Topic: Self-Determination


**BOTTOM LINE**

Self-determination is becoming an increasingly important topic in special education. However, in order to create instruction that promotes the growth and development of self-determination, it is important to develop an understanding of what self-determination is, and how it impacts the lives of individuals with disabilities. The functional model of self-determination provides one way of doing this. It views self-determination as a characteristic of individuals that is relatively stable over time. People who are self-determined are able to exert control over their lives. They act independently, regulate their own behavior, and have a realistic understanding of their abilities and limitations. By promoting skills such as choice-making, decision-making, positive attitudes about abilities, and self-awareness, educators can enable and support students with disabilities to become self-determined individuals.

**TIPS**

- Develop an understanding of what self-determination is and use this understanding to implement instruction for students with disabilities.

- Look for occasions to enable students with disabilities to make choices, decisions, and to develop a positive self-image. Incorporate these opportunities into daily activities in the classroom and at home.

- Self-determination has received increasing attention in the field of special education since the early 1990s.
KEY FINDINGS

- It is important to have an understanding of what self-determination is and how students develop it in order to implement effective instructional strategies to promote self-determination.

- One way to understand self-determination is to look at it as a function of the behaviors that characterize it.

- Self-determined behaviors enable a person to make things happen in their lives that improve their quality of life.

- People who make things happen in their lives experience
  ♦ autonomy—they act according to their own preferences and interests and free from undue influence
  ♦ self-regulation—they are able to evaluate situations, set goals, problem solve, etc.
  ♦ psychological empowerment—they have confidence in what they do, feel they have control over their environment
  ♦ self-realization—they recognize their strengths and limitations and are able to capitalize on their strengths.

- Research based on this functional model of self-determination indicates that people with disabilities tend to experience less self-determination than their non-disabled peers.

- Environmental characteristics, such as a lack of opportunities to make choices or exert control, can restrict the development of self-determination.

- The skills associated with self-determination can be incorporated into classroom and home environments.

- Some skills that are associated with self-determination include: choice-making skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, goal-setting and attainment skills, self-instruction skills, and leadership skills.


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