

Research Highlights

Topic: Self-Determination

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Schalock, R. (2001). Self-determination and quality of life: Implications for special education services and supports. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 33(8), 1-16.

BOTTOM LINE

As standards-based school reform is increasingly being brought into focus, it also becomes increasingly important to consider the best ways to foster positive education and life outcomes of students with disabilities. Two concepts that are receiving growing attention in special education are self-determination and quality of life. Promoting and enhancing student's self-determination and perceived quality of life can serve to foster these positive outcomes. However, it is necessary to put a greater focus on blending these skills and values into the general curriculum.

TIPS

- Think of ways to blend the various aspects of quality of life, including self-determination, with academic objectives.
- Remember to enhance self-determination. Students need education in the skills associated with self-determination, opportunities to practice them, experience expressing these skills, and supports, as necessary, to enable individuals to use the skills in a wide range of contexts.

KEY FINDINGS

- In light of current school reform movements, it is important to consider how it may be possible to continue to increase positive educational and life outcomes for students with disabilities, as they are educated in the general curriculum. Promoting self-determination in educational environments may be one way to do this.
- Research shows that adults who are self-determined act more autonomously, are better social problem-solvers, are more self-aware, and hold more adaptive perceptions of their ability to control their life than adults who are not self-determined.

KEY FINDINGS

CONT.

- There is a correlation between the promotion of self-determination and the promotion of quality of life.
- Quality of life is gaining increasing attention in the disability field. The term is used to bring attention to the need to focus on the individual and his/her environment, and to provide an organizing framework to look at the various factors that influence quality of life, including
 - emotional well-being
 - physical well-being
 - material well-being
 - personal development
 - interpersonal relationships
 - self-determination
 - social inclusion
 - rights
- Research has shown that people who experience an implement opportunities for more self-determination tend to report having a better quality of life.
- In order to promote self-determination in educational settings, it is important to
 - provide instruction to promote the skills and knowledge associated with self-determination (choice-making, decision making, goal-setting skills)
 - provide opportunities for students to practice these skills and experience choice and control in their lives
 - design supports and accommodations to assist students in developing and expressing these skills
- To enhance quality of life it is important to
 - create environments that are accessible to students, enable them to engage in age-appropriate activities with their peers, and enable them to express their preferences, and exert control
 - create programs that provide for emotional well-being, personal development, social inclusion, etc.

RELATED
PUBLICATIONS

Schalock, R.L. (1994). Quality of life, quality enhancement, and quality assurance: Implications for program planning and evaluation in the field of mental retardation and developmental disabilities. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 17, 121-131.

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., & Schwartz, M. (1998). The relationship between self-determination, quality of life, and life satisfaction for adults with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 2-12.

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