

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Palmer, S. B. (2003). Adult outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities three-years after high school: The impact of self-determination. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 38 (2), 131-144.

BOTTOM LINE

Increased attention in special education literature has been given to the importance of self-determination in the education of students with disabilities. Through federal funding many resources of instructional support and materials are available to educators to incorporate self-determination into the general curricula. This study further supports the importance of self-determination by finding increased long-term benefits in major life outcomes like employment and access to benefits, independent living, and financial independence for high school graduates that have higher levels of self-determination versus those with lower self-determination, as measured by The Arc's Self-Determination Scale.

TIPS

- Teachers can promote or enhance self-determination for students using available resources curricular materials and guides, instructional strategies and methods, assessment tools, teaching models, model programs, position papers, and student-directed planning programs.
- Encourage students to become part of their community by volunteering, talking with local people in preferred jobs, and taking recreational classes to enhance leisure and social/ personal skills.
- Families of students with learning disabilities or mental retardation can support self-determination by encouraging and providing choice and autonomy as appropriate.

KEY FINDINGS

- Generally the high self-determination group resulted in more successful outcomes versus the low self-determination group. The low self-determination group did not do better than the high self-determination group on any questions or items.
- Within a year of high school graduation, students in the high self-determination group were much more likely to move away from where they were living in high school and have a job.
- By the third year after graduation, the young adults in the high self-determination group were less likely to be living in their high school home and were much more independent than the low self-determination group.
- The high self-determination group also continued to improve in terms of financial independence like maintaining a bank account and paying for their own groceries between the one-year follow-up and the three-year follow-up.
- Among students who were employed, more of the high self-determination group obtained job benefits, such as health insurance, vacation, and sick leave.
- IQ and high self-determination were not highly correlated. For example, there were people with mental retardation who were in the high self-determination group.

METHOD

- This study gave The Arc's Self-Determination Scale, a 72-item global self-determination measure, to high school seniors with learning disabilities or mental retardation. Based on the results, students were split into two groups: high self-determination and low self-determination.
- A survey relating to outcomes in major life areas like employment and living situation was also given to those students both a year and three years after graduation either through the mail or over the phone.
- Most participants were recruited by obtaining permission from school districts to identify seniors with learning disabilities or mental retardation and their teachers sent consent forms to the students' homes. Signed consent by the parents and the students were received for 103 students, 77 students answered both the first-and third-year outcome measurements.
- The study looked at the differences between high and low self-determination groups in terms of their major life outcomes, changes between the first-year follow-up and the third-year follow-up, and the effect of intelligence and age.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS

- Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1996). Promoting self-determination in school reform, individualized planning, and curriculum efforts. In D. J. Sands & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *Self-determination across the life span: Independence and choice for people with disabilities* (pp. 197-213). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Halpern, A. S. (1990). A methodological review of follow-up and follow-along studies tracking school leavers from special education. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 13, 13-27.
- Peraino, J. M. (1992). Post-21 follow-up studies: How do special education graduates fare? In P. Wehman (Ed.), *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities* (pp.21-70). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Wagner, M., D'Amico, R., Marder, C., Newman, L., & Blackkorby, J. (1992). *What happens next? Trends in postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

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