals can work on to facilitate effective decision-making skills in adulthood.

The third component of self-determination, problem-solving skills, presents as a task for which there is no apparent answer. An individual must progress through the process of solving

the problem. The first step is to identify the problem, list possible solutions, identify the effect of each solution, make a judgment concerning a preferred solution, and assess the effectiveness of the judgment. Problem solving activities naturally occur in classrooms. Students need guidance in how to work through the process of unraveling and resolving the issue. All individuals need to possess problem-solving skills in order to become more independent in academic and social endeavors. The fourth component is goal setting and attainment skills. This skill refers to the ability to clearly define a goal, develop objectives to reach the goal, and determine steps needed to achieve the goal. Goal setting tasks can be embedded in instruction when new concepts are being introduced. Another component of self-determination is self-regulation and self-management skills. This component refers to the ability of an individual to examine the environment, evaluate possible responses, and then implement and evaluate a selected response. The student-directed approach to learning enables the teacher to become a facilitator of learning and the student to participate in self-directed learning. Individuals can learn many strategies to self-regulate learning through student-directed approaches.

The sixth component, self-advocacy and leadership skills, refers to the ability of an individual to advocate on their own behalf. However, an individual must know what to advocate for and how to effectively promote his or her own self-determination. Instruction in self-advocacy can be promoted within the classroom setting by allowing the student to participate in education planning. The seventh component, self-awareness and self-knowledge, is defined as an individual's ability to recognize personal strengths, weaknesses, and unique learning styles and have the ability to understand how to use this knowledge to maximize individual achievement and growth. The skills associated with self-awareness and self-knowledge cannot be taught with traditional instructional models. These skills must be learned through non-classroom experience,

as when a student interacts with peers and environmental factors. All individuals benefit from self-determination instruction and assessment. However, the implication for self-determination skills is imperative for students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD).

The components of self-determination must be incorporated into the instructional strategies of Special Educators as they seek to address the individual educational needs of students. The history of Special Education discloses the relentless effort of advocates to ensure a free appropriate education for all students. As a result, SWSCD are entitled to education and assessment strategies that integrate self-determination into classroom practices.

Self-determination Legislation

Advocacy in Special Education has made possible many opportunities for students with disabilities. In order to understand where Special Education is going, we must understand from whence it came. In the beginning of public education, exclusion was the rule when children with disabilities were concerned. Prior to states enacting laws safeguarding educational rights for students with disabilities, many local schools boards excluded children who were deemed challenging to educate. The exclusion of students with disabilities has often been authorized by the courts. As early as 1893, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled that a student who was mentally retarded was to be excluded from public education (*Watson v. City of Cambridge*, 1893). The courts concluded that the student was too “weak minded” to benefit from education. In another case 26 years later, the Wisconsin Supreme Court denied a child with cerebral palsy access to public education, stating that he produced a “depressing and nauseating effect upon his teachers and school children.” These two examples provide a glimpse into the mindset of public education in relation to students with disabilities around the 20th century.

Fortunately, parents and advocates were not content to allow these students to be confined to the outer boundaries of society.

Advocates for students with special needs made progress as a result of The Civil Rights Movement and the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. This ruling extended equal protection under the law to minorities and also allowed individuals with disabilities to make parallel achievements. Parents' struggles were beginning to pay off. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 was passed. This law was known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), and it declared that public school systems were required to provide a "free appropriate public education" for all students with disabilities. Furthermore, it stated that school districts should provide this education in the "least restrictive environment". This law was reauthorized in 1990. At this time, the law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L.105-17). IDEA made services available for millions of students who had previously not had access to an appropriate education. IDEA required school districts to provide additional services, such as interpreters for the deaf and assistive technology for the physically impaired. Another reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 strengthened academic expectations and bridged the gap between what students with disabilities learn and what is required in the general curriculum. This it made possible for students to reach their full academic potential. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was passed in 2004 and made available federal funding to states that educate students receiving Special Education services. The IDEIA was responsible for outlining procedural safeguards to be followed and presented discipline measures for students with disabilities.

These laws ensure that students with disabilities receive the education to which they are entitled. However, even after these measures, the education system still needed to assure that

assessment measures were in place to determine if the education is beneficial for the student with disabilities. Thus, the federal government enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10) which set guidelines to be followed in order for schools to retain federal funding. The ESEA requires states to measure academic performance with assessments. Student performance on standardized test is the most common assessment used to determine school progress. When schools fail to meet federal expectations, they are subject to lose funding. In 2004, the ESEA of 1965 was amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110). The IDEA regulations, in alignment with NCLB, required the development of an alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. In fact, the document states that, “If the State has adopted alternate academic achievement standards permitted under the regulations promulgated to carry out Sec. 1111(a)(2)(E) (i-vii) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, then it must measure the achievement of children with disabilities against those standards” [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(16)(C)(ii)(II)]. MSAA/NCSC accomplishes the goal of alternate assessments for alternative achievement standards, but research surrounding the effectiveness of MSAA/NCSC on the self-determination of students with significant cognitive disabilities is limited. Clearly, though, there is a need for self-determination instruction and assessment measures.

Instructional Models

If students are expected to become self-determined, then they need instruction that teaches these aptitudes in concrete terms. The explicit direct instruction of self-determination is vital to the success of SWSCD. The fusion of this instruction into the existing curriculum is essential in order for students to realize how these skills are applicable in real life situations. There are instructional models that promote the teaching of self-determination from early

elementary through high school. Upon closer examination, many schools find that they already teach self-determination unintentionally as educators focus on goal setting, problem solving, and decision-making within the normal presentation of lessons. However, a more direct approach to teaching self-determination must be implemented for SWSCD.

In order for self-determination to become a characteristic for SWSCD, it must become a priority for educators. Educators need to understand and value the implications for self-determination in the lives of their students. This instructional practice is necessary for success in post school transitions into adulthood. Therefore, the implementation of self-determination instructional strategies can no longer wait until the secondary level of education. It must begin earlier in a child's educational journey. The information surrounding elementary teachers' perceptions and promotion of self-determination in SWSCD is limited. This deficiency in the literature is due to minimal studies reporting elementary Special Educators' perceptions of self-determination. To date, there is not even one study relating Tennessee's teachers' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for this population of students.

It is crucial that teachers hold high expectations for SWSCD and embrace new research concerning individual capabilities. Exposure to academic content, in natural settings, has proven to enhance quality of life and prepare students for college, career, and community readiness. (Hunt, McDonell, & Crockett, 2012).

There are several instructional strategies that Wehmeyer and Fields (2007) found to be beneficial when teaching the knowledge, beliefs, and skills for self-determination. These strategies include modeling and mentors, cooperative learning groups, coaching, and behavioral strategies. Modeling and mentors provide both direct and indirect examples of self-determined behaviors. SWSCD are able to see appropriate behaviors demonstrated in the correct manner by

peers whom they developed a relationship with. Cooperative learning groups offer an opportunity for SWSCD to strengthen their collaboration skills in a group setting, as well as providing increased exposure to peer modeling. These skills are particularly important as one considers the amount of collaboration that is need as a student prepares to transition into adulthood. Coaching is useful in its ability to provide support for SWSCD as they attempt goal attainment. Often SWSCD need repetitive instruction in the attainment of new concepts. Coaching offers theses students' assistance through the availability of trainers to prompt them as they progress. Lastly, behavioral strategies can be beneficial by reinforcing positive behaviors. The reinforcement of proximal behaviors can lead to acquisition and maintenance of new behaviors. While these strategies are worthwhile, they are not the only approaches to self-determination instruction.

The Adaptability Instructional model, developed by Mithaug, Martin, and Agran (1987), was utilized to teach behavior regulation to students with disabilities by helping students (a) identify goals, (b) engage in independent actions through self-monitoring, (c) evaluate actions in terms of existing standards, and (d) learn from mistakes and adjust previous goals. Another model for teaching self-determination was developed by Konrad, Walker, Fowler, Test, and Wood (2008). This model aligns with general education curriculum standards, and focuses on deciding what to teach, how to teach it, and evaluating and adjusting as needed. Lastly, Wehmyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) introduced the Self-determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) to provide teachers with a model that engages students in becoming the casual agents in their own lives. The SDLMI focuses on the components of self-determination, self-regulated problem solving, and student directed learning (Wehmyer & Field, 2007). This model has proven effective in early elementary students and Palmer and Wehmyer

(2003) found that students as young as 5 years of age were able to set goals and work through the model with assistance. Many options exist when considering self-determination instruction. However, despite the established models of instruction, teachers have reported the unavailability of instructional methods to be a barrier to instructing students in self-determination (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2012).

An additional strategy to teach self-determination to SWSCD is to embed the component skills of self-determination within classroom instruction. The first of these skills include choice-making. Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) stated that choice-making should begin in the early elementary years. Furthermore, choice-making and problem solving skills are antecedent behaviors that younger individuals can work on to facilitate acquisition of more complex skills. Another component skill to embed is goal setting and attainment. It is important to remember that goals should be challenging, but not unattainable. Additionally, goals must be motivating in order for students to aspire to meet them. Wehmeyer and Fields (2007) suggest that if students are not able to set goals yet, teachers should set goals for them with individual preferences and interests in mind. This attention to preference will provide motivation for the students. Next, teachers should focus on teaching problem solving skills. (Karoven, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004). Then, decision-making should be an emphasis on instruction. The introduction of decision-making should begin with simple decision and lead to ones that will have greater consequences. Additionally, this instruction should be implanted within the existing curriculum and incorporated throughout the day. This will allow students to understand the general application of decision-making, and assist them as they generalize these skills. The teacher should also concentrate on fostering self-awareness and self-knowledge. These skills help students to realize their strengths, weaknesses, and unique learning styles. The advantage of

teaching this attribute to students is that it enables SWSCD to enhance their quality of life. When presented in the school setting, students have the opportunity to practice self-determination skills and receive feedback in order to adjust their actions and make progress.

Self-determination instruction focuses on knowledge, skills, and beliefs. (Wehmeyer & Fields, 2007). The opportunities to become more self-determined are dependent upon the practice students receive within the educational environment to refine their personal characteristics of self-determination. Wehmeyer and Fields (2007, p. 58) list indicators of school wide and classroom characteristics that support the development of self-determination in the educational environment. The predominant principles that appear repeatedly are that all members of the school community are involved with the practice of self-determination. Next, it is vital that all students within the school are focusing on practicing self-determination behaviors. Instruction, within the school environment, provides opportunities for SWSCD to witness self-determination being modeled by typically developing peers in various settings. A collaborative approach to self-determination promotes autonomy in ways that cannot be realized through direct instruction alone. Education is efficient at assessing teaching, learning, and various programs. However, because education for SWSCD is individualized, an individual assessment of self-determination is warranted. Fortunately, educators have several to choose from.

Models of Assessment

Traditional academic models of assessment may or may not be effective in determining the instructional needs of self-determination for SWSCD. Nevertheless, assessment measures specifically designed to gauge students' self-determination are available. One standardized measure of self-determination is the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (SDS) (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). This scale is a self-reporting measure that provides data on each of the four

essential characteristics of self-determination. The characteristics of the Arc SDS include student autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and student self-realization. Wehmeyer & Schwartz (1997) proved this normed-based assessment to be effective to determine relationships between self-determination and positive post school outcomes. The validity and reliability of the Arc SDS was proven by Wehmeyer (1996) when he discussed the efficacy of the scale for instructional and research purposes. Jameson (2007) found that students possessing higher self-determination scores, as measured by the Arc SDS, express more positive post-secondary experiences than those possessing lower self-determination scores. Likewise the Arc SDS verified higher scores in transition planning knowledge in students with higher self-determination scores (Lee et al., 2012). The Arc SDS assessment measure was designed to give a voice to students with cognitive disabilities by incorporating a self-reporting indicator of self-determination. Prior to its use, students' interests or preferences were seldom considered. This assessment scale can also analyze individual strengths and weaknesses of domains in order to formulate goals and objectives for students. This assessment is a very strong tool to measure self-determination, but it is not the only one available.

Another measurement is the Self-determination Assessment Battery (Field, Hoffman, and Sawilowsky, 2004). This measurement possesses many tools with which to measure cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects that relate to self-determination. The Self-determination Assessment Battery includes input from the student, parent, and teacher. Thus, it offers a comprehensive picture of individual self-determination characteristics. This measurement consists of five instruments that focus on self-determination. The first instrument is the Self-determination Knowledge Scale Pretest. The pretest determines the student's cognitive knowledge of self-determination. The next two instruments of the assessment are the Self-

determination Parent Perception Scale and the Self-Determination Teacher Perception Scale. Both of these are utilized to determine behaviors and skills that are associated with self-determination from the perspectives of parents and teachers. The fourth component of the assessment is the Self-determination Observation Checklist. This checklist is to be applied by the classroom teacher in order to help determine if the student exhibits any behaviors that are associated with self-determination. Finally, the Self-determination Student Scale is given to measure affective and cognitive traits of the student's self-determination. The five instruments that encompass the Self-determination Assessment Battery can be utilized to examine a student's cognitive, behavioral, and affective characteristics of self-determination, as well as to assist educators in planning for self-determination instruction. However, while this measurement has demonstrated effectiveness, there is another self-determination scale that has proven more beneficial for elementary students.

The American Institutes for Research Self-determination Scale (AIR) (Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994) measures an individual's capacity and opportunity for self-determination. This assessment measure contains student, parent, and educator forms that seek to reveal a student's level of self-determination. The results of these scores can be used to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, develop educational goals and objectives, and suggest strategies to improve students' capacity and provide opportunities for students to become more self-determined. The AIR Assessments adhere to the learning theory of self-determination as presented by Mithaug, Mithaug, Agran, Martin, and Wehmeyer (2003), suggesting that the necessary characteristics of self-determination develop over time as children learn skills and develop attitudes that allow them to engage in self-determined behaviors (Davis, 2015b). The effectiveness of the AIR Self-determination Scale can be seen in its ability to

identify self-determined behaviors by measuring capacity and opportunity in youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). Additionally, Lee et al., (2012) found the AIR-Student form to be a good predictor of students' self-determination. Carter, Trainor, Owens, Sweden, and Sun (2010) examined the capacity and opportunity components of self-determination in adolescents with disabilities and found that teachers assess capacity for self-determination differently based on student disability. For example, students with learning disabilities were determined to have a higher capacity for self-determination than students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). Furthermore, the students with EBD were rated as having higher self-determination scores than students with cognitive disabilities. Clearly, teachers' perceptions were influenced by student disability.

Familiarity of Self-determination

The opinions and views of teachers who provide self-determination instruction are pertinent. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) surveyed 43 Special Educators to determine their familiarity with self-determination, the adequacy of their training, specific strategies acquired, and the effectiveness of strategies. In their study, 75% of respondents reported having familiarity with the term self-determination, but 67% of those felt their training in this area was inadequate. This study also reported the method in which Special Educators attained their knowledge of self-determination. Graduate courses were responsible for the greatest mode of acquisition (25%), followed by workshops and conferences (23%), books (18%), undergraduate courses (16%), and school district in-services (14%). Most respondents indicated that information about the facilitation of student self-determination in undergraduate and graduate level courses was extremely important. Next, teachers were asked if they taught individual components of self-determination and how important they thought the instruction to

be in those areas. The most frequently chosen areas reported by teachers were choice-making (86%) and problem solving (84%) that were easily absorbed and had substantial backing from outside the public school system.

The research conducted by Grigal, Neubert, Moon, and Graham (2003) sought to determine familiarity of self-determination for teachers. This study reported that two-thirds of participants stated that they were familiar with self-determination. These researchers examined this familiarity within and across four different constructs. First, self-determination was examined with respect to type of student disability and secondly with respect to teacher type. Special Educators of students with high-incidence disabilities indicated more familiarity than general educators. However, no difference was reported between special and general educators who taught students with low-incidence disabilities. Next, self-determination was examined with respect to type of instructional program (college preparatory and career technology versus community based life skills). Teachers who taught community life skills to students with high-incidence disabilities were more familiar with self-determination than teachers who taught in college preparatory and career technology programs. Additionally, Special Educators who taught in college preparatory and career technology reported more familiarity with self-determination than general educators who taught the same subjects. Finally, self-determination was examined with respect to teaching experience. Teachers with more than 10 years of experience instructing students with high-incidence disabilities demonstrated more familiarity with self-determination and better understood how to teach it than teachers of students with low-incidence disabilities. Educators of students with low-incidence disabilities who possessed fewer than 10 years teaching experiences reported more familiarity with self-determination and a better

understanding of how to teach it than teachers who taught the same students for more than 10 years. Undeniably, teacher perceptions are crucial to implementation of self-determination.

Importance of Early Initiation

Most discussions about self-determination tend to focus on secondary transition. However, more recent dialogues have begun to center on self-determination in early childhood. Wehmeyer and Field (2007) recommended that self-determination become an instructional focus that spans across an individual's life in order for students to succeed. Children with disabilities will often require support to cultivate skills that are precursors to developing self-determination. Palmer et al. (2012) reveal precursor skills that include choice-making and problem solving which, when developed, will form a foundation for children to build self-determination skills. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) disclosed that Special Educators in their study reported choice-making (86%) and problem solving (84%) as most important. Wehmeyer (1999, 2005) stated that mastering the components of self-determination will lead individuals to become causal agents in their own lives. This process of progressing through the components is essential for SWSCD to have a good quality of life as adults. One functional model of self-determination was introduced by Wehmeyer (1999). The model stressed providing opportunities for individuals to practice components of self-determination within the environments and experiences that are natural for the individual.

In an earlier study, Bullock and Lutkenhaus (1988) studied the developmental pattern of volitional actions of children between the ages of 15 and 35 months. They observed children engage in play and clean-up activities and determined that young children are able to achieve goals. These results give credibility to the notion presented Wehmeyer that volitional acts of self-determination start to develop in the early childhood years and are consistent with the views of

other researchers who argue that the origins of self-determination commence in early childhood and develop over time with the support of others (Brown & Cohen, 1996; Erwin & Brown, 2000, 2003; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003). Erwin et al. (2009) stated that just because an individual grows older chronologically does not necessarily ensure that the individual has had opportunities to master choice and decision-making. If these prerequisite skills, which lead to later self-determination, have not been mastered, then self-determination will not ensue. However, because choice-making and decision-making can be facilitating early in life, self-determination can be nurtured.

Focusing on establishing the foundation of self-determination in the early years has proven beneficial. Abery and Zajac (1996) listed four of these advantages. First, an organized approach to developing the precursor skills that lead to self-determination encourages adults to provide guidance to young children as they practice needed skills. Second, childhood provides ample time for practice and improvement of choice-making and problem solving skills before independence is achieved. Next, when concepts related to self-determination are introduced at an early age, overdependence, low self-efficacy, and external locus of control can be avoided. Finally, childhood provides many opportunities for the infusion of self-determination within a child's developmental framework which will facilitate the attainment of skills that lead to self-determined behavior. Given the fact the self-determination has proven to be a developmental process (Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 1996), it does not make sense to wait until an individual is an adult and has matured to begin the instruction in this development progression.

The Key Component of Self-determination

Palmer et al. (2012) proposed a relationship of overlapping concepts that are vital components for the later development of self-determination for children with disabilities in the

early years. These components include: a) opportunities for the child to make choices and engage in problem solving, b) self-regulation and c) engagement. Choice-making and problem solving are self-determination skills that can be cultivated early in life (Doll et al. 1996). The development of these skills is witnessed daily by educators of young children. However, SWSCD often require a structured support system in order to develop these skills within the learning environment. McCormick, Jolivet, and Ridgley (2003) indicated that choice-making activities offer young children a chance to exhibit ownership of daily activities and facilitate the beginning of independence and independent decision-making. Many times choices and decisions are pre-selected by educators and adults in the lives of SWSCD. Jolivet, McCormick, McLaren, and Steed (2009) found that children with and without disabilities made choices regarding the options that were introduced by adults who had specific outcomes in mind. However, choices should be offered to young SWSCD to facilitate the formation of preferences so they may decide what they do and do not like (Liso, 2010). Seligman (1975) publicized the importance of engaging children with disabilities in the identification of personal preferences through choice to contest learned helplessness. Likewise, Hauser-Cram, Bronson, and Upshur (1993) concluded that children who make choices to exercise control over their environments will start to understand the consequences of choices. Thus, the field has shifted from an enabling and powerlessness perspective to one of empowerment and self-determination. However, it is still not clear whether TESE perceive self-determination to be an important part of their teaching roles.

Administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals have recognized choice-making as an essential component that needs to be taught during the early years of a child's education. Cabeza et al. (2013) reported the results a study which surveyed Tennessee Administrators about self-

determination practices in their schools. These administrators reported that choice-making was the most frequently taught component of self-determination in their schools, and that self-advocacy and leadership was the least taught component. Wisconsin paraprofessionals were surveyed about their perceived importance of the individual components of self-determination, and rated choice-making and problem solving as the most important (Walter, Johnson, & Schomberg, 2009). Cho (2009) surveyed elementary Special Education teachers and found that educators of students with severe disabilities ranked goal setting as the most important component of self-determination and choice-making as the least important component. However, Cho found that the most frequently component taught by the same educators was problem solving followed by choice-making. Additionally, the least reported component taught by elementary Special Educators was self-advocacy. Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) found that teachers rated decision-making, problem solving, and choice-making as the highest components. These researchers also reported that teachers of students with significant disabilities expressed the most value for choice-making. Carter et al. (2013) stated that problem solving, self-management, and choice-making skills received high importance ratings while goal setting and self-advocacy and leadership received less importance. However, choice interventions implemented within academic, daily living, and vocational activities yielded uncertain results in a meta-analysis conducted by Shogren, Fagella, Bae, and Wehmeyer, (2004).

The field of Special Education has witnessed an increase in the number of articles concentrating on individuals with disabilities that embrace the components of self-determination across the life span. Shogren, Wehmeyer, Buchanan, and Lopez (2006) reported that 18% of articles integrated a component of self-determination. Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, and Wood (2001) conducted a meta-analysis assessing interventions across disability groups and

ages and noted that choice-making was the most often promoted and taught component to students with intellectual disabilities.

The importance of providing SWSCD choice-making opportunities in the early elementary years is evident. Wehmeyer (2002) identified this need as essential for young students in order for them to understand that they possess the ability to exercise control and that many choices have limited possibilities from which to choose. Special Educators have a responsibility to foster the acquisition of self-determination by the introduction of the component skills that lead to self-determination. In particular, choice-making opportunities must be offered to students, and teachers must provide feedback to SWSCD about the outcomes of their choices. In this way, students will begin to associate choice with consequence (Wehmeyer, 2002). As a result, teachers begin laying the foundation for self-determination skills that will develop and, by definition, empower their students in the process. Given the prior listed research studies and their results, it is reasonable to assume that the most important components of self-determination are choice-making and problem solving. This assumption will be utilized in the development of hypotheses focusing on most important components skills of self-determination.

Frequency of Teaching Components of Self-determination

Examination of self-determination has revealed the importance of its implementation and highlighted many of the benefits this instructional approach holds for students with disabilities. Many studies have surveyed Special Educators to ascertain their views and practices of self-determination. Agran, Snow, and Swaner (1999) surveyed 100 teachers and found that 29% of teachers regarded self-determination as very important, 35% ranked it between medium and high priority, 17 % rated it medium priority, and 3% viewed it as lowest priority. These researchers

also found that the 91% of teachers associated self-determination with choice-making and that 84% of the teachers reported teaching decision-making.

Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) conducted a nationwide survey of Special Education teachers that examined their knowledge and practices of self-determination. The above studies found 66 -75% of respondents were familiar with self-determination. As a result, this researcher will utilize these parameters as a guide for setting criteria for levels of knowledge when assessing Tennessee elementary Special Educators' (TESE) familiarity of self-determination. The survey results indicated that 60% of the teachers were familiar with self-determination and that all seven components were seen as important to teach. However, the highest rated components, in regards to importance of teaching, was decision-making, problem solving, and choice-making. It is important to note that no difference was found in importance of self-determination between teachers of students with mild disabilities and severe disabilities, except for choice-making. Teachers of students with severe disabilities regarded instructional efforts to be more important to their students than did teachers of students with mild disabilities.

Another study conducted by Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008) surveyed 340 general and Special Education high school teachers regarding reported importance of teaching components of self-determination and actual time spent teaching these components. Reported results indicated that 66% of teachers assigned the value of very important to problem solving, self-regulation/self-management, decision-making, and goal setting. Both general and Special Education teachers implemented self-determination instruction as much as they valued the importance of all components. Additionally, the researchers found that Special Educators taught self-determination more frequently than general educators. Correlations were reported for teachers' perceptions of the importance of self-determination and rated importance and self-

determination instructional practices for all seven components. The correlations are as follows: choice-making ($r = .75$); decision-making ($r = .74$); problem solving ($r = .76$); goal setting/attainment ($r = .72$); self-advocacy/leadership ($r = .75$); self-management/ self-regulation ($r = .71$); and self-awareness/self-knowledge ($r = .72$). The results of this study confirm choice-making, problem solving, and self-advocacy and leadership as having the strongest relationships.

Other researchers have investigated the most frequently taught components of self-determination. Cho (2009) surveyed 407 elementary school teachers and found that the most frequently taught components of self-determination were problem solving and choice-making. Cho, Wehmyer, and Kingston (2011) also surveyed elementary teachers to determine instructional times devoted to teaching the components of self-determination and found choice-making and problem solving to be ranked the highest. Clearly, research provides evidence that choice-making and problem solving are perceived to be the most frequently taught components of self-determination.

The findings of the aforementioned research studies led to the hypothesis that choice-making and problem solving are be the component skills of self-determination that were taught with the most frequency by TESE. This hypothesis will be tested by surveying TESE and analyzing the data resulting from that survey.

Barriers to Teaching Self-determination

Many barriers to teaching self-determination exist and several studies have given account of their influences on the implementation of self-determination instructional practices. A study conducted by Agran, Hong, and Blankenship (2007) surveyed 187 teachers of students with visual impairments and reported perceived barriers to providing self-determination instruction. The most commonly selected response was that students have more urgent instruction needs

(51%), followed by the response that faculty are unaware of available curricular and assessment materials (38%). The least commonly reported barrier, other than “none of the above,” was someone else is responsible for this type of instruction (25%).

Wehmyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) surveyed 1,219 Special Education teachers across the United States and assessed perceived barriers of self-determination. The highest rated barrier was that students would not benefit from instruction of self-determination skills (42%), followed by insufficient training (41%), and students having more urgent needs (29%). A survey of 407 elementary school teachers’ perceptions and promotion of self-determination was conducted by Cho (2009). In this study, barriers to self-determination were evaluated as they related to both general educators and Special Educators. The results revealed that 52% of Special Educators and 60% of general educators reported the greatest barrier as students having more urgent needs in other areas. The next highest barrier was insufficient time, cited by 47% of Special Education teachers and 34% of general education teachers. This was followed by lack of training or knowledge which received a 35% rating for Special Educators and a 27% rating for general educators. Another perceived barrier was that students were too young (33% of Special Educators and 26% of general educators). Finally, the least reported barrier was difficult to empathize, which was reported by 1% of Special Educators and 1% of general educators.

Another study assessing barriers to self-determination, conducted by Cho, Wehmyer, and Kingston (2011), surveyed 407 educators to assess possible barriers to the promotion of self-determination. These researchers found the most reported barrier to be that teachers felt their students had more urgent needs for instruction. This barrier was followed by lack of training and time. In this study, the researchers found that the belief that students would not benefit from

instruction was ranked close to the bottom of the list. This finding is in contrast to those of Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000).

Summarily, the results of the aforementioned studies indicate that teachers perceived more urgent instructional needs as the most prevalent barrier to the development of self-determination skills followed by not enough time and training. When assessing possible reasons for teachers identifying students as having “other more urgent instructional needs,” Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2012) speculated that these other instructional needs may be related to problem behavior and relationship difficulty experienced by some SWSCD. The above studies found 66 -75% of respondents were familiar with self-determination. As a result, this researcher will utilize these parameters as a guide for setting criteria for levels of knowledge when assessing TESE familiarity of self-determination.

Acquisition of Self-determination Knowledge

Research focusing on methods of acquisition of self-determination knowledge is limited. In fact, only two studies were found that contributed to this topic. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) reported the method in which Special Educators attained their knowledge of self-determination. Graduate courses were responsible for the greatest mode of acquisition (25%), followed by workshops and conferences (23%), books (18%), undergraduate courses (16%), and school district in-services (14%). Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) wanted to define sources from which educators gain their knowledge of self-determination. These researchers reported the highest rated source (36%) as professional journal articles. As a result, the researcher sought to study the strength of the relationship between TESE familiarity with self-determination and time spent reading educational literature. Due to educational literature being ranked the highest source of obtaining information, the researcher predicted that a moderately

strong relationship would be found between familiarity of self-determination and time spent reading educational literature.

Statement of the Problem

Research has established the effectiveness of self-determination in the lives of SWSCD. There are three reasons why educators must dedicate instructional time and resources to teaching self-determination skills (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). First, adults with disabilities have reported the significance of self-determination for an enriched quality of life. Second, increased student involvement in decision-making has been linked to self-determination. Last, students exiting high school as self-determined citizens are likely to achieve more positive adult outcomes. Studies that have focused on teachers' perceptions of self-determination have mainly dealt with students at the secondary level and those transitioning to adulthood. Currently, five studies have been conducted that focus on elementary school teachers perceptions of self-determination (Cho, 2009; Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011, 2012; Mason et al., 2004; & Stang et al., 2009). None of these studies address the perceptions and promotion of self-determination for Special Educators who teach SWSCD within the state of Tennessee. This study addresses this void in the literature.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to add to the literature pertaining to teachers' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for SWSCD at the elementary level. Additionally, this research seeks to specifically determine elementary Special Educators' perceptions of self-determination for SWSCD in the state of Tennessee.

Significance of the Study

The increased emphasis for students with disabilities to exit high school with skills that enable them be college, career, and community ready (Davis, 2015b) is evident. However, there is minimal data reporting elementary Special Educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination in SWSCD. Carter et al. (2015) reported the extent to which Tennessee administrators prioritized the seven skills of self-determination, and found administrators do place high value on staff teaching self-determination skills. Next, it was determined that staff taught these skills only sometimes to students with and without disabilities. This study revealed that self-determination skills were being taught in a variety of settings and classes across the state of Tennessee. Lastly, the researchers discovered administrators placed the same value for teaching skills of self-determination to students with disabilities and the entire student body, except for the domain of problem solving. In this area, administrators reported a greater need for the student body to possess these skills over students with disabilities.

The views of administrators concerning self-determination are important. Even more imperative is the perceptions of teachers. Currently, documentation of Tennessee elementary Special Educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination in SWSCD does not exist.

Research Design

A non-experimental survey research design was utilized to conduct this research study. This research design has been used to assess teachers' perceptions on many topics surrounding education (Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2011) as well as to identify relationships between variables pertaining to self-determination and other education-related phenomena (Biggerstaff, 2012).

Summary

This review of literature is aimed at disclosing the current research concerning self-determination and instructional practices of teachers' who serve SWSCD. The support for self-

determination instruction for students with disabilities has seen a heightened focus in research, policy, and instructional practices as the educational expectations of these students have risen. This increased emphasis has focused largely on students who are in secondary education or who are transitioning into post-school communities. Minimal research has focused on developing an atmosphere conducive for self-determination at the elementary level. The limitations of self-determination research at the elementary level suggest that teachers of SWSCD may not realize their potential role in facilitation of self-determination skills within the elementary school environment. Therefore, it was deemed important to conduct a study focusing on the components of self-determination, their levels of significance, time spent teaching these components, and barriers to teaching these components needed to be examined from the perspective of TESE who instruct SWSCD.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to assess Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' (TESE) perceptions of self-determination. Specifically, the researcher wanted to determine the general knowledge Special Educators in Tennessee possess concerning self-determination and how familiar they were with the term. Additionally, the study defined the level of importance that TESE place on self-determination, if TESE placed the same value on all components of self-determination, how often individual components of self-determination are taught, and if a relationship existed between the level of importance and time spent teaching individual components of self-determination. The research also examined perceived barriers to teaching self-determination. Lastly, the researcher examined if a relationship exist between the amounts of time Special Educators peruse educational literature and the general level of importance placed on teaching self-determination skills to students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD). Approaches to teaching components of self-determination to SWSCD are discussed and implications for future research and practice are presented.

This research study was conducted through an online survey (Survey Monkey), posted through a survey company, to which TESE are invited to respond.

Participants

The participants in this study were 72 elementary Special Education teachers in Tennessee. The researcher obtained a list of Special Education directors from the Tennessee Department of Education, Special Populations Division. Each Special Education director (SED) received an invitation for elementary Special Education teachers in their district to participate in this study. The researcher did not send an invitation to the district in which she is employed, in order to

avoid soliciting biased responses. Each SED who signed the consent form received a survey invitation to forward to the elementary Special Education teachers working in that district. The survey invitation provided instructions on how to access the survey. A total of 20 SED consented for their teachers to partake in the study, which reflected a district participation rate of 14%. The Special Educators taught students with disabilities from Kindergarten through sixth grade with a variety of disabilities. The participants taught in urban, suburban, and rural districts.

Power Analysis

With a sample size of 72 participants, a medium effect size and an alpha level set at .05 the statistical power of this study was estimated to be .95 demonstrating that a high percentage of parallel design parameters could be projected to find similar statistically significant results.

Procedures

Approval for this research containing human subjects as participants was obtained from the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). SED received an email from the researcher in the fall of 2015 inviting them to participate in the study. TESE from participating districts subsequently received an email invitation that explained the purpose and significance of the study and directions to access the survey on the internet if they decided to participate. Participants received no financial compensation for their contribution.

Research Design

A non-experimental survey research design was utilized to conduct this study. This design was chosen due to its flexibility and ubiquitous nature. This design was also the most suitable method for canvassing opinions and feelings about particular issues because the participants feel freer to answer more candidly due to the guaranteed anonymity of the online survey format (Muijs, 2011). Survey research does not set up a simulated situation like an

experiment. Therefore, it is easier to generalize the results of the study. Survey studies are also more effective for gathering large numbers of data with little to no cost and minimal effort on the part of the researcher. Many educational researchers have realized the statistical benefits of the non-experimental survey research design (LaFrance & Calhoun, 2012; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012; Waldon, 2015). An additional advantage of this type of research design is the flexibility it offers to the participants. The teachers are able to choose a convenient time and place to complete the survey. This approach to gathering data allows all participants to complete the same questionnaire in the exact same manner.

The self-determination survey contained simple questions focusing on concepts of self-determination and was able to be completed in less than 20 minutes. These questions concentrated on extracting the knowledge, perceptions, and educational practices of TESE as they relate to self-determination. The research questions were designed to make the survey process easy to understand and effortless to answer.

An experimental research design was considered for this research because of its ability to identify cause and effect relationships. However, this design was ruled out due to the lack of a control agent in this study. By using the non-experimental survey research design the variables were presented as they appeared in the practice of TESE (Muijs, 2011), which was valuable for this research.

Threats to Validity and Reliability

When assessing the self-determination survey, several factors may have appeared that could have jeopardized the validity of the instrument. First, poor design of the instrument could lead to a threat to content validity. However, because this instrument was adapted from previous research (Cho, 2009) the threat was minimized. Reliability was strengthened by the reduced

probability of random measurement error. Likewise, minimal bias occurred from confusion or misinterpretation of survey items. It is important to note the potential for bias if TESE responded in ways that they perceived to be professionally expected. In order to minimize this bias, the self-determination questionnaire stressed the need for honest responses with the guarantee of anonymity. An expert in self-determination reviewed the instrument to ensure its effectiveness, clarity, and brevity (M. L. Wehmeyer, personal communication, June 29, 2015). The expert knowledge confirmed the content and construct validity of the instrument.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized for this survey can be found in Appendix A. This survey was adapted based on one developed and used by Cho (2009). Cho's survey, in turn was a modified version of a survey instrument used by Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000). Cho's modifications were a result of needing a survey instrument to be more relevant to younger children. Cho's survey focused on both general and Special Educators in the elementary school setting and their knowledge and use of interventions to promote self-determination. The survey contained a demographic section that included questions pertaining to participants' primary teaching assignments, amount of teaching experience, states in which they resided, disability categories of students served, and grade levels taught. In addition, the survey contained questions pertaining to teachers' perceptions regarding the level of importance they ascribe to self-determination and how beliefs, level of disability, and ecological factors influence teacher practices. Cho also assessed student involvement in Individualized Education Plans and perceived barriers to self-determination instruction.

In order to assess TESEs' perceptions of self-determination, several alterations were made to the survey. First, the survey focused solely on the knowledge and implementation practices of

TESE who serve students with disabilities. Next, the questions pertaining to Individual Education Plans were excluded. Finally, questions gathering information to determine participant state of residency were omitted.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data was conducted using the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The demographics and professional characteristics of participants were defined by descriptive statistics. Levels of importance were determined by assigning nominal scales to varying levels of stated importance. Next, coding was utilized to assign numerical values in order to run statistical analyses. This process was also utilized for determining how often each individual component of self-determination was taught.

The relationship between reported level of importance and time spent on each individual component of self-determination was measured statistically using correlation coefficients. Likewise, correlation coefficients were used to determine the association between reported levels of importance and perceived barriers of teaching self-determination as well as the relationship between the familiarity of self-determination and the amount of hours spent reading educational literature.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How familiar are TESE with the term self-determination?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE are not very familiar with the term self-determination as evidenced by 69% or less responding that they are familiar with the term.

H₁: TESE are very familiar with the term self-determination as evidenced by 70% or more responding that they are familiar with the term.

Analysis: Item 5 of the survey asked TESE if they were familiar with the term self-determination. Descriptive analysis was used to report the percentage of participants who were familiar with self-determination. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 66 replied to item 5.

Research Question 2: What level of importance do Tennessee Special Educators place on teaching self-determination skills in general?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE place low level of importance on self-determination skills in general as evidenced by a mean score of 2.5 or below on the survey scale (Range = 1 – 5).

H₁: TESE place a medium to high level of importance on self-determination skills in general as evidenced by a mean score of 3.5 or above on the survey scale (Range = 1 – 5).

Analysis: Item 7 of the survey asked TESE to rate how important they felt it was to teaching self-determination to SWSCD on a scale of 1 to 5, Not Important to Most Important. Descriptive analysis was used to define the level of importance placed on teaching self-determination in general. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 60 replied to item 7.

Research Question 3: Do TESE assign higher levels of importance to choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE do not assign higher levels of importance on choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination.

H₁: TESE assign higher levels of importance on choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination.

Analysis: Item 8 on the survey asked TESE to report the level of importance of teaching each component of self-determination. Each component was listed with an accompanying scale of 1 to 5, Not Important to Most Important. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to determine if a difference existed between choice-making and problem solving and other components of self-determination. Out of the 72 participants, 61 responded.

Research Question 4: How frequently are components of self-determination taught?

Hypotheses

H₀: Not every individual component of self-determination is taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting for SWSCD as evidenced by a mean of 3.9 or below.

H₁: All individual components of self-determination are taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting for SWSCD as evidenced by a mean score of 4.0 or above.

Analysis: Item 9 on the TESE survey asked teachers to rate how frequently individual components of self-determination were taught. The question included a scale from 1 to 5, Never to Very Often. Descriptive analysis of mean scores was utilized to report the frequency with which different components of self-determination were taught. A total of 59 responses were collected from the 72 participants.

Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which each component is taught?

Hypotheses:

H₀: There are weak relationships between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which components are taught as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are less than .25.

H₁: There are moderate to strong relationships between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which components are taught as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are between .25 and .75.

Analysis: Items 8 and 9 on the TESE survey were investigated to determine the strength of the relationship between perceived level of importance of individual components of self-determination and the frequency of teaching these components. A Pearson *r* correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength of relationships between importance and time variables. The reported results were from 59 of the 72 participants.

Research Question 6: What do TESE identify as the most significant barriers that prevent the teaching of self-determination skills at the elementary level?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE will identify “lack of training or time” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination.

H₁: TESE will identify “difficulty communicating” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination.

Analysis: Item 11 of the survey asked TESE to check all reasons that might lead to not providing self-determination instruction. Descriptive analysis was used to describe perceived barriers to self-determination instruction. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 56 replied to item 11.

Research Question 7: Is there a relationship between TESEs’ familiarity with self-determination and the amount of hours spent reading educational literature?

Hypotheses:

H₀: There is a weak relationship between familiarity with self-determination and the number of hours spent reading educational literature as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are less than .25.

H₁: There is a moderately strong relationship between familiarity with self-determination and the number of hours spent reading educational literature as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are between .25 and .75.

Analysis: Items 5 and 18 on the TESE survey were investigated to determine if a relationship existed between familiarity of self-determination and amount of hours spent reading educational literature. Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength of relationships between the variables. The reported results were from 57 of the 72 participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study was conducted after reviewing the literature surrounding teachers' perceptions of self-determination at the elementary school level. The purpose of this non-experimental survey research was to canvass the opinions and practices of Tennessee's elementary Special Educators' (TESE) concerning self-determination. The study examined teachers' perceptions of the importance of self-determination as a general concept as well as the level of importance they assign to individual components of self-determination. Additionally, this research surveyed the frequency with which components of self-determination were taught gauged whether all components were taught with the same level of frequency. Barriers to teaching self-determination were also examined. The research explored relationships between levels of importance and frequency of components being taught, as well as relationships between level of importance and number of barriers that TESE experience in relation to implementing self-determination activities. Finally, the survey assessed whether or not a relationship existed between familiarity of self-determination and amount of hours spent reading educational literature.

The succeeding sections report descriptive and inferential statistics pertaining to survey responses of TESE. The first section provides demographic information pertaining to the participants. This is followed by a sequential list of research questions, hypotheses, descriptions of statistical methods used to test the hypotheses, and a summary of the statistical results.

Participants

Participants were 72 elementary Special Education teachers in Tennessee. The participants were 7% male and 93% female (see Figure 1) and taught students with disabilities

from kindergarten through sixth grade (see Table 1). Participants taught in resource/interventionist classrooms (65%) and comprehensive developmental classrooms (35%) (see Figure 2). Most indicated that they taught students that were in more than one disability category; the most frequent categories being autism (81.82 %), intellectual disability (79%), speech and language impairment (76%), specific learning disability (76%), and multiple disabilities (61%) (see Table 2). In addition, 77% taught in rural districts, 18% in suburban districts, and 5% in urban districts (see Figure 3). Lastly, 17% of participants had 3 or fewer years of teaching experience, 19% had 4 - 6 years of experience, 10% had 7 – 9 years of experience, and 54% of the participants had 10 years or more teaching experience (see Figure 4). Of the participants surveyed, 86% taught in Title 1 schools, and 14% taught in non-title schools.

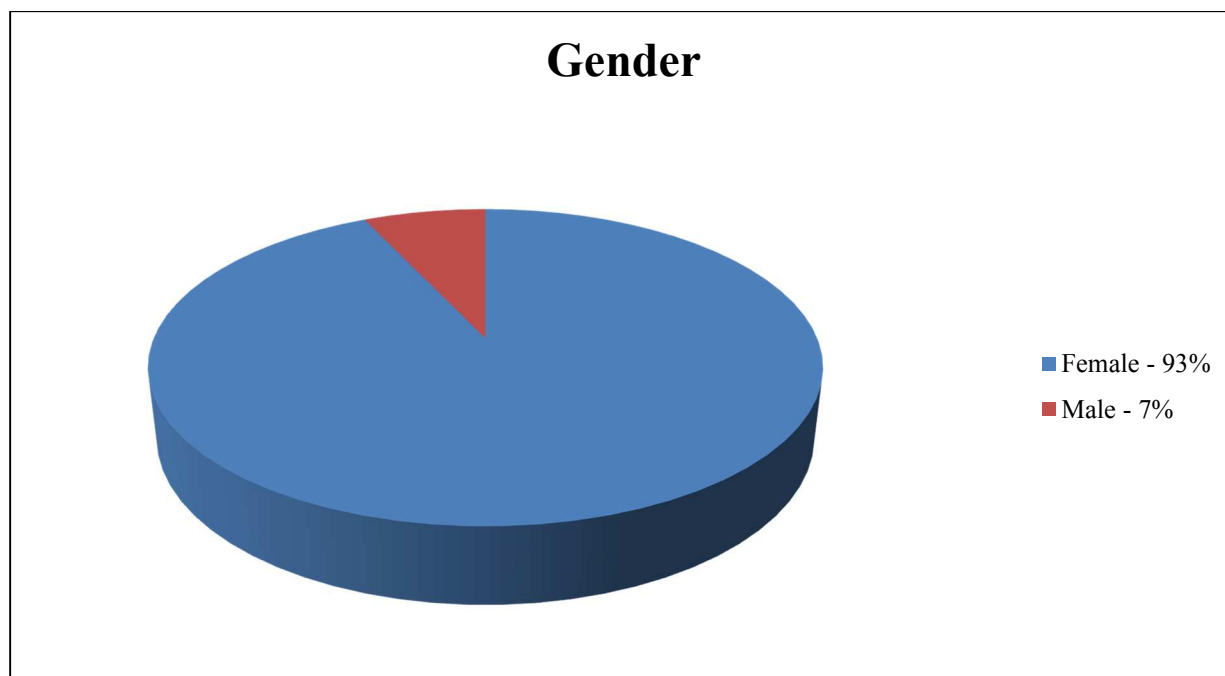


Figure 1. Gender of Participants

Table 1

Grade Levels Taught by Participants

Grade Level	Percent of Responses	Number of Participant Responses (n=72)
Kindergarten	63	34
First Grade	66	37
Second Grade	72	39
Third Grade	74	40
Fourth Grade	65	35
Fifth Grade	52	28
Sixth Grade	35	19

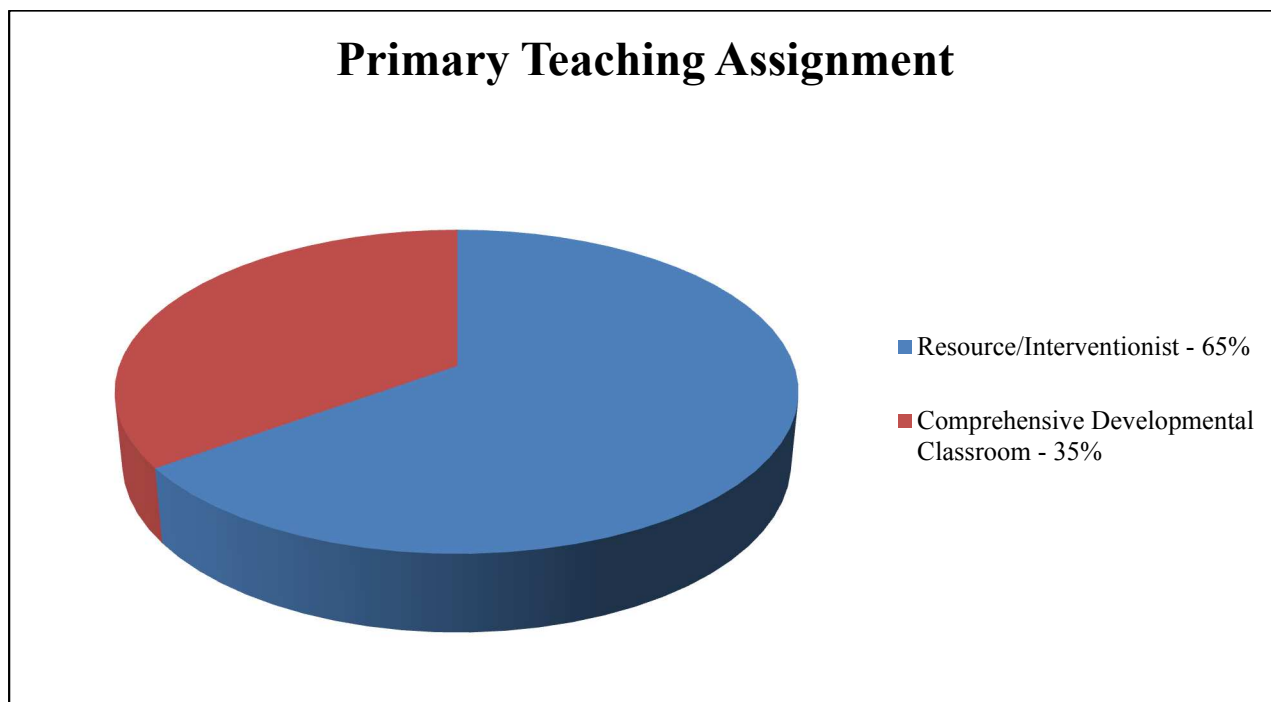


Figure 2. Participants' Primary Teaching Assignment

Table 2

Disability Categories Taught by Participants

Category	Percentage (%) of Responses	Number of Participant Responses (N=72)
Intellectual Disability	79	52
Emotional/Behavioral Dis.	38	25
Traumatic Brain Injury	20	13
Multiple Disability	60	40
Autism	82	54
Deaf/Blindness	11	7
Orthopedic Impairment	26	17
Specific Learning Dis.	76	50
Speech/Language Imp.	76	50

Note. Most special educators reported multiple types of disabilities within their classroom setting.

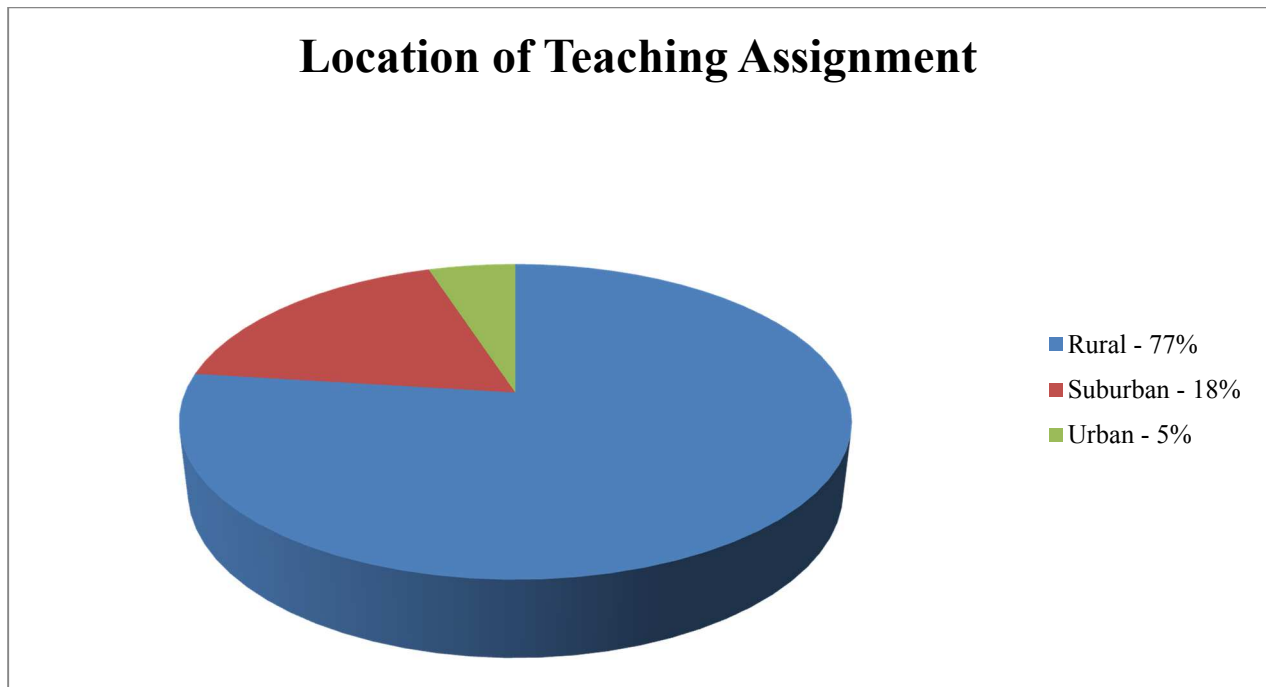


Figure 3. Location of Participants' Primary Teaching Assignment

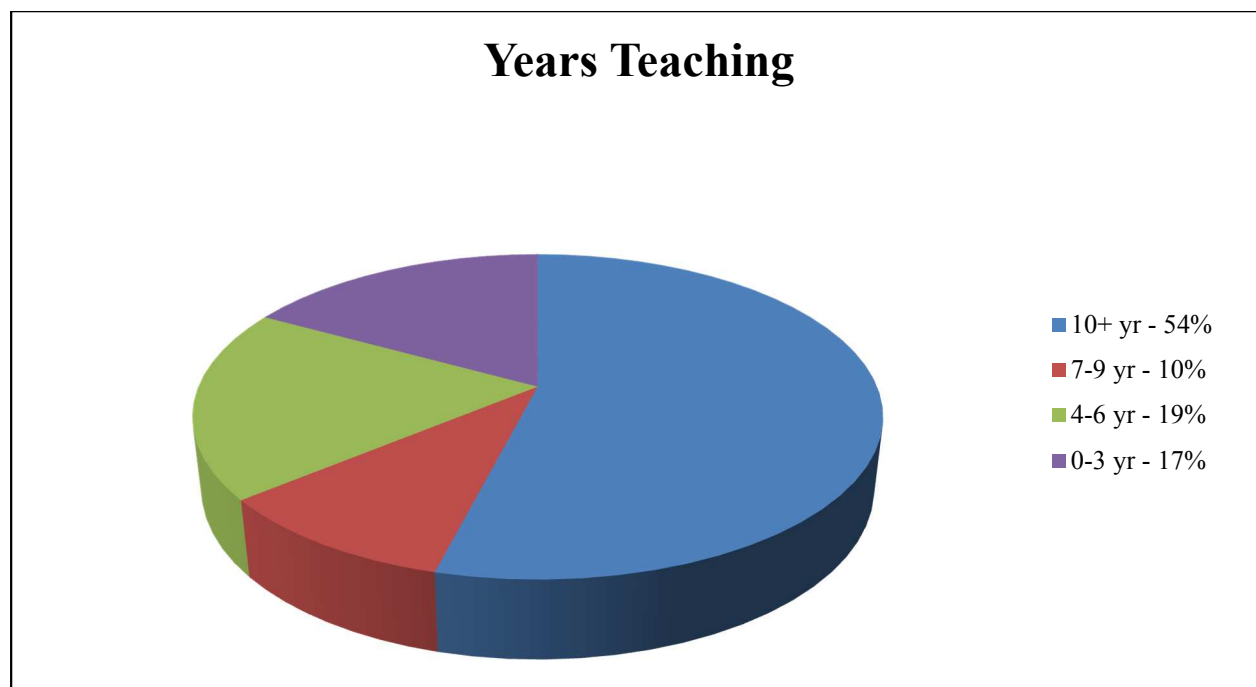


Figure 4. Number of Years Teaching Special Education

Research Questions, Hypotheses and Results

Research Question 1: How familiar are TESE with the term self-determination?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE are not very familiar with the term self-determination as evidenced by 69% or less responding that they are familiar with the term.

H₁: TESE are very familiar with the term self-determination as evidenced by 70% or more responding that they are familiar with the term.

Analysis: Item 5 of the survey asked TESE if they were familiar with the term self-determination. Descriptive analysis was used to report the percentage of respondents who were familiar with self-determination. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 66 replied to item 5.

Results: Seventy-nine percent of the TESE participants noted that they were very familiar with the term self-determination. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative was accepted.

Research Question 2: What level of importance do TESE place on teaching self-determination skills in general?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE place low level of importance on self-determination skills in general as evidenced by a mean score of 2.5 or below on the survey scale (Range = 1 – 5).

H₁: TESE place a medium to high level of importance on self-determination skills in general as evidenced by a mean score of 3.5 or above on the survey scale (Range = 1 – 5).

Analysis: Item 7 of the survey asked TESE to rate how important it was to teach self-determination to students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD) on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (Not Important to Most Important). Descriptive analysis was used to define the level of importance placed on teaching self-determination in general. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 60 replied to item 7.

Results: The level of importance that TESE (n=60) placed on self-determination averaged 3.68 (SD = 0.75) (see Figure 1). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative was accepted. TESE placed a moderately high level of importance on self-determination skills in general.

Research Question 3: Do TESE assign higher levels of importance to choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE do not assign higher levels of importance on choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination.

H₁: TESE assign higher levels of importance on choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination.

Analysis: Item 8 on the survey asked TESE to report the level of importance of teaching each component of self-determination using a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = Not Important to 5 = Most Important). A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if differences existed between choice-making, problem solving, and other components of self-determination.

Results: (Means and standard deviations pertaining to Level of Importance for the individual components of Self-Determination are listed in Table 1). The repeated-measures ANOVA revealed no significant differences among the individual components of self-determination (Wilks' Lambda = .81, $F(6, 52) = 1.98$, $p = .85$). Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. Specifically, TESE do not place higher levels of importance on choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination.

Table 3

Importance of Teaching Components of Self-determination

Component	Mean	SD	N
Self-management and Self-regulation	4.13	.81	60
Self-awareness and Self-knowledge	4.08	.80	60
Goal setting and Attainment	4.04	.66	61
Problem solving	4.04	.69	61
Self-Advocacy and Leadership	3.93	.75	60
Choice-making	3.86	.56	61
Decision-making	3.85	.68	60

Note: Importance ratings were determined on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Not Important, 5 = Most Important)

Research Question 4: How frequently are components of self-determination taught?

Hypotheses

H₀: Not every individual component of self-determination is taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting for SWSCD as evidenced by a mean of 3.9 or below.

H₁: All individual components of self-determination are taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting for SWSCD as evidenced by a mean score of 4.0 or above.

Analysis: Item 9 on the TESE survey asked teachers to rate how frequently individual components of self-determination were taught using a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = Never to 5 = Very Often). Descriptive analysis of mean scores was utilized to report the frequency with which different components of self-determination were taught. Teaching a component on a frequent basis was defined by a mean score of 4.0 and above on the Likert scale.

Mean scores below 4.0 meant that a component was not taught on a frequent basis. A total of 59 responses were collected from the 72 participants.

Results: A comparison of means for individual components of self-determination was conducted to determine how often TESE (n= 59 and 58) taught each component. (Means and standard deviations pertaining to the frequency with which individual components of self-determination are taught are listed in Table 2). TESE placed high value on all 7 components with means ranging from 3.52 to 4.08. However, not all components are taught on a frequent basis given that five of the individual component mean scores fell below the cutoff of 4.00. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. Not every individual component of self-determination is taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting SWSCD.

Table 4

Frequency of Teaching Components of Self-determination

Component	Mean	SD	N
Problem Solving	4.08	.84	59
Self-management and Self-regulation	4.05	.88	59
Self-awareness and Self-knowledge	3.98	.81	58
Choice-making	3.95	.86	59
Goal setting and Attainment	3.88	.93	59
Decision-making	3.69	.99	59
Self-advocacy and Leadership	3.53	1.06	59

Note: Frequency ratings were determined on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Never, 5 = Very Often)

Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which each component is taught?

Hypotheses

H₀: There are weak relationships between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which components are taught as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are less than .25.

H₁: There are moderate to strong relationships between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which components are taught as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are between .25 and .75.

Analysis: Items 8 and 9 on the TESE survey were written to determine the degree of relationship between level of importance of individual components and the frequency with which corresponding components are taught. A Pearson's r correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength of relationships between importance and frequency variables. (A weak correlational relationship was defined as $r < .25$. A moderate correlational relationship was defined as $r > .25$, but $< .75$), while a strong correlational relationship was defined $r > .75$ using a Likert scale that ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = Not Important to 5 = Most Important). The reported results were from 59 of the 72 participants.

Results: Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning Choice-making ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .56$) and the amount of time ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .86$) spent teaching this component of self-determination. A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a

moderate relationship, $r = .27, p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated Choice-making as a significant component to teach reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching choice-making.

Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning decision-making ($M = 3.85, SD = .68$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 3.69, SD = .99$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .34, p = 0.01$. Teachers who marked decision-making as an important component to teach reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching decision-making.

Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning problem Solving ($M = 4.04, SD = .69$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 4.08, SD = .84$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .51, p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated problem solving as a significant component to teach reported spending moderate amounts of time teaching problem solving.

Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning goal setting and Attainment ($M = 4.04, SD = .66$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 3.88, SD = .93$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .45, p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated goal setting and Attainment as a significant component to teach reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching goal setting and Attainment.

Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning Self-advocacy and Leadership ($M = 3.93, SD = .76$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.06$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .40, p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated Self-advocacy and

Leadership as a significant component to teach also reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching Self-advocacy and Leadership.

Fifty-nine TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning Self-management and Self-regulation ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .81$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .88$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .48$, $p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated self-management and self-regulation as significant components to teach reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching self-management and self-regulation.

Fifty-eight TESE were surveyed about their perceived level of importance concerning Self-awareness and Self-knowledge ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .80$) and the frequency with which they taught this component of self-determination ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .81$). A Pearson's r data analysis revealed a moderate relationship, $r = .46$, $p = 0.01$. Teachers who rated self-awareness and self-knowledge as a significant component to teach reported spending a moderate amount of time teaching self-awareness and self-knowledge.

A moderate relationship was demonstrated between perceived importance of all components of self-determination and the frequency with which their corresponding components are taught (see Table 4). The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. There are moderate relationships between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which their corresponding components are taught.

Table 5

Pearson's r: Importance vs. Time

Component	Importance		Time		Pearson's <i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Relationship
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Choice Making	3.87	0.56	3.95	0.86	0.27	0.05	Moderate
Decision Making	3.85	0.68	3.69	0.99	0.34	0.01	Moderate
Problem Solving	4.05	0.69	4.08	0.84	0.52	0.01	Moderate
Goal Setting	4.05	0.67	3.88	0.93	0.45	0.01	Moderate
Self-advocacy	3.93	0.76	3.53	1.06	0.40	0.01	Moderate
Self-management	4.13	0.81	4.05	0.88	0.48	0.01	Moderate
Self-awareness	4.08	0.81	3.98	0.81	0.46	0.01	Moderate

Research Question 6: What do TESE identify as the most significant barriers that prevent the teaching of self-determination skills at the elementary level?

Hypotheses:

H₀: TESE will identify “lack of training or time” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination.

H₁: TESE will identify “difficulty communicating” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination.

Analysis: Item 11 of the survey asked TESE to check all reasons that might lead to not providing self-determination instruction. TESE were asked to check all barriers that applied. The percentage of participants reporting individual components was calculated. Descriptive analysis was used to report the percentages of perceived barriers to self-determination instruction. Out of the 72 respondents to the survey, 56 replied to item 11.

Results: Responses to question options and percentages are listed in Figure 1, and in narrative form as follows; 1.) There are more urgent instructional needs (37.5%), 2.) There is not sufficient time to provide instruction in these areas (34.7%), 3.) My students have difficulty communicating effectively (29.2%), 4.) There is not enough freedom to teach these skills due to IEP requirements (18.1%), 5.) I am not aware of available curricular assessment materials, or instructional methods to teach in these areas (18.1%), 6.) My students are too young to learn these skills (15.3%), 7.) None of the above (15.3%), 8.) My students already have adequate skills in these areas (12.5%), 9.) I have not had sufficient training or information to teach in these areas (11.1%), and 10.) My students will not benefit in these areas due to their characteristics (5.6%). Respondents reported the biggest barrier to self-determination instruction was that SWSCD

possessed more urgent instructional needs, and the smallest barrier was that SWSCD would not benefit from self-determination instruction (see Figure 5). The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative was accepted. TESE identified “more urgent instructional needs” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination.

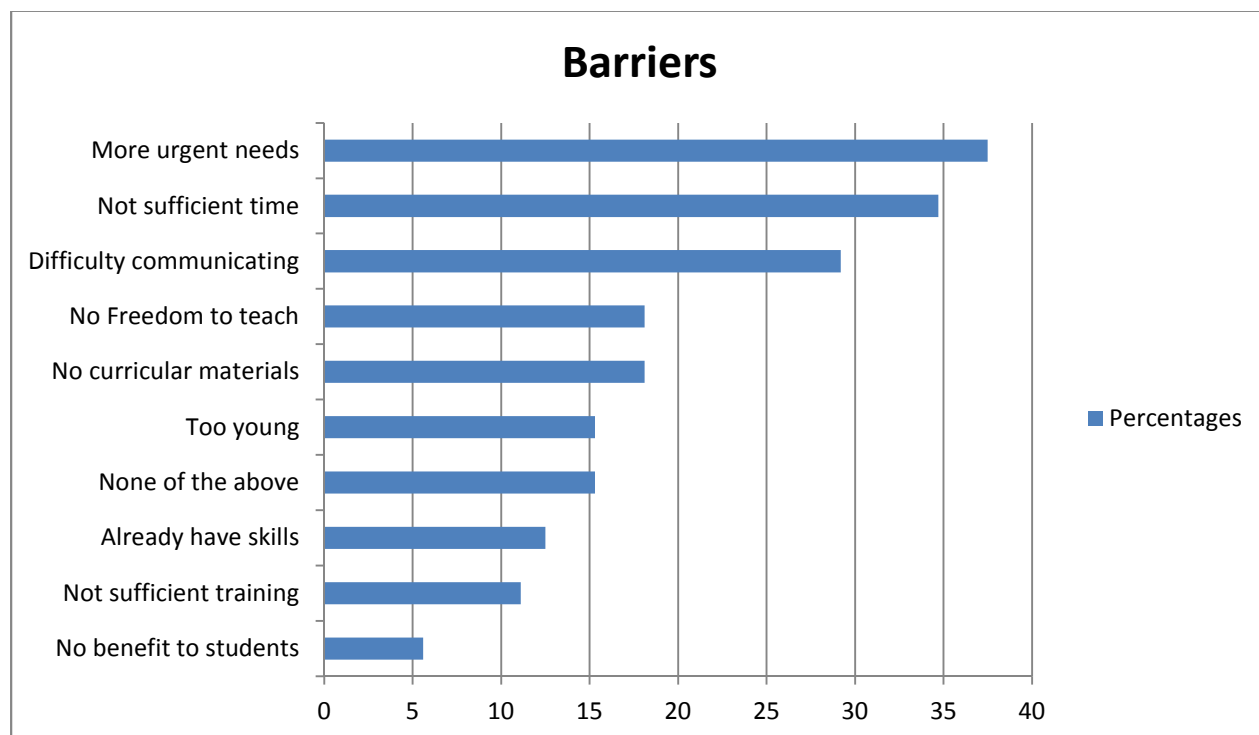


Figure 5: Barriers to teaching Self-determination

Research Question 7: Is there a relationship between participants’ level of familiarity with self-determination and the amount of hours they spend reading educational literature?

Hypotheses:

H₀: There is a weak relationship between familiarity with self-determination and the number of hours spent reading educational literature as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are less than .25.

H₁: There is a moderately strong relationship between familiarity with self-determination and the number of hours spent reading educational literature as evidenced by correlation coefficients that are between .25 and .75.

Analysis: Items 5 and 18 on the TESE survey were investigated to determine the strength of the relationship between familiarity of self-determination and number of hours spent reading educational literature. A Pearson's r correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the strength of the relationship. The reported results were from 57 of the 72 participants.

Results: A Pearson's r data analysis revealed that there was a very weak negative relationship between familiarity of self-determination and number of hours spent reading educational materials, $r = -.05$, $p = .70$. The null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report the results of this study surrounding TESE perceptions and promotion of self-determination at the elementary school level. The initial inquiry of this study sought to determine how familiar TESE are with the term self-determination and participants stated that they were familiar with this concept. Next, the researcher wished to discover the level of importance that TESE place on self-determination in general and found that they placed a moderately high level of importance on it. The researcher was curious as to whether TESE assign higher levels of importance to choice-making and problem solving as components of self-determination and discovered that this was not the case. In terms of the frequency with which TESE teach components of self-determination, the results indicated that not every component of self-determination is taught on a frequent basis within the classroom setting for SWSCD. The researcher also sought to determine if a relationship existed between the

level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which each component is taught. A moderate relationship was demonstrated between all components of self-determination and the frequency with which the same component was taught. Given that TESE might be interested in teaching self-determination skills, but experience barriers in their implementation, the researcher asked participants to identify the most significant barriers to implementation. As expected, TESE identified “more urgent instructional needs” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination. Finally, there was a weak relationship between TESEs’ level of familiarity with self-determination and the amount of hours they spend reading educational literature.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a brief overview of self-determination pertaining to students with significant cognitive disabilities (SWSCD). This is followed by a discussion of the findings including the implications, limitations, and recommendations for future studies. It is the researcher's hope that teachers, administrators, and developers of curriculum materials will be able to utilize these results to inform practice and policies for SWSCD.

The purpose of this study was to assess Tennessee's elementary Special Educators' (TESE) perceptions of self-determination for SWSCD. Research was conducted using data from 20 districts and 72 elementary Special Educators across Tennessee. Current research establishes the need for teaching self-determination in the early elementary years. Instruction in self-determination has proven effective in increasing IEP participation and academic achievement (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010), goal setting and self-evaluation, (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003), and problem solving skills (Cote, Jones, Barnett, Pavelek, & Nguyen, 2014). Wehmeyer, Cho, and Kingston (2011) found that all elementary Special Educators valued teaching self-determination, and Special Educators who teach in general education, resource, and self-contained settings valued the instruction more than educators teaching in the general education setting. Previous research demonstrates the importance of teaching self-determination (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000).

The researcher sought to answer seven questions surrounding TESE perceptions of self-determination. First, the researcher wanted to assess TESE familiarity with the term self-determination. A review of the literature presented research demonstrating that educators are familiar with this concept. Therefore, it was hypothesized that TESE would be very familiar with

self-determination as well. Consequently, 79% of TESE responded that they were familiar with the term “self-determination.”

This finding is significant and can be used to inform persons who establish policies and procedures for SWSCD and administrators who provide professional development opportunities for their Special Educators. Clearly, a foundation for increased instruction self-determination is in place. This realization is an entry point with which to approach persons who develop policies and procedures for SWSCD that self-determination must become an educational priority in the elementary school years. Awareness of a concept is the first step in bringing about change to an educational position. Additionally, this insight can serve as a guiding principle for school administrators in the structuring of professional development opportunities for teachers of SWSCD. Professional development opportunities focusing on self-determination will facilitate deliberate practice, which Ericsson (2008) recognizes as essential to refining areas of teaching that require improvement. The implementation of self-determination learning opportunities aligns with the recommendations of Wehmeyer and Field (2007), who suggest self-determination become an instructional focus that occurs across an individual’s life in order to ensure student success.

Next, the researcher assessed the level of importance TESE placed on teaching self-determination skills in general. TESE perceived self-determination instruction to be an important part of their work with SWSCD. In fact, high values of importance were assigned to all components of self-determination. These findings affirm those of Stang, Carter, Lane, and Pierson (2009) who surveyed elementary and middle school educators and found that less than 8% of teachers rated any of the seven self-determination domains as having limited significance.

TESE reported self-management and self-regulation as most important while the lowest rated component was decision-making.

The finding that TESE assigned high values to all components of self-determination adds to the existing knowledge base, affirming the idea that components of self-determination are valued by the respondents. Seventy-five percent of the participants in Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura's (2002) study reported having familiarity with the term self-determination. This discovery is significant to establishing the need for self-determination instruction during elementary school. Special Educators value and see the necessity of self-determination instruction. Therefore, administrators as well as those responsible for policies and procedures concerning SWSCD must provide opportunities for professional growth and strategies with which to implement this crucial instructional element of learning.

The next query posed by this researcher was whether TESE assign higher levels of importance to choice-making and problem solving components than their general education counterparts. Although the researcher hypothesized that these would be the most important components the results did not confirm her hypothesis. In fact, choice-making and problem solving were ranked sixth and fourth, respectively among the seven components. These findings contrast with those of Walter, Johnson, & Schomberg, (2009) who reported that Wisconsin Special Education paraprofessionals rated choice-making and problem solving as the most important components of self-determination. However, the current research corroborate the findings of Cho (2009) who surveyed elementary teachers and found choice-making ranked seventh and problem solving ranked third with respect to levels of importance. The dissimilarity between the current study and that of Walter, Johnson, and Schomberg (2009) may be attributed to difference in survey participants. This researcher focused on perceptions of Special Educators

only while Walter, Johnson, and Schomberg centered on those of Special Education paraprofessionals. Furthermore, they reported that paraprofessionals spend more time working with students with disabilities and are responsible for the administration of the majority of their instruction.

With research question four, the researcher sought to ascertain how frequently the components of self-determination are taught. In contrast to the researcher's hypothesis, the results indicated that not all of the individual components of self-determination are taught on a frequent basis. These results are discouraging considering past research has stressed the significance of self-determination instruction and the benefits this instructional approach possesses for students with disabilities. The current research adds to the work of Cabeza et al. (2013) who assessed the perceptions of Tennessee administrators pertaining to the frequency with which components of self-determination are taught by teachers. Administrators noted that there is a great deal of variability in terms of how often they are taught. Moreover, the findings of this study support those of Stang, Carter, Lane, and Pierson (2008) who found that importance ratings of individual components does not correspond to the time teachers devote to teaching it. However, these researchers noted that middle school educators reported teaching self-determination with more frequency that did elementary educators. The fact that TESE in the current study teach components of self-determination less frequently may be because this researcher focused exclusively on elementary Special Educators and self-determination instruction has historically commenced in secondary school settings. In light of these results, elementary Special Educators should be provided opportunities to grow their professional practice in self-determination.

Additionally, the results of the fourth research question were analyzed to determine which components of self-determination are taught most frequently. An analysis of TESE responses indicated that only two components (problem solving and self-management/self-regulation) are taught frequently. This finding is incongruous with the research of Cabeza et al. (2013), who reported choice-making as the most frequently taught component in schools. However, the present findings for frequency of teaching problem solving skills are consistent with those of Cho (2009) who found the most frequently component taught by educators was problem solving, which was then followed by choice-making. Elementary educators tend to focus on teaching skills that assist students in navigating their learning environment. Therefore, the researcher's conclusion that problem solving and self-management/self-regulation skills are most frequently taught is understandable because these two components help students navigate social interactions and behavior issues that occur naturally in the educational setting. In fact, teachers reported instructing students in self-determination skills assisted in improving their academic performance and social behaviors in the elementary setting (Cho, 2009).

For question five, the researcher wanted to determine the strength of the relationship between the level of importance TESE place on individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which their corresponding components are taught. It was hypothesized that there would be at least a moderate correlation for level of importance and all components of self-determination, and this was, indeed, accurate with regard to all of the components. These findings align with those of Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008), who surveyed 340 general and Special Education high school teachers regarding the degree of importance they ascribe to teaching components of self-determination and the actual amount of time they spent teaching the components. They reported that both general and Special Education teachers not only

implemented self-determination instruction on a frequent basis, but that they placed high value on all of these components. The finding of moderate relationships for all components reveals that TESE value the legitimacy of self-determination and value their potential for SWSCD.

One of the goals of this study was to identify barriers that TESE perceive as hindrances to self-determination instruction. Educators feel that self-determination is important, but research indicates the existence of significant barriers preventing the implementation of self-determination instruction. Previous researchers have established that some of the most frequently reported barriers include a perception among teachers that students have other more urgent instructional needs as well as insufficient time, insufficient training, student difficulty with communicating (Cho, Wehmeyer, Kingston, 2011, 2012), and the belief that SWSCD would not benefit from instruction in self-determination (Wehmeyer, Argan, & Hughes, 2000). Less frequently reported barriers to teaching self-determination included teachers being unaware of materials and having inadequate skills (Cho, Wehmeyer, Kingston, 2011).

Participants of this study reported the major barrier to promoting self-determination to be students having more urgent needs, followed by lack of sufficient time to provide instruction and students having difficulty in communicating effectively. These results affirm the conclusion of Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2011) who also found the aforementioned components to be the primary barriers. Reported by TESE to be the least intrusive barrier was a belief that students would not benefit from self-determination instruction.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities often have severe physical, emotional, and educational needs that require intense intervention. Unfortunately, meeting these essential needs often takes precedence over self-determination instruction. Clearly, TESE value self-determination as an instructional component, but are sometimes hindered by more urgent needs.

Finally, the researcher sought to determine the strength of the relationship between the familiarity of self-determination and the amount of hours spent reading educational literature. Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) concluded that the greatest mode of acquisition of self-determination knowledge to be graduate courses (25%) followed by workshops and conferences (23%), books (18%), undergraduate courses (16%), and school district in-services (14%). Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) reported the highest rated source of knowledge pertaining to self-determination (36%) as professional journal articles. The researcher wanted to determine if there was a similar relationship among the participants of her study.

In contrast to Whemeyer, Agran, and Hughes' study, the results of the current study revealed a weak negative relationship between familiarity of self-determination and amount of hours spent reading educational materials. Elementary Special Educators in Tennessee currently obtain much of their knowledge of self-determination from sources outside of educational literature. Perhaps the increased emphasis being placed on self-determination is gradually becoming common language among Special Education professionals. This finding is important for future planning of professional development opportunities pertaining to self-determination. If educators are not obtaining their information from educational literature, then administrators need to provide professional development opportunities to allow for professional growth in this area. Cabeza et al. (2013) asked Tennessee administrators to rate potential professional development opportunities based on expected staff participation, and found "in district, during school workshops" and "good practice guides" to be the highest rated (92%), with journal articles ranking eighth out of 15 possible choices.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of self-determination at the elementary school level. TESE revealed that they are very familiar with the term self-determination. Additionally, they placed a moderately high level of importance on self-determination, but did not assign high levels of importance to choice-making and problem solving in the current study. This finding was in contrast to the researcher's expectations and to the findings of Walter, Johnson, and Schomberg (2009) who reported choice-making and problem solving as the most important components. Additionally, this research revealed that not every component of self-determination was taught on a frequent basis and that moderate relationships existed between perceived levels of importance of individual components and the frequency with which the corresponding components were taught. Barriers to teaching self-determination were also examined. TESE identified "more urgent instructional needs" as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination. These results confirmed those found by Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2011), but were in contrast to the findings of Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) who reported the greatest barrier to self-determination to be that "students would benefit from instruction" of self-determination skills. Finally, the survey assessed the strength of the relationship between familiarity of self-determination and amount of hours spent reading education literature. Results revealed a weak relationship between these two variables.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Practice

This study adds to the existing body of literature stressing the importance of self-determination skills for SWSCD. TESE were surveyed to determine the extent to which self-determination was an instructional priority for SWSCD in the Tennessee. This study assessed

teachers' perceptions of each of the seven components of self-determination and the extent to which these skills are taught in classrooms across Tennessee. Several implications are pertinent for teachers, administrators, and personnel who develop policies and procedures for SWSCD.

The need for SWSCD to attain self-determination skills has gained precedence among researchers and educators in the field of Special Education. This study revealed that TESE perceive all components of self-determination to be important for SWSCD. This affirmation of awareness provides evidence for the necessity of a curricular concentration on self-determination for SWSCD. Perske (1972, p. 199) established the principle that people with severe disabilities deserved the right to experience the "dignity of risk." Prior to the ideology of self-determination SWSCD often were the recipients of services and care. However, the acquisition of self-determination skills enables these individuals to become empowered and causal agents in their own lives. Promoting self-determination instruction can foster student achievement of goals and many studies have verified the effectiveness of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) for secondary school students with disabilities (Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000). However, only a few studies have used an adapted version of the SDLMI at the elementary school level and demonstrated its effectiveness with younger students (Mazzotti et al., 2010; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003). More research focusing on the use of adapted versions of the SDLMI with younger students needs to be conducted.

While self-determination awareness is present, a thorough understanding of how an individual progresses through each of the components to become self-determined is lacking. This disclosure is evident by TESE not rating choice-making and problem solving as important. Indeed, they rated self-management/self-regulation and self-awareness/self-knowledge as most

important. Choice-making and problem solving are precursor skills (Palmer et al., 2012) that need to develop in the elementary years to ensure students have a foundation upon which to build self-management/self-regulation and self-awareness/self-knowledge skills upon. Professional development opportunities need to be offered to TESE who instruct SWSCD. This suggestion is confirmed by the findings of Mason, Field, and Sawilowsky (2004) and Zhang, Whemeyer, and Chen (2005) who identified a need for teacher training and information concerning self-determination at the elementary level. TESE must be provided with learning opportunities through professional developments that foster and in-depth understanding of self-determination and presents self-determination as a progressive development process. Likewise, coursework in teacher education programs should expose pre-service Special Educators to curriculum, instructional strategies, and research based practices in self-determination to safeguard against unintentional negligence.

When assessing the strength of relationships between individual components of self-determination and the frequency with which each was taught, moderate relationships were demonstrated. An inquiry into perceived barriers was conducted and revealed TESE identified “more urgent instructional needs” as the greatest barrier to teaching components of self-determination. This researcher was unable to locate studies that defined “more urgent instructional needs.” However, Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2012) speculated that these “more urgent instructional needs” might be related to problem behavior and relationship difficulty experienced by some SWSCD. Additional research is warranted to determine definitive descriptions of “more urgent instructional needs.”

An examination of the relationship between familiarity of self-determination and individual teachers’ number of hours spent reading educational materials revealed a very weak

negative relationship. Perhaps educators are cognizant of self-determination for SWSCD from other sources. This awareness may originate from the present increase in emphasis for students with disabilities to exit high school with skills that will enable them to be college, career, and community ready (Davis, 2015b). Proponents of this initiative understand that a key factor in this movement requires students to be self-determined. Research has shown that students who possess self-determination have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence (Davis, 2015a). This research supports the view that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

The need for SWSCD to achieve self-determination skills has gained precedence among researchers and educators in the field of Special Education. However, it is now time to put this research into action and begin promotion and implementation of self-determination in the elementary school. Educators, administrators and personnel responsible for policies and procedures for SWSCD must work together to discover ways to advance the teaching of self-determination and implement curriculum in elementary schools.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

There were several limitations of this study. This is the first known study to examine TESEs' perceptions and promotion of self-determination in Tennessee. Consequently, additional research is needed to confirm the results of this study. In a similar vein, this study is limited to teachers in one state. Additional research that focuses on the generalities of perceived self-determination skills across different regions of the country would give a more comprehensive view of this concept for all SWSCD.

The greatest barrier to self-determination was the belief that students have “more urgent instructional needs.” However, this researcher did not investigate to determine what needs these may be. Future studies need to focus on defining “more urgent instructional needs” to gain a better understanding of how to assist teachers in the facilitation of self-determination instruction.

Another limitation of this study is that only a sample of TESE participated in the study, which once again limited the merit of generalizing the findings. Further investigation into the total number of Special Educators within the state of Tennessee needs to be assessed so as to improve the validity of the research results.

The response rate (14%) was quite low, further limiting the validity of generalizing the results. However, Holbrook, Krosnick, and Pfent (2007) found that surveys with low response rates were only marginally less accurate than those with comparatively high response rates. In fact, Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2013) report that low response rates do not guarantee lower survey accuracy, but merely indicate a greater risk of inaccuracy.

A final limitation pertains to the failure of some participants to answer all of the questions. It is not entirely clear as to why they did not respond to all of the questions, but this has potential to affect the accuracy of the research results. Additional research is needed to address topics not within the scope of this limited study.

Summary

The researcher hoped to clarify the self-determination perceptions of TESE in order to build a platform from which future instructional practices will benefit the lives of SWSCD. Given the importance of self-determination in the field of Special Education, one would expect Tennessee to have programs and initiatives to implement the strategies that lead to SWSCD becoming self-determined. However, recent dialogue with a representative from the Tennessee

Department of Education, Special Populations Division (L. Nixon, personal communication, April 7, 2016) conveyed that self-determination policies and programs are not in place. The results of this study indicate that self-determination is not a well-understood ideology for TESE. Educators in the state of Tennessee must not become content with current practices. Mason, Field, Sawilowsky (2004) reported that only eight percent of teachers, administrators, and related service personnel were satisfied with the approach being utilized to teach self-determination. TESE must advocate for best practices that will help to lead students to become causal agents in their own lives. Self-determination is a developmental process that occurs over an individual lifespan. Students with disabilities often require a greater number of opportunities to practice self-determination skills than those without disabilities. In addition, they frequently need assistance with the conception and implementation of new skills. For this reason, perceptions of self-determination must continue to be assessed in order to ensure promotion of self-determination instruction remains a priority for SWSCD. Self-determination instruction must begin at the early elementary level in order to enable students to maximize their potential.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument

Perceptions and Promotion of Self-determination Instruction: A Survey of Tennessee's Special
Educators

Please read and respond to each question as completely as possible.

1. What is your primary teaching assignment as a Special Educator
 - a. Resource/Interventionist
 - b. Comprehensive Developmental Classroom (CDC)
2. Identify the qualifying disability category of the students you currently teach. (Check all that apply):
 - a. Intellectual Disability
 - b. Emotional Behavioral Disability
 - c. Traumatic Brain Injury
 - d. Multiple Disability
 - e. Autism
 - f. Deaf/Blindness
 - g. Orthopedic Impairment
 - h. Specific Learning Disability
 - i. Speech or Language Impairment
3. What method of teaching do you use most often with your students? (Check all that apply):
 - a. One-to-one instruction

- b. Small group instruction
 - c. Whole group instruction
 - d. Peer mediated instruction
 - e. Individual seatwork
4. Are you familiar with the term “self-determination?”
- a. Yes
 - b. No
5. If yes, from what source did you obtain your knowledge?
- a. Undergraduate training
 - b. Graduate training
 - c. District In-service Training
 - d. Conference or workshop training
 - e. Professional Journals
 - f. Educational Text
 - g. Colleagues
 - h. I am not familiar with “self-determination”
6. In general, how important do you feel it is to teach self-determination to students with significant cognitive disabilities?
- | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not important | Slightly Important | Important | Very Important | Most Important |
7. Report how important you feel it is to teach the following components, as well as how often you do teach the following components:

- a. Choice-Making – encouraging students to identify interests, express preferences, and make choices: providing students the opportunity to select preferences in socially and age-appropriate ways.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- b. Decision-making – teaching student to make effective decisions using peer and instructional modeling, and providing opportunities to participate in making decisions about their education and extra-curricular activities.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- c. Problem Solving – asking students to identify causes and problems, encouraging them to think about how to solve a problem and suggesting strategies that students can use to solve problems in socially appropriate ways.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- d. Goal Setting and Attainment – encouraging students set goals, and helping them to recognize what steps need to be taken to achieve these goals.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- e. Self-Advocacy and Leadership Skills – teaching students to know and stand up for their (and others) rights in socially appropriate ways, to negotiate effectively and assertively, and to be an effective leader or team member.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- f. Self-Management and Self-Regulation Skills – teaching students to monitor and evaluate their own behavior, encouraging the development of intrinsic motivation, and having students set their own schedule. Encouraging students to engage in self-directed learning through strategies like self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-reinforcement, and picture cues.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

- g. Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge – giving students various opportunities to identify their own strengths and limitations through interaction with peers, and then guiding them to apply that knowledge to their advantage.

Importance:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important	Most Important

Teach:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

8. Have you taught any of the following strategies to your previous or current students:
- Self-Monitoring – encouraging your students to keep track of learning or behaviors.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Self-Evaluation - encouraging students to evaluate their own behavior, effort, or progress in order to take control of their own learning.
 - Yes
 - No
 - Self-Reinforcement – guiding your student to reward their own effort or progress and accomplishments.
 - Yes
 - No

- d) Self-Instruction – demonstrating how to do a task first and then encouraging your students to instruct themselves orally.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - e) Goal setting – students set their own instructional goals
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - f) Self-Scheduling – encouraging your students to choose the order of their school tasks.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - g) Antecedent Cue Regulation – using visual aids or cues to direct attention or behavior
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. What reasons might lead you to NOT provide instruction in any or all of the above listed items? (Check all that apply)
- a. My students already have adequate skills in these areas.
 - b. My students have difficulty communicating effectively.
 - c. My students are too young to learn these skills.
 - d. There is not sufficient time to provide instruction in these areas.
 - e. There is not enough freedom to teach these skills due to IEP requirements.

- f. There are more urgent instructional needs (academic, communication, behavior etc.)
- g. My students will not benefit from instruction in these areas because of their characteristics (e.g. their passivity, level of ability or capacity to engage in behavior)
- h. I have not had sufficient training or information on teaching in these areas.
- i. I am not aware of available curricular or assessment materials, or instructional methods or strategies to teach these areas.
- j. None of the above

10. In your opinion, how much will teaching your students self-determination help them improve their academic performance and social behaviors in elementary school?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	Most Helpful

11. In your opinion, how much will teaching your students self-determination help prepare them for future years in secondary education and transition to adult services?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	Most Helpful

12. What grade are you currently teaching? (Check all that apply)

- a. Kindergarten
- b. First Grade
- c. Second Grade
- d. Third Grade

- e. Fourth Grade
 - f. Fifth Grade
 - g. Sixth Grade
13. How many years have you been teaching Special Education?
- a. 0-3 years
 - b. 4-6 years
 - c. 7-10 years
 - d. More than 10 years
14. Which setting best describes the location of your primary teaching assignment?
- a. Urban
 - b. Suburban
 - c. Rural
15. Which type of school do you teach in?
- a. Title 1
 - b. Non-Title
16. What educational literature do you read?
- a. Education Journal
 - b. Special Education Journal
 - c. Education Books
 - d. Special Education Books
 - e. I do not read educational literature
17. How much time do you spend reading educational literature
- a. 0 hours

- b. 1-2 hours per month
- c. 3-4 hours per month
- d. 5 or more hours per month

APPENDIX B

IRB Application

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH REVIEW FORM**

PLEASE TYPE

PROTOCOL NUMBER:

SUBMISSION DATE:

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

HUMAN PARTICIPANTS RESEARCH REVIEW FORM

Request for Expedited Review Request for Full Review

RESEARCHER INFORMATION

Do not begin your Research until you have received a formal letter of IRB approval!

Attach documentation of Human Subjects Research training for ALL Investigators and ALL Faculty Supervisors. Internet Training Certificates can be obtained by completing the training www.citiprogram.org . Submit forms via email to compliance@mtsu.edu as attachments.

Internet citiprogram.org Training Certificate Workshop Certificate

(NIH training is only accepted if completed before September 2009. Go to www.citiprogram.org to update training requirements.)

Project Title:

Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' Promotion of Self-Determination in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Principal Investigator: Stephanie D. Davis

Principal Investigator e-mail: sdd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu

If Principal Investigator is a student, alternate e-mail: mattnsis@blomand.net

Principal Investigator Address: 571 Larry Davis St.

Spencer, TN 38585

Principal Investigator Telephone: 931-212-9074

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

If Principal Investigator is a student, Faculty Advisor Name: Dr. Craig Rice

Faculty Advisor e-mail: craig.rice@mtsu.edu

Faculty Advisor Address & Telephone: College of Education Building, 335. Phone: 615-898-5643

Department or University Unit: College of Education

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Investigator Status (For Each Investigator): Faculty/Staff Graduate Undergraduate Other

Type of project: Faculty/Staff research McNair URECA Scholar

Thesis URECA Assistant Class Project Dissertation

****Those who are performing McNair, URECA Scholar, thesis, or faculty projects must complete the Social and behavioral basic training course. All other students may complete the shorter "minimal risk" course. Students assisting professors may also complete the "min. risk" course.**

If the principal investigator is a student, complete the information for the faculty supervisor. Please note that THE FACULTY ADVISOR MUST INDICATE KNOWLEDGE AND APPROVAL OF THIS PROPOSAL BY EMAILING THIS FORM TO THE COMPLIANCE OFFICE WITH A STATEMENT OF APPROVAL IN THE BODY OF THE EMAIL. Students should not email forms directly to the IRB.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Source of funding for project: N/A

Expected starting date for project: October 29, 2015

Is this project expected to continue for more than one year?

Yes No

Anticipated completion date: May 2016

☐ IRB approval is valid for one year.

☐ If more than one year is needed to complete data collection and analysis the investigator must submit a written request for continuing review and a Progress Report (form available at www.mtsu.edu/~irb/)

☐ Only two continuations will be granted for a given project.

☐ After three years a new application must be submitted.

What is the research question being addressed in the study?

What are Tennessee's elementary special educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities?

Describe relevant research that has been done previously. Include citations as well as a brief description of relevant methods and important findings. You may limit this section to a sample of the most relevant research.

The purpose of this study was to determine Tennessee's elementary special educators perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

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There is an increased emphasis for students with disabilities to exit high school with skills that will enable them be college, career, and community ready. An essential component of this emphasis falls on students' ability to be self-determined. Wehmeyer & Schwartz (1997) reported that students who possess self-determination have a stronger chance of being successful in making the transition to adulthood, including employment and independence. Additionally, their research supports the view that self-determination in high school is related to positive transition outcomes. Self-determination must be an educational objective if these students are expected to achieve this measure. The importance of promoting self-determination for students with disabilities is evident by the manifestation of self-determination in special education policy, research, and advocacy.

Most teachers are aware of self-determination and its benefits. Wehmeyer, Argan, and Hughes (2000) discovered that teachers working with secondary students generally have a respectable knowledge of this concept and feel that it is valuable for students while in school and in preparation for their post school life. Various researchers have established that teachers do feel that teaching self-determination is an important aspect of their job (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011, 2012). While the research concerning self-determination for secondary students is promising, there is a limitation of studies regarding the teaching of self-determination in the elementary years.

Research associated with self-determination reveals that the benefits of instruction in self-determination for students with disabilities enrich their overall quality of life. This instruction promotes increased independence, involvement in IEP meetings, social interactions, academic progress, and post-secondary school outcomes. Furthermore, research reveals that employment opportunities are more

favorable for individuals who are self-determined. Current practices focus on self-determination at the secondary level of students' academic career. The call for self-determination instruction and research at the elementary level has been made, and elementary special educators in Tennessee must evaluate those perceptions of self-determination in order to provide the best services for students.

References

Agran, M., Snow, K., & Swaner, J. (1999). Teacher perceptions of self-determination: Benefits, Characteristics, Strategies.

Cho, H., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Kingston, N. M. (2011). Elementary teachers' knowledge and use of interventions and barriers to promoting student self-determination. *Journal of Special Education*, 45(3), 149-156.

Cho, H., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Kingston, N. M. (2012). The effect of social and classroom ecological factors on promoting self-determination in Elementary School. *Preventing School Failure*, 56(1), 19-28.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (2000). A national survey of teachers' promotion of self-determination and student-directed learning. *The Journal of Special Education*, 34(2), 58-68.

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(2), 245- 255.

Describe in detail each step of your proposed study. Provide a description of all procedures to be followed, describe any experimental groups and/or manipulations. Also, give a brief description of your study design. (e.g., qualitative, correlation, factorial, etc)

Tennessee Special Education Supervisors will receive an invitation/consent letter for their district to participate in the research.

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Upon receipt of district consent, Special Education Supervisors will receive a letter to forward to their Elementary Special Educators' inviting them to participate in the study. This email invitation will explain the purpose and significance of the study and directions to access the survey via the internet. The teachers will be able to choose a convenient time and place to complete the survey. This approach to gathering data allows all participants to complete the same questionnaire in the exact same manner.

A non-experimental survey research design will be utilized to conduct this study. This design was chosen due to its flexibility and ubiquitous nature. This design is also the most suitable method for canvassing opinions and feelings about particular issues because the participants feel freer to answer more candidly due to the guaranteed anonymity of the online survey format (Muijs, 2011).

The self-determination survey contains a consent form and simple questions focusing on concepts of self-determination and is able to be completed in less than 20 minutes. These questions concentrate on extracting the knowledge, perceptions, and educational practices of TESEs as they relate to self-determination. The research questions were designed to make the survey process easy to understand and effortless to answer.

The survey site, Survey Monkey, will compile data. The survey site will close on January 1, 2016. At this time, the data will be analyzed.

Muijs, D. (2011). *Designing non-experimental studies*. In Sage Publications (Eds.), *Doing Quantitative Research in Education with SPSS, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA

What is your plan for analyzing the data?

Analysis of data will be conducted using the SPSS software. The demographics and professional characteristics of participants will be defined using descriptive statistics. Levels of importance will be determined by assigning nominal scales to varying levels of stated importance. Next, coding will be utilized to assign numerical values in order to run statistical analysis. This process will also be utilized for determining how often each individual component of self-determination was taught, how much teaching self-determination will help improve academic performance and social behaviors, and how much teaching self-determination will prepare students for future years in secondary education and transition to adult services.

The relationship between reported level of importance and time spent on each individual component of self-determination will be statistically measured using correlation coefficients. Likewise, correlation coefficients will be used to determine the association between reported levels of importance and perceived barriers of teaching self-determination, as well as the correlation between the familiarity of self-determination and the amount of hours spent reading educational literature. Barriers to teaching self-determination skills will be measured reporting mean scores of each factor.

How will this design allow you to address the research question?

This design was chosen due to its flexibility and ubiquitous nature. This design is also the most suitable method for canvassing opinions and feelings about particular issues because the participants feel freer to answer more candidly due to the guaranteed anonymity of the online survey format (Muijs, 2011). Survey research does not set up a simulated situation like an experiment. Therefore, its generalizability will be representative of findings of real-life situations. Survey studies are also more effective for gathering large numbers of data with little to no cost and minimal effort on the part of the researcher. Many educational researchers have realized the

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statistical benefits of the non-experimental survey research design (LaFrance & Calhoun, 2012; Schoeman & Mabunda, 2012; Waldon, 2015). An additional advantage to this type of research design is the flexibility it offers to the participants. The teachers are able to choose a convenient time and place to complete the survey. This approach to gathering data allows all participants to complete the same questionnaire in the exact same manner.

Muijs, D. (2011). Designing non-experimental studies. In Sage Publications (Eds.), *Doing Quantitative Research in Education with SPSS, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA

If there are special qualifications required to conduct research in this area, how will the researcher(s) meet these qualifications?

There are no special qualifications to conduct research in this area.

How will participants be debriefed? (In addition to describing the debriefing procedure, attach a copy of all debriefing information)

Participants will not be debriefed. However, a link to the final dissertation will be sent to all Special Education Directors to share with their Elementary Special Education teachers.

List the potential risks and benefits of conducting this research. Include benefits for participants, science, and society. Evaluate the level of risk relative to the potential benefits.

No risks beyond the standard risks associated with responding to an online survey will be experienced by the participants.

Note: If your study involves risk (including sensitive information), minors as participants, psychological intervention, deception, physiological intervention, or biomedical procedures, you should also complete the appropriate section at the end of the form.

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Maximum Number of Participants: The exact number of participants is undetermined. Research participants of this study will include a random sampling of Tennessee Elementary Special Educators'.

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Participant population (check all that will be specifically targeted to participate in the research):

ADULT:

Yes NO

MINOR:

Yes NO

PRISONER:

Yes NO

MENTALLY HANDICAPPED:

Yes NO

MENTALLY DISABLED:

Yes NO

PHYSICALLY ILL:

Yes NO

DISABLED:

Yes NO

OTHER:

Yes NO

If other, PLEASE SPECIFY: N/A

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

How will participants be selected for this research?

Describe the recruitment/contacting methods and compensation to participants. If any advertising or recruitment devices will be used they must be attached to the application. Be specific!

There are currently 149 school districts in the state of Tennessee that I will send Invitations/Consents to the directors of Special Education to gain permission for their district to participate in my research. I will not send an invitation to Warren County School District, because that is my place of employment. My plan goes as follows:

1. Late October: Invitation/Consent to first 50 Districts on the list (Form 1)

Mid November: Invitation/Consent to the next 50 Districts on the list

First of December: Invitation/Consent to the last 49 Districts on the list

2. Upon receipt of signed consent, I will send the Directors of Special Education the "Survey Invitation" (Form 2) for the supervisors to forward to their elementary special education teachers.

The elementary Special Education teachers will then connect to the survey from the URL embedded within the invitation to complete the survey.

3. The first page of the survey is actually the Tennessee Elementary Special Educators Consent for survey(Form 3). If participants give consent, then the survey will begin (Form 4). If participants do not consent, the survey will end.

The actual survey (Form 4) varied just a bit from the document I am sending you. The content remained intact, but due to Survey Monkey's design process, the set up was altered to offer a document that was easier for the participants to read and answer.

Also, the list of Special Education Supervisors/Directors and their emails that was forwarded to me by Joey

Hassell is included.

All forms and email list are attached to the end of this document.

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NOTE: If the participants are to be drawn from an institution or organization (e.g., hospital, social service agency, prison, school, etc.) which has the responsibility for the participants, then documentation of permission from that institution must be submitted before final approval can be given.

If using the Psychology Research Pool: (<http://mtsu.sona-systems.com/>)

Provide a title, a brief abstract (one or two sentences describing the project) and a full description (including the risks, benefits, and any information necessary for students to make an informed decision about participating). These should be written exactly as they will appear to the Research Pool participants.

Title: N/A

Brief Abstract: N/A

Full Description:N/A

Provide a list of inclusion/exclusion criteria for the proposed research and justify any demographics (e.g. sex, race, economic status, sexual orientation) that have been excluded.

All participants must be Tennessee Elementary Special Educators.

CONFIDENTIALITY

List any identifying information that will be recorded from your research participants.

Identifying information includes but is not limited to:

- Full name
- Identification numbers
- Telephone number
- Street address
- E-mail address
- IP address
- Vehicle registration plate number
- Photographs or video tapes
- Voice recordings
- Handwriting samples
- Digital Identity
- Credit card numbers
- Driver's license number

No identifying information will be recorded from research participants.

Federal guidelines require all study related documents (documentation of informed consent, surveys, study notes, data records, and all study-related correspondence) be stored securely for at least 3 years following completed research. Materials must be stored securely in a faculty member's office on campus for 3 years. (Or another secure location if there is reason to believe the faculty member's office is not secure. These arrangements must be approved).

Where will research materials be stored? If anywhere other than an MTSU faculty researcher's office, please describe why the faculty researcher's office is not secure; include an address where data will be stored.

The research data will be submitted to Dr. Craig Rice and stored according to Middle Tennessee State University policy.

List anyone other than the Investigators who will have direct access to the research participants or their primary data. Consider research assistants, transcribers, statisticians,

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and any other individuals who may be present during the research or who will have access to the data records. These individuals must also submit Human Subjects Training Certificates.

Only the principal investigator, Stephanie Davis, and Faculty Advisor, Dr. Craig Rice, will have direct access to the research participants and their primary data.

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INFORMED CONSENT

Will informed consent be obtained from participants?

Yes NO

If no, the form to request waiver of consent must be submitted. See Appendix G.

Will you collect signed consent forms?

Yes NO

If yes, attach a master copy of the consent form to your application. The form must be stamped approved by our office. Once approved, you will need to make copies of the master bearing the "approved" stamp to distribute to participants. Attach the form exactly as it will be presented to participants.

If no, the form to request waiver or alteration of consent must be submitted. See Appendix G.

Will you obtain consent orally?

Yes NO

If yes, attach an oral consent script to your application.

You still must complete Appendix G if a signed consent form will not be used.

Give a description of your consent "process". Who is administering the consent information? Where is it obtained? How is it administered?

There are currently 149 school districts in the state of Tennessee that I will send Invitations/Consents to the directors of Special Education to gain permission for their district to participate in my research. I will not send an invitation to Warren County School District, because that is my place of employment. My plan goes as follows:

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The actual survey (Form 4) varied just a bit from the document I am sending you. The content remained intact, but due to Survey Monkey's design process, the set up was altered to offer a document that was easier for the participants to read and answer.

Also, the list of Special Education Supervisors/Directors and their emails that was forwarded to me by Joey

Hassell is included.

All forms and email list are attached to the end of this document.

The following are required elements of informed consent. Check "yes" if the element appears in your consent document, if it does not check "no". If you check no to any item you must complete the request for waiver of consent. See Appendix G.

A statement that the study involves research and the true purpose of the research (If using deceit, check no and justify in Appendix G).

Yes NO

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SEE THE APPENDIX INDICATED FOR A MORE DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THESE CATEGORIES

A description of all the procedures in detail to be followed and the expected duration

Yes NO

Foreseeable risks or discomforts to the participant

Yes NO

Benefits to the participant or others

Yes NO

Disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment

Yes NO

A statement describing the extent of confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained

Yes NO

A statement regarding compensation to participants in case of injury

Yes NO

Contact information for the researcher and the Compliance Officer

Yes NO

A statement that the research is voluntary, there are no penalties for refusal to participate, and participation can be discontinued at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Yes NO

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

INDICATE BELOW WHETHER YOUR PROJECT INVOLVES ANY OF THE FOLLOWING. FOR EACH ITEM CHECKED, PROVIDE THE REQUESTED INFORMATION IN THE ADDITIONAL PROCEDURAL INFORMATION SECTION BEGINNING AFTER THE SIGNATURE SECTION OF THIS FORM.

Risk (Appendix A)

Minors as Participants (Appendix B)

Psychological Intervention (Appendix C)

Deception (Appendix D)

Physiological Intervention (Appendix E)

Biomedical Procedures (Appendix F)

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Investigator(s): Please read and initial each item.

Checklist item

Initial

Is all information typed?

SD

Is documentation of IRB training attached for each investigator and for the faculty supervisor?

SD

Are the investigator email address and other contact information included?

SD

If student research, is the faculty supervisor email and other contact information included?

SD

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Are surveys, questionnaires, tests, interview forms / scripts attached?

SD

Is the number of participants indicated?

SD

Is the method of participant selection indicated?

SD

If using the Psychology Department research pool, is signup information included?

If a consent form is being used, is a copy of the consent form attached?

SD

If consent form does not match the template available at our website, or you are requesting a waiver of the requirement for consent, is the Request for Waiver or Alteration Form attached?

SD

For research involving minors, is an assent form attached?

For research at outside institutions (e.g., schools), are permission letters on official letterhead attached?

Incomplete applications will result in delay of research approval.

Acknowledgements

(If possible, use electronic signature- if not type your name in the space provided.)

I certify that 1) the information provided for this project is accurate, 2) no other procedures will be used in this project, and 3) any modifications in this project will be submitted for approval prior to use.

____Stephanie D. Davis_____ 10/26/2015_____

Name of Investigator Date

If the P.I. is a student, his/her Faculty Advisor must also sign this form.

I certify that this project is under my direct supervision and that I am responsible for insuring that all provisions of approval are complied with by the investigator.

 Name of Faculty Advisor Date

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Committee Use Only

NOTE: APPROVAL OF THIS PROJECT BY THE IRB ONLY SIGNIFIES THAT THE PROCEDURES ADEQUATELY PROTECT THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN TO INDICATE UNIVERSITY APPROVAL TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH.

Expedited Review

Approved: _____

Committee Member Date

Committee Review

Approved: _____

Committee Chair Date

APPENDICES

Appendices are labeled A through G.

Only fill out the appendix that you were instructed to.

Type all your answers.

ADDITIONAL PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

APPENDIX A

SUBJECTS AT RISK

If human subjects participating in this proposed research project may be exposed to the probability of harm, including physiological, psychological, economic, or social harm, please provide the information requested in the following items:

1. Identify and describe the probable RISKS, including physiological, psychological, economical, or social harm, to which subjects involved in the proposed research project may be exposed.
2. JUSTIFICATION. Explain why you believe the risks to the subject are so outweighed by the sum of the benefit to the subject and the importance of the knowledge to be gained as to warrant a decision to allow the subject to accept these risks. Discuss the alternative ways of conducting this research and why the one chosen is superior.
3. Explain fully how the RIGHTS AND WELFARE of such subjects at risk will be protected. (e.g., equipment closely monitored, medical examination given prior to procedures, psychological screening of prospective subjects, etc.)

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APPENDIX B

RESEARCH INVOLVING MINORS AS SUBJECTS

If some or all of the subjects of the proposed research will be minors (under the age of 18), please provide the information requested in the following items. Documents in the Office of Sponsored Programs provide additional information on these points.

1. Specify how PARENTAL CONSENT, when required, will be obtained and documented. Attach copies of all letters and consent forms.
2. Specify provisions for soliciting the ASSENT of minor subjects. Attach copies of assent forms or script of oral permission.
3. Specify provisions for minimizing COERCION on minors to participate.
4. List all schools in which the research will be conducted and provide documentation of PERMISSION from the school district(s) to conduct the research. Letters of permission from Principal and Superintendent on letterhead are required. (NOTE - Provisional approval can be given pending receipt of documentation from school districts, but research cannot be conducted until such documentation is received).
5. Where necessary, specify procedures for complying with the "BUCKLEY AMENDMENT" (Students', or parents if students are under 18 years of age, rights to inspect and review their educational records).

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH INVOLVING PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

If the subject(s) of the proposed research will be exposed to any psychological intervention such as contrived social situations, manipulation of the subject's attitudes, opinions or self-esteem, psychotherapeutic procedures, or other psychological influences, please provide the information requested in the following items:

1. Identify and describe in detail the PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION.
2. Identify and describe in detail the BEHAVIOR expected of subject(s) and the context of the behavior during the psychological intervention.
3. Describe how DATA resulting from this procedure will be gathered and recorded.
4. Identify anticipated and possible psychological, physiological, or social CONSEQUENCES of this procedure for the subject(s).
5. Indicate the investigator's competence and identify his/her QUALIFICATIONS, by training and experience, to conduct this procedure. Given name, title, department, address, and telephone number of the individual(s) who will supervise this procedure.

APPENDIX D

DECEPTION

A study is deceptive if false information is given to subjects, false impressions created, or information relating to the subjects' participation is withheld that might result in adverse effects on subjects.

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1. Describe in detail the DECEPTION involved, including any instructions to subjects or false impressions created.
2. JUSTIFICATION. Explain in detail why deception is necessary to accomplish the goals of the research. Care should be taken to distinguish cases in which disclosure would invalidate the research from cases in which disclosure would simply inconvenience the investigator.
3. Describe, in detail, the plan for DEBRIEFING subjects. Attach a copy of any debriefing statement.

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APPENDIX E

RESEARCH INVOLVING PHYSIOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

If the subject(s) of the proposed research will be exposed to any physiological treatments or intervention upon the body by mechanical, electronic, chemical, biological or any other means, please provide the information requested in the following items:

1. Identify and describe in detail the PHYSIOLOGICAL INTERVENTION.
2. Identify and describe in detail the MEANS used to administer the intervention.
3. Identify and describe in detail the BEHAVIOR expected of subject(s) and the behavior of the investigator during the administration of the physiological intervention.

4. Describe how DATA resulting from this procedure will be gathered and recorded.
5. Identify anticipated and possible physiological, psychological, or social CONSEQUENCES of his procedure for the subject(s).
6. Indicate in detail specific steps that will be taken to assure the proper OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE of the means used to administer the intervention. Give particular attention to prevention of accidental harm or injury to the human subject(s).
7. Indicate the investigator's competence and identify his/her QUALIFICATIONS, by training and experience, to conduct this procedure. Give name, title department, address, and telephone number of the individual(s) who will supervise this procedure.

APPENDIX F

BIOMEDICAL PROCEDURES

If the proposed research involves biomedical procedures (e.g., the taking or withholding of medication, ingestion of any food or other substances, injections, blood drawing, or any other procedure which would normally be done under medical supervision), please provide the information requested in the following items.

1. Describe in detail the biomedical PROCEDURES involved in this project.
2. Identify anticipated and possible physiological CONSEQUENCES of these procedures of the subject(s).
3. Identify the SITE where the procedure is to be carried out.
4. Indicate the investigator's competence and identify his/her QUALIFICATIONS, by training and experience, to conduct this procedure. Give name, title, department, and telephone number of the individual(s) who will supervise this procedure.

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APPENDIX G

REQUEST FOR WAIVER OR ALTERATION OF CONSENT

Under 45 CFR 46.116(d) the IRB may waive the requirement for obtaining informed consent or approve a consent procedure that leaves out or alters some or all of the elements of informed consent, provided that the IRB finds and documents that all of the following four criteria are met:

- a) the research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects;
- b) the waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects;
- c) the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration;

d) whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

Are you requesting a waiver of obtaining informed consent? (i.e., you will not obtain informed consent at all. e.g., observational study and informing participants that they are in a research study would make the research impossible.) Yes NO

Are you requesting that signed consent forms are not obtained? (e.g., you are conducting research online and cannot obtain signatures; you wish to not obtain signatures to reduce the burden to participants.) Yes NO

Are you requesting approval to alter the consent form such that not all the required elements of consent are included? (i.e., you checked "no" to some elements in the checkbox for informed consent) Yes NO

If you answered yes to any above, answer the following:

a. How does the research involve no more than minimal risk?

No risks beyond the standard risks associated with responding to an online survey will be experienced by participants.

b. How will a waiver of informed consent not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the participants?

District Special Education Supervisors will submit a signed consent form in order for their Elementary Special Educators' to participate. The waiver consist of research participants clicking a "yes" or "no" button on the survey site to consent to participate in the survey.

c. Why could the research not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration?

Identifying information for participants will not be gathered, such as names/signatures. Additionally, the survey supports the use of an embedded response that participants check "yes" or "no" to provide their consent.

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d. If appropriate, how will subjects be provided with additional pertinent information after participation? A link to the final dissertation will be sent to all Special Education Directors to share will their Elementary Special Education teachers.

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval

November 16, 2015

Investigator(s): Stephanie D. Davis

Department: College of Education

Investigator(s) Email: sdd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu, mattnsis@blomand.net

Protocol Title: "A comparison of total work done at different intensity levels while contrast training"

Protocol Number: 16-2031

Dear Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB or its representative has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for "Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' Promotion of Self-Determination in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities" participants.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date. Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be

able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires 11/16/2016

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and

anonymity.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board

Middle Tennessee State University

APPENDIX D

District Invitation Letter

Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' Promotion of Self-Determination in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Information Letter for Participation in Survey

Fall 2015

Dear Special Education Supervisor:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting as a student in the Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Doctoral Program, in the College of Education at the Middle Tennessee State University under the supervision of Dr. Craig Rice.

Over the years, special education teachers have played a significant role in the academic, social, and behavioral achievements of students with significant cognitive disabilities. The purpose of this study is to determine elementary special educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with cognitive disabilities.

The self-determination survey contains a consent form and questions concerning self-determination. These questions concentrate on extracting the knowledge, perceptions, and educational practices as they relate to self-determination, through an online survey.

The survey questions focus on demographics and professional information about the participants' primary assignments, teaching experience, identified disabilities, and grade levels taught by participants. No identifying information will be asked.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and has been approved by the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. All information is completely confidential. The data collected will be submitted to Dr. Craig Rice and stored according to Middle Tennessee State University's policy. No risks, other than that associated with responding to an online survey, are anticipated.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 931-212-9074 or by e-mail at sdd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Craig Rice, at 615-898-5643 or e-mail craig.rice@mtsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Stephanie D. Davis, M. Ed.
Doctoral Student
College of Education

Dr. Craig Rice
Dissertation Chair
College of Education

Middle Tennessee State University

Middle Tennessee State University

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information letter about the study being conducted by Stephanie D. Davis at Middle Tennessee State University titled Tennessee's Elementary Special Educators' Promotion of Self-Determination in Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

This project had been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Institutional Review Board at Middle Tennessee State University. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in his study, I may contact the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Craig Rice at 615-898-5643 or e-mail craig.rice@mtsu.edu.

By signing below, I agree for the Elementary Special Education Teachers in my district to participate in this study.

School District: _____

Special Education Supervisor's signature _____

Date: _____

Please email the consent form to Stephanie D. Davis at sdd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu.

APPENDIX E

Special Educator Invitation Letter

Stephanie D. Davis
Middle Tennessee State University
College of Education
Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Doctoral Program

Hello Special Educators,

My name is Stephanie D. Davis, and I am a Doctoral student at Middle Tennessee State University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. I am working on completing the Doctorate of Education degree in the Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement Program. This study will be the focus of my dissertation that is a portion of the degree requirements.

The purpose of this study is to determine Tennessee's elementary special educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The self-determination survey contains a consent form and questions concerning self-determination. These questions concentrate on extracting the knowledge, perceptions, and educational practices as they relate to self-determination, through an online survey. No risks beyond the standard risks associated with responding to an online survey will be experienced by the participants.

To complete the survey online, please go to the URL <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DAVISperceptions> and follow the online survey instructions. You will be prompted to complete the Consent Form prior to beginning the survey. Your answers will be completely confidential. The results of the survey will be reported in a summary format, so again no one will link you to your responses.

This research will add to the literature concerning teachers' perceptions and promotion of self-determination for students with significant cognitive disabilities at the elementary level. Additionally, this research will document Tennessee Elementary Special Educators' perceptions and promotion of self-determination in students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this important research study. If you have any questions about the administration of the survey, please contact Stephanie D. Davis, Middle Tennessee State University, at sdd3r@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Sincerely,

Stephanie D. Davis, M. Ed.