

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Palmer, S. B., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2003). Promoting self-determination in early elementary school: Teaching self-regulated problem-solving and goal-setting skills. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*, 115-126.

BOTTOM LINE

Problem solving and goal setting are important components of self-determination. It has been questioned whether young children have the ability to set goals. This study focused on the implementation of the self-determined learning model of instruction with young children with diverse learning needs. Fourteen teachers and 50 students participated in this study. Results showed that even children as young as age 5 were able to set goals and use the model to achieve them. Young children also demonstrated an ability to self-monitor their progress accurately. Instruction that incorporates opportunities to self-regulate problem solving and to self-direct learning will better prepare young children to become self-determined adolescents and adults.

TIPS

- Talk with young students to see what it is they would like to learn or do and use student- involvement in problem solving and self-directed learning to build capacity for later self-determination for students with disabilities.
- Components of goal setting and problem solving can be incorporated into the general education or special education classroom. Students may work together in teams in order to reinforce efforts.

KEY FINDINGS

- Mean teacher-rated and student-rated Goal Attainment Scale (GAS) scores were at the average or slightly above average range, which indicates that both student and teachers felt that goals had been achieved.
- More students exceeded expectations (34%) than failed to achieve them (12%).

KEY FINDINGS

cont.

- There were no significant differences in GAS scores by age or goal content area.
- Students additionally showed improvement on knowledge of the meaning of the word “goal” and the ability to provide goal examples

METHOD

- Fourteen teachers from two states were trained to implement the early elementary version of the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction*. Fifty students (32 male, 16 female) who participated were enrolled in kindergarten through third grade in 11 elementary schools. Most students were receiving special education supports in one or more category.
- Teachers implemented the model using both large-group (introduction to the model) and one-on-one training. Developmentally and age appropriate materials were provided by project staff. Teachers discussed and defined the meanings of the words goal and problem.
- After instruction was complete, teachers scored student progress on each goal. This scoring was analyzed for model efficacy. Teachers also completed a 16-item questionnaire reporting their opinions about the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction*.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Thoma, C. A., Nathanson, R., Baker, S. R., & Tamura, R. (2002). Self-determination: What do special educators know and where do they learn it? *Remedial and Special Education, 23*, 242-247.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Agran, M., & Hughes, C. (1998). *Teaching self-determination to students with disabilities: Basic skills for successful transition*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Agran, M., Mithaug, D. E., Martin, J. E. (2000). Promoting causal agency: The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 439-453.

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