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Implementation of a Post-Secondary Inclusive Recreation Program

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Abstract

As individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities become increasingly involved in post-secondary educational opportunities, it becomes the responsibility of the institution to provide inclusive recreation opportunities. This manuscript incorporates Sugermans' (2001) Model of Inclusive Facilitation into an inclusive recreation program for students with disabilities within a post-secondary based recreation program. The program model presented demonstrates a deliberate attempt to address and implement inclusive recreation opportunities for post-secondary students with disabilities outside of the traditional intramural/campus recreation model. The goal of the program is to enable post-secondary institutions to be comfortable and competent in creating inclusive recreation programs for students with disabilities by developing the ability to focus on participants' abilities.

Keywords: disabilities, inclusion, recreation program, post-secondary institution, accessibility

Implementation of a Post-Secondary Inclusive Recreation Program

Introduction

Recreation and leisure activities are necessary for a high quality of life for all, including those with disabilities (Dieringer & Judge, 2015). As individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities become progressively involved in recreational activities at all ages and skill levels, it becomes increasingly important for practitioners to organize and facilitate safe and effective inclusive programs. Sugerman (2001) stated "individuals are not interested in participating in segregated programs designed specifically for people with disabilities, but are interested in participating in programs that are inclusive" (p. 166). As persons with disabilities get older, the opportunities for inclusive recreation activities/sports start to differ depending on age and skill level, specifically with college-aged students.

Traditionally, when college students want to participate in recreation/sport activities, they participate in their campus recreation programs, more specifically, they participate in intramural sports (Kampf & Teske, 2013). Campus Recreation departments have the potential to influence the entire campus community either directly or

indirectly. Researcher from the National Intramural-Recreational Sport Association (NIRSA) study on the influence and value of participating in collegiate recreational sports activities found that “participation in recreational sports is a key determinant of satisfaction and success in college” (NIRSA, 2002, p. 9). While including students with disabilities in extracurricular recreational opportunities is not a new concept, at the post-secondary level, many institutions have overlooked inclusive recreation programs for students with disabilities for many years. However, given the importance that campus recreation plays in the development of holistic (intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social) students and the improvement of one’s quality of life (Lower, Turner & Peterson, 2013), providing recreational opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities, becomes much more important.

According to the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (2015a), nearly half of adults with disability get no aerobic physical activity and are three times more likely to have a serious chronic disease when compared to individuals without disabilities. Also, generally speaking, students with disabilities participate in extracurricular sports at a lower rate than their same-aged peers without disabilities (GAO, 2013). According to Traci (2009), significant barriers to accessing recreation and sport opportunities continue to exist for individuals with disabilities, including the lack of appropriate equipment, trained staff, and information about accessible programs. As the population of people with disabilities grows, educators, professional recreation administrators and supervisors must improve their services to reach a broader array of people (NCHPAD, 2015b; Scholl, Glanz & Davison, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

There is a crucial need for programs that help college aged students with disabilities to achieve greater self-sufficiency and improved school, work, and community living outcomes (Kunstler, Thompson & Croke, 2013). As of the fact that very little research has focused on both post-secondary institutions and inclusive recreation programs, it is important to start that conversation. Assimilation into college life can be difficult for all students, much more so for students with disabilities. The involvement of students in a college recreation program aids in the integration into the social atmosphere of the university (Kampf & Teske, 2013). In addition, inclusive sports participation among individuals with disabilities has been shown to promote social interactions and healthier lifestyles (Davis, 2011; Machek, Stopka, Tillman, Sneed & Naugle, 2008). By expanding recreation inclusion research to include post-secondary institutions, opportunities arise for college-aged students with disabilities to experience a broader range of recreational and social experiences while in school.

The purpose of this manuscript is to incorporate Sugermans’ (2001) Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1) into an inclusive recreation program for students with disabilities within a post-secondary based recreation program. This conceptual paper is divided into four specific areas: (1) provide an overview of the relative literature; (2) using the Model of Inclusive Facilitation, provide a detailed description of the comprehensive facilitation process of the inclusive recreation program; (3) provide information on evidence of success and challenges; and (4) conclusion. The program

model presented here demonstrates a deliberate attempt to address and implement inclusive recreation opportunities for post-secondary students with disabilities outside of the traditional intramural/campus recreation model.

According to Sugerman (2001), the model was created to lead practitioners through a process of facilitating outdoor adventure groups that included people with disabilities. Specifically, the model was designed to enable practitioners to: (a) be comfortable and competent in including people with disabilities in their programs; (b) develop the ability to focus on participant's abilities rather than disabilities; and (c) manage and minimize the impact of a disability on the adventure experience (Sugerman, 2001). While outdoor adventure was not the basis for the current inclusive recreation program created, the foundational tenants of the model provided an excellent road map to guide the authors through the creation and implementation process.

Literature Review

Leisure Education

The basis for inclusive recreation programming is within the principles of leisure education. Sivan (1997) suggested, "leisure education refers to a lifelong learning process that helps people achieve through socially acceptable leisure activities to their fullest leisure potential and desirable quality of life" (p. 42). There is growing recognition of the value of leisure in all societies and the importance of leisure education. Given the various perspectives on leisure education, this review of literature focuses on the importance of leisure education in relation to enhancing the quality of life of individuals. The underlying assumption of leisure education is that everyone should have opportunities to experience leisure and that leisure contributes to human development, it is important that everyone also have the chance to be educated for leisure (Sivan, 2008).

To engage in leisure is to express our individual essence, including our talents and capabilities, pursue our potential, and experience a variety of positive emotions while we participate in enjoyable and meaningful activities (Kleiber, 2012). Leisure education helps people identify leisure experiences that facilitate building happy, growth-filled, valued lives (Carruthers & Hood, 2011). An important aspect of developing the process of leisure education is incorporating a systems approach. Therefore, it is helpful when providing leisure education to clearly outline a purpose to guide service delivery. One way to offer leisure education that is described in this paper is to provide a balanced and systematic approach to facilitating leisure participation. Offering leisure education services creates opportunities for individuals, regardless of the severity of their limitations, to engage in various meaningful and enjoyable recreation activities (Dattilo, 2015). If participants feel as if they have the freedom and opportunity to engage in recreation activities of their choosing, they are likely to experience a sense of empowerment.

Inclusive Recreation

Hurd and Anderson (2011) defined recreation as "an activity that people engage in during their free time, that people enjoy, and that people recognize as having socially redeeming

values” (p. 9). Inclusion within recreational activities is important at any level. Dieringer and Judge (2015) created implementation strategies for inclusion of students with disabilities into physical education opportunities and extracurricular athletics. Specifically, they focused on potential barriers to implementation, such as federal and state allocations to public schools, and the importance of collaboration between stakeholders. Dieringer and Judge (2015) also mentioned advocating for students and athletes with disabilities as a positive form of inclusive recreation implementation, specifically “creating disability awareness activities that promote a better understanding of what it means to have a disability, everyone, regardless of ability level, disability, or interest, has the right to be included in organized physical activity” (p. 98).

Miller, Schleien, and Bowens (2010) stated, “inclusive recreation represents a step toward viewing individuals with and without disabilities in an equal manner and eliminating the number of people perceived as “they” (p. 36). In January 2013, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report that underscored the access to, and participation in, extracurricular athletic opportunities (GAO, 2013). Unfortunately, the GAO found that students with disabilities are not being afforded an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities in public elementary and secondary schools. To ensure that students with disabilities consistently have opportunities to participate in extracurricular athletics equal to those of other students, the GAO recommended that the United States Department of Education clarify and communicate to schools their responsibilities under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, regarding the provision of extracurricular athletics (GAO, 2013). Interestingly, Section 504 regulations are not limited to elementary and secondary schools, it states that students with disabilities at the post-secondary level must be provided with an equal opportunity to participate in athletics, including intercollegiate club, and intramural athletics (GAO, 2013).

As the population of people with disabilities continues to grow within post-secondary institutions, professional recreation administrators and supervisors must improve their services to reach a broader array of people (Scholl, Glanz & Davison, 2006, U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Historically, recreation for individuals with disabilities has been delivered through separated recreation programs (Watcher & McGowan, 2002). The prevailing philosophy held that individuals with disabilities needed separate programs to accommodate lower skill levels, different learning processes, or different physical abilities (Fennick & Royal, 2003). A more contemporary philosophy regarding participation of individuals with disabilities in recreation is inclusion, where individuals with or without disabilities participate in sport and recreation opportunities together. Several well-known organizations exist to facilitate inclusion within sports. For example, the International Federation for Intellectual Disability Sport (INAS), the National Sports Center for the Disabled (NSCD), SPORTS for Exceptional Athletes, the Adaptive Sports Association (ASA), the Special Olympics Unified Sports Program, I Can Do It, You Can Do It!, and most recently, The Commit to Inclusion Campaign. The Special Olympics sums up the concept of inclusion and sport by stating, “Special Olympics is dedicated to promoting social inclusion through shared sports training and competition experiences”

(Special Olympics, 2017, p. 1). These organizations, as well as many others, dedicate themselves to providing inclusive opportunities through sport.

Implementation of Inclusive Recreation Program through the Model of Inclusive Facilitation

Providing recreational opportunities for students with disabilities is the basis of inclusive recreation. In 1999, the National Recreation and Park Association adopted a Position Statement on Inclusion (NRPA, 1999), the purpose of which was to “encourage all providers of park, recreation and leisure services to provide opportunities in settings where people of all abilities can recreate and interact together” (p. 94). The creation and implementation of inclusive recreation programs at the post-secondary level can lead to a more comprehensive educational experience for all students. The program reviewed in this manuscript was implemented at a large public university in the southeastern United States. The inclusive recreation program was organized, created, and implemented by an academic department within a college of Health and Human Service in conjunction with an inclusive post-secondary educational program (see AILSG) housed within the same college. The college itself has five departments and centers, with approximately 4,235 students, and 136 faculty and staff.

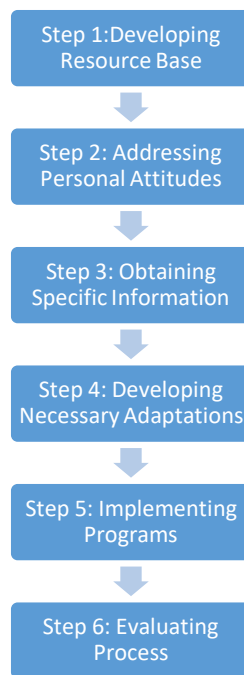
The Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth

The Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth (i.e. Academy) provides a university-based, post-secondary education experience for persons with different intellectual and/or developmental abilities. The Academy, by design, focuses on independence through an inclusive campus program – encouraging social growth and development through real life college experiences. The programs are tuition-based with housing options available on and off campus. The Academy is comprised of two certificate programs that work in conjunction. The initial program, which began in 2009, Academic, Social, and Career, Enrichment (ASCE) program, is designed to provide a two-year foundational base for enhancement of academic, career, and social skills in an inclusive setting. This foundational program has been approved by the Department of Education as a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). The Advanced Leadership and Career Development Program (ALCD), which began in 2014, is designed to enhance existing skills in the areas of career development, self-advocacy, leadership and independence, and academic exploration (AILSG, 2017). The Academy has approximately 11 full time faculty and staff, and 41 students (AILSG, 2017).

Model of Inclusive Facilitation

Using the Model of Inclusive Facilitation as a guideline (see Figure 1), the inclusive recreation program was created by faculty, with assistance from local recreational and physical education professionals working within inclusive recreation. The inclusive program was created because students within the Academy program were not participating in the traditional campus recreation model, and expressed a desire to participate in a university organized recreation program.

The process offered here for review is unique in many respects. First, while inclusive post-secondary programs exist at some institutions, a review of current post-secondary programs shows very few provide a recreation based program designed specifically for its students. Second, traditionally these programs are organized and implemented through campus recreation/intramural sports. The current program was created, organized, and implemented by faculty and students within an academic department, outside the scope of the traditional campus recreation/intramural programs.



*Figure 1. Model of Inclusive Facilitation Sugerman (2001). Adapted from “Inclusive outdoor education: Facilitating groups that include people with disabilities” by D. Sugerman, 2001, *Journal of Experiential Education*, 24(3), 166-172.*

While the basic model was followed in the creation of the Academy recreation program, adjustments were made to better fit the newly created post-secondary inclusive recreation program.

Developing a Base of Resources

Sugerman (2001) suggested that the first step of the model involves the development of community resources, including people and written materials (see Figure 1, Step 1). Specifically, this step will form a support structure from which facilitators can gather information and obtain feedback. To implement the inclusive recreation program at the post-secondary level, the program facilitators, both of whom have professional and academic backgrounds in recreation and sport management, gathered information and obtained specific feedback on the most appropriate manner to create and implement the Academy recreation program.

First, the facilitators met with the Academy Director and staff to determine the basic needs of the students, as well as to gauge general interest of the staff and their levels of support (e.g. administrative, facilities, financial, etc.) for the program. Second, a series of meetings were completed with the university's Department of Sport and Recreation, specifically Intramural Sports, Club Sports, and Facilities. The purpose was to learn about their programs and implementation processes, as well as to introduce these departments to the Academy recreation program so that there could be a collaborative work environment as the recreation program grows. This meeting also helped inform the facilitators on how to mirror aspects of the Academy recreation program, such as registration scheduling, etc., with existing campus recreation/intramural sport programs. In addition to the facilitators and Academy staff, two student assistants from the academic department volunteered to help with the initial program. Given that this was the first program of its kind on campus, there needed to be an ongoing relationship with other campus organizations, specifically campus recreation/intramural sports and facilities. To meet this requirement, the student assistants took on a liaison type role between the Academy and on-campus organizations. The idea was to use this relationship to secure space and offer programs in parallel with the standard intramural program offerings.

In addition, to gather additional information, and to develop a larger base of resources, the program facilitators met with local recreational organizations to not only inform them of the programs creation, but to ask about "best practices" they have used with inclusive recreation programs. The facilitators specifically met with local Special Olympics organizations, public parks and recreation special needs programs, as well as Blaze Sports America. Blaze Sports is a nonprofit organization that was created after the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, it offers a variety of sport and recreation programs for kids and veterans with physical disabilities (Blaze Sports, 2017). These additional resources were instrumental when designing the Academy recreation program within a post-secondary setting.

Addressing Personal Attitudes

The next step in the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1, Step 2) involves recognizing, understanding, and confronting personal attitudes about people with disabilities (Sugerman, 2001). For various reasons, society has removed people with disabilities from everyday life, which means most have not had personal contact with anyone who has a disability. As Sugerman (2001) suggested, this step is an opportunity to study attitudes towards disabilities, and to change attitudinal barriers when facilitating groups that include people with disabilities. To complete Step 2 within the post-secondary model, several phases were implemented. First, two student-assistants from the academic department worked directly with the Academy to assist in organizing and implement the recreation program. The student-assistants worked closely with approximately 5-10 Academy students on a daily basis, which provided continuity and a sense of routine between the students and the recreation program. Second, Academy students were invited to the academic departments' student club meetings, additionally; approximately 20 non-Academy students were invited to each inclusive recreation program activity as participants. This phase lasted for one academic semester and

allowed all participants involved (Academy and non-Academy) the opportunity to get to know each other, forms friendships, and address any issues. Lastly, as part of the Academy curriculum, students are integrated within the academic departments' curriculum by taking a variety of classes (approximately 2-3 a semester), so non-Academy students regularly interact with Academy students inside and outside of class throughout the semester.

As Sugerman (2001) suggested, the goal is to view people with disabilities as valuable, contributing members of the community, and not as outsiders. By including these various phases of inclusion into the inclusive recreation program, it provided an understanding about the values and beliefs concerning people with disabilities among all participants, which lead to more effective facilitation.

Sugerman (2001) also suggested that it is equally important to learn general guidelines about speaking and interacting with people with disabilities and learning to treat individuals with disabilities as a person first, with the disability as a secondary consideration. Throughout the recreation programs, facilitators, participants, faculty, and staff modeled person-first language. The Academy encourages the practice of person-first language to help people be more thoughtful of the language used.

Obtaining Specific Information

Within this step (see Figure 1, Step 3), the facilitator needs to obtain specific information about the disabilities of the participants, and the implications for participating in the inclusive program. In addition, it is important to gather information from the participants themselves. To complete this task, it is suggested that in-person interviews be conducted with participants to develop a common understanding of expectations and estimate the participant's ability level.

One of the byproducts of this step was determining that not all Academy students have a desire to participate in a recreation program, so it was determined that during the pre-planning process, student recruitment was important to the success of the program. Before the semester began, a baseline survey was created by the facilitators based on formal and informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff within the academic department. The survey was designed to determine the basic needs and general interest of students in the program. The facilitators and student-assistants then attended the Academies first Friday of classes to meet the students, then administer, and collect surveys. Once the surveys had been analyzed through quantitative (e.g., descriptive statistics) and qualitative (e.g., thematic responses) measures, a tentative calendar was created which provides a detailed monthly outlook of the planned events, and is then posted in the Academy study room for students to review. In a perfect world, the Academy recreation program would begin as early as the second or third week of classes. More realistically, with the hectic nature of the beginning of the semester for all students, the program did not begin until around the second month of classes.

Obtaining information about all participants is an on-going process throughout the semester, but so is student recruitment, which is also completed in step 3. Completing

both steps simultaneously is important because it allows the program facilitators to create a baseline of information to plan program logistics (e.g. type and size of facility, equipment & support staff, etc.). Students were also encouraged to participate in recruitment tasks like making flyers and gathering equipment for the program. Through active engagement in the planning period, students experienced a sense of ownership of the program. Academy students who are in their third year were given the chance to earn credit for their Academy classes through taking leadership roles in the recreation programs (e.g. making flyers, gathering kids to go to the event, helping with the planning process, etc.).

Throughout this step, the Academy facilitators were consistently visiting Academy classes to obtain as much information as possible about the participants and to meet with students and generate interest for the program. Also, the Academy facilitator's talked to the students who are just "hanging out" in between classes and let them know recreation programs are happening and where to go to participate. In addition, the facilitators had a full contact list of students and were constantly using technology and social media (e.g. email, texting, Facebook, etc.) to reach out to students.

Developing Adaptations

Adaptations are oftentimes promoted as a means to teach students with and without disabilities in the same setting (Kalyvas & Reid, 2003). Additionally, "adaptations can occur at the micro or macro level and might involve changes in activity, assessment, teaching, or physical and temporal environments" (Kalyvas & Reid, 2003, p. 182). In designing programs for people with disabilities, several types of adaptations may be possible: equipment adaptations, procedural adaptations, skill sequence adaptations, environmental modifications, and program modifications (Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, & Rynders, 1993). Adaptations bridge the gap between the abilities of the participant and the demands of the activity and are an important step in the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (Sugerman, 2001). Sugerman (2001) provided general guidelines relating activity adaptations: (1) adapt on an individual basis; (2) adapt only as necessary; and (3) adapt for functionality (see Figure 1, Step 4).

One of the most important characteristics in effectively implementing any sport adaptation involves positive attitudes from both the facilitator and the participant. Because the Academy recreation program provided a variety of activities, various adaptations were made to accommodate participants. Many times, changes and adaptations had to be made due to the number of participants. For example, if there were not enough students to play flag football, then a variation of a lead-up game would be played such as running passing routes or designing plays. Sometimes adaptations were made to the rules in order for everyone to achieve a certain level of success for all skill levels. For example, during an indoor soccer match, rules were often enforced to limit the impact of better players such as a two touch rule (e.g., only being able to touch the ball twice before having to pass), or designating players that could play in the offside position. Participants often think the adaptation would primarily benefit students with disabilities; however, in the spirit of inclusion, the adaptations that were made often had a positive effect on some of the lower skilled students without disabilities.

Implementing the Program

This step brings together the skills developed in the earlier steps of the model to implement the program (see Figure 1, Step 5). Implementing programs include not only physical integration (e.g., adapting equipment so that an individual with a disability can participate in a program), but also social integration or the development of mutually beneficial relationships between people with and without disabilities (Lais, 1987). Sugerman (2001) added that this could be accomplished through setting group guidelines, modeling appropriate behavior, and developing symbiotic relationships among participants.

Once the semester begins and the Academy recreational program was in full swing, the program provides weekly activities for students and volunteers. A Gmail account was set-up to create a master calendar of events, and from this e-mail the students are contacted weekly about the upcoming events of the week. In addition, a flyer of the month's planned activities was posted in the Academy study room at the beginning of each month. Activities that have been offered to date include: 1) kickball; 2) soccer; 3) word games; 4) bocce; 5) ultimate Frisbee; 6) flag football; 7) game night; 8) archery; 9) dodgeball; 10) movie day; 11) basketball; and 12) bowling. One of the highlights of the program is the end of the semester special event. The end of the semester event during the first semester of the inclusive recreation program was a bowling/laser tag event that included Academy students, several of the volunteers, and faculty and staff from both the Academy and academic department.

As part of the implementation process, recreational "meet-ups" were created, which resembled open recreation. These "meet-ups" were in addition to regularly scheduled programs and were designed to create non-structured recreation opportunities for Academy students. To provide this opportunity a couple of times a week, the student-assistants organized different activities that emulated activities offered by the campus recreation department and were organized in an open green space on campus. The legal aspect of organizing and implementing programs to individuals with disabilities is important to any inclusive recreation program. Similar to other campus recreation/intramural activities, all participants attended an introduction class on the recreation program requirements, as well as signed waivers before they were eligible to participate

To be able to implement any recreational program or activity, volunteers are essential, as they are to the success of the Academy recreation program. Volunteers were recruited directly from students within the academic department through class visitations and majors' club meetings. At the meetings, the facilitators presented the volunteer opportunities as well as a sign-up sheet for interested students. Once a student volunteer list was generated, at the beginning of each week, the facilitators provided updates on the week's activities to the volunteers through emails and texts. The weekly communication provided specific information about the week's programs (e.g. date, time, location, activity, etc.). In addition, the volunteers were always encouraged to bring guests to participate and help program the activities.

Additional students were also recruited to assist with implementation, and they also participated in the activities, which increased the participation from the general student body of the university. This relationship with department students provided the opportunity for the Academy students to participate in other recreation and leisure activities such as tail gating at football games with a known group people, which helped develop social integration and mutually beneficial relationships between people with and without disabilities.

Evaluating the Process

In the last step of the Model of Inclusive Facilitation (see Figure 1, Step 4), the facilitator identifies areas that were strengths in program implementation and areas that need additional attention, with the evaluations being completed on both an informal and formal basis. As Sugerman (2001) suggested, reflecting on these responses, and discussion with group members and other facilitators, can reinforce effective program elements and generate ideas for improvement. In addition, the evaluation process begins to build a stronger base of knowledge, skill, and attitude concerning the inclusion of individuals with disabilities into inclusive programming.

Within the Academy recreation program, various evaluation processes were completed. Once the semester is complete and the students and volunteers have participated in the program, a post semester evaluation process takes place. First, similar to the pre-program survey, a post-program survey was created by the facilitators based on formal and informal conversations with students, faculty, and staff within the academic department, and was given to all participants and student-assistants. Second, led by the program facilitators, the Academy faculty and student-assistants met to discuss the semester's event, as well as begin to plan for the next semester's activities. The planning process looked at what worked and what needs to be improved upon, specific to type of activities offered, when they are offered, and any programmatic and administrative adjustments that needed to be made. Based on the post semester evaluation process to date, certain recommendations have been made by faculty, staff and students. They include but are not limited to: 1) make all faculty and staff available to the Academy; 2) determine the best days/times to attend classes to be able to recruit students; 3) do not just drop in and out of Academy classes, stay and talk with the students to build trust and create friendships, because bonding with the students is the only way some of them will be willing to attempt to participate in the intramural sports program; and 4) begin programming early in the semester, recruit students, volunteer and reserve space early.

Academy student feedback is also very important to the success of the program, and to date, recommendations from Academy students include: 1) finding a more efficient way to communicate (e.g. possibly text vs. e-mail); 2) create programs at different times of the semester so that more Academy and non-Academy students can attend consistently; and 3) invest in supplies to support programs (e.g. actual flags for flag football).

Evidence of Successes

Sport remains a source of personal and social entertainment, but the psychological and physical health benefits associated with participation are very important (Lower, Turner & Peterson, 2013). To that point, sport/recreational activity involvement for students with disabilities provides a unique and rewarding opportunity to benefit from the psychological and physical benefits that comes from participation. The most efficient process to measure success within recreational programs is attendance, and since the inception of the Academy recreation program, attendance (Academy and non-Academy students and volunteers) has increased approximately 5% every semester, with some activities (e.g., soccer, dodgeball, and bowling) reaching 20-25 participants (e.g., Academy & non-Academy students). In addition, the Academy has now placed advertisements for the recreation program within their off-campus recruiting materials, as well as featured the program overseas during study abroad trips to the United Arab Emirates.

Challenges

As with any recreational or sport program, there are going to be challenges. Because this program is working in conjunction with academic programs, there are certain administrative challenges that are present. For example, start-up challenges, because this was and is a unique program not traditionally found within post-secondary institutions, creating and implementing this program was initially difficult because the campus had trouble adjusting to meet the demands of the program and its participants. There seems to be a dichotomy between students who want to participate on a recreational level and those who want to participate on a more competitive level, balancing those desires is difficult. Students in the Academy show-up inconsistently, which makes it difficult to plan activities. In addition, there are many space and time challenges associated with the program. Again, because of the uniqueness of this program and the relatively small size of the participants compared to other university programs, securing activity space is difficult. Often the space needed is already reserved, or the time space is available is not conducive to the Academy participant's schedule. More established campus programs would receive preferential treatment when it came to scheduling, making programming a tough task.

A challenge that faculty and staff overlooked was the social capacity of many of the participants. As an example, many participants are shy and do not enjoy being in large crowds, so having activities during the middle of the day in open green spaces on campus meant students were visible by all students, something Academy students tried to avoid. Based on some of the challenges observed, one could begin to wonder if students felt self-conscious playing in open and crowded areas due to insecurities associated with being novices or unskilled in some of the activities. Perhaps in the future, the program should incorporate smaller group skill building sessions before an open event. The most successful events were smaller ones which involved little to no outside groups and no additional paperwork, unfortunately, this somewhat goes against the inclusion philosophy. Other challenges arose when the program facilitators attempted to include activities off campus that included additional fees and transportation.

Conclusion

Research suggests recreational/intramural sports programs can be a tremendous tool to promote student engagement and social development. Working with Academy students to make their college experience as consistent as a traditional student takes time and commitment from faculty, staff, students and administration.

The program presented is unique in that it was conceived with the express purpose of providing recreational opportunities for students with disabilities, both intellectual and developmental. The hope is that after reviewing this model, post-secondary institutions would feel more comfortable and competent creating and implementing an inclusive recreation program. While there are numerous programs that offer recreational opportunities for students with disabilities, a review of current research could find few that were offered at post-secondary institutions. This program is the basis of inclusive recreation and is providing physical and emotional growth for a group of students who would not have had that opportunity otherwise. As this program grows and becomes more common within the post-secondary community, we believe other institutions can use this example as a model to develop inclusive recreation opportunities for students all over the country.

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Chris Brown, Ph.D. Dr. Brown received both his B.S. and M.Ed. in Recreation Administration from the University of Georgia, and his doctorate from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Dr. Brown has worked with a variety of recreation populations (able bodied and students with disabilities) while in school and in my professional and academic careers. He teaches a service learning class where students organize and implement three fundraising events for four different non-profit organizations that work directly with individuals with mental or physical disabilities. Those organizations include the Kyle Pease Foundation, Cherokee County Special Olympics, Acworth Parks and Recreation Special Needs Program, specifically the Horizon League, and KSU's Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth. Dr. Brown, along with Dr. Johnson, began working with the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth (AILSG) to provide recreation and sport opportunities for their students through a well-organized, inclusive recreation program. Dr.'s Brown and Johnson organized and implemented KSU's first on campus recreation and sport program for students with disabilities, which began in spring 2014.

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Strengthening Social and Emotional Intelligences through Writing

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Abstract

Using writing to allow children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to express how they are feeling or to stimulate thinking about a social situation will allow the students the opportunity to strengthen social and emotional intelligences. By giving prompts about different social and emotional situations or ideas to children, the teacher allows the children to think about social circumstances and get used to new ways of thinking. Prompts may be associated with scenarios and followed by questions, such as “How would this make me feel?” or “How do you think the other person feels? How do you know?” By responding to the prompts, the students should be thinking more about their own emotions and about how the other person feels, along with what may have changed the situation. By using writing as a response to the prompts, students who have difficulty communicating will have the opportunity to be thoughtful about their responses before actually acting or reacting in a real situation.

Key Words: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence

Strengthening Social and Emotional Intelligences through Writing

In an Autistic Support, full-time special education classroom, a student with low functioning autism wants to eat more of her banana instead of doing her puzzle. Instead of voicing this request, this student, who is non-verbal, has to communicate in other ways. In order to tell her Personal Care Assistant (PCA) that she wants more banana before completing her puzzle, the young learner throws a puzzle piece at the banana. This student is not able to get others to understand her wants or needs without physically demonstrating them. This is a clear demonstration of a communication barrier. Social skills training may assist this student with communication in a more desirable or suitable manner. Additionally, using more acceptable means of communication or approaches may be enhanced by making this student more socially and emotionally aware of her own actions and the feelings of others.

Literature Review

Bradberry and Greaves (2005) found that children with autism have a desire to be socially involved with their peers, but since they are held back by deficits in social and emotional intelligences, they have difficulty forming relationships. Many common characteristics of ASD come into play, often hindering these children from forming

relationships. For instance, one common characteristic of individuals with ASD is a lack of understanding and comprehension of what other people are trying to say to them, especially when the communication is unspoken or when a spoken communication is not literal. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Further, social interactions and social cues help individuals understand how emotions play into conversations. For example, a facial expression, such as smile can mean that one is reciprocating an enjoyable feeling after something pleasant is shared. A sigh can mean that someone is tired or frustrated. These cues are often missed by a person with ASD.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize one's own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different feelings and label them appropriately, and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior. Emotional intelligence focuses on the individual's ability to process emotional information and utilize it to navigate the social environment. It also encompasses the ability to self-perceive or to recognize one's own emotions or feelings.

Social intelligence is an important factor which leads to people understanding social skills and how well they can get along with others. Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) note that social intelligence is a set of interpersonal competencies built on specific neural circuits that inspire others to be effective. Goleman (2006) believes that social and emotional intelligences are connected. Therefore, it is important to instill these signals, cues and indications into children with ASD early on, so they are able to grasp the understanding of emotional awareness and socially acceptable behaviors.

There are specific key elements that play into social intelligence, including verbal fluency and conversational skills, knowledge of social roles, rules and scripts, listening skills, understanding other people, social self-efficacy, and management skills. These elements will allow one to become better at interacting socially.

The concept of emotional intelligence was questioned when some people with high intelligence quotients and very high levels of education did not manage their lives well, did not relate to other people appropriately, and were generally unhappy, while other people, who did not score well on traditional measures of intelligence, did extremely well in managing their lives and being fruitful and effective.

For example, Green (2011) shares Mayer and Salovey's 16-step model of emotional intelligence from childhood to adulthood, which comprises four branches:

- The ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others accurately.
- The ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking.
- The ability to understand emotions, emotional language, and the signals conveyed by emotions.
- The ability to manage emotions so as to attain specific goals.

In *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book*, Bradberry and Greaves (2005) discuss that brains can be manipulated to change pathways, called plasticity, and by changing pathways, new connections can be reinforced where previous misinformation existed.

Further, Bradberry and Greaves (2005) discuss how Richard La China, “trained his brain” (80-81) by pushing himself past the discomfort of his old ways. With new challenges he was able to form new connections in his brain that helped him retrain his brain. With each reinforcement of the task, he had less trouble completing the same task.

The concept of social and emotional intelligences has been embraced by educators. Thousands of schools are teaching these intelligence skills to children, and it is part of a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2016). These schools are requiring that students achieve a certain level of SEL skills. In Illinois, specific learning standards for every grade level have been established (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015). Some of the skills learned in elementary school include being able to identify nonverbal cues regarding how someone else is feeling. In high school, the students must be able to talk and listen in ways that resolve conflicts.

By exposing children to effective initiation and responses to social situations with peers, they begin to acquire these crucial intelligences. This understanding occurs as children develop. One recent study using peer training in an after school program for kindergarten and first grade students found success in using peers to prompt students with ASD to use phrases for social situations, such as “please” and “thank you,” and “may I have a turn?” (Kamp et al., 2015). Shaul (2014) believes in visual techniques for teaching social skills and uses a train as a metaphor to teach conversational skills. Using illustrations of the freight wagons, the author shows how important turn-taking is in conversation. His book includes worksheets at the back for reinforcement and assessment.

Children with autism have a great deal of trouble understanding emotional indications and social cues. By learning to recognize the emotions of one’s self and that of others, children with ASD can develop higher emotional intelligences and can benefit by increasing social intelligences, learning to distinguish social cues and then developing appropriate responses or ways to originate social interactions.

Social impairments are a critical element in the definition of ASD. The National Institute of Mental Health (2015) reports that most children with ASD have trouble engaging in everyday social interactions. For example, some children with ASD may:

- Make little eye contact
- Tend to look and listen less to people in their environment or fail to respond to other people
- Rarely seek to share their enjoyment of toys or activities by pointing or showing things to others
- Respond unusually when others show anger, distress, or affection.

Further, recent research (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015) suggests that children with ASD do not respond to emotional cues in human social interactions because they may not pay attention to the social cues that others typically notice. Children with ASD look at the mouth of someone who is talking and not the eyes. Without the ability to

construe another person's tone of voice as well as gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal communications, persons with ASD may not respond properly.

Rationale for the Study

Herbert and Weintraub (2012) discuss how, with enough therapy and interaction, the child can develop self-awareness to know when he/she has acted inappropriately. In some autistic support classrooms, there are different behavior plans set up for each student. Some students have charts or schedules. Charts can show contingency situations; for example, the teachers can use a chart with student A to help the student understand that if he does a task appropriately, then he will get a reward or a preferred task. Further, prompts and social stories are often used in autistic support classrooms to teach social skills.

Although behavior plans and contingency charts are helpful, there is a need for students to express how they feel and to respond in a non-threatening way. Writing is a tool that may be useful. Writing is an essential way for children to express themselves, whether it is about their favorite season or how their weekend went. This tool allows children to develop their writing skills while developing expression by writing more thoroughly.

Using writing to allow children with ASD to express how they are feeling or to stimulate thinking about a social situation will allow the students the opportunity to strengthen social and emotional intelligences. By giving prompts about different social and emotional situations or ideas to children, the teacher allows the children to think about social circumstances and get used to new ways of thinking. Prompts may be associated with scenarios and followed by questions, such as “How would this make me feel?” or “How do you think the other person feels? How do you know?” By responding to the prompts, the students should be thinking more about their own emotions and about how the other person feels, along with what could have changed the situation. By using writing as a response to the prompts, students who have difficulty communicating will have the opportunity to be thoughtful about their responses before actually acting or reacting in a real situation.

Since children with ASD have a hard time learning and expressing emotions, it is important to stimulate these emotions in different ways. Stimulating thinking of emotions or of social interactions allows the children to contemplate responses while not actually experiencing the real-life situation. The prompts not only stimulate the student to think about emotions and social skills, but they also help the students that are non-verbal to express themselves. Children who are non-verbal can replace speech by explaining their thoughts in writing. Giving the students writing prompts and writing journals for free writing will allow these skills to be reinforced. Starc (2014) discusses how journaling is a good form of self-expression for those who have difficulties communicating with others. Starc (2014) notes that writing is good way for children with ASD to work through issues that are troubling them without having to talk to people.

The Study

The goal of the study was to investigate whether an intervention that aims to improve social and emotional intelligences will help children learn how to express themselves and learn social skills and responses that are appropriate. By using writing journals, students with autism explored how to express themselves and ways to gain insight to appropriate and inappropriate social skills and responses. The prompts were designed to stimulate thinking about social and emotional skills.

Two times per week, participating students were asked to complete activities, such as responses to questions or stories. The activities or prompts were designed to stimulate thinking about emotions and appropriate social skills. For example, prompts such as the following were used:

- On the pictures of handshakes, write two words about being a good friend
- On the lines below, describe the following: if you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be and use three examples of how you could make that change?
- Using the shaded truths cards, one example might be, if a friend asks you if you like her outfit and you really do not like it, how could you answer in a way that would not hurt her feelings?
- When you are feeling a particular way, for example frustrated, draw a picture to show how you look and tell what your body does when you feel this way.

The writing was not limited to the biweekly prompts, but could also be a means to express emotions as a result of an incident that recently occurred. Students were given the opportunity to free write when an unplanned incident occurred. The prompts were categorized into the following areas:

- Adjusting Behavior by What People Are Thinking
- Being Part of a Group
- My Body and Mind
- My Language
- Observing Others
- Self-Awareness and Self-Monitoring
- What People Mean by What They Say
- Making Friends

Methods

This research design was teacher action research, which included pre and post surveys and qualitative data collected from the analysis of the journal writing. The surveys included pre and post attitudinal surveys of participating teachers of autism support classrooms and pre and post surveys of the participating students with autism who were in these classrooms. A comparison of pre and post surveys were analyzed for patterns, and findings were anecdotal in nature and are related to teacher views of their students.

Since the study group was small, as this was a pilot study, the surveys responses from the teachers were mostly open-ended, for example, “Have you noticed changes in students’ awareness of other people’s feelings? If yes, please give at least one example.” Another example is, “Have you noticed changes in students’ respecting other people’s opinions? If yes, please give at least one example.”

For the student surveys, some questions were open-ended, like “Things I do wrong when trying to make a friend...”, and “I should apologize when...” Some questions asked students to self-assess perspectives on social and emotional intelligences. See the following examples:

I get very angry when someone does not play with me.

- A. True
- B. Somewhat True
- C. Not True

I have one good friend or more.

- A. True
- B. Somewhat True
- C. Not True

In addition, data were gathered through an analysis of the participating students' journals. The journals were the medium used for expression and responses. The journal assignments were given 2 -3 times weekly and reviewed and discussed with the students by the teachers. Researchers reviewed the journal data each month. The pilot study lasted for 15 weeks.

Participants

Two teachers of autism support full-time classrooms participated in this pilot study. One teacher from each of the two participating autism support schools was included. The teachers were recommended by the director of the autism schools. An email assent was sent to the two recommended teachers followed by a formal letter. The teacher participation was voluntary, but a stipend of \$200 was awarded to each for participation. Both teachers were females between the ages of 25 and 29 with 1 to 3 years of experience teaching students with disabilities. Both teachers earned a Master’s Degree and have experience teaching students in middle school/junior high and high school. These teachers reported having training in autism spectrum disorders through university classes while in graduate school, professional workshops, and independent readings. These two teachers rate themselves as confident and very confident in their abilities to provide direct intervention services as part of a team of professionals for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Two students from each participating classroom took part in the study. Students who are identified as having autism and who attend the participating autism support schools were considered potential participants. Parental permission, signed consent, was required for participation. A verbal assent was used by the researcher for the students who the

teachers recommended. Each child's participation in this project was completely voluntary. In addition to parental permission, the child was asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Only those children who had parental permission and who wanted to participate were afforded the opportunity, and the students were able to withdraw participation at any time, able to withdraw participation at any time and for any reason without penalty.

Of the four students who participated in the study, two were females and two were males. Two students' ages ranged from 14 – 16 years, and the other two students were in the 17 – 19-year range for the study. All students were Caucasian and spoke English as their first language.

Results

The pilot study did not allow for a large participant group, and therefore the results are limited. However, there are some findings that are notable. According to the teacher post-survey, the following behaviors improved in the students who participated in the study: taking turns, sharing, helping others, playing with others, appropriate physical contact during play, following directions, raising their hands to be called on, not crying during school work, and not yelling at the teachers. One teacher explained that students are now using writing as a coping skill. One student is expressing how she feels instead of engaging in self-injurious behaviors, such as cutting. Another student uses writing to help her to stop worrying about situations which she cannot control. The second teacher shared that students have limited the amount of inappropriate touching with others. One exercise through the answering of writing prompts was to identify kinds of touch and to name persons for whom the kind of touch was appropriate, along with where (or in what setting) the touch was appropriate. For example, students identified giving a high five to friends at school, but kissing would only be appropriate with mom or dad at home. Teachers also said that students no longer tended to reach out to have their hands squeezed by others. Also, students have also begun raising their hands to be called on and are taking turns more during group activities.

Conversely, teachers noted an increase of the following negative behaviors: using appropriate voice tone and listening. According to one of the teachers, the students struggle during conversations and at times tend to monopolize a conversation. They interrupt often. The other teacher notes difficulty in following directions due to not listening or not reading instructions.

One of the most noteworthy results was that students are more aware of the feelings of others and of their own feelings. Teachers commented that if a student notices that a peer is feeling sad, or if a peer indicates on an emotion scale that he or she is feeling sad, the student will attempt to help make that classmate feel better. Further, students ask their classmates if they are okay when upset. They also state that they feel bad for a student or want to help a student when the other student is upset. The students confirm that they are more aware of the feelings of others.

Two of the four students identified expressing feelings as their most improved quality. For example, students recognize the following as things to do or say when scared: cover face, cuddle with blanket or stuffed animals, listen to music, read, play a video game, “Make it stop,” or “Don’t be scared,” and “Don’t be afraid.” Students practiced, through the prompts, skills such as how to respond to others. One prompt asked students to respond to the question from a friend, “Do you want to join our group?” Examples of responses are: I would love to; No thank you. I would like to do this on my own, but maybe next time; I would like to work alone today. Other skills dealt with communication, for example what to do when a friend is talking to me. Some responses were: “be quiet and listen,” “pay attention and look at the person,” and “be happy.”

Similarly, teachers noted changes in students’ respecting the opinions of others. One student is starting to accept another person’s opinion even though she still feels that she is always correct. Other students do not argue as much when someone voices an opinion about a topic and have started to understand opinions of others, especially when the other side is explained. Students are more willing to share with others how they are feeling instead of keeping the feelings to themselves and shutting down. One student, who previously preferred to socialize with adults, is engaging in social interactions with her peers and playing board games with peers. Students are accepting responsibility for their own actions and one student is apologizing after having a misbehavior. He now wants to take responsibility for his actions.

Teachers also noted changes in the students’ coping skills. Students use writing as a coping skill instead of engaging in behaviors of concern. They use writing to help them deal with anxious feelings, often caused by an upcoming change in routine that may or may not be in their control. Also, as students become upset, they ask for more breaks to calm down.

The small participant group made findings difficult to identify. However, there are gains in areas like enjoying interacting with others as well as decreases in areas such as getting angry when someone does not play with me.

Most importantly, students identified the following as most improved areas: fidgeting, expressing feelings, sharing with friends, and telling the truth. They also noted improvements in how to handle teasing and how to listen when someone is talking to them.

Further research is needed in this area to confirm the findings of this small, pilot study. The researchers recommend that further research be done with a larger number of participants within multiple settings. The authors also suggest that the study be duplicated for students with other disabilities, in which social or emotional problems are common, such as emotional or behavioral disorders or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

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Let's Get Parents Ready for their Initial IEP Meeting

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Abstract

Parental participation in the initial Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting is a critical component of the process. Even though parents have rights to be equally involved in making decisions at the IEP meetings, frequently parents aren't prepared to be equal members on the team with school personnel. This study focused on a preparation program for parents who were to be attending their child's first IEP meeting. The research was conducted in three phases through an interview and training process with 298 parents. Phase one consisted of asking parents a series of questions on their knowledge and perceptions regarding the meeting. Phase two involved an intervention of preparing the parents for the meeting. Phase three entailed asking the initial set of questions from phase one to determine gains parents had made in knowledge and attitudes about the meeting. Results indicate parents benefited greatly from the preparation prior to the meeting.

Let's Get Parents Ready for their Initial IEP Meeting

Preparation of Parents for the Meeting

Parents are a very important team member at the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting. The IEP meeting is intended to assure students with disabilities have appropriate educational services and supports. A parent's involvement is especially critical for the initial IEP meeting as this meeting sets the tone for the partnership between the parents and the school personnel. Parents have a great deal of knowledge about their children and thus can provide valuable input on decisions being made about their child's special education program. Not only is parental involvement a vital component of the IEP meeting due to parents' knowledge, it is a parent's right to participate and to be engaged in making decisions about their child's education.

Parental participation and shared decision making are two of the basic principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Findings from studies on the IDEA which resulted in The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 emphasized that after 30 years, research has shown that children with disabilities can benefit from the involvement of their parents in their education. The findings from these studies continue to focus on the need to help parents get stronger in their role and

responsibility with school personnel in providing meaningful educational opportunities at school and at home.

Although parental participation at the IEP meeting is a mandated right through the IDEA, parents are often unprepared to participate in the initial IEP meeting. Hammond, Ingalls, and Trussell (2008) studied parental perceptions of their experience at attending the initial IEP meeting for their child who had a disability. Over a four year period, 212 parents were interviewed to determine their reactions to the initial IEP meeting. From these interviews, only 28% of the parents believed they were prepared for the meeting and 72% of parents felt very anxious and overwhelmed at attending the initial IEP meeting. Additionally, only 27% of the parents reported they understood the professional terms used in the meeting and the remaining 73% of parents stated they understood none/some of the terms..

In a follow-up study conducted by Ingalls, Hammond, Paez, and Rodriguez (2016), 323 parents were interviewed to determine parental perceptions regarding the initial IEP meeting. Forty-seven percent of parents indicated they believed they were prepared for the meeting and the remaining 53% of parents revealed they were unprepared. This study also looked at how comfortable parents were in attending this initial meeting. Only 19% of the parents felt comfortable in attending the meeting and 69% of parents stated they were overwhelmed and anxious about attending the meeting. Other studies on family involvement in the IEP process reported other types of issues for families. Bezdek, Summers, & Turnbull (2010) found that many school personnel stated they valued family-centered practices but did not follow these practices with families. They discussed some of the problems family members face when beginning their involvement in the IEP process. As a result of their findings they provided suggestions for teachers to use to help develop and strengthen a relationship with parents. Turnbull et al., 2010 described how many parents are intimidated by the IEP meetings and do not feel adequately prepared for participation. This research provided specific strategies to help prepare families to be equal decision makers and to partner with others in their child's education. Additionally, Wright, Stegelin, and Hartle (2007) and Thatcher (2012) identified many reasons why parents are not as involved as they could be in their child's education and the IEP process. They offered practical solutions to use to try to overcome some of these challenges and to help build a family, school, and community partnerships.

Dabkowski (2004) reported how some elements of the school team culture could actually negatively affect parents and discourage their involvement in their child's education. Lo (2012a) discussed how Chinese immigrant families are very hesitant to ask school personnel for help with their child with a disability. They see the teacher as the expert and that they themselves can contribute very little to their child's education. Lo (2012b) discussed some of the common problems parents from diverse backgrounds, who have a child with a disability, have in developing a partnership with school personnel. The findings from this research offered a variety of suggestions to improve family-teacher relationships. In later research Lo (2014) studied the readability of a number of IEPs. She found the reading level of a majority of IEPs were at the high school/college level. Lo stated this high reading level can be a barrier for some parents at attaining a

partnership with school personnel particularly if English was their second language. Mueller, Milian, & Lopez (2009) studied Latina mothers who had children with severe disabilities. The mothers reported they experienced a gap with school personnel in developing a partnership but felt very positive about the support groups they attended. The groups provided the mothers with effective communication, information, and emotional support.

The intent of the IDEA was to lay a foundation for parents of students with disabilities to have an opportunity to participate with school personnel in planning an appropriate program for their child who has a disability (“Questions and Answer about IDEA: Parent Participation.” 2016). In order for parents to actively participate on the team at the meeting, they need to be prepared for the meeting. Applequist (2009) and Kayama (2010) stated in order for parents to be active and equal members on the team, they need to have an understanding of special education law and their options regarding services. Included in the preparation process, parents must understand the purpose of the initial IEP meeting, who will be attending the meeting, the roles of the people who will be in attendance, jargon and professional terminology that will be used at the meeting, and the agenda of the meeting. Most importantly parents should realize their importance on the team and that they will be encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and provide suggestions of/to team members. This preparation must be very direct and meet the needs of the parent prior to attending the first IEP meeting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine if parents would benefit from an intervention training program to prepare them for the upcoming initial IEP meeting for his or her child. The focus of this study was to prepare parents for various aspects of the initial IEP meeting so that each of them would be more familiar with terminology, roles, the meeting’s agenda, and participants who would be attending. An additional purpose of this study was to obtain parental suggestions for other parents and to school personnel on ways to improve the IEP process. The research was designed and based on the theoretical foundation that supports the importance of parental involvement in a child’s education and the importance of empowering parents with knowledge and skills to increase and improve their involvement. The results of this study can be compared to two previous similar studies by Hammond et al. (2008) and Ingalls, Hammond, Paez, and Rodriguez (2016) which also looked at parental perceptions of the IEP process, their knowledge of the process, and their attitudes about attending the initial IEP meeting.

Method

Participants and Setting

The participants of this study involved 298 parents who had been notified to participate in an upcoming initial IEP meeting for their son or daughter. All parents agreed to volunteer their participation in this study. The parents consisted of individuals who resided in a southwestern community in the United States. This region borders the United States and Mexico and consists of a population of approximately 85% of individuals coming from a Hispanic background. The individuals involved in this research mirrored the region’s

population with 85% of participants identifying themselves as being Hispanic. The parents came from one urban and six rural school districts within the region. The participants had varying levels of education that ranged from less than a high school degree to a master's degree. Their knowledge of the IEP meeting was limited for a majority of participants as approximately 73% of participants indicated they had very little knowledge as to what the IEP meeting entailed.

Procedure

Data were collected over a 3 year period through a semi-structured interview process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The samples size included 298 parents who met the following criteria: (a) parents of children from early childhood and elementary school programs, (b) parents with children who had recently been referred for the initial special education evaluation, and (c) parents who were scheduled to attend the initial IEP meeting. The criteria and selection process assured a strong representative sample of parents would be involved in the study and provide the data needed to determine if an intervention training phase would be beneficial to parents attending their initial IEP meeting. Parents were selected for the study based on the sampling criteria.

To minimize selection bias, the interviewers identified parents with whom they had limited professional or personal interactions. The steps utilized to complete the semi-structured interviews were predetermined by the researchers of this study. The individuals completing the interviews with the parents were graduate students in a master's degree program within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Services. Each of the individuals was seeking a degree in either special education or educational diagnostician. The interviewers, who also became the data collectors, were trained in using a semi-structured interview process which included both structured and unstructured questions. This type of interview process increases validity and reduces bias (Gay et al., 2006).

Standardization across interviews was assured by providing the interviewers with a set of nine predetermined interview questions. Seven questions were structured with a closed-ended design and two questions were unstructured with an open-ended design. Additionally, each parent was asked to provide the interviewers with two suggestions for other parents and school personnel to help improve the IEP process with parents. The interviewers were trained to use a particular sequence and wording of the questions during the administration of the interview questions. They were instructed to write down the parents' responses verbatim. Each of the nine questions was written on a paper with adequate space in between each question for the interviewer to write the parents' exact responses. The additional two items for parental comments were also included on the interview sheet with ample space to write comments. The researchers of the study reviewed each of these questions/items with the interviewers to assure they were familiar with the interview sheet and that they understood the interview process (following the sequence, using the exact wording each interview item, and writing down the parents' answers verbatim).

The researchers of this project were university faculty within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Services. Each researcher was very familiar of parental involvement in the IEP process and were instructors of both the graduate special education and educational diagnostician programs. Additionally, both researchers were familiar with the semi-structured interview process and the system of data analysis.

The parents' responses were analyzed by the researchers using a system of organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the data. The organization of the data involved tallying the data from closed-ended questions and assigning percentages of similar responses. The data from open-ended questions were compiled according to verbal responses and then were categorized according to themes. Initially, the data were analyzed by the two researchers independently. In the final phase of analysis, the researchers reviewed and revised the categories/themes of parental responses to achieve agreement. Data were then interpreted to determine the parents' readiness for the upcoming initial IEP meeting both prior and after the intervention.

Phases of the Study

In an attempt to address the need for preparation of parents prior to the initial IEP meeting and to determine the success of the preparation activity, parents involved in this study participated in three phases of study. All phases of this study were completed prior to the parent's attendance at the initial IEP meeting. Phases one and three were approximately 30 minutes each in length and phase two was approximately 2 hours in length. All three phases occurred on the same day at one meeting and individually with the parent.

Each parent was interviewed asking him or her questions and each parent verbally responded to the interviewer's questions. Each of the parent's responses was written down verbatim. The questions addressed such issues as the parent's comfort level of attending the meeting, the parent's knowledge of special education terms and the law, what the parent believed the IEP meeting would entail, who would be attending the meeting, and the parent's understanding of people's roles at the meeting including their own role. Additionally, parents were asked if they had been prepared in any way by school personnel to attend and to be actively involved in the initial IEP meeting. This stage of the study was referred to as phase one.

Following this interview activity with the parents, the interviewer provided the parent with an informal training on each of the issues discussed in the interview. This stage of the study was referred to as phase two. An example of this training would be teaching the parent specific terms that may be used during the IEP meeting and their meanings. Another example of training was to inform parents on who will be at the meeting and the person's role. Many topics were discussed with the parents, questions were answered, and handouts were given to provide additional information.

The training was intended to prepare the parent for the upcoming IEP meeting. With this preparation, it was believed the parent would be more comfortable, knowledgeable, and involved in his/her participation with the school personnel. Additionally, the preparation

was intended to assist the parent in developing a positive attitude and perception of the upcoming initial IEP meeting. The training program remained consistent all three years. Each interviewer, who completed the training, was told to have the training session be thorough to cover topics that parents had questions on and also cover the basics of the IEP meeting. The basics included helping the parent to understand what an IEP meeting was, the purpose of the meeting, who would attend the meeting, each person's role at the meeting, the meaning of terms and vocabulary that may be used, the purpose of the child's assessment, what special education services are, and the importance of the parent's participation and involvement in the meeting.

Following the training session, the trainer completed a post interview with the parents asking the same questions of the parent but from a different reference point as questions focused on their knowledge and perceptions following the training session. Figure one provides a listing of these follow-up questions. This stage of the study was referred to as phase three. For example in the initial interview (phase one), the parent was asked "What are your feelings about attending the initial IEP meeting that is coming up?" In the post-interview phase, parents were asked the same question but from the reference point that followed the training, i.e. "We have spent a lot of time talking about your upcoming IEP meeting. How do you now feel about attending the IEP meeting?" A listing of the nine questions initially asked of the parents are included in table one.

Figure 1

Questions Asked of Parents After the Training

Q1: Since we have had a chance to talk and prepare you for the IEP meeting, what are your reactions now regarding your child's referral for assessment?

Q2: We have spent time talking about what a special education evaluation entails. Do you now feel like you know what the evaluation will involve?

Q3: We have discussed what the IEP meeting is and the purpose of the meeting. Do you now feel like you are more familiar with what this meeting is?

Q4: After our discussion regarding the IEP meeting, do you now know who will attend the meeting and what the people's roles are?

Q5: Do you also have a better understanding of what will happen at the IEP meeting?

Q6: We have spent a lot of time talking about your upcoming IEP meeting. How do you now feel about attending the meeting?

Q7: Do you have a good understanding of what your role will be at the meeting?

Q8: If you are given the opportunity, do you now feel more comfortable asking questions, disagreeing with suggestions, and making comments at the IEP meeting?

Q9: Do you feel prepared to attend and to participate in the upcoming IEP meeting?

Data were gathered over a three year period on parents' responses to each of the questions asked in phases one and three. Training also occurred with each of the parents (phase two) to cover any types of information parents needed to know to better prepare them for the initial IEP meeting. Parental preparation was thought to be a key to empowering parents with knowledge and thus increasing positive participation in the IEP process. Table one shows the results of data collected for each of the two interview phases, i.e. initial interview prior to attending the IEP meeting (phase one) and the post interview following the parents' involvement in a training session regarding the IEP meeting (phase three). An average score for each of the nine questions for the three years was calculated and displayed in table one. The table shows the percentage of responses prior to training (phase one) and following the training (phase three).

Table 1
Parental Responses Regarding IEP Meeting

Questions	Scores Before Training (N=298)	Scores After Training (N=298)
Q1: Your child was referred for a special education assessment. Please tell me what your initial reaction to this referral was.		
Ready/Prepared	31%	70%
Shocked	68%	29%
Q2: Your child is scheduled to be evaluated. Do you know what the evaluation will involve?		
Yes	13%	46%
No	86%	54%
Q3: You have been asked to attend an IEP meeting. Do you know what the IEP meeting is?		
Yes	21%	64%
No	78%	35%
Q4: Do you know who will attend the IEP meeting?		
Yes	15%	60%
No	84%	40%
Q5: Do you know what will happen at the IEP meeting?		
Yes	29%	66%

No	71%	34%
Q6: What are your feelings about attending the IEP meeting?		
Positive Feelings	18%	65%
Negative Feelings	81%	28%
Q7: Do you know what your role will be at the IEP meeting?		
Yes	50%	97%
No	50%	3%
Q8: If given the opportunity, would you be comfortable asking questions, disagreeing with suggestions, and making comments at the meeting?		
Yes	62%	89%
No	38%	10%
Q10: Has anyone prepared you for the upcoming IEP meeting?		
Yes	23%	83%
No	73%	17%

As an additional component of this study, the interviewers asked the parents to provide two suggestions that could be given to other parents or school personnel regarding ways to improve the IEP process. It is very useful to have parents provide feedback based on their personal experiences regarding the process and especially on their attendance at the initial IEP meeting. Their ideas and comments can be vital in structuring or restructuring the IEP process from beginning to end. Figure two “Let’s Hear It from the Parents” contains specific feedback.

Figure 2

Let's Hear it from the Parents

- ❖ Parents need to TALK to someone. Reading about the IEP process was not helpful.
I couldn't seem to keep the terms straight and it was tedious sifting through mounds of information. Having someone explain it in plain English, without the lingo, during back and forth conversations made a huge difference.
- ❖ I think school personnel should talk to parents more about what the tests are and why they are being tested. This would make it a lot easier to get ready for the IEP meeting. Teachers should really explain to parents what the IEP process is from beginning to end. It sure would have taken a lot of stress off of me.
- ❖ Well I think it would be nice for all of the parents to receive a pamphlet for what to expect of the meeting because it can be very overwhelming for parents. It was definitely overwhelming for me at first because I was not sure what to exactly expect. Parents need the information because they are so worried about what is going to happen to their child. Learning about the IEP meeting will ease some of the tension for parents. Parents should be informed of what they can do prior to the meeting so they can prepare.
- ❖ It is important for school staff to understand where the parents are coming from. They deal with this all the time plus the children they are talking about are not their children. Therefore they should be caring and patient with parents. Many times parents are not educated so explaining the process in detail is crucial so they understand the IEP process. Also letting them feel like the parent is part of the team and the team is working together for the best interest of the child.
- ❖ I think it is so important for parents to meet with someone prior to the meeting because I didn't know what was going to go on. I was really scared. If I had not met with you to talk about the IEP meeting, I probably wouldn't have asked any questions. It's uncomfortable for me to be in a room with people who know so much but I finally realized that nobody knows my son more than I do and I need to be his voice.

Final Thoughts

It is interesting to view the changes in averages across the three years from phase one to phase three. In question one, data shows an increase in parents' rating of feeling prepared for the meeting. This increase went from 31% to 70% (39% increase). Likewise in question one, parents decreased their feelings of being nervous or feeling shocked about their child's referral for the special education assessment. This decrease went from 68% to 29% (39% decrease).

Similar patterns across the rest of the questions showed a positive increase or decrease with each question item. The findings for question six were very critical as parental perceptions about attending the meeting could set the tone for the parents for future meetings and involvement. When parents were asked about their feelings of attending the initial IEP meeting, a majority of parents, 81% stated they were experiencing negative

feelings about attending the meeting. But after receiving the training, their feelings regarding their attendance changed in a positive direction. The negative feelings regarding their participation in the meeting decreased from 81% to 28% which is a decrease of 53%.

Another interesting finding in this study was how parents began to see they had a right to be actively involved in the discussion with school personnel regarding their child's education program. When asked during phase one if they would be comfortable to ask questions, disagree with suggestions, and make comments at the IEP meeting, 62% believed it was appropriate for them to have this type of involvement. After the training in phase three, the percentage increased to 89% (an increase of 27%) believing they had a right to participate in the discussions at the IEP meeting.

A critical question asked of the parents at phase one and three involved the preparation of the parent for the initial IEP meeting. Parents were asked if school personnel had prepared him or her for the IEP meeting. Prior to the training session, only 23% of family members responded positively regarding their preparation for the meeting. In contrast, following the training in phase three, parents' ratings made a dramatic increase. The positive responses jumped to 83% feeling prepared (60% increase).

Although one of the purposes of this study was to determine if parents would benefit from attending a training session to learn about the IEP process, it would have been beneficial to have interviewed parents after the initial IEP meeting. This would have given data on the long term benefits of the training and the actual success parents had in the initial IEP meeting. Another consideration that may have strengthened the results of this study would be the use of a one or two week delay in implementing phase three. This delay would allow parents time to reflect on the training information and perhaps have the needed time to digest their newly acquired knowledge. Consequently data may have been different in the post interview, i.e. parents may have reported a higher level of being prepared for the meeting and having less anxiety. A third point of consideration was whether or not the interviewers should have probed the parents on their responses to the questions in phase three. The interviewers were instructed by the researchers to maintain the process of asking each of the identified questions in a particular order and wording. If the interviewers had strayed away from this research design, the standardization of the procedures used in this study would have been compromised.

Overall the specific training the parents received appeared to have positively impacted the parents' attitudes and perceptions of the initial IEP meeting. Parents revealed they were more accepting of their child's referral for the special education assessment. They stated they had more knowledge about the meeting's agenda, who would be at the meeting and the details of their roles, what their child's evaluation involved, and what the IEP meeting was. It appears these types of information successfully opened the door for the parents to begin their collaboration and to become equal partners with the school personnel.

This research is very important to the field of special education and early intervention. For years, school personnel, family members, and various other professionals in the field have discussed the value of empowering parents and family members to become more involved in the IEP process (Bezdek, et al., 2010; Ingalls, et al., 2016; Questions and Answers about IDEA, 2016). As noted earlier in the literature, individuals have suggested reasons why parents are not as involved in the process and included suggestions to increase parents' and family members' involvement.

A study of this type provides both parents and school personnel with an example of an intervention program that appeared to increase the parents' knowledge and consequently their involvement in their child's initial IEP meeting. From the findings, individuals can begin to take the model used in this study and expand on it with possible more trainings with the parents prior to the meeting, follow-up sessions with the parents to monitor their knowledge and answer questions, and additional meetings with the school personnel to assure they are preparing parents adequately for the initial IEP meeting. This parental preparation model is a beginning step for parents and school personnel to use to improve their partnership.

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Preparing Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Classrooms: A State-Wide Survey of Teacher Education Faculty

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Abstract

Faculty (N = 154) from approved Tennessee teacher education programs across the range of disciplines responded to an online survey designed to assess the extent to which they practice, teach, and express confidence in co-teaching, collaboration and implementation of universal design for learning (UDL). Faculty strongly endorsed items indicating they practice, teach, have confidence in, and receive departmental support for collaboration and UDL. In contrast, faculty less strongly endorsed items on their practice, teaching, confidence, and departmental support for co-teaching. General education faculty reported less practice of ($p < .01$) and confidence in ($p < .01$) co-teaching than special education faculty. From open-ended responses, major obstacles identified were lack of time, separation of general and special education departments, “buy-in”, and lack of skill in and knowledge of those practices. Results confirm the need for cross-discipline collaboration between general and special teacher education faculty to ensure candidate preparation for effective inclusive practice.

Keywords: teacher education faculty, teacher preparation, co-teaching, collaboration, Universal Design for Learning

Preparing Preservice Teachers for Inclusive Classrooms: A State-Wide Survey of Teacher Education Faculty

While federal policies and laws have aimed much of the accountability spotlight on schools and teachers, the spotlight is slowly but surely shifting to educator preparation programs [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2015, Individual with Disabilities Improvement Education Act or IDEIA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)]. Gone is the one-size-fits-all approach in classrooms and, instead, the era of specially designed, individualized programs for all students has been ushered in. Graduates of teacher education programs, both general and special educators, are expected to hit the ground running together when they enter a school and, increasingly, teacher preparation programs are expected to provide evidence of their effectiveness based on their graduates' effectiveness as teachers [e.g., see Standard 4 (“Program Impact”) of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013].

To provide clarity for the reader, the following are definitions of the main constructs addressed in this study:

1. *Universally Designed Learning*: “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) recognizes that every learner is unique and processes information differently...UDL provides a framework to create and implement lessons with flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that support learning for all students” (The Center for Applied Special Technology, 1999).
2. *Inclusive classroom*: The inclusive classroom can be defined as having students with disabilities ‘primarily in the general education classroom, under the responsibility of the general classroom teacher’ (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010, p. 7).
3. *Co-teaching*: Co-teaching can be defined as two teachers, usually a general educator and a special educator, sharing ‘instructional responsibility for a diverse group of students that usually includes several with disabilities or other special needs’ (Friend, 2007, p. 49).
4. *Collaboration*: Collaboration can be defined as “co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (Cook & Friend, 1991, p. 25). For the purpose of this study, collaboration was further defined to be: communication between special educators and non-special educators on how to best serve the needs of a diverse group of students, including but not limited to, those with disabilities.

Research on education faculty’s knowledge and practices in preparing teachers across disciplines and grade levels to teach in inclusive settings reveals inconsistent approaches across programs (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010; Voltz & Elliott, 1997). Pugach and Blanton (2009) asked “Are collaborative structures of teacher education transforming the preservice curriculum and how faculty conceptualize teaching the full range of students, or do they instead function to maintain traditional views of teacher education with merely some tinkering around the edges?” (p. 581). As K-12 general and special educators increasingly work together to ensure achievement of their students, it seems reasonable, even imperative, that faculty collaborate across disciplines to present a unified approach in preparing new teachers for the field. This study was designed to assess the extent to which faculty are incorporating validated practices in teacher education programs to prepare preservice teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has become the norm, not the exception. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), from the years 1990 to 2012, the percentage of students with disabilities who are educated 80% or more of the time in the general education classroom has risen from 33.1% to 61.2% (2016). In addition, approximately 11% of new teachers were employed in team-teaching or “pull-in/pull-out” positions (NCES, 2010) which are commonly utilized to serve students with disabilities.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) in *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and Be Able to Do*, likened the teaching profession to the

medical profession. One key disposition doctors need to have is the ability to diagnose and treat a disease, not simply based on what was learned from a textbook but in the context of the individual person and his/her history. In addition, doctors often work in teams (with other doctors, nurses, physician's assistants, etc.) rather than individually. Similarly, teachers need to be able to do more than simply transmit the information of their specific disciplines; they should know how to base instructional decisions on the context of their classrooms, addressing needs and interests of a diverse range of students. And, they need to be able to collaborate with other professionals in order to make sound decisions and use effective classroom practices.

Further, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2007) argued that because our schools exist within a democracy, it is important that all have equal access to the instruction given within. Institutions charged with preparing teachers need to ensure teacher candidates are learning practices that accomplish this purpose. Regarding diversity, Darling-Hammond and Bransford asserted that teachers should be "building an inclusive practice" (p. 255). To accomplish this task, teacher preparation programs must keep diverse learners as a central focus throughout coursework and field experiences. Importantly, if teachers are better prepared to address diverse learners in the classroom, the strategies they gain and learn to use mean better classroom teaching for all.

Arthur Levine (2006) also addressed the importance of educating all learners. In one of his series of policy reports on America's schools, *Educating School Teachers*, which focused on the education of classroom teachers, he concluded:

...today's teachers need to know and be able to do things their predecessors did not. They have to be prepared to educate all of their students to achieve the highest learning outcomes in history. This is a fundamentally different job than that of past generations of teachers (p. 11).

Faculty acknowledge that more should be done to model the practices of co-teaching, collaboration, and best practices for inclusive environments, but there has not been a comprehensive approach for how to accomplish this (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; McKenzie, 2009).

Several researchers have examined teacher education curriculum and coursework in the context of preparing candidates to educate students with disabilities. McCray and McHatton (2011) investigated perceptions of pre-service general education teachers about including students with disabilities in general education classrooms via a survey taken prior to and after a course on integrating students with disabilities into general education. Preservice teachers' perceptions increased from pre to post survey (pre $M = 3.94$, post $M = 4.31$), but they voiced concerns over not having enough training in strategies and accommodations. The authors concluded that "teacher educators can only strengthen programs by building relationships across disciplines. Instructional strategies and accommodations that seamlessly grant students with disabilities maximum access to the general education curriculum should naturally be infused in methods courses" (p. 151).

Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) reviewed coursework for elementary teacher education programs in 109 universities from across the country for four identified competencies they deemed necessary for general educators' success in inclusive classrooms. They found the following percentages of specific courses devoted to the competencies as follows: a) basic knowledge of characteristics and needs of students with disabilities, 33%, b) ability to differentiate instruction, 27%, c) classroom and behavior management skills, 41%, and d) ability to collaborate effectively with special educators, 6%. Overall, between 7-10% of coursework was specifically dedicated to educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings. According to Allday et al., "it is evident that many university teacher preparation programs in elementary education are allocating minimal coursework to issues related to disabilities and may not be adequately preparing their graduates for entry into today's inclusive schools" (p. 306). Their findings suggest a "possible disconnect between what preservice teachers are taught and what they face as practicing teachers" (p. 308).

Recognizing the importance of collaboration to successful inclusive teaching, several researchers have investigated practices and beliefs of teacher education faculty. McKenzie (2009) surveyed special education teacher educators ($N = 53$); he reported that preservice special educators are better prepared to engage in collaborative roles and value collaboration more highly than preservice general educators. According to McKenzie, the "splintered manner in which collaboration is addressed in many pre-service programs not only hinders but also likely precludes the production of skilled collaborators"(p. 391). Similarly, Harvey, et al.(2010) concluded that the limited exposure preservice teachers have to collaboration at the preparation level perhaps contributes to the difficulties then encountered at the P-12 level and that teacher educators need to develop a shared vision across disciplines to provide opportunities for co-teaching and collaboration. They surveyed 124 teacher educators from across the country; 70% reported that co-taught classes were not offered at their institution and that more resources, money, time, and co-teaching opportunities would assist efforts to prepare preservice teachers for inclusion and co-teaching.

Responding to a request from area superintendents to have better prepared general education teachers for inclusive classrooms, Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, and Vallecorsa (2008) surveyed 73 faculty who had taught a key general education course in the last two years. Approximately 36% of faculty reported their own knowledge and skills in how to prepare preservice teachers to work with students with disabilities was "extremely limited" to "somewhat limited" with 26% reporting "not at all" to "very little." In addition, the need for resources and funding to support faculty development and collaborative opportunities across disciplines was noted. Grenot-Scheyer, Coots, and Bishop-Smith (2004) examined federal reforms and mandates, three teacher preparation programs and their responses to calls for collaborative, inclusive teachers, and discussed the lessons learned that could frame teacher preparation responses. They reminded us that any student, whether one with a disability or not, should be central in decisions made and it is important that this focus not be lost. They suggested the need to establish connections across disciplines that are meaningful and purposeful, the need to ensure that

field experiences are supervised and chosen thoughtfully to provide the best exposure and practice, and that support from the top down is essential. They further concluded that classrooms at the university level reflect P-12 classrooms which are home to both general and special education teachers and students.

Researchers in teacher preparation programs have not examined systematically how and if programs have changed in response to changing legal requirements, professional standards, and realities of the P-12 environment. The literature review reveals a gap in the research of teacher educators' use of effective practices for preparing preservice teachers for inclusive classrooms. Available research suggests there is a disconnect between what is taught in preparation programs and what new teachers encounter at the P-12 level, and that viewpoints of general and special education faculty may differ on what preservice teachers even need in their preparation. Though some teacher preparation programs do have a partnership between general and special education faculty, collaboration within others can be minimal at best. This study was designed to determine the extent to which teacher educators in a southeastern state practice/use, teach, and are confident about the practices of co-teaching, collaboration, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 1999). The researchers hope to help define more specifically current practices in teacher preparation programs and identify potential changes needed to further the preparation of all teachers for today's inclusive, collaborative classrooms.

Method

Participants

The target population of the study was faculty, both special and general education, of teacher education departments in a southeastern state. Twenty-five of the state's 36 approved Education Preparation Providers (EPPs) opted to allow its faculty to participate in the study. Size of the education faculty of the 25 EPPs participating ranged from one to 49. The average ratio of general education faculty to special education faculty was 18 to 3 or 86% general education faculty to 14% special education faculty. In addition, the average gender ratio of female to male faculty for these institutions was 10 to 5 or 66% female to 34% male faculty. The 25 EPPs varied from large, public, research universities to small, private, liberal arts colleges and had a total of 481 full time faculty members; 154 completed the survey (a 32% response rate) with a ratio of 110 (74%) general education faculty to 38 (26%) special education faculty (six chose not to specify discipline) and 118 (77%) female to 36 (26%) male faculty. Consequently, the demographic characteristics of the participating sample were adequately representative of faculty in the institutions surveyed.

Survey Instrument

The Survey of Teacher Educator Practices: Students with Disabilities (STEP: SWD) contains 24 closed-ended items comprised of scales and subscales: The Practice, Teaching, and Confidence in Collaboration, Co-teaching, and UDL (PTC scale) has 15 items with three subscales of five items each, Practice Subscale, Teaching Subscale, and Confidence Subscale. In addition, the Department Support for Collaboration Subscale has three items and the Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale has six items. All 24 closed-ended items are forced-response (Practice, Teaching, Confidence and Department

Support are Likert type answers with choices from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and the Use of Co-Teaching items have 5 choices ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (every class). Participants could opt not to respond to the 11 demographic questions (e.g. discipline taught, size and type of institution, years teaching, age, gender). Finally, the survey contains five optional open-ended items: a) three on obstacles to implementing collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL; and b) two requesting examples of co-teaching and UDL used in coursework.

Several indicators of psychometric adequacy of the STEP: SWD were determined. Cronbach's alpha (a commonly used measure of internal consistency reliability) was calculated for the 24 closed-ended items ($\alpha = .89$), indicating relatively strong internal consistency. Further, correlations of items assessing similar constructs (practice, teaching, and confidence; department support; and use of co-teaching models) were calculated and indicated large correlations in an expected manner (range of correlations: $\alpha = .70$ to $.92$). Two additional sources of evidence for validity of the survey included review and feedback from experts; and content validity, i.e., content of items was drawn from professional literature.

Results and Discussion

One of the goals of this study was to determine the extent to which faculty practice collaboration, co-teaching, and implement UDL, and then to determine if there were significant differences when faculty were divided into separate categories of general and special education faculty (see Table 1 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Results indicate that most faculty report they practice collaboration and UDL, but report less that they co-teach. In general, collaboration at the university level is a professional expectation. UDL is still a relatively new concept but it is gaining in use and is seen more and more frequently from the arenas of legislation (National UDL Task Force, 2012) to that of standardized testing (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2013). Collaboration and UDL are relatively easy to include in typical preservice coursework. The finding on co-teaching also is not surprising. Co-teaching at the university level is not unheard-of (Bacharach et al., 2008), but it is certainly not the norm as Harvey et al. (2010) found in a survey in which 70% of faculty reported that their institutions did not offer co-taught classes, as well as the results of Arndt and Liles' (2010) study showing the need for teacher educators to more closely model concepts such as co-teaching.

Another goal was to determine the extent to which faculty report they teach about collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL, and then determine if there were significant differences when comparing general and special education faculty. Mean scores indicated similar results as reported in the foregoing paragraph with most faculty reporting they teach about collaboration and UDL and fewer saying they teach about co-teaching. Those who teach special education more strongly agreed that they teach co-teaching. The third goal was to determine the extent to which faculty report confidence in their knowledge of and skills in collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL, and then if there were any significant differences between general and special education faculty. Mean scores indicated most

faculty report confidence in all three; however, special education faculty expressed stronger confidence in co-teaching.

Table 1

Summary of Descriptive Statistics for the Practice, Teaching, and Confidence in Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and UDL Scale (Practice Subscale) for Total Sample, and for General Education (GenEd) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants

Practice Subscale	<i>M</i> <i>n</i> = 154	<i>SD</i>	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	<i>M (SD)</i> <i>GenEd</i> <i>n</i> = 110	<i>M (SD)</i> <i>SpEd</i> <i>n</i> = 38
			<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)		
1.I collaborate with colleagues	4.42	0.92	5 (3.2%)	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.6%)	49 (31.8%)	92 (59.7%)	4.39 (.90)	4.53 (1.03)
2.I model co-teaching	3.22	1.16	12 (7.8%)	34 (22.1%)	36 (23.4%)	52 (33.8%)	20 (13%)	3.29 (1.18)	3.03 (1.13)
3.I use multiple methods of presentation when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.49	.86	4 (2.6%)	4 (2.6%)	1 (0.6%)	48 (31.2%)	97 (63%)	4.54 (.84)	4.45 (.95)
4.I use multiple methods of engagement when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.55	.71	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.6%)	53 (34.4%)	96 (62.3%)	4.64 (.63)	4.37 (.88)
5.I use multiple methods of assessment when planning and implementing my own lessons	4.44	.75	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	6 (3.9%)	61 (39.6%)	83 (53.9%)	4.47 (.69)	4.39 (.92)
Practice Overall	4.22	.64	5 (3.24%)	9.2 (5.98%)	9.6 (6.22)	52.6 (34.16%)	77.6 (50.38%)	4.27 (.85)	4.15 (.98)
Teach Subscale									
6.I teach the principle of collaboration in my coursework	4.28	.95	4 (2.6%)	6 (3.9%)	11 (7.1%)	55 (35.7%)	78 (50.6%)	4.28 (.90)	4.37 (1.08)
7. I teach the principle of co-teaching in my coursework	3.68	1.17	9 (5.8%)	19 (12.3%)	26 (16.9%)	58 (37.7%)	42 (27.3%)	3.60 (1.15)	4.08 (1.15)
8.I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of presentation in their lessons	4.42	.84	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	11 (7.1%)	49 (31.8%)	89 (57.8%)	4.45 (.81)	4.50 (.89)
9. I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of engagement in their lessons	4.42	.85	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	12 (7.8%)	47 (30.5%)	90 (58.4%)	4.44 (.82)	4.53 (.89)
10. I teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of assessment in their lessons	4.33	.91	3 (1.9%)	5 (3.2%)	13 (8.4%)	50 (32.5%)	83 (53.9%)	4.32 (.89)	4.53 (.89)
Teach Overall	4.23	.78	4.4 (2.82%)	6.8 (4.4%)	14.6 (9.46%)	51.8 (33.64%)	76.4 (49.6%)	4.22 (.91)	4.40 (.98)
Confidence Subscale									

11.I am confident in my ability to incorporate the principle of collaboration in my coursework	4.42	.77	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	9 (5.8%)	58 (37.7%)	83 (53.9%)	4.45 (.70)	4.47 (.89)
12.I am confident in my ability to incorporate the principle of co-teaching in my coursework	4.02	.95	4 (2.6%)	7 (4.5%)	23 (14.9%)	68 (44.2%)	52 (33.8%)	3.95 (.94)	4.34 (.91)
13.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of presentation in their lessons	4.49	.79	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.3%)	5 (3.2%)	51 (33.1%)	93 (60.4%)	4.48 (.74)	4.61 (.95)
14.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of engagement in their lessons	4.53	.75	3 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (3.9%)	48 (31.2%)	97 (63%)	4.55 (.66)	4.63 (.94)
15.I am confident in my ability to teach my preservice education students how to use multiple methods of assessment in their lessons	4.40	.80	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	12 (7.8%)	54 (35.1%)	84 (54.5%)	4.41 (.76)	4.53 (.86)
Confidence Overall	4.37	.69	2.8 (1.8%)	2.6 (1.68%)	11 (7.12%)	55.8 (36.26%)	81.8 (53.12%)	4.37 (.76)	4.52 (.91)

Both closed- and open- ended items were used to assess collaborative practices among the surveyed faculty (see Table 2 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Most faculty agreed or strongly agreed that their department provides support and level of support does not vary based on general versus special education status. This finding is interesting when compared to findings by Harvey et al. (2010), McKenzie (2009), and Cooper et al. (2008), who all concluded that a more collaborative culture with more opportunities for faculty collaboration needs to be incorporated at the university level. Despite acknowledgement of strong departmental support for collaboration, open-ended responses by participants in this study identified time as an obstacle to collaboration (30% by both general and special education faculty); in addition, 38% of special education faculty cited separate departments as another obstacle.

Table 2
Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Department Support Subscale for Total Sample, and for General Education (Gen Ed) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants

Department Support Subscale	M N = 154	SD	1 Strongly Disagree f (%)	2 Disagree f (%)	3 Neutral f (%)	4 Agree f (%)	5 Strongly Agree f (%)	M (SD) Gen Ed n = 110	M (SD) SpEd n = 38
1.My department/program values collaboration between colleagues on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students	4.31	.97	5 (3.2%)	6 (3.9%)	7 (4.5%)	54 (35.1%)	82 (53.2%)	4.33 (.99)	4.29 (.98)
2.My department/program provides or encourages formal professional development opportunities (e.g. workshops, conferences) on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students	4.13	1.07	5 (3.2%)	10 (6.5%)	18 (11.7%)	48 (31.2%)	73 (47.4)	4.14 (1.03)	4.11 (1.25)

3. My department/program provides or encourages informal professional development opportunities (e.g., faculty meetings, sessions led by colleagues) on how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the needs of all students.

			6	9	18	52	69	4.10	4.16
	4.10	1.07	(3.9%)	(5.8%)	(11.7%)	(33.8%)	(44.8%)	(1.05)	(1.18)
Overall				8.33	14.3	51.3	74.7	4.20	4.19
	4.18	.91	11 (3.43%)	(5.4%)	(9.3%)	(33.37%)	(48.47%)	(1.02)	(1.14)

As with collaborative practices, both closed- and open-ended items were used to assess co-teaching practices of surveyed faculty (see Table 3 for a summary of descriptive statistics). Not surprisingly, there was a significant difference with faculty who more strongly indicate practicing co-teaching also more likely to indicate the use of co-teaching models. In describing obstacles to incorporating co-teaching within education coursework, similar responses were obtained from faculty with the largest reported theme again separation of disciplines (39% general education to 41% special education) and the second lack of time. This finding reiterates those of studies above: separation of disciplines and lack of time are major contributing factors in implementing either collaboration or co-teaching. In addition, it is interesting to note that special educators indicated more frequently than general educators a lack of knowledge/skill in co-teaching (21% special educators, 12% general educators) as well as a lack of “buy in” to the idea of co-teaching (21% special educators, .07% general educators) as obstacles. When asked to give examples of how they incorporate co-teaching within their coursework, 46% of general educators and 57% of special educators provided acceptable examples. The majority of remaining answers were not unacceptable; instead, participants stated they did not practice it (35% to 26% respectively), which again echoes findings of other studies (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010) indicating faculty co-teaching is simply not a common practice.

Table 3

Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale Total Sample, and for General Education (Gen Ed) and Special Education (SpEd) Participants

Use of Co-Teaching Models Subscale	M n = 154	SD	1 Never	2 One class per semester	3 Several classes in a semester	4 One class every week	5 Every class	M (SD) Gen Ed n = 110	M (SD) SpEd n = 38
Identify how often you use the following models of co-teaching:			f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1. One teach, one observe (one teacher leads large-group instruction while the other gathers data on specific students or the class group)	1.73	.96	88 (57.1%)	26 (16.9%)	34 (22.1%)	5 (3.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1.76 (.98)	1.63 (.85)
2. One teach, one assist (one teacher leads instruction while the other circulates among the students offering individual assistance)	1.92	1.03	76 (49.4%)	24 (15.6%)	46 (29.9%)	6 (3.9%)	2 (1.3%)	1.95 (1.07)	1.82 (.90)
3. Parallel teaching (each teacher has half the class, present the same material for the primary purpose of fostering instructional differentiation and increasing student participation)	1.51	.86	106 (68.8%)	22 (14.3%)	22 (14.3%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	1.55 (.88)	1.39 (.72)

The number one response faculty gave to obstacles of implementing UDL was that there were no obstacles (36% general educators to 48% special educators). The second themed response was lack of time and the third was lack of skill and/or knowledge. Participants were also asked to give examples of how they incorporate UDL principles in their coursework. Of the participants who chose to answer this question, 99% of general educators and 100% of special educators provided acceptable examples. Encouragingly, it appears that UDL is being incorporated in education coursework for both general and special education preservice teachers and that, at least for this sample of the population, it is understood and correct examples are utilized.

Implications

What do these results mean for teacher educator preparation programs? If one operates from the premise that the goal of preparing teacher candidates is to ensure they are ready for differing needs at the P-12 level, then modeling educator preparation to mirror realities in P-12 schools seems an obvious response. The practices of collaboration and co-teaching, and the principles of UDL are now a part of the vocabulary and practice of our P-12 schools and teacher preparation institutions need to be in sync. Studies on the training preservice teachers receive on the principles of collaboration, co-teaching, and UDL reveal that when explicitly incorporated into teacher education programs, attitudes and ability increase (Bacharach et al., 2010; Laarhoven et al., 2006; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005; Spooner et al., 2003). However, researchers have also shown that inaccurate expectations of competencies needed in classrooms exist in preservice teacher candidates based on differing experiences in coursework and/or fieldwork (Arndt & Liles, 2010; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Wasburn-Moses, 2009). Differences in general and special education faculty approaches have contributed to this confusion and lack of commonalities between the two disciplines (Cooper et al., 2008; Harvey et al., 2010; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; McKenzie, 2009).

Results of this study suggest that faculty are more familiar with and better prepared to practice and teach collaboration and UDL than they are to co-teach. And, special education faculty report they teach more and are more confident about co-teaching than general education faculty. In addition, because two of the most frequent responses for obstacles to collaboration and co-teaching are time and separation of disciplines, results seem to indicate that faculty from the two disciplines need to spend more time deliberately collaborating with one another in order to better incorporate these practices in teacher education programs. Results suggest that the practice of co-teaching needs to increase at the educator preparation level, specifically with faculty from both general and special education together. In order for cross-discipline co-teaching to occur, support needs to come from within the department (or departments). Paradoxically, though responses indicate that most faculty surveyed believe that their department supports efforts to collaborate, one of the most reported obstacles to collaboration and co-teaching is separate departments/classes/schedules. It seems that one of the single most important hurdles is overcoming the limitations placed on departments when general and special education faculty operate as separate entities.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that responses were self-reported by faculty. In addition, while leaders from all institutions across the state were invited to participate, only those whose department heads/chairs chose to accept the invitation on their behalf participated. These factors somewhat limit the generalizability of the findings to all teacher education institutions.

While wording on the survey indicated that any question about collaboration or co-teaching was in reference to that between general and special educators on how to best serve students with disabilities, it is possible that participants did not answer this question based on that provision but instead were referring to any type of collaboration or co-teaching.

Recommendations

Rather than incorporate some large-scale redrawing of the blueprint of teacher education programs, collaboration within and across departments at the university level might go far in better preparing preservice educators for the climate of today's schools. While some at the P-12 level are dually certified, for the most part teachers are certified in specific disciplines and are being asked to collaborate to create the best possible learning environment for their students. Is it too much to ask faculty to do the same thing? This should be teacher educators' simple goal: to prepare teachers who are able to effectively educate all students in the classroom. Collaborating at the higher education level seems imperative in order to effectively model for preservice teachers' best practices that best serve all students in today's classrooms.

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Are We Practicing What We Are Preaching? An Evaluation of Self-Determination Instructional Components in IEPs at a Midwestern High School

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Abstract

Promoting self-determination in students with disabilities is recognized as an integral component of education today. For most students with disabilities, self-determination should be addressed through instruction and in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Yet, IEPs are rarely evaluated to determine if goals targeting self-determination are present. This report focuses on one such evaluation. Specifically, an evaluation was conducted to assess whether the IEP goals for 286 high school students with disabilities attending a suburban high school in the Midwest included components of self-determination. The purpose of this report is to describe the evaluation process, identify the outcomes of the evaluation, and provide a discussion of the results in relation to current research. Limitations and implications for practice are presented.

Keywords: individualized education program, program evaluation, self-determination, transition

Are We Practicing What We Are Preaching? An Evaluation of Self-Determination Instructional Components in IEPs at a Midwestern High School

A large body of research has supported the development, enhancement, and practice of self-determination skills for students with disabilities beginning at a very young age (Hart & Brehm, 2013; Wu & Chu, 2012). Wehmeyer (2014) compared self-determination with “being the causal agent in one’s life” (p. 2). Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) defined self-determination as “a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination” (p. 2). Self-determination is also recognized as a complex construct consisting of component elements (e.g., choice making, decision making; problem solving, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-advocacy) that can and should be addressed through instruction (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner, & Lawrence, 2007; Wood, Karvonen, Test, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004). Furthermore, certain components of self-determination (e.g., self-advocacy, self-awareness, self-management, and goal setting) are critical to the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Morningstar et al., 2010).

Researchers have long contended that self-determination skills lead to more successful postsecondary transition outcomes (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2011; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). In a review of self-determination literature, Chambers et al. (2007) found that students with higher levels of self-determination skills were more likely to have positive postschool outcomes, especially in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. Further substantiating the importance of enhancing self-determination skills during the transition process, Test, Fowler, et al. (2009) identified self-determination instruction (i.e., teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills) as an evidence-based practice in transition with a moderate level of evidence based on the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center's Decision Rules for Determining Levels of Evidence. Evidence-based practices in transition are grounded in scientifically-based research that may potentially lead to improved transition services and more positive postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. Besides self-determination instruction, Test, Fowler, et al. also identified 31 other secondary transition evidence-based practices (e.g., teaching life skills, teaching job-specific employment skills, teaching safety skills, and social skills training). In a review of transitional and correlational literature, Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009) recognized self-determination as an evidence-based in-school predictor of improved postschool outcomes. Results indicated self-determination was a predictor of education and employment with a potential level of evidence. Consequently, researchers support the continuous integration of self-determination skills into the education of students with disabilities to enhance the transition process (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Stang, 2008; Held, Thoma, & Thomas, 2004; Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004).

Legislation clearly underscores the importance of teaching, enhancing, and practicing self-determination skills (Denney & Daviso, 2012; Individuals With Disabilities Act [IDEA], 2004; National Council on Disability, 2004; Rehabilitation Acts of 1992 and 1998). For example, the IDEA of 2004 requires measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of education, employment, training, and independent living for students with disabilities, and these goals should be based on students' strengths, preferences, interests and needs (Konrad, Walker, Fowler, Test, & Wood, 2008; Morningstar et al., 2010). Although this legislation does not specifically mandate instruction to promote the enhancement of self-determination skills in students with disabilities, the emphasis on postsecondary goals that reflect students' strengths, preferences, interests, and needs indicates the significance assigned to self-determination (Konrad et al., 2008). Steere and Cavauiolo (2002) asserted that self-determination skills are necessary for students to identify their postsecondary goals. These authors surmised that it would be challenging for students to plan their future if they did not have the skills to clarify their future goals. Additionally, self-determination and postsecondary goals are related to the development of annual goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Effective self-determination skills provide the foundation for developing desired postsecondary goals, and postsecondary goals drive the development of annual goals (Steere & Cavauiolo, 2002). Moreover, annual goals address skills students need to achieve those postsecondary goals.

Malian and Nevin (2002) emphasized that self-determination is an indicator of a student's future success, and students who have an IEP that includes self-determination goals and objectives have a greater chance for success when exiting school. Thus, the inclusion of self-determination skills in the annual goals of students with disabilities may enable them to progress on their postsecondary goals and ultimately achieve more successful postschool outcomes. For most students with disabilities, self-determination is an area of need and should clearly be addressed through goals and objectives in IEPs. Particularly, incorporating self-determination into IEP goals and objectives can promote instruction and subsequently facilitate self-determination skills in students with disabilities (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Wood et al., 2004). If these students are going to be successful in life, they will need self-determination skills that will empower them to face challenges, make decisions to overcome those challenges, and actively participate in their lives. Hence, the inclusion of self-determination goals in IEPs indicates that these skills should be included in the instruction of students with disabilities. Instructional materials and methods have been developed to promote the component elements of self-determination because instruction occurs at the component level (Wehmeyer, 1999). For many students with disabilities, self-determination skills are not the result of incidental learning; therefore, explicit instruction is necessary for students to acquire these skills (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007; Pocock et al., 2002; Schreiner, 2007).

Intervention research utilizing systematic instruction to enhance self-determination has been effective. Specifically, findings strongly support interventions incorporating instructional strategies that enhance component skills (e.g., self-advocacy, problem solving, goal setting, and self-regulation) or global self-determination. For example, Walker & Test (2011) implemented an intervention to teach college students to self-advocate for academic accommodations. As a result of the intervention, the students attained mastery of the skills and demonstrated between 7 and 11 of the target behaviors during generalization. Student social validity data also supported the impact of the intervention on the ability of the students to self-advocate for the needed supports. In a review of literature focusing on the effects of self-determination skill interventions on academics with children with learning disabilities (LD) and/or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, and Wood (2007) found that teaching self-determination skills to students with LD and/or ADHD holds the promise of improving academic skills. Most interventions included the components of self-management, goal setting, and self-advocacy, with self-management being the most prevalent. Although effects varied from very weak to very strong, stronger effects were noted for interventions in which self-management and other components of self-determination were combined. Wehmeyer et al. (2012) examined the impact of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) on the self-determination of students with disabilities. The SDLMI is a student-directed model of teaching that promotes self-regulated problem solving, goal setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and enhanced global self-determination. Results from Wehmeyer et al. (2012) indicated significant improvements in self-determination of the intervention group. This study established a causal relationship between the SDLMI and global self-determination.

Furthermore, enhancing self-determination skills may positively influence student outcomes in areas such as employment, postsecondary education, quality of life, and academics (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) surmised that students with higher self-determination have a greater chance of attaining employment and earning a higher wage than students with lower self-determination. McDougal, Evans, and Baldwin (2010) concluded that self-determination was a predictor of quality of life. Specifically, individuals with higher baseline self-determination identified greater perceptions of personal development and personal fulfillment over time.

To identify self-determination skill areas that special education teachers perceived to be most important for their students, Wehmeyer et al. (2000) identified seven instructional domains based on component elements of self-determination that are generally addressed through instruction. These domains include (a) choice making, (b) decision making, (c) problem solving, (d) goal setting and attainment, (e) self-advocacy, (f) self-management and self-regulation, and (g) self-awareness and self-knowledge. Carter et al. (2008) and Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2011) referenced these domains in survey research to determine the self-determination skills that teachers valued the most in relation to their students and addressed most frequently through instruction. Additionally, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998) utilized these seven domains to evaluate the transition goals in the IEPs of students with intellectual disabilities to determine the extent that self-determination instruction was occurring. These researchers contended that if a transition goal reflected one of the component elements included in the domains, then those skills were being taught. Based on previous research, these seven domains have been identified as skills that can be referenced in IEP goals and addressed in instruction.

Qualitative research studies have also demonstrated that self-determination is an important construct in the lives of students with disabilities. Specifically, the perspectives of parents (e.g., Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003), teachers (e.g., Carter et al., 2008), students (e.g., Getzel & Thoma, 2006) and adults with disabilities (e.g., Stoner, Angell, House, & Goins, 2006) have been analyzed. Participants in these studies have further confirmed that self-determination skills are a fundamental area of instruction, a necessity for successful student outcomes, and an instrumental factor to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Educators have access to best practices, strategies, and curriculum to develop these undeniably important and vital self-determination skills (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2011). Yet, the question remains, Are these skills being addressed in IEPs? In this era of accountability, we, as educators, must evaluate not only student outcomes but also the content of educational programs by ascertaining if we are addressing the skills, such as self-determination, that will prepare students with disabilities for adult life.

Literature has identified “gaps between research and implementation of self-determination skills” (Denney & Daviso, 2012, p. 49). IEPs should be the starting point when investigating the implementation of self-determination skills, for if IEPs do not contain goals and objectives related to self-determination, the chances of self-determination skill instruction are minimal. Wood et al. (2004) stressed that “IEPs should

specifically target self-determination and transition plans, in the form of goals and objectives” (p. 9). Since self-determination skills continue to be critical to the transition process, best practices include incorporating these skills into the curriculum and the annual goals and objectives of a student’s IEP (Steere and Cavauiuolo, 2002). In essence, we must be accountable, identify and understand what is occurring in schools regarding the self-determination skills of students with disabilities by evaluating our current educational programs. For it is only through evaluation that we can recognize program strengths and identify areas of need.

Program evaluation, to be effective, must not only measure program outcomes but also provide accountability and identify areas of needed improvement (Peterson, 2002). To further illustrate this point, Scriven (1967) unequivocally declared that the primary purpose of an evaluation is to determine “the estimation of merit, worth, value, etc.” (p. 5) of that which is being evaluated. These tenets of program evaluation are the foundation from which we conducted this study. We strongly believe that educators should not shy away from program evaluation but embrace it, for it is only by evaluating a program, that we can effectively improve it.

The current program evaluation was an internal evaluation which is objective oriented. In other words, an internal evaluator, the first author, who was employed by a high school district in the role of a Special Programs Support Facilitator, completed the evaluation. As a Support Facilitator, her responsibilities included overseeing several district programs and promoting new data-based initiatives. IEPs are individualized programs for students with disabilities, and we contend we are evaluating one component (i.e., annual goals) of the students’ individualized programs. The program evaluation of the IEPs was proposed as a starting point to determine if self-determination skills were being incorporated into the instruction of students with disabilities, specifically through IEP implementation.

Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) identified advantages and disadvantages to internal evaluations; internal evaluators have knowledge of the organizational culture, the program history, the stakeholders, and administrators’ decision-making style. In addition, internal evaluators are more likely to use the results and advocate for change. However, Fitzpatrick et al. surmised that these advantages could also be disadvantages. Due to the proximity of internal evaluators to the program, they may not see apparent solutions as readily. Additionally, they may have biases and lack impartiality in the evaluation process. We attempted to minimize these concerns by using an external evaluator, the second author, to follow the audit trail, examine the data and its analysis, and review the recommendations.

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine if a large high school in a Midwestern state included self-determination skills in the goals and objectives in students’ IEPs. Specifically, the IEPs of all students with disabilities who received special education services within this school were analyzed. The following evaluation questions were addressed: (a) To what extent are self-determination goals targeted in the IEPs of students with disabilities? and (b) Are there differences in the inclusion of self-

determination components in IEP goals when comparing disability area, gender, or grade level? Since the purpose of program evaluation is to make a judgment, we set criteria for these objectives and based those criteria on discussions between the evaluators, the program coordinator, and general practice. We set the objectives relative to these evaluation questions as: (a) Self-determination instructional components will occur in 80% of IEPs of students with disabilities and (b) There will be similar results of self-determination instructional components in the IEPs of students across disability, gender and grade level.

Method

Setting and Participants

The evaluation focused on a low achieving suburban high school with a high minority and low income population. This school is located close to a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. Of the approximately 2,000 students in grades 9 – 12 educated at this school, 286 are students with disabilities. Due to an on-going decline in test scores for both students with and without disabilities, this school had been placed on the Academic Watch Status for the state. The racial/ethnic background of the high school consisted of 90.5% Black, 1.8% White, and 5.8% Hispanic. Students from low-income households comprised 68% of the school population. The mobility rate was 10.6%. Of the 286 students with disabilities in the high school, there were approximately 30% more males than females. Students received services across multiple disability areas, but the three most prevalent categories were specific learning disability (56%), intellectual disability (15%), and emotional disability (10%). Complete demographic data for the students with disabilities is provided in Table 1.

The 286 students who have IEPs were determined to be eligible for special education and related services as a result of eligibility meetings. Eligibility determination is uniform from school to school within the district and the state and based on requirements mandated by the IDEA, 2004. Once each student was deemed eligible, an IEP was developed and reviewed at least annually. The IEPs at this school conformed to the requirements imposed by special education law (i.e., IDEA, 2004) and were based on student strengths, parent concerns, evaluation results, and the individual needs of the students.

Table 1
Student Demographic Data (n = 286)

Characteristic	Number	Percent of students with disabilities
Gender		
Male	185	65%
Female	101	35%
Disability		
Autism	12	4%
Emotional Disability	29	10%

Hearing Impairment	2	1%
Intellectual Disability	43	15%
Other Health Impairment	13	4%
Physical Impairment	7	2%
Specific Learning Disability	160	56%
Speech/Language Impairment	16	6%
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	>1%
Vision Impairment	3	1%
Grade		
9th	72	25%
10th	67	23%
11th	63	22%
12th	84	29%

Site selection for this evaluation was based on several factors. First of all, the school's vision statement recognizes the importance of preparing the students for their postsecondary future. Particularly, emphasis is placed on enhancing skills that will promote college and career readiness, and self-determination has been identified as a practice that may promote more positive postschool outcomes (Wehmeyer, 2014). Next, students at this school must complete a Senior Project, which is a graduation requirement.

The purpose of this project is to have students select and participate in activities (e.g., job shadowing, career research, college visits, service learning) that may promote their college and career goals. As a result of this requirement, the college and career goals of students with disabilities may be reflected in the annual goals of students' IEPs. Implications regarding the relationship between the Senior Project and the inclusion of self-determination goals in IEPs will be discussed later to determine if this requirement increased the likelihood of self-determination being addressed in the goals. Furthermore, this school was selected because it is located in a state in which students' IEPs must include postsecondary goals and transition services when the student is 14 ½ years of age. This means all students with disabilities in this school should have a transition plan with annual goals that reflect their postsecondary goals. This is not a federal mandate and some states do not require transition services to be included in an IEP until a child turns 16. Lastly, this school is located in a state that has established social emotional learning standards that define what all students should know and be able to do. These learning standards include component elements of self-determination (i.e., decision making, self-awareness, and self-management) that may be referenced in the annual goals of students with disabilities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The IEPs of all 286 students with disabilities in grades 9-12 were collected and analyzed. Permission to obtain information for this evaluation was provided by the University's Institutional Review Board and the Director of Pupil Personnel Services for the school district. Confidentiality was secured by assigning all IEPs a numerical code and by not transferring student names to the database. Goals and objectives from each student's IEP

were collected from an electronic report, IEP at a Glance, which was generated from the electronic IEP program, Easy IEP™. IEP at a Glance is an individualized report that details the disability area, current goals and objectives, and accommodations for each student with an IEP. The school's data system, PowerSchool©, was referenced to obtain and verify the gender and grade level of each student.

Referencing the IEP at a Glance reports, the annual goals for each student were entered into a Microsoft Excel™ matrix by the first author. Descriptive statistics were then utilized to answer the evaluation questions and determine the extent that each corresponding objective was met. For this evaluation, the seven instructional domains utilized in previous research (i.e., Carter et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2011; Wehmeyer et al., 2000; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998) were referenced to identify which components of self-determination were included in the IEPs. Table 2 provides a brief description of each of these domains. Wood et al. (2004) contended that components of self-determination that are teachable and measurable should be included in the goals and objectives in students' IEPs. Since these instructional domains represent skills that can be taught and measured, these domains were utilized for the goal analysis. When the IEP goals were found to be too broad or too vague, the corresponding objectives were then examined for clarification. The second author conducted interrater reliability by examining 30% (75 IEPs) of the IEPs chosen at random. Interrater reliability was 98%. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the extent to which self-determination goals were present in the IEPs, the instructional domains of self-determination that were referenced in the goal, and if differences existed due to areas of disability, gender, or year in high school (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior). In total, 286 IEPs containing 1033 goals were analyzed.

Table 2
Seven Instructional Domains of Self-Determination

Instructional Domain	Definition
Choice making (CM)	selection between alternatives based on individual preferences
Decision making (DM)	incorporates choice-making, but this is a process with specific steps or elements • define an issue or problem • collect information and consider options • use choice-making • implement a plan of action
Problem solving (PS)	involves a specific situation that requires a response to function effectively
Goal setting (GS)	identification of goals, objectives, and tasks to achieve goals; actions to attain a desired outcome

Self-awareness (SW)	knowledge of one's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and abilities, and how to use these to influence one's quality of life
Self-advocacy (SA)	skills to speak up or defend a cause; to advocate on your own behalf
Self-regulation (SR)	process of monitoring one's own actions (includes self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement)

Note. Definitions based on "The Development of Self-Determination and Implications for Educational Interventions with Students with Disabilities," by M. L. Wehmeyer, D. J. Sands, B. Doll, and S. Palmer, 1997, *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 44, p. 390-316.

Results

Evaluation Question 1: To what extent are self-determination instructional components represented in the IEPs of students with disabilities?

Of the 286 IEPs that were examined, 89% (254 IEPs) contained at least one self-determination component and 11% (32 IEPs) did not include a goal that referenced a self-determination skill. Of the 1033 goals, 590 included at least one of the seven self-determination instructional components. The three most common components reflected in the goals were self-regulation, self-awareness, and choice making. The distribution of each of the components is represented in Figure 1.

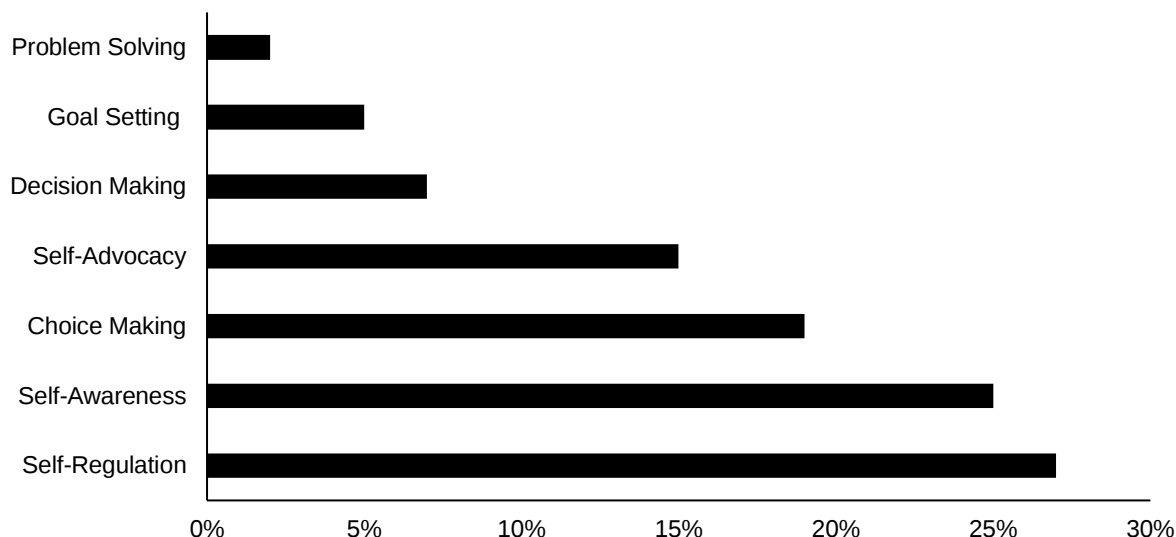


Figure 1. Self-determination component distribution based on 1033 IEP goals.

Consequently, we can answer the first evaluation question that 89% of the IEPs of students with disabilities had at least one goal that reflected a self-determination instructional component. In addition, the objective set for this evaluation question, that

self-determination instructional components will occur in 80% of IEPs of students with disabilities, was met.

Evaluation Question 2: Are there differences in the inclusion of self-determination components in IEP goals when comparing disability area, gender, or grade level?

Two analyses were conducted to determine if there were differences in the inclusion of self-determination components when comparing disability area, gender, and grade level. First, the prevalence of instructional components in the goals for each disability area was tabulated. The goals were analyzed to ascertain which instructional components were most often referenced and if differences existed among the disability areas. Results of this analysis indicated that self-awareness, self-regulation, and choice making were the top three self-determination components across all disabilities. However, self-awareness was most often cited in the goals of students with learning disabilities, whereas self-regulation was most prevalent in the goals of students with intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, autism, and other health impairments. Table 3 provides the specific number of instructional components across disabilities.

Table 3

Self-Determination Instructional Components by Disability Area

Instructional Domain ^a	Disability ^b										Total
	AU	ED	HI	ID	OHI	PI	SLD	SLI	TBI	VI	
Choice Making	5	12	1	19	4	2	57	11	0	1	112
Problem Solving	1	2	0	0	0	0	6	3	0	0	12
Decision Making	1	8	0	5	2	1	20	3	0	0	40
Goal Setting	0	4	0	1	1	1	20	1	0	0	28
Self-Regulation	14	31	1	26	16	8	60	6	0	1	163
Self-Advocacy	1	11	1	16	6	7	41	1	1	4	89
Self-Awareness	9	16	1	17	5	1	84	11	1	1	146
Total	31	84	4	84	34	20	288	36	2	7	590

^aComponent elements of self-determination based on the instructional domains utilized by Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000).

^bDisability Areas –Autism (AU), Emotional Disability (ED), Hearing Impairment (HI), Intellectual Disability (ID), Other Health Impairment (OHI), Orthopedic Impairment (PI), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Speech or Language Impairment SLI), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Visual Impairment (VI).

IEPs for each of the disability categories were then analyzed to determine the percentage of IEPs that contained self-determination instructional components across disability categories. In total, there were only 32 IEPs that contained no goals reflecting components of self-determination. The IEPs without self-determination instructional components were in all categories of disability except vision impairment and traumatic brain injury. Both of these categories had very few students; there was only one student identified with a traumatic brain injury and only three students were identified with a visual impairment. The final results of this analysis indicated that all disability categories, except for one (hearing impairment), had at least 86% of IEPs reflecting self-determination instructional domains. There were only two students identified as hearing impaired and that category had one student without a self-determination goal. Consequently, except for the category of hearing impairment, all disability categories had percentages ranging from 86% to 100% of self-determination instructional components represented in the IEPs. See Table 4 for the inclusion of self-determination components in IEPs by disability category.

Table 4

Inclusion of Self-Determination Components in IEPs by Disability Category

Disability Category	Number of Students	Number of IEPs Including a Self-Determination Instructional Domain	Percentage of IEPs Including Instructional Domain
Autism	12	11	92%
Emotional Disability	29	27	93%
Hearing Impairment	2	1	50%
Intellectual Disability	43	38	88%
Other Health Impairment	13	12	92%
Physical Impairment	7	6	86%
Specific Learning Disability	160	141	88%

Speech / Language Impairment	16	14	88%
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	1	100%
Vision Impairment	3	3	100%
Total	286	254	89%

Similarly, no major discrepancies were noted between the inclusion of self-determination instructional components in the IEPs for males and females. Out of the 185 IEPs for male students, 20 IEPs, or 11%, did not include instructional components of self-determination. Of the 101 IEPs for female students, 12 IEPs, or 12%, did not include components of self-determination. After analyzing the overall number of goals that included elements of self-determination for males and females, the three primary instructional components were self-regulation, self-awareness, and choice making. Comparable results were identified between gender and self-regulation, self-awareness, and choice making; however, it should be noted that very few goals reflecting the components of decision making and problem solving were included in the IEPs for female students. Figure 2 displays the relationship between the instructional component elements and gender.

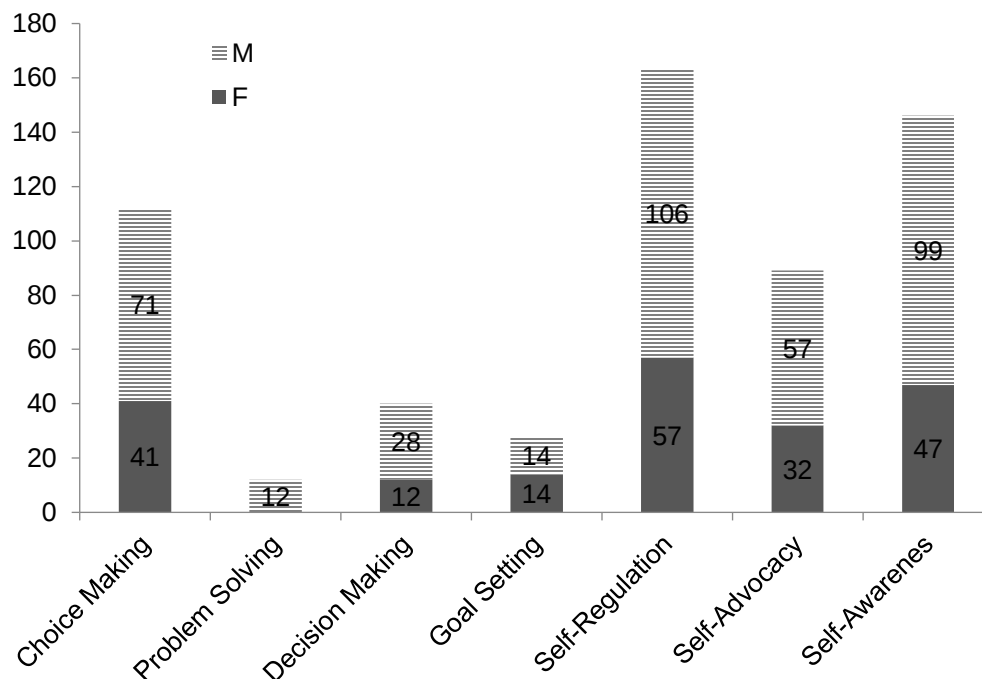


Figure 2. Elements of self-determination in relation to gender.

Out of 286 students, 72 were in the 9th grade, 67 were in the 10th grade, 63 were in the 11th grade, and 84 were in the 12th grade. Based on the comparison of grade level and

inclusion of self-determination instructional components, 89% of 9th grade students, 85% of 10th grade students, 89% of 11th grade students, and 92% of 12th grade students had IEP goals that reflected components of self-determination.

Furthermore, self-awareness, self-regulation, and choice making were the three dominant instructional components in the goals for students in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. Self-regulation and self-awareness were common elements for the 12th grade students; however, self-advocacy was the prevailing instructional component for 12th graders. See Figure 3 for the distribution of components based on the four grade levels.

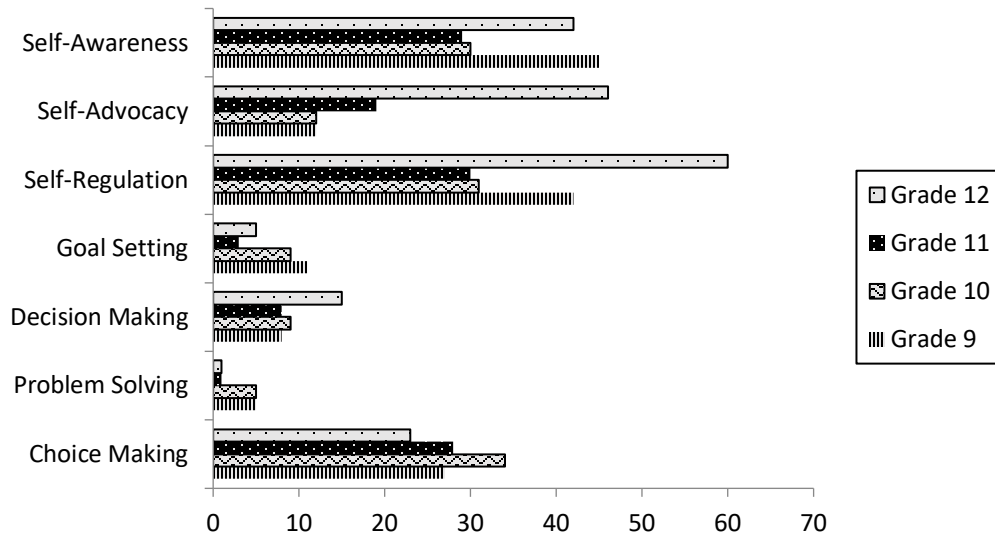


Figure 3. Elements of self-determination in relation to grade.

Accordingly, we feel that we can state that there were no major differences in the IEPs of students with disabilities when comparing disability area, gender, and grade level; the one exception is the category of hearing impairment that had two students, one of whom had no IEP goal that reflected a self-determination instructional component. IEPs are based on the individual students' needs and we do not have a concern over the varying frequencies of instructional components, such as students with behavior disorders having more self-determination goals reflecting the instructional component of self-regulation. However, we are concerned that female students did not have as many goals reflecting decision making and problem solving.

Discussion

This evaluation was conducted to answer two questions: (a) To what extent are self-determination goals targeted in the IEPs of students with disabilities? and (b) Are there differences in the inclusion of self-determination components in IEP goals when comparing disability area, gender, or grade level? The comprehensive answers to these questions are described in the results. We also set objectives relative to these evaluation questions as: (a) Self-determination instructional components will occur in 80% of IEPs of students with disabilities and (b) There will be similar results of self-determination instructional components in the IEPs of students across disability, gender and grade level.

We can state that this evaluation has determined that both of these objectives were met, with the exception of the disability of hearing impairment. Based on the results of this evaluation, we determined and provided the following recommendations for the program: (a) continue to monitor self-determination instructional components in IEPs by evaluating a certain percentage of the IEPs each year (i.e., 30%), (b) further investigate why female students had fewer self-determination goals reflecting the instructional components of decision making and problem solving, (c) evaluate treatment fidelity of self-determination instruction by observation or self-reporting (using a fidelity checklist), (d) evaluate student outcomes by curriculum-based assessments and observation, and (e) promote the components of self-determination that were addressed less frequently in the IEP goals (e.g., problem solving, decision making, and goals setting).

According to Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) the primary purpose of evaluation “is to render judgments about the value of the object under evaluation” (p. 35). The purpose of this evaluation was to determine if the IEPs for students with disabilities at a suburban high school in the Midwest reflected the components of self-determination. Elements of evaluation sometimes mirror procedural components of research and make it challenging to distinguish between the two processes; however, the purpose or end result is indicative of the process. Thus, the current evaluation sought to provide information to make a judgment as opposed to adding knowledge to the field or advancing theory, which is a primary distinction between research and evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Although the intent of this evaluation was to analyze the data to answer the evaluation questions, the outcomes can add to previous research.

Self-determination is regarded as a critical component of the curriculum, and results from this evaluation corroborate this assertion. The current evaluation supports findings from previous studies in which teachers regarded self-determination as an important construct (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Carter et al., 2008; Cho, et al., 2011; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). The number of IEPs in this evaluation that comprised at least one goal reflecting an instructional component of self-determination substantiates this conclusion. Nonetheless, results from this evaluation found larger numbers of IEPs that included components of self-determination than did the Agran et al. (1999) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000) studies. Findings from the current evaluation indicated that elements of self-determination were included in 89% of IEPs; whereas, in the Agran et al. and Wehmeyer et al. (2000) studies most of the teachers reported that their students did not have self-determination goals in their IEPs. Agran et al. found that 55% of the respondents indicated that self-determination goals were not included, or only included in some of their students’ IEPs, and 31% of the teachers in the Wehmeyer et al. (2000) study reported that their students did not have self-determination goals in their IEPs. Thus, the identification of components of self-determination in 89% of the IEPs at this school is a promising finding.

Not only do the results of this evaluation surpass the findings by Agran et al. (1999) and Wehmeyer et al. (2000), but this evaluation is the first one to analyze IEP goals of students from 10 disability categories and identify that self-determination skills are being included in the goals. A previous study by Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998) examined

transition-related goals in the IEPs of students with intellectual disabilities to determine if students were being taught self-determination skills. Findings from this study indicated that instruction to teach students skills associated with self-determination was not occurring. More specifically, not one goal was identified that substantiated students were being taught the component skills of self-determination (e.g., decision making, problem solving, and choice making). Therefore, findings from this program evaluation support the current emphasis on promoting the self-determination of students with disabilities as indicated by the inclusion of self-determination skills in 89% of the goals in the IEPs. The presence of these skills in 89% of the goals is also very encouraging. When self-determination skills (e.g., choice making, decision making, and self-regulating) are reflected in the goals of students with disabilities, these students may potentially achieve more positive postschool outcomes than students whose goals do not include self-determination skills (Malian and Nevin, 2002).

Besides determining the presence of self-determination components in IEP goals, the current evaluation identified which self-determination instructional components were reflected in the IEP goals. The findings indicated that the instructional components of self-determination included in the IEPs matched the elements that researchers have identified as significantly important to educators. In this evaluation the three most prevalent instructional components in the goals and objectives were self-awareness, self-regulation, and choice making. Both choice making and self-regulation have been recognized as key instructional domains that should be included in curriculum for students with disabilities. Specifically, educators in the Wehmeyer et al. (2000) study cited choice making, problem solving, and decision making as the most important instructional domains, and educators in the Carter et al. (2008) research rated problem solving, self-management, and decision making as the most essential self-determination instructional domains.

Since no previous studies were located that analyzed the inclusion or exclusion of self-determination instructional components in IEPs based on areas of disability, gender, or grade level, no comparisons with previous studies could be made. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998) only examined the IEPs of students with intellectual disabilities. Nevertheless, the results of this evaluation indicate that self-determination goals in each of the disability areas, as well as those for male and female students and students in grades 9-12, were reflected in the students' IEPs. While the presence of self-determination goals in the IEPs emphasizes the value that teachers place on addressing the self-determination needs of all students with disabilities, the outcomes of this evaluation do not provide data to support whether these goals were addressed in instruction or if students made progress. As a result, future evaluations should seek to determine if self-determination goals are being implemented and achieved.

Implications for Practice

Enhancing the self-determination in students with disabilities is regarded as best practice. To promote this practice, self-determination skills should be incorporated into the curriculum through instructional practices and reflected in IEP goals. Teachers have

identified self-determination as an important curricular component (Carter et al., 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2000), yet it is through the implementation of the goal that instruction occurs. For students with disabilities, if the acquisition of self-determination skills is not specifically identified in the goals and objectives of the students' IEPs, the possibility remains that these skills may not be addressed. This evaluation provided a means to determine if the IEP goals at one suburban high school in a Midwestern state included self-determination components; however, this is only the beginning of a more comprehensive evaluation. Further evaluation of the instruction related to self-determination goals, the treatment integrity of interventions designed to implement the goals, and the student outcomes is warranted. Data that reflects both teacher implementation (a fidelity checklist and/or observation of instruction) and student outcomes (administration of self-determination assessments or detailed curriculum-based assessments) should be the next step to determine if self-determination instructional domains are being addressed and if they are producing positive student self-determination outcomes.

High schools share a common goal of seeking to prepare their students to be college and/or career ready so that they will attain more positive post-school outcomes. To achieve these outcomes, we must provide instruction to address self-determination skills that will enable all students to be the change agents in their lives. While instruction that promotes all components of self-determination is important, additional emphasis should be placed on incorporating self-actualizing components (e.g., problem solving, decision making, and goal setting) of self-determination into IEPs. Results from this evaluation indicated that fewer goals included these integral components, even though teachers have recognized decision making and problem solving as two of the most essential self-determination elements (Carter et al., 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Furthermore, for students to become productive citizens, they will need to identify and achieve attainable goals, make decisions based on those goals, and solve problems they will encounter along the way. As a result, these domains should be addressed in future research. In closing, incorporating self-determination into IEP goals will remain a focal point for students with disabilities to meet their individual needs; however, we must also acknowledge that promoting self-determination across the curriculum will benefit all students.

Limitations

Resources and time limit all program evaluations, and this evaluation is no exception. Given more resources and time, the evaluators would have conducted a comprehensive evaluation focusing on instruction and student outcomes. However, IEPs are the guiding document for both instruction and student outcomes and offer strong evidence of the value placed on self-determination goals.

Another limitation is that this evaluation occurred in one high school and generalization to other populations is limited. Evaluation procedures are idiosyncratic to the program being evaluated; yet, we believe that application of our methods allow for school personnel to ascertain the presence of self-determination goals, which in turn can lead to specific recommendations for each school.

A final limitation of this evaluation is that the school required students to complete a Senior Project. Since this was a graduation requirement for all students, including those with disabilities, this requirement may have increased the likelihood that self-determination skills would be reflected in annual goals. It should be noted that quite a few of the goals in the analysis referenced the Senior Project. Thus, the Senior Project may have prompted IEP teams to include self-determination skills that may not have otherwise been addressed; nevertheless, this emphasis on college and career readiness skills that foster more self-determined students is a positive outcome.

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STRETCH (Students Ready To Make Change): Making a Difference in the Lives of Students

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Abstract

Described in this multifaceted article are various types of bullying and the potential long-term, harmful effects. The authors also depict a multitude of strategies for parents / guardians and teachers in assisting children who have suffered from bullying. Furthermore, the authors share their personal experiences with bullying and explain the reasons they are extremely passionate and dedicated in doing whatever is in their power to end bullying. Finally, a university student organization named STRETCH (Students Ready To Make Change) is introduced. Members of STRETCH create multi-media presentations to assist students in understanding the harms of bullying and the benefits of performing acts of kindness for all individuals. STRETCH members perform these entertaining presentations which consist of videos, personal stories, music, and educational activities to K-12 students in an effort to make a difference in their lives and letting them know they are not alone.

STRETCH (Students Ready To Make Change): Making a Difference in the Lives of Students

Failure to Protect

As a mother and educator I have an instinctive drive to nurture, educate, and provide safety to my sons and students. One can only imagine the devastation and extreme sense of failure I feel when I recall those dark years of my youngest son's elementary experience. *Failure to protect* - these are the words that plague me as I think about those years and how my son was ostracized and shunned by his peers. The thought that perhaps I failed to protect him saddens me immensely and outrage engulfs me as I undeniably know the school system failed him, as well as many other children in today's society.

It all began when I accepted a job as an assistant professor at a prestigious university in the Midwest. My family, including my two sons and husband, were excited as we anticipated and prepared for this new life changing adventure. We moved from our large Texas city to a relatively small town. At the time, my older son was preparing to begin the fifth grade, while my younger son was starting the third grade. As one can imagine,

moving half way across the country was stressful and my work as an assistant professor took every minute of my time. I was so driven to do well and to make a name for myself that much of my attention was focused on my new career. It was not until about six weeks into the school year that I realized what was happening. I often ask myself how I could have been so oblivious to my son's grief. To this question I can only answer that he hid his pain very well, as many children who are bullied manage to do.

Late one night I passed by my youngest son's bedroom and heard him crying. I knocked on the door and walked in to find him lying on the floor sobbing. I immediately went to him and asked him what was wrong. At first he would not tell me, but then eventually he began to divulge the source of his immense sadness. He began to describe episode after episode of how the children in his class unmercifully ridiculed him and excluded him on a daily basis. He explained that no one would sit with him at lunch and that when he tried to begin conversations with students, they would laugh and walk away from him. He expressed how the students called him every name in the book and made him feel worthless. I could now see so clearly that the once fun loving, outgoing, confident child I thought I knew so well, had become insecure, beaten down, and frightened.

I had nine years' experience of teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders and eleven years as a parent, so I knew many strategies for how to calm a child. However, the strategies I attempted were not working, and he became more and more distraught. As the first hour of our conversation turned into the second, I became desperate. I finally told him that he did not have to attend school the following day and that I would make an appointment to meet with his teacher. He eventually stopped crying and fell asleep. I, on the other hand, did not rest at all that night. Memories of my own elementary years flooded back to me. I had been horribly bullied in fifth grade, and the descriptions of bullying my son shared with me that night rang all too well a familiar bell. I sat at the kitchen table despising myself for letting this happen to him and making a plan for how to end this bullying.

The next day I scheduled an appointment to meet with his teacher. I remember walking into the classroom filled with hope and confidence that she would assist me in resolving this issue. I recall thinking that perhaps this had all just be an enormous misunderstanding and that possibly the situation was not as dire as I had believed the night before. As I described to her the events of the previous evening, the expressions, and comments of the teacher did not instill confidence in me, but increased dread. She stated that she understood my son wanting to remain at home and she herself had experienced bullying as a child and stayed home many days from school to escape her tormenters. She further confirmed that everything my son had said was true and she was concerned about the bullying in her class. When I asked her what her ideas were concerning putting an end to the bullying, she was at a loss. I began to make suggestions but quickly realized my ideas were as unwelcome as my presence. I left the school feeling utterly defeated and alone.

That first year was definitely the most difficult. During the following years there were slight improvements; however, true peace did not actually come until we decided to move out of the district so my son could attend a different school. During those years I truly felt

trapped. We had contemplated several other alternatives including moving to a different district, private schooling, and even home schooling. Our financial situation prohibited us from moving to a different district any sooner than we did. I looked into private schools, but the tuition was extremely expensive and not financially feasible. I did contemplate home school; however, I was working at least sixty hours a week and I knew in my heart that was not the right choice for us. We even seriously considered moving back to Texas. However, we had made a new life. We had no jobs or home in Texas anymore. This was now our new home and I felt like we had to try and make things work.

My youngest son is now a junior in high school. Even though several years have passed, he still talks about the reoccurring, relentless episodes of bullying he endured throughout those years in elementary school. I know being bullied has changed him. As a professor, I often times ask my students, who are preparing to become educators, to imagine being bullied every day of their lives. I ask them to envision reoccurring episodes of being pushed, tripped, ridiculed, spit upon, and made to feel like the punch line of every joke. I then inquire how long they think it may be before they actually started to believe the horrible, mean comments everyone was saying about them. This aspect of bullying is one of the most damaging. Frequently when we are the recipients of repeated abuse, we begin to see ourselves as others describe us and treat us.

I instruct my teacher candidates to have a zero tolerance for bullying in their classrooms. I instill in them that they are responsible for the safety and well-being of all of their students. If someone is being bullied in their classrooms, they absolutely must stop it immediately. I wish my fifth grade teacher had been diligent in stopping me from being bullied. I also wish, above anything else, my son's teachers had been able to prevent him from being harassed, ostracized, and made to feel as though he was insignificant and without value. This is why bullying is such a critical issue to me. No parent should ever have to pick their grief-stricken child up from the bedroom floor.

Literature Review

What is Bullying?

Imagine a group of second graders on the playground at recess. They are playing a friendly game of tag when a young boy named David comments to his classmate, Susie that she smells like cheese. She states in a friendly manner, "We just ate pizza for lunch silly. Everyone here smells like cheese." However, this seemingly innocent comment from David quickly escalates into a full blown attack on Susie's appearance and daily hygiene. David says loudly, "No, I don't smell like you! You smell bad and look ugly. I'm not even sure why we are all playing with you." Sally is left speechless and does not know quite how to respond to David's now escalated verbal assault. However, within seconds other children from the playground chime in hurtful comments about Susie and begin to run away from her screaming she has "cooties." The barrage of comments leaves Susie stunned and in tears.

According to Banks, a multitude of actions constitutes bullying:

Bullying is comprised of direct behaviors such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect by causing a student to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion (Banks, 2013, para. 2).

Some individuals may construe David's original comment as somewhat harmless and as a simple example of teasing; however, the situation quickly progresses into a full onslaught of bullying. At times it is difficult for children to distinguish the difference between teasing and bullying. As in this example of David and Susie, what began as teasing quickly escalated. At times the line between teasing and bullying can be almost non-existent, "Teasing becomes bullying when it is repetitive or when there is a conscious intent to hurt another child" (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015, para.1). Students may endure a multitude of different types of bullying, including physical, social, and cyberbullying (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, et al., 2014).

Teachers are frequently at a loss about what they should do to resolve an escalating situation. Unfortunately, some educators think that all children from time to time participate in teasing one another and may not construe verbal comments as truly concerning, until the behaviors become physical in nature (Banks, 2013). However, this misconception by teachers can be extremely detrimental to students who are experiencing bullying. Physical bullying has the potential to be extremely harmful and can result in serious bodily injury. However, according to research, it is the insults that children utter in the hallway and the exclusion on the playground or at lunchtime that can be potentially just as destructive, if not more so (Williams & Nida, 2009).

Physical, verbal, and social bullying may occur outside on the schoolyard or within various places inside school buildings, including cafeterias, hallways, restrooms, and classrooms. However, the increasing epidemic of cyberbullying has now made it possible to be bullied inside the safety of one's own bedroom or while sitting on the couch watching a movie with family. Many students feel almost invincible by the anonymity that a computer grants them. As with all types of bullying, cyberbullying is extremely detrimental. Furthermore, whereas physical, verbal, or social bullying may cease at the end of the school day, cyberbullying leaves its sufferers feeling there are no safe havens. The statistics related to students experiencing bullying are staggering:

While the various studies show different numbers of students who claim to have been the victim of bullying, the general consensus is that about one quarter of students are victimized by bullies at school. Of those children who are victimized, about 77 percent of them are bullied verbally and physically, while about 43 percent have been bullied online (NoBullying.com, 2014, para. 2).

As someone who has personally experienced bullying in countless different ways, I can honestly attest that all forms of bullying result in pain and devastation. Whether the bullying results in bruises or a shattered self-esteem, the damages can be irreparable and have life-long consequences (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001).

Students Affected by Bullying

Student may be affected by bullying at any time throughout their years of schooling. The type of bullying encountered may depend upon if the student is in elementary, middle, or high school:

Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in the middle school/junior high school years, and decline during the high school years. However, while direct physical assault seems to decrease with age, verbal abuse appears to remain constant (Banks, 2013, para. 3).

Some children and teenagers may not ask for assistance to end their bullying nightmares; instead they seek out solutions of their own. Research reveals thousands of students attempt to seek safety at home and escape bullying episodes by refusing to attend school (NoBullying.com, 2014; Batsche & Knoff, 1994). As a child, I employed this strategy on multiple occasions to escape my tormentors. During my own childhood, when the repeated bullying became intolerable for me, I would feign an illness. To this day, almost thirty years after the fact, I remember how very difficult it was for me to tell my parents what was happening to me at school. I was embarrassed and feared my parents would see me as my bullies did, weak and unworthy. I hated deceiving my parents, but pretending to fall down a flight of stairs and hurt my wrist or telling them I had been awake all night with a stomach virus was much easier for me than explaining I had been spit upon, kicked, punched, and constantly ridiculed.

Whereas some students refuse to go to school, other sufferers of bullying attempt to arm themselves with weapons or participate in self-harm (NoBullying.com, 2014; Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010). These approaches in particular may possibly have devastating, long-lasting effects for all of those involved. The most tragic and heartbreaking outcome occurs when students who are bullied believe there will never be an end to their pain and contemplate or attempt suicide. Research indicates students affected by bullying, especially cyberbullying, have increased thoughts about and attempts of suicide (van Geel, Vedder, & Tanilon, 2014). Other consequences of bullying may include severe complications to health. Students who are bullied may not be able to sleep at night, as they contemplate the anguish of the following day. They also may lose their appetites and suffer from depression and absolute sadness. The problem may further be compounded by a loss of desire to participate in previously loved activities. Finally, academics may deteriorate as the student loses interest, refuses to attend on a regular basis, or drops out of school (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015; stopbullying.gov., n.d., *Bullying and children and youth with disabilities and special health needs*).

Students who are perceived to be different may be the targets of bullying. This may entail slight differences in hair style, selection of clothing, or the way in which a child speaks. Children who participate in bullying behaviors often pursue others who they believe will not take actions to stop the abusive acts, whether the actions are physical, verbal, or social in nature. Therefore, students with special needs may be the recipients and / or perpetrators of bullying acts:

Children with physical, developmental, intellectual, emotional, and sensory disabilities are more likely to be bullied than their peers. Any number of factors - physical vulnerability, social skill challenges, or intolerant environments - may increase their risk. Research suggests that some children with disabilities may bully others as well. (stopbullying.gov., n.d., Bullying and children and youth with disabilities and special health needs, para. 1).

Whereas all students are susceptible to bullying, some may be especially vulnerable because they have special needs including: learning disabilities, physical or health impairments, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), language and speech difficulties, or autism (Twyman, et.al, 2010; Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010; Hamiwka, et. al, 2009; Weiner & Mak, 2009; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999).

These students may be singled out as potential targets more so than students without special needs because of physical differences, social awkwardness, or communication (Blake, Lund, Zhou, et al., 2012). It is critical for teachers to ensure that each one of their students is protected and has a safe environment in which to learn and thrive. It is also just as essential that parents are able to detect the warning signs demonstrated by children who are being bullied and to know what they should do if bullying is occurring. Students with special needs who are bullied may need specific assistance in developing skills such as self-assertiveness and problem management (Baladerian, Coleman, & Stream, 2012).

Helpful Information for Parents

Reasons students do not request adult assistance. It can be a heartbreaking experience for parents to come to the realization that someone is harming their child. The anger, sadness, and guilt associated with this situation can be immense. As a parent who has experienced this first-hand, I felt extreme guilt and still struggle with this years later. As I indicated earlier, my son was able to hide the bullying he endured thoroughly from me for several weeks. I, too, was able to conceal my experiences from my parents. The reasons a child may decide not to share the bullying occurrences with their parents or trusted adults are extensive. In fact, according to 2012 statistics derived from *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, children decided to not reveal their bullying experiences to an adult 60% of the time (stopbullying.gov, n.d., *Warning signs*). As I also explained previously, I did not share my experiences with my parents, because I was very embarrassed. It was excruciating for me to finally admit to them what was happening to me. I was needlessly worried, because their reactions were that of any concerned, loving parent. However, research indicates that children often do not tell their parents or other trusted adults, because they are anxious these individuals will somehow think negatively

of them (stopbullying.gov, n.d., *Warning signs*).

Other possible causes for students who are being bullied to remain silent and not tell a trusted adult involve self-esteem issues, fear of further rejection by peers, and social isolation. Repeated episodes of bullying can strip someone of his or her self-esteem (Zwierzynska, K., Wolke, D., & Lereya, T. S., 2013). It is possible that students remain silent because they wish to regain some of their lost self-esteem by attempting to handle the issue on their own. In their minds, informing adults only solidifies their feelings of incompetence. Students may also decline to reach out to adults for assistance because they are concerned their peers will perceive them as weak, thus making a bad situation even worse. Finally, every bullying situation is different; however, one common factor includes social isolation. Students may believe they are the only ones who are being treated badly, therefore contributing to guilt and social isolation (stopbullying.gov, n.d., *Warning signs*).

Strategies Parents May Utilize to Assist Children Being Bullied

Listening without judgement. When a parent first realizes his or her child is being bullied, it is sometimes difficult to know how to proceed and resolve the dilemma. However, there are many steps parents can take in assisting their children. To begin, it is critical to listen to the child and offer reassurance, support, and love (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015). It is important that parents do not criticize or impose judgements. Parents need to keep in mind that it may be extremely difficult for a child to disclose occurrences of bullying. Therefore, during these interactions, it is paramount for children not to feel as if their parents are blaming them for the situation.

Discussing and role playing situations. Also, it is often beneficial for parents to talk with their children concerning specific situations and assist them in knowing what actions they should take. Sometimes children are at a loss of what to say or do when they encounter embarrassing or uncomfortable situations. It can be beneficial for parents to discuss with their children possible responses to unkind comments or techniques to escape unfavorable situations (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015). When my son was experiencing bullying at school, my husband and I employed this strategy frequently. He would arrive home from school, sometimes in tears, and after much prompting would explain to us what had occurred throughout the day. He would lay bare every harsh comment and unkind act which had been bestowed upon him that day. In turn, my husband and I would role play with him possible alternatives of what he might have said or done differently. For example, if he sat down next to a group of students at lunch and they refused to acknowledge his existence, we discussed possible alternatives, such as possible topics of conversations or finding other children with whom to eat lunch. If the situation repeated itself the following day, he would know other ways to resolve it. This strategy met with good success and was often beneficial to him. He also very much appreciated our efforts in attempting to assist him. He acknowledged these discussions helped him feel as though he was not alone and that we supported him completely.

Communicating with teachers. It is extremely important for parents to discuss the treatment of their children with their teachers (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015; Witmer, 2015). This strategy should be employed immediately upon learning of or suspecting that a child has been bullied. It is important for parents to talk to teachers so that they may express their concerns and relate first-hand accounts from adults' perspectives of the events occurring. As I stated earlier, I immediately called my son's teacher and scheduled an appointment to meet with her that very day. Even though my son's teacher did not provide the type of support I had hoped for; it was beneficial to speak with her about daily events. She was able to be my ears and eyes on a regular basis. She continuously reinforced my son's accounts of bullying episodes and, as time progressed, I think truly did intervene more frequently. My constant communication with my son's teacher also assisted in her understanding that I was extremely involved in my son's life and very concerned. I believe this communication further reinforced her efforts to intercede and assist my son when possible.

Furthermore, it is important for parents to document the dates, times, and contents of all meetings, phone calls, and emails with teachers. This information is critical so that this verification may be presented to school administrators or superintendents, if necessary (Witmer, 2015). Lastly, communicating with school personnel assists in children's understanding that the parent(s) and school are working together to solve the problem, thus creating an atmosphere of unity and mutual concern.

Finding activities to build self-esteem. Research reveals bullying has negative effects on one's self esteem (Home of Parent & Child Magazine, 2015; Banks, 2013; Batsche & Knoff, 1994). Therefore, it is paramount that parents find ways in which to restore their children's self-image. This strategy was one of the most essential my husband and I utilized during the years in which my son was being bullied. My son's self-esteem improved when we began exploring different opportunities and hobbies for him in which he might become involved. Over time, he discovered his great passion and talent for sketching pictures, swimming, writing short stories, and reading. Additionally, I made certain we were doing many activities as a family. We never allowed him to spend too much time alone and always had enjoyable activities planned that we could participate in together. These exciting and fun family activities and his discovery of newly found talents assisted in increasing his self-esteem. Furthermore, my husband and I continuously praised his accomplishments and offered daily accolades. Although at time it felt as if twenty compliments from his family members could be obliterated by one hurtful comment from a peer, we were not deterred and kept making efforts. Finally, we worked diligently on assisting my son in meeting new people and making new friends outside of school. We worked with him on strategies of making and maintaining friendships which proved to be very beneficial.

Seeking support from others. Students who are bullied often believe they are completely alone and no one has ever experienced similar occurrences. Many times reading the accounts of others in similar situations may be helpful. There are numerous on-line support groups for students who have been bullied. Having the opportunity to recount their own stories in conjunction with reading the narratives from others helps children

understand they are certainly not alone in their experiences. However, if this is an option of interest, it is extremely important parents assist their children in locating a support group right for them. It is also critical that parents oversee and monitor their children's participation in these support groups to ensure positive experiences. It may also be beneficial to locate in-person support group meetings for those who have been bullied. If there is not an in-person support group available in a nearby location, parents may consider the option of collaborating with others to establish one.

What can Teachers do to Eliminate Bullying?

Establishing rules and consequences. It is critical teachers create a classroom environment that establishes an atmosphere of compassion, tolerance, and consideration for everyone. Clear expectations concerning the manner in which students treat one another should be created and explicitly presented to students both verbally and in written form on the first day of the school year (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009). Students must know and understand the teachers' expectations, as well as the consequences of bullying. Many elementary, junior high, and high schools, have established school wide anti-bullying rules and consequences. It is critical teachers work collaboratively with administrators in establishing and reinforcing the school's policies against bullying (Migliore, 2003).

Remaining vigilant. Once rules and consequences have been clearly expressed to students, it is paramount teachers continuously monitor students. Sometimes bullying episodes may be overt and occur in classrooms. However, on many occasions bullying happens in places such as restrooms, playgrounds, locker rooms, cafeterias, and hallways. Therefore, teachers should constantly monitor their students and act expeditiously if bullying occurs. When I was a child and experiencing relentless bullying, the episodes transpired in every location of the school. The exclusion, harassment, and physical altercations frequently took place in front of a teacher. At ten years old, I was at a loss as to why my teacher stood by and only intervened in the direst of circumstances. As I explained earlier, I was embarrassed and ashamed I was being bullied. Therefore, I did not seek assistance from my parents or teachers until the bullying became absolutely intolerable. However, any school personnel paying at least a modicum of attention would have realized what was occurring.

STRETCH (Students Ready To Make Change)

Creation of STRETCH. My own past experiences with bullying and the years of bullying my son endured fueled a fire within me to do whatever was in my power to end bullying. My first thought was that I would design and deliver innovative and dynamic presentations for students in the K-12 setting. These presentations would consist of inspirational videos, educational activities, and the sharing of personal stories to assist students in understanding that bullying is destructive and can have long-term effects. I also wanted to send the message to students that if they were being bullied, they were definitely not alone. Many times when I was being bullied I thought I was the only person in the world bearing such pain. However, I quickly realized that K-12 students

would not want to listen to me about such topics, because they would simply view me as another adult telling them what to do. However, I believed that the students at my university would be much more effective in the delivery of these critical messages, because they would perceive college students as mentors, friends, or resemble an older sibling. I shared this idea with my dear friend and colleague and the student organization STRETCH (Students Ready To Make Change) originated during spring 2014.

Interviews of members. Becoming a member in this organization requires an in-depth interview and assessment of skills which are vital to presenting. We are continuously looking for students who attend our university, who display qualities and characteristics such as: being extremely well spoken, charismatic, and not hesitant to perform in front of extremely large venues filled with children and teenagers. Most importantly, STRETCH members must share the same passion and desire to end bullying, so that no student endures feelings of fear, inadequacies, or shame. Interviews are held two times each year to ensure continuous growth of the organization.

Designing and rehearsing presentations. STRETCH members meet weekly to design and rehearse presentations. We create several presentations to perform for different grade levels. Of course it is imperative that members design presentations which are age appropriate and clearly depict our message in an entertaining manner, as to hold the attention of students. Our presentations consist of numerous educational, motivating, and inspirational activities and videos. As stated, students' grade levels determine the types of activities we employ. For younger students, we focus our presentations on teaching the students acts of kindness, explanations of what bullying looks like, and the importance of notifying trusted adults for assistance. For older students, the activities we create focus on maintaining positive self-esteem, understanding healthy ways to resolve conflict, and being a role model for younger children. The videos we utilize invoke emotion to all who view them and reinforce the concepts we introduce.

Scheduling of presentations. As the co-founder and faculty advisor of STRETCH, I contact schools each semester to schedule our complimentary presentations. As presentation dates approach, we arrange rehearsals to ensure we perform the best presentations possible. It is imperative to us that our presentations are engaging, well-rehearsed, and relatable to the age of students to whom we are presenting. We spend two or more hours rehearsing each presentation to ensure cohesiveness and complete student engagement during presentations.

Evolution of STRETCH. This organization has grown tremendously over the past two years. As word of our professionalism and powerful message has spread from school to school, more administrators are inviting us to present to their students. Two years ago, it was necessary for me to actively recruit administrators to allow us to present to their students. However, at this point in time, administrators contact me and ask for us to come to their schools. The administrators hear about STRETCH through their colleagues or through similar measures. This new swing of the pendulum has assisted in making the scheduling of presentations much easier. This is a great feeling and shows the tremendous growth of our organization. During the 2015 - 2016 academic year, STRETCH

performed forty-five completely complimentary presentations for schools in Illinois and California.

Currently, STRETCH has twenty-five active members. When the organization first originated in spring 2014, there were fifteen members. This organization absolutely has a close, family feel to it. We rehearse and present to schools almost weekly, so we spend a tremendous amount of time together. The friendships that our members have forged assist us greatly in our presentations. We like and respect each other tremendously as a group and our kinship and bond are evident to the K-12 grade students to whom we present.

Funding for STRETCH. It has always been the mission of STRETCH to perform our presentations to any school district in our region or surrounding areas absolutely free of charge. We completely furnish all supplies for activities during the presentations and are more than willing to give our time to the design and rehearsal of the presentations. In the beginning, my colleague and co-founder of STRETCH and I financially supported STRETCH. We provided money to purchase supplies for activities which were utilized during the presentations. However, since that time, we have been extremely fortunate to receive two grants which have been exceedingly beneficial. Since fall 2014, STRETCH has received a yearly grant from the Parents' Association. This grant has been instrumental in assisting us in the purchase of t-shirts for the organization, supplies, and travel expenses. During spring 2016, I accompanied four exceptionally talented members of STRETCH to present to schools in Los Angeles, California. Monies received from the Parents' Association and a Special Emphasis Student Travel Grant awarded by our university made this trip of over 3,200 miles round trip possible. Therefore, we were able to perform our presentations in Los Angeles completely free of charge to the K-12 schools with all expenses for travel being funded by our university.

Members of STRETCH. All of the members of STRETCH have experiences with bullying to varying degrees. These past bullying occurrences assist them in relating to the K-12 students who have experienced similar episodes. During presentations, STRETCH members speak from their hearts, and it is evident to everyone listening. In the following section, four members describe in their own words their heart-felt experiences with bullying and the reasons they joined this organization.

STRETCH Members Share Their Experiences with Bullying

James. *Well I was only 17, when I walked in, she had a razor to her wrist cut open. I didn't understand why, I thought her life was just fine. Then I realized, she's been lying. You've been gone in a world so messed up, gone in a world so cold, gone in a world so screwed up, you can barely leave your home.* These are lyrics for a song I wrote a few years ago titled, *Secret Love*, which expressed deep sympathy for someone I knew. *Secret Love* is a song about suicide, anxiety, and depression. I know so many people in my life, friends and family, who have dealt with these problems. I myself have struggled with anxiety. I believe that my anxiety developed from previous problems such as being bullied, both physically and verbally by different children when I was younger. One such instance happened when I was in the 6th grade when someone hit me in the face because

at the time I was heavier than most people. Unfortunately, there were many more instances of bullying which followed.

As time progressed and I started to learn how to deal with anxiety, predominantly through music. I have been playing guitar and writing music for almost 10 years now. Music became more than a hobby or a passion. It became who I am and everything I do. Music became everything to me and I found myself coping with life differently because of it. The majority of the music that I write describes my personal experiences in life, the lives of my friends and family, and love. I very much enjoy exploring various types of music genres and writing inspirational songs.

During my senior year of college one of my friends told me that interviews were being held for potential members to join a student organization named STRETCH. I always wanted to join a group of this nature or even start one myself. I was so excited about the mission of this group that I immediately walked into the room where interviews were being held by the co-founder of STRETCH and Executive Board members. I told them I was extremely interested in joining the organization and asked them to listen to a few tracks of my music and shared a short film I made titled, *Stop the Bullying*. This was a video I created and posted to YouTube in high school in an effort to demonstrate the tragic repercussions that bullying can cause. Everyone in the room could instantly see how passionate I was about putting an end to bullying; therefore, I became a member that very same day.

STRETCH has allowed me to use my talents to help K-12 students who have been in similar bullying situations as myself. Every time I present, I play my guitar and sing an inspirational song that encourages students to keep their heads up and to let them know that their situations will get better. It means the world to me to reach students of all ages and to let them know they are not alone. When I present to these children, they see me as a friend and role model. They are really able to hear me when I tell them there is always a brighter side to these situations. STRETCH is not just a group or an organization, it is a movement.

Sarah. I am of Middle Eastern descent and, unfortunately, as a child I experienced bullying and have even been a bully myself. As an adult, I now reflect on these incidences and am not proud of how I acted. In the sixth grade, I shared information about a classmate that was not mine to share, causing her even more pain.

I also experienced a great deal of bullying in my small home town. For example, in the fifth grade, a day after September 11, 2001, a girl approached me and asked, “Why would your family do this to us?” In the seventh grade, a girl who wanted to fight because she “just did not like me” chased me down a stairwell. In high school, a group of girls wanted to fight me for absolutely no discernable reason. They showed up in my classrooms to scare me. Another year, I received anonymous phone calls for over a month calling me fat, worthless, unlovable, and encouraging me to kill myself. In college, a man asked me if I learned Arabic to be able to say bomb correctly. The same year an individual approached me while I was studying to tell me my country (Jordan) was disgusting and

asked if I was proud to be an American. I have also witnessed students being left out by both classmates and teachers. I have seen rumors spread like wildfire through the school communities, ruining a child's reputation and spirit.

As a member of STRETCH, I have seen students at the age of seven listen to our presentations and understand for the first time that if a physical altercation occurs they should seek an adult's help and not attempt to take matters into their own hands. I know we have made an impact through our presentations, because students frequently approach us afterwards and tell us the strategies they plan on using in their daily lives.

I have seen many horrible things in this world. I have seen fights and have both heard and spread rumors. I have seen people broken from other's words. I have been broken by these same words. As an adult, I have an immense passion for spreading anti-bullying messages to children. I want students to understand that their positive actions, no matter how small or large, can make our world such a beautiful place. I want students to know that spreading hate to others will hurt themselves and their communities. I have experienced the pain of bullying and felt the burn of hurtful words. It kills me to see other people experience it and makes my heart physically hurt. As a member of STRETCH, I cannot always take the pain away for children. However, I can educate and inspire children, one at a time or in the masses, to step up against bullying, to share love and spread kindness.

STRETCH has completely changed my mindset. I take the time to get to know people. I accept people for who they are because we all have a story to tell. STRETCH gives me an opportunity to discuss with students the fact that we cannot take back our hurtful words and to think before we speak. It gives me an opportunity to share my stories of being bullied and being the bully. Through this sharing, I hope to encourage students to think about their actions, to stand up for others, and to think about the impact of unkind actions. It gives me an opportunity to discuss ways to show kindness. STRETCH has made my life so fulfilling, brought me a wealth of happiness, and inspired me to inspire others.

Samantha. Five years ago my life was affected by a terrible act, which occurred as a consequence of bullying. My life took an absolute turn for the worst, and I was faced with several new challenges. To be more specific, I almost lost my best friend in the entire world. There are no words to express the feeling of discovering self-inflicted injuries on the wrists of someone who means the absolute world to you.

During this time, she was in the seventh grade and faced several different challenges throughout her middle school years. These challenges involved both verbal and emotional abuse from her peers at school, struggling with schoolwork, and living through an extremely difficult family situation. There was a time that she just could not handle it all anymore. She had no outlet, no escape. Unfortunately she turned to self-harm. This was easily one of the most heartbreaking series of events that I have ever gone through in my entire life. Sitting through all her out-patient appointments and listening to how badly she was hurting because of the different things the children at her school were saying to her

could not have broken my heart more. The fact that such hurtful words could make someone even think about harming themselves is a heart wrenching experience. Luckily, with time, she overcame one of the biggest struggles in her life and found a new way to cope with different challenges she may encounter. She learned to find the positives in every challenging situation and learned that there were countless people who loved her unconditionally. There is truly no one who I admire more in this world. Her endless amount of bravery and perseverance is inspirational.

Ever since this life-changing event took place, I wanted to find a way to make a difference in people's lives. I wanted them to know that they are not alone. I then found STRETCH, which is an organization geared towards putting an end to bullying and promoting acts of kindness throughout the community. I was blessed with the opportunity to become a part of this wonderful team and travel throughout the area to perform different presentations for students in kindergarten through twelve grades. There truly is no better feeling than knowing that you are making an incredible difference in someone's life. Unfortunately, bullying is tremendously prevalent in today's society, so it is important for everyone to be informed of the various ways to prevent it. It is also just as vitally important to promote a more positive environment in which everyone can thrive.

Jack. I joined STRETCH because there was a time, during a long period of my life, in which I was bullied. I was bullied for being different than the other children. I did not dress like everyone else, and sometimes I acted differently. I was bullied for just overall being myself. The results of those recurring bullying events have impacted my life greatly, even to this day. There were times when I was hurt, struggling, and angry. I would take out my angry, frustration, and sadness on my brother and parents. I joined STRETCH because I want to have an impact on others. I want to show children that bullying is not the thing to do. I want to teach them that bullying can greatly affect someone in more ways than they would ever possibly imagine. STRETCH is an awesome opportunity to share my experiences, provide a positive influence, and to leave a positive impact on someone's life.

Conclusion

As research has shown, bullying often has life-long lasting effects on individuals, which may include: lowered self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, or self-harm (NoBullying.com, 2014; van Geel, Vedder, & Tanilon, 2014; Zwierzyńska, K., Wolke, D., & Lereya, T. S., 2013; Arseneault, Bowes, & Shakoor, 2010). Prolonged bullying episodes may have extremely detrimental impacts on an individual's welfare, safety, and happiness (Cross, et al., 2011). Moreover, these students often believe that no one else in the world is experiencing similar situations, thus increasing feelings of isolation and loneliness (stopbullying.gov, n.d., *Warning signs*). Even though all students may possibly be subjected to bullying, students with special needs are particularly vulnerable (Twyman, et.al, 2010; Van Roekel, Scholte, & Didden, 2010; Hamiwka, et. al, 2009; Weiner & Mak, 2009; Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999).

As I indicated earlier, I was bullied significantly as a child. However, my true pain did not occur until I witnessed my son enduring the same fate. My feelings of guilt for not realizing this was happening to him were immense and still plague me to this day. Bullying must simply not be permitted to continue. It is the responsibility of parents / guardians, school personnel, and community members to work together to end bullying. With organizations such as STRETCH, I am hopeful that no child will ever feel frightened, alone, or ashamed because of experiences with bullying.

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Effects of Activity Schedules on Challenging Behavior for Children with Autism

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Abstract

This study examined activity schedules as an intervention to decrease challenging behavior and increase academic engagement during work tasks scheduled after free play activities in three boys diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Functional analysis results indicated all participants' challenging behavior was maintained, at least in part, by access to tangibles. No differences were noted in challenging behavior nor in academic engagement between baseline and activity schedule conditions. Results suggest that activity schedules are not effective as a stand-alone intervention for children with ASD with tangibly maintained challenging behavior.

Keywords: activity schedules, challenging behavior, autism spectrum disorder

Effects of Activity Schedules on Challenging Behavior in Children with Autism

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability marked by impairments in social communication as well as restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While not a part of the diagnostic criteria for autism, challenging behavior is common in this population, often evoked by a number of factors such as deficits in expressive language (Carr & Durand, 1985) or interruption of stereotypic behaviors (Green & Striefel, 1988). Individuals diagnosed with ASD often display challenging behavior when transitioning between activities, faced with unpredictable events, or changes to routines (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). For this reason, interventions have been developed in an effort to decrease challenging behaviors associated with transitions from one task to the next, one of which is the use of activity schedules (e.g., Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000; Dooley, Wilczenski, & Torem, 2001).

Activity schedules are used as an antecedent intervention to provide information, organize a daily schedule, or as a way of signaling upcoming activities (McClannahan & Kratz, 1999). Furthermore, these are used to increase an individuals' independence

within a particular setting (Hume & Odom, 2007). Typically, activity schedules are comprised of written directives, pictures, or a combination of the two detailing the number of activities and the order in which these are to be completed (McClannahan & Kratz, 1999). It is hypothesized that the presentation of this information in advance will increase predictability, which may serve to increase compliance across activities (Flannery & Horner, 1994; Flannery, O'Neill, & Horner, 1995). However, the exact operant mechanism impacting behavior when activity schedules are in place has yet to be thoroughly ascertained. Regardless of this, activity schedules are a popular intervention with high social validity among teachers and clinicians given the minimal cost and training needed to implement it (Lequia, Machalicek, & Rispoli, 2012).

Another reason for the intervention's popularity for children with ASD is the effectiveness of activity schedules across various response classes and settings. In a review (Lequia, Machalicek, & Rispoli, 2012) examining activity schedules for children with ASD most participants were reported as demonstrating a decrease in challenging behavior (e.g., Schmit, Alper, Raschke, & Ryndak, 2000), while some participants also displayed an increase in adaptive, functional behaviors, such as on-task engagement (e.g., Hall, McClannahan, & Krantz, 1995). In addition, several studies have noted increases in compliance during activities across environments children with ASD regularly encounter with the use of activity schedules (Dettmer et al., 2000; Waters, Lerman, & Hovanetz, 2009).

Although the aforementioned review found activity schedules to have a positive influence on both challenging and adaptive behavior during transitions, Lequia and colleagues (2012) found that activity schedules were often utilized as one component of a multi-component treatment. Additional treatment components such as differential reinforcement, extinction, and prompting were used in combination with activity schedules. Interestingly, the degree to which these additional components contributed to the success of activity schedules is unknown as there is limited research examining the effectiveness of activity schedules as a stand-alone intervention. Even the National Standards Project published by the National Autism Center (2015) indicates activity schedules are an established, evidence-based intervention for self-regulation purposes. Yet this information is supplemented by a clause noting that activity schedules are often used in conjunction with additional interventions, like reinforcement (National Autism Center, 2015).

Though largely demonstrated as effective, it has been suggested that activity schedules may in fact evoke challenging behaviors in some situations. For example, McCord, Thomson, and Iwata (2001) found that providing a 2 min advance notice of transitions via visual supports (i.e., activity schedules) and vocal instructions (i.e., countdowns) had little effect on escape maintained self-injurious behavior (SIB). On the other hand, differential reinforcement of alternative behavior when combined with extinction and response blocking (i.e., physically preventing SIB) produced a long-term decrease in SIB during transitions for both participants rather than the advance notice of transitions (McCord, Thomson, & Iwata, 2001). In this case challenging behavior was maintained by escape, but the literature in relation to activity schedules for individuals with ASD is

limited concerning both escape and tangibly maintained challenging behavior (Lequia, Machalicek, & Rispoli, 2012)

From the available research there appears to be a lack of information on the utility of activity schedules for children with ASD, specifically as a stand-alone intervention. Furthermore, there is minimal evidence on the effectiveness of activity schedules for children with ASD needing substantial academic and behavior support with escape and tangibly maintained challenging behaviors, specifically during typical classroom transitions between activities. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the effects of an activity schedule for children diagnosed with ASD who engaged in tangibly maintained challenging behavior. This study addressed two questions: (a) does an activity schedule influence challenging behavior during work tasks after playing with a high preference item and (b) does an activity schedule alter academic engagement during work sessions that follow play with high a high preference item?

Method

Participants

Three children diagnosed with ASD who engaged in challenging behavior participated in this research. All participants were previously diagnosed by an outside qualified physician, received special education services in public schools, and had 1 hr of applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy at a university-based clinic twice weekly. Pertinent characteristics of the participants, operational definitions of challenging behavior and academic engagement, as well as activities used throughout the study are available in Table 1. (see Table 1 after References section)

Tito was a 12-year-old male who spoke using three- and four-word phrases; however, these words were often not clearly articulated. In addition, he frequently engaged in vocal stereotypy and repetitive body rocking. Tito engaged in SIB (i.e., head hitting) as well as disrobing, hitting others, and hitting objects (i.e., table, wall). During the play session Tito would play a game or watch videos on the iPad®. In the work session, he was required to read a Grade 3 reading level book out loud as this was one of his ABA therapy goals that had not reached the mastery criterion.

Rocco was a 10-year-old male who spoke using three- to four-word phrases, which typically included previously heard phrases. Rocco engaged in multiple topographies of challenging behavior that often occurred together including aggression (i.e., hitting others) and SIB (i.e., hitting head and chest) as well as noncompliance (i.e., falling to the floor, saying “no”). During the play session Rocco would draw pictures using a whiteboard and dry erase marker. In the work session, he was required to complete two digit addition and subtraction math problems using a pencil as this was one of his ABA therapy goals that had not reached the mastery criterion.

Luca was a 5-year-old male with an additional diagnosis of a speech delay and a vision impairment in one eye. He used three- to four-word phrases and word approximations to communicate. Luca’s challenging behaviors included screaming and, at times, falling to the floor. During the play session Luca would watch videos on the iPad®. In the work

session, he was required to color a page in a coloring book using crayons as this was one of his ABA therapy goals that had not reached the mastery criterion.

Setting and Materials

All sessions were conducted at a university-based ABA clinic in therapy rooms that consisted of a child-sized table and chair. Additionally, experiment-specific materials were available, including work tasks and preferred items for use during sessions. One highly preferred item for each participant was identified via a paired choice preference assessment (Fisher et al., 1992). One work activity was selected for each participant via therapist interview. Specifically, a task in which the participant had demonstrated some independence, but had not reached mastery criterion was selected. If multiple tasks were available, the therapists were asked to select the task most frequently associated with challenging behavior.

One to four sessions were conducted per day and each were recorded using a videocamera, which was placed in an inconspicuous location in the room. One to three experimenters were present in the room to implement the procedures and collect data during each session.

Activity schedules were individualized for each participant based on preferred items and work tasks and laminated for re-use. At the top of the page the activity schedule was labeled with the participant's name (i.e., "Luca's Activity Schedule"). Photographs of the preferred items and work tasks were taken prior to procedures being implemented. The picture of the preferred item was placed at the top of the page with the name of it directly to the right. Beside the name was a square outlined in black, the exact size of the picture, used to check off activities on the schedule with a black dry erase marker at the completion of a task. For example, Luca had a picture of the iPad® with the word "iPad" written next to it, followed by the outlined square. Beneath the preferred item was the picture of the work task, the name of the work task, and the same outlined square. The size of these items were identical to the preferred item line. For Luca's schedule this was a picture of crayons and a page from a coloring book followed by the word "Color" and the outlined square. Nothing else was included on the schedules.

Experimental Design

An ABABAC reversal design was implemented in this study. The following conditions were evaluated across participants including (a) Baseline, (b) Activity Schedule, and (c) Activity Schedule with Reinforcement.

Measurement and Interobserver Agreement

Data were collected on challenging behavior and academic engagement using a 10 s partial interval procedure across all phases of the study by graduate students specializing in ABA. Data collectors were trained regarding the operational definitions of challenging behavior and academic engagement for each participant. Target behaviors were only collected during work tasks as neither challenging behavior nor academic engagement occurred during play.

Interobserver agreement (IOA) was calculated using an interval-by-interval method. The number of intervals in which both observers agreed (occurrence plus nonoccurrence) was divided by the total number of intervals (agreements plus disagreements) and multiplied by 100%. IOA was conducted on 100% of functional analyses across participants. Mean IOA was 99.9% (range: 99-100%). IOA was measured on 100% of all baseline and intervention conditions across participants. Mean IOA was 94% (range: 70-100%) for challenging behavior and 96% (range: 77-100%) for academic engagement.

Treatment Fidelity

Treatment fidelity data were collected for at least 30% of sessions for each participant. A procedural task analysis was developed for each phase of the study with the experimenter behaviors operationally defined. Treatment fidelity was calculated by dividing the number of procedural steps completed correctly by the total number of procedural steps for the condition and then multiplying by 100%. The mean treatment fidelity in baseline conditions was 100%. In intervention conditions of this study treatment fidelity was 98% (range: 96-100%).

Procedure

Gilliam Autism Rating Scale – 3. The *Gilliam Autism Rating Scale–3* (GARS–3; Gilliam, 2014) was completed by the participants' ABA therapist to provide additional evidence for an ASD diagnosis as well as a descriptor for the level of support required in order to provide more information related to each participants' functioning. The Autism Index score notes the probability of an individual being diagnosed with autism. Scores less than 54 indicate an unlikely diagnosis of ASD, scores ranging from 55 to 70 indicate a probable diagnosis, and scores ranging from 71 to greater than 101 indicate a very likely diagnosis.

Severity level estimates the level of support needed, which corresponds to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5* (DSM 5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) criteria for ASD diagnoses including Level One – Minimal Support Required (Autism Index between 55 and 70), Level Two – Requiring Substantial Support (Autism Index between 71-100), and Level Three – Requiring Very Substantial Support (Autism Index greater than 101). The greater the Autism Index score, the more support an individual will need in addressing social communication and restricted or repetitive behaviors. Tito received a score of 114 and Rocco received a score of 106 on the Autism Index, indicating a need for Level Three support. Luca received a score of 94 on the Autism Index, indicating a need for Level Two support.

Functional analysis. In order to identify the function of challenging behavior, an analogue functional analysis was completed with each participant using procedures similar to that of Iwata, Dorsey, Slifer, Bauman, and Richman (1994). A multielement research design was used with sessions lasting 5 min in duration including attention, demand, play, and tangible conditions. An alone condition was not evaluated given the descriptive data indicated target behaviors were mediated by social reinforcement.

Baseline. Baseline consisted of two conditions, play and work. No activity schedule was used. During the play session the participant was told “You can play with [the preferred activity].” The researcher was within 2 ft of the participant at all times and provided verbal attention every 10 s. At the end of 5 min the participant was told, “Play time is over. It’s time to work.” If the preferred activity was not handed to the researcher (i.e., the iPad® or dry erase marker), it was removed from the reach of the participant and placed out of view.

The work session was then immediately implemented, which consisted of the participant given the instruction specific to his academic task. For example, Tito was presented a story book and told, “It’s time to read out loud.” The experimenter was within 2 ft of the participant at all times and provided least-to-most prompting when necessary for task completion or error correction (Duker, Didden, & Sigafoos, 2004). For example, this prompting included pointing to a word Tito pronounced incorrectly. If he did not say it correctly the experimenter would say the first letter of the word aloud. If he still did not correctly pronounce the word, the experimenter would say the entire word aloud. No reinforcement was provided for correct responding with the task. Additionally, all challenging behavior was ignored.

Activity schedule. The intervention was identical to the baseline phase except for the use of the activity schedule. At the beginning of the play session the participant was presented the schedule and told “First you can play with [the preferred activity] and then it will be time to work.” The schedule was left on the table and visible to the participant at all times. The play condition then proceeded as in baseline. At the end of 5 min the participant was told, “Play time is over. Let’s check it off the schedule.” and a checkmark was placed on the activity schedule in view of the participant. The experimenter then directed the participant’s attention to the next task on the activity schedule and said, “Now it’s time to work.” The work session then proceeded as in baseline. At the conclusion of 5 min in the work session the participant was told, “Work time is over. Let’s check it off the schedule.” A check mark was placed in the box next to the activity on the schedule in view of the participant and the session was ended.

Activity schedule with reinforcement. The procedures for this phase were identical to the Activity Schedule phase with one exception. Reinforcement in the form of verbal praise related to work task completion was provided on a variable interval (VI) schedule. The schedule of reinforcement was determined based on the average occurrence of challenging behavior displayed per minute during both Baseline and Activity Schedule phases. The average was then divided by two to determine the reinforcement schedule. This was done in order to provide a rich schedule of reinforcement. For example, Rocco engaged in challenging behavior on average every 30 s; therefore he was reinforced on a VI 15 s schedule for work task completion (i.e., about every 15 s Rocco was provided verbal praise for completing a math problem). The purpose of the activity schedule with reinforcement phase was to determine the possibility of low levels of challenging behavior and high levels of academic engagement. In other words, to determine if the

behaviors were subject to change given the availability of simple verbal praise as reinforcement.

Results

Functional Analysis

The results of Tito's functional analysis are available in the top panel of Figure 1. Aggression was displayed only in the tangible conditions of the functional analysis. The mean percent of intervals with challenging behavior was 0%, 0%, 0%, and 43% across attention, demand, play, and tangible conditions, respectively. The level of challenging behavior exhibited in the tangible conditions led to the conclusion that aggression was maintained by access to a preferred item.

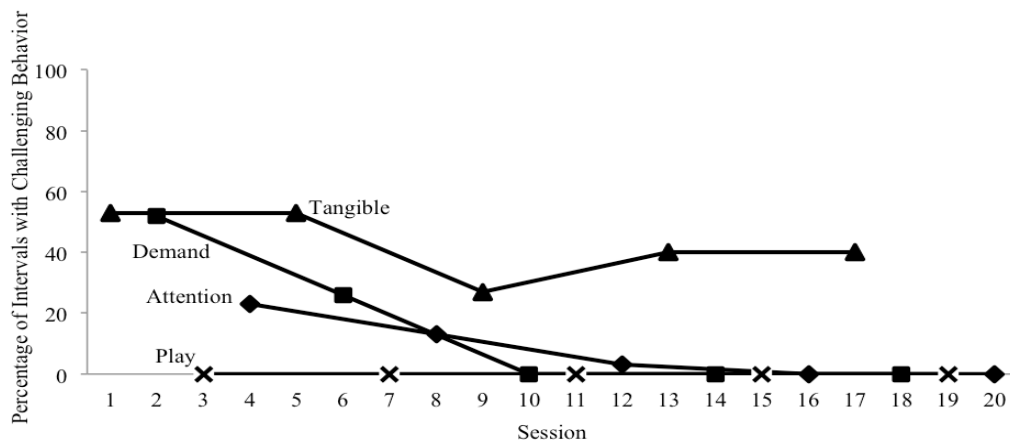
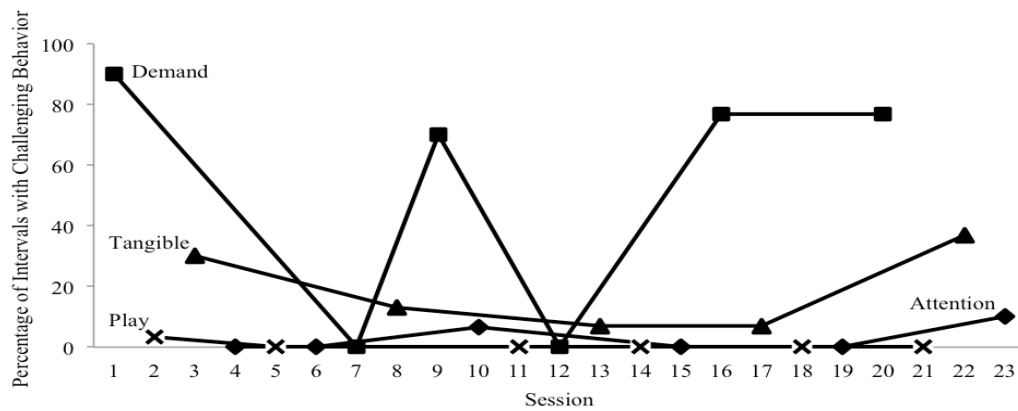
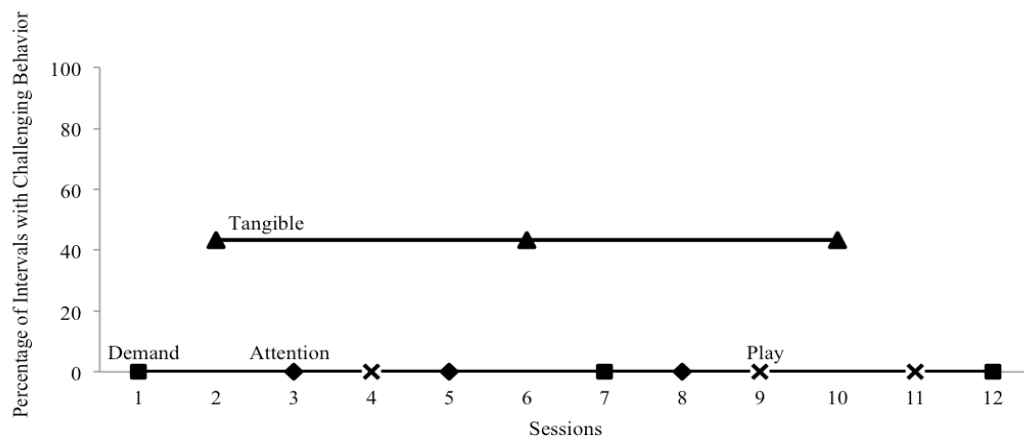


Figure 1. Functional analysis results of Tito, Rocco, and Luca respectively.

The results of Rocco's functional analysis are available in the middle panel of Figure 1. For Rocco aggression and noncompliance were highest in demand and tangible conditions. The mean percent of intervals with challenging behavior was 2% (range: 0-10%), 47% (range: 0-77%), 0%, and 17% (range: 7-30%) across attention, demand, play, and tangible conditions, respectively. The variability of challenging behavior exhibited in the demand condition as well as elevated rates of challenging behavior in the tangible condition led to the conclusion that aggression and noncompliance were multiply-maintained, serving both to escape a demand and to gain access to a preferred item.

The results of Luca's functional analysis are available in the bottom panel of Figure 1. For Luca screaming was highest in the tangible condition of the functional analysis, followed by demand. The mean percent of intervals with challenging behavior was 10% (range: 0-23%), 20% (range: 0-53%), 0%, and 43% (range: 27-53%) across attention, demand, play, and tangible conditions, respectively. The level of challenging behavior exhibited in the tangible condition led to the conclusion that screaming was maintained, at least in part, by access to a preferred item.

Intervention

Challenging behavior. The top panel of Figure 2 shows Tito's challenging behavior across phases, which occurred exclusively after the play session ended and the work task was presented. Tito engaged in moderate and consistent levels of aggression in Baseline ($M = 21.3\%$; range: 7-43%). Challenging behavior was nearly identical during the Activity Schedule conditions ($M = 20.6\%$; range: 13-30%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement condition challenging behavior decreased ($M = 3.2\%$; range: 0-13%) in relation to both Baseline and Activity Schedule phases.

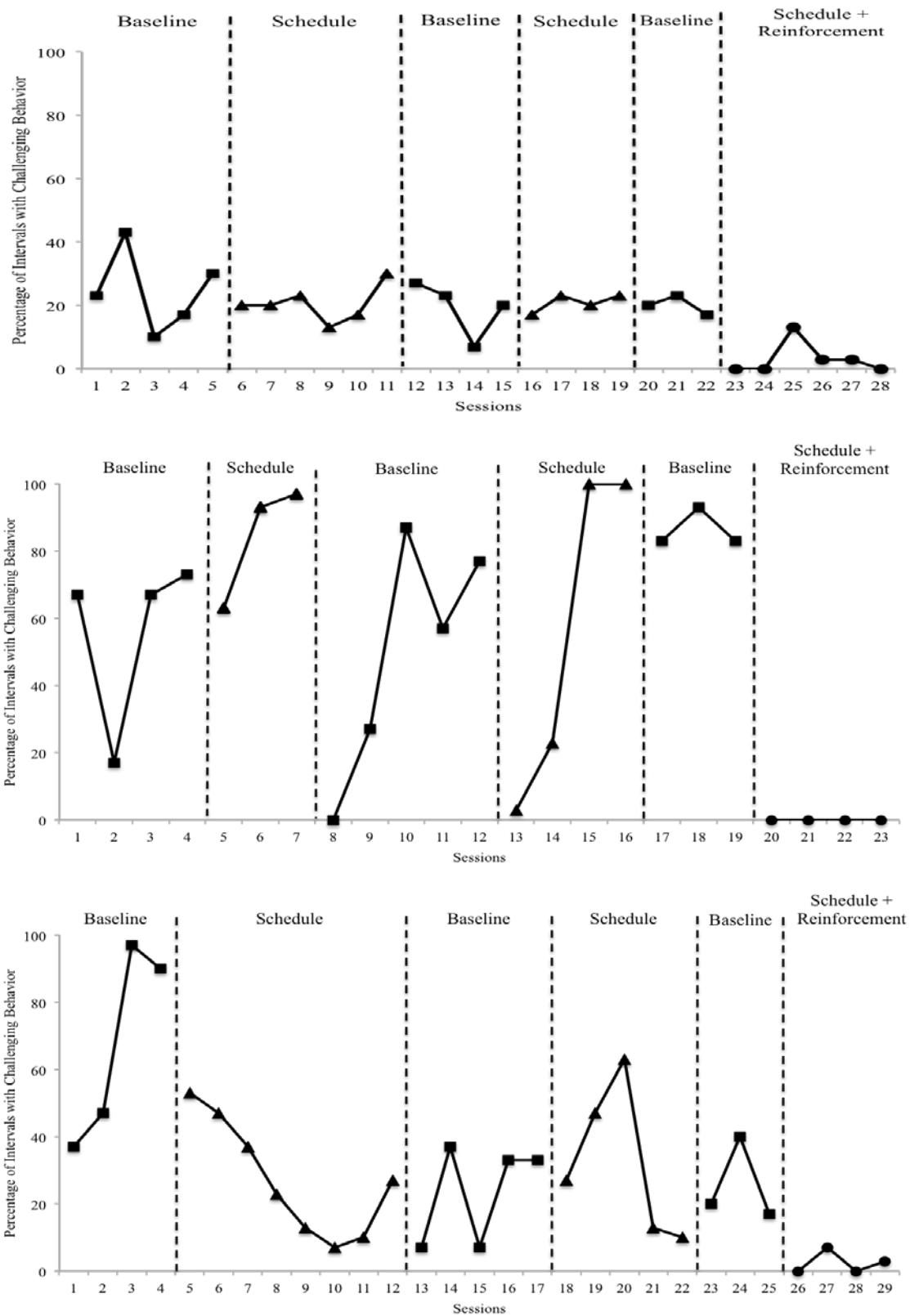


Figure 2. Tito, Rocco, and Luca's challenging behavior across study phases respectively.

The middle panel of Figure 2 shows Rocco's challenging behavior across phases, which occurred exclusively after the play session ended and the work task was presented. Rocco engaged in high and variable levels of aggression and noncompliance in Baseline ($M = 64\%$; range: 0-93%). Challenging behavior was slightly higher during the Activity Schedule conditions ($M = 70.4\%$; range: 3-100%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement phase challenging behavior decreased significantly ($M = 0\%$) in relation to both Baseline and Activity Schedule conditions.

The bottom panel of figure 2 shows Luca's challenging behavior across phases, which occurred exclusively after the play session ended and the work task was presented. Luca engaged in high and variable levels of screaming in Baseline ($M = 39\%$; range: 7-97%). Challenging behavior decreased slightly during the Activity Schedule conditions, however there was not as much variability in responding ($M = 29.6\%$; range: 7-63%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement phase challenging behavior decreased ($M = 2.5\%$; range: 0-7%) in relation to both Baseline and Activity Schedule conditions.

Academic engagement. The top panel of Figure 3 shows Tito's academic engagement across phases during work tasks. Tito displayed consistently high levels of academic engagement in Baseline ($M = 93.9\%$; range: 67-100%). Academic engagement was nearly identical during the Activity Schedule phases ($M = 94.5\%$; range: 73-100%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement phase academic engagement remained high and consistent across sessions ($M = 100\%$).

The middle panel of Figure 3 shows Rocco's academic engagement across phases during work tasks. Rocco displayed variable levels of academic engagement in Baseline ($M = 32.4\%$; range: 0-83%). Engagement was considerably lower than Baseline during the Activity Schedule phases ($M = 1.9\%$; range: 0-7%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement phase academic engagement increased in relation to both Baseline and Activity Schedule conditions ($M = 94.3\%$; range: 90-100%).

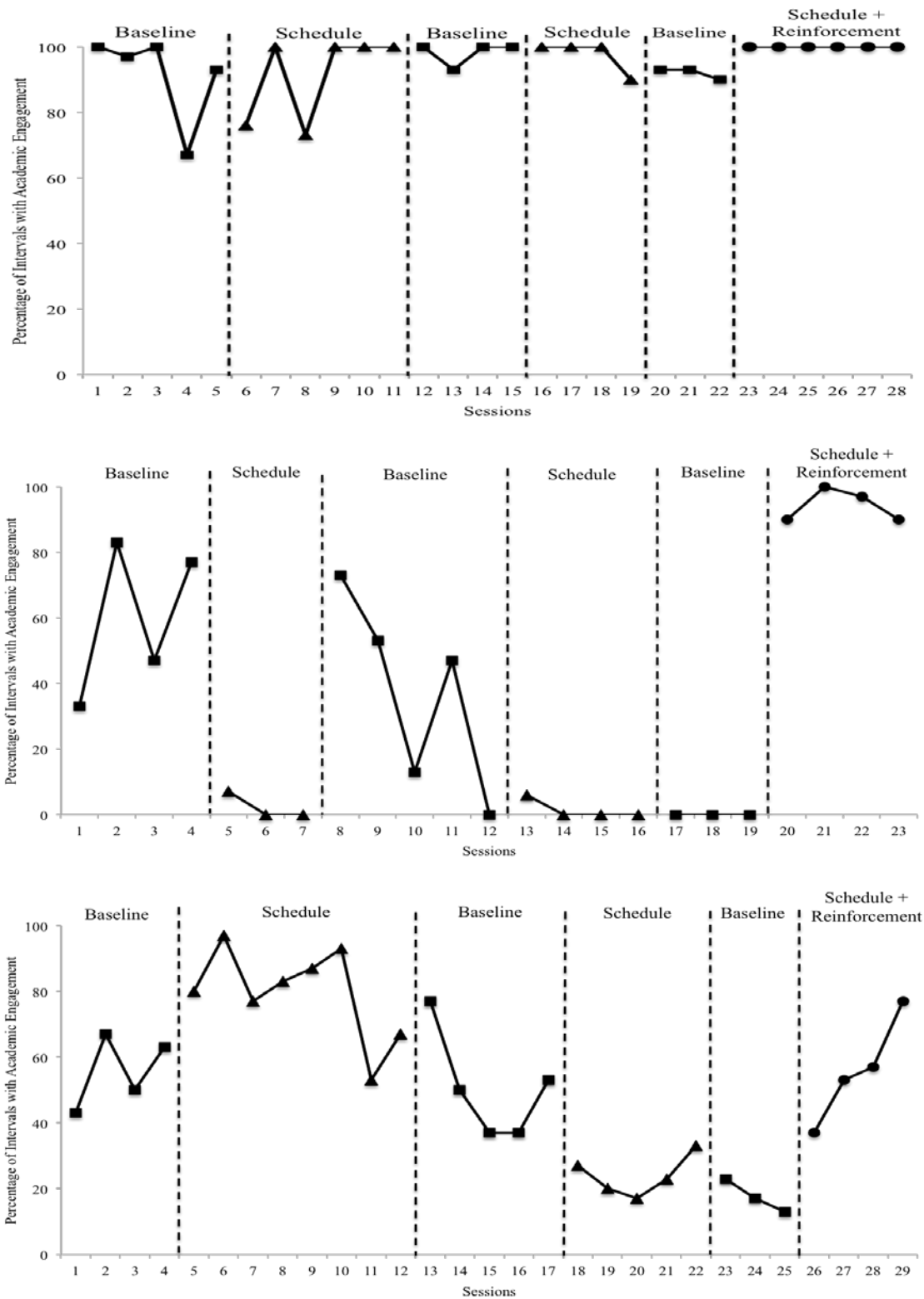


Figure 3. Tito, Rocco, and Luca's academic engagement across study phases respectively.

The bottom panel of Figure 3 shows Luca's academic engagement across phases during work tasks. Luca engaged in moderate and variable levels of academic engagement in Baseline ($M = 41.4\%$; range: 13-67%). Academic engagement increased slightly during the Activity Schedule phases, however there was considerably more variability in responding across sessions ($M = 51.8\%$; range: 17-97%). Finally, in the Activity Schedule with Reinforcement phase academic engagement increased in relation to both Baseline and Activity Schedule conditions and was less variable than in previous conditions ($M = 56\%$; range: 37-77%).

Discussion

The present study found no effect of activity schedules on challenging behavior nor academic engagement during work tasks following preferred free play activities. This research filled a gap in the literature by (a) investigating activity schedules as a stand-alone intervention, rather than as one component of a multi-component treatment and (b) examining activity schedules for children diagnosed with ASD who engaged in challenging behavior maintained by access to tangibles, at least in part.

Based on the results of this study, activity schedules appear to be ineffective as a stand-alone intervention to decrease challenging behaviors associated with typical classroom transitions between play and work activities. These findings are consistent with McCord, Thomson, and Iwata (2001) who found providing individuals with advance notice produced no changes in SIB. Consequently, advance notice of a task may even increase challenging behavior, as it signals that an undesirable event is forthcoming. This suggests that, in some cases, activity schedules could function as a reflexive conditioned motivating operation, which could help to explain inconsistencies in the literature regarding the effectiveness of activity schedules. Rocco's results from the current study might reflect this, as challenging behavior, although undifferentiated between baseline and activity schedule phases, does show an increase the longer he is exposed to the schedule.

In order to ensure that the challenging behavior and academic engagement measured in this study were sensitive to environmental changes, a final condition in which reinforcement was provided for task completion was implemented. All three participants engaged in low levels of challenging behavior and high levels of academic engagement throughout this condition. While the activity schedule plus reinforcement intervention was not experimentally-controlled, it verified that the participants were capable of demonstrating appropriate on-task behavior when engaging in academic work.

As mentioned, the National Standards Project lists schedules as an effective intervention with a strong evidence backing in the literature, specifically as a tool to increase self-regulation skills for individuals with ASD (National Autism Center, 2015). However, activity schedules have not been demonstrated as an effective stand-alone intervention (e.g., McCord, Thompson, & Iwata, 2001) nor is there evidence to support the reduction of challenging behaviors with the use of schedules. Since schedules have a high level of

social validity, are cost effective, require minimal training to implement, and are easy to use (Lequia, Machalicek, & Rispoli, 2012) there is an increased likelihood that practitioners will use this specific intervention to target a variety of behaviors regardless of its effectiveness. Therefore, careful consideration should be made before implementing an activity schedule, especially as a stand-alone intervention for children with ASD who engage in tangibly maintained challenging behavior.

Limitations

Some limitations of the current study should be taken into consideration. First, though Tito and Luca's behaviors are clearly tangibly maintained, as evidenced by the functional analysis, Rocco's results are less clear. Rocco's functional analysis indicates that his aggression and noncompliance are multiply-maintained serving both an escape and tangible function. However, the activity schedule literature indicated that research on challenging behavior maintained by escape was needed as well. Additionally, variation in Rocco's functional analysis may have resulted from collapsing several topographies of challenging behavior (i.e., aggression and noncompliance) into one operational definition.

Second, a photograph-based paper activity schedule with words was used, whereas alternative schedules associated with known preferences may prove more effective. Given two participants' preference for the iPad®, an electronic schedule may have been a preferable alternative. For example, picture schedules could be displayed using an additional iPad® and application showing the upcoming activities. Though there may not be any difference in challenging behavior and academic engagement with an alternative form, certainly participant preferences should be considered in the development of interventions (Wolf, 1978). Furthermore, the participants could have had more direct interaction with activity schedules either in their creation, indicating a task was completed, or both.

Third, this study did not measure challenging behavior during a physical transition from one activity to the next. Both the play and work tasks occurred in the same location. Transition from one activity to the next involved the removal of activity-specific materials and the presentation of activity-specific materials, which was less than 1 min in duration. Previous activity schedule research has measured the effects of the transition period specifically, but transitions typically involved moving from one setting to another (McCord, Thomson, & Iwata, 2001). While this study did not measure transition given it was short in nature, this may actually be a strength of the study in that many transitions in school activities do not involve physically transitioning from one setting to the next. For example, a school transition may involve transition from reading to math, both of which are conducted at the same desk, but with different materials. In other words, this study reflects common transitions from one activity to another that occur within one setting.

Fourth, participants were only exposed to an activity schedule during transitions from play to work sessions. This may have become predictable to some extent across the

duration of the study and unduly influenced findings related to challenging behavior and academic engagement. However, this sequence of activities was chosen given the limited information available in the literature on the effectiveness of activity schedules for challenging behavior and academic engagement associated with work tasks after free play activities among children with ASD.

Finally, the activity schedule plus reinforcement condition was not experimentally-controlled. The purpose of this condition was to evaluate the possibility of behavior improvement, rather than identify and experimentally-control a successful intervention. In other words, because the activity schedule alone was ineffective, it was important to determine if this was in part because the targeted behavior was simply incapable of change. The activity schedule plus reinforcement condition confirmed the ability of the measured behaviors to decrease based on environmental manipulations.

Future Research

Based on the results of this study, several areas of investigation remain regarding the use of activity schedules. All participants in this research received “very likely” scores on the Autism Index and required either Level Two or Level Three support on the GARS – 3 (Gilliam, 2014). Future research might investigate the effectiveness of activity schedules with participants with ASD who have lower Autism Index scores and require Level One support to determine the effectiveness of activity schedules on challenging behavior based on pertinent participant characteristics. Another consideration for future research would be replication of the procedures outlined in this study with participants whose challenging behavior is multiply-maintained, especially those maintained by escape and tangible functions, as this specific area is currently lacking in the literature.

Additionally, future investigations should consider the characteristics and construction of the activity schedules. For example, tailoring activity schedules to meet individuals’ preferences, such as electronic-based schedules for individuals who prefer the iPad®. Furthermore, it may be relevant to consider the order of activities on the schedule, such as the influence of a work activity followed by a play activity. Given participants’ challenging behavior was maintained by access to a tangible, reordering conditions on the activity schedule may assess for additional operant mechanisms that were not a component of this study, leveraging the use of the Premack Principle.

Conclusion

The current study demonstrates that activity schedules produce no effect on tangibly maintained challenging behaviors nor on academic engagement when used as a stand-alone intervention during common classroom transitions from play to work. Additional investigation is warranted on activity schedules given the high social validity of the intervention, either highlighting its effectiveness or narrowing the scope in which it can be successfully utilized. The acceptance and use of activity schedules as an intervention for children diagnosed with ASD whose challenging behavior is tangibly maintained

creates a need to identify components which increase the efficacy of activity schedules if they are to continue to be used in the future.

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Table 1
Characteristics, activities, and operational definitions across participants

Participant	Age	GARS – 3	Play activity	Work task	Challenging behavior	Academic engagement
Tito	12	114 Level 3	Playing a game or watching videos on the iPad®	Reading aloud Grade 3 reading level books	Aggression: using an open palm or fist to hit self, others, or objects	Sitting in the chair, holding the book open, clearly articulating each word, and turning pages at appropriate times
Rocco	10	106 Level 3	Drawing on a whiteboard with a dry erase marker	Math worksheet with 20 two-digit addition and subtraction problems	Aggression: using an open palm or fist to hit self, others, or objects; Noncompliance: sitting or lying on floor, saying “no”	Sitting in the chair, holding the pencil, looking at the worksheet, and counting aloud or writing the answers
Luca	5	94 Level 2	Watching videos on the iPad®	Coloring using crayons and coloring book pages	Screaming: any non-word vocalizations above typical speaking volume or pitch	Sitting in the chair, holding the crayon in his right hand, holding the page down with his left hand, and moving the crayon across the page

Alternative Approaches to IEP Conflict: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

The originators of special education law anticipated disputes and provided due process hearings as a means to settle the disputes. However, due process proved to be unfair, costly (financially and emotionally), and destructive to school-family relationships. Years later, lawmakers offered mandated mediation along with resolution meetings in attempts to lessen the usage of due process. While the number of due process hearings has decreased, mediation and resolution meetings may occur too late in the resolution process to repair broken trust and communication in relationships between families and school districts. Alternative dispute resolution strategies offer means to end conflicts sooner, less expensively, and with fewer damaged relationships.

Alternative Approaches to IEP Conflict: A Review of the Literature

Conflict is unavoidable when disagreement arises between parents and schools; consequently, communication and cooperation break down (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Mueller & Carranza, 2011). Sometimes, due to budget cuts, schools do not offer solutions for meeting students' learning needs in a way that satisfies parents (Gesler, 2014). Unresolved or ineffectively handled conflict in special education leads to costly resolution. Traditional methods of dispute resolution, such as due process hearings, mediation, or resolution sessions are often unfair to either or both parties and are very costly, financially, emotionally, and in lost productivity (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Goldberg and Kuriloff, 1991). Alternative forms of conflict resolution address disputes earlier, enhance communication and cooperation, and provide for solutions that are more equitable. Moses and Hedeon (2012) provide a continuum of dispute stages and levels of intervention beginning with Stage I, which is early in the IEP process and where prevention strategies are useful to avoid conflict, to Stage V, where disagreements have already produced conflict and legal review and litigation are needed.

Traditional Approaches to Dispute Resolution

Due Process Hearing

Within the development of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), Congress provided procedural safeguards including due process hearings. Congress viewed due process as a means of ensuring parental involvement in the education of their children and as a way of settling disputes between school districts and parents. Additionally, hearings were viewed as providing equity for individual conflicts (Friendly, 1975).

However, due process is not fair; it destroys relationships, and it is costly (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Fritz, 2008; Goldberg and Kuriloff, 1991; Hendry, 2010; Mueller, 2009b). Due process hearings fail to meet requirements of three types of fairness—subject, outcome, and objective (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Goldberg & Kuriloff, 1991). In their study, Goldberg and Kuriloff (1991) found that most parents felt that they did receive timely notice of hearings. However, less than half

felt that the school provided either records or explanations in a suitable manner (Goldberg and Kuriloff, 1991). Further, the fact that parents cannot navigate the complexities of a due process system unaided supports the premise that, even in terms of objective fairness, due process is not fair (Cope-Kasten, 2013). Additionally, due process presents roadblocks to minority and low-income parents (Erlichman, Gregory, & St. Florian, 2014).

Due process is costly, both financially and emotionally (Fritz, 2008; Hendry, 2010; Moses & Hedeon, 2012). Parents' legal costs include \$1500-\$7500 plus 10-20 billable attorneys' hours (Moses & Hedeon, 2012; Understanding IEP Due Process, 2009). Parents are emotionally involved due to their concern for their children. Both parties are strongly invested, therefore, emotions run high, and the proceedings can become contentious. However, even though parents may win a case, the preceding conflict may bring about so much anger and animosity that winning a hearing may only provide validation of, rather than healing of, resentment caused by the conflict (Cope-Kasten, 2013). Relationships are damaged and hostility is common after due process hearings (Cope-Kasten, 2013; Mueller, 2009b).

Mediation

Because of the overuse of due process hearings and the facts that hearings that are often hostile and financially burdensome, the 1997 IDEA reauthorization introduced mediation as an option for dispute resolution and then made mediation a requirement in the 2004 reauthorization (34 § § C.F. R. 300.506, 300.510). Mediation is a way to manage conflict between two parties by enlisting the help of an impartial mediator (Hendry, 2010). Mediation has several benefits over due process. Mediation is less costly than due process. Many times, parties seeking mediation have the aim to work together to resolve the dispute. In those instances, mediation has a high success rate (Fritz, 2008). As such, school and family relationships can recover to focus on students and their needs (Hendry, 2010).

However, mediation has its limitations. Mediation is used in Stage IV of disputes where relationships are already damaged (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). State (SEA) and local education agencies (LEA) can make the road to and through the mediation process easier to navigate. Eliminating or minimizing the roles of attorneys, politics (such as mediators needing to provide donations or favors for particular elected officials or when advocacy groups push for litigation in order to change laws), finances, and procedures are positive steps (Fritz, 2008; Mueller, 2009b). Other ways to improve mediation include making it easier to obtaining mediation information, using creativity, providing training and early intervention, and sharing what works (Fritz, 2008). However, when parents or school districts only use mediation as a way to appear reasonable, to garner sound bites to use against the other party in a hearing, or because a school district is forced into mediation, it has a lower chance of success (Fritz, 2008).

Resolution Meeting

In addition to requiring mediation before a due process hearing, IDEA 2004 reauthorization required a school to hold a resolution meeting within 15 days of receiving word that parents have filed for due process with the aim of addressing and resolving concerns without going to a hearing (34 § § C.F. R. 300.510). Like mediation and due process, Resolution Meetings are formal sessions that only occur after cooperative working relationships have disintegrated and are not at all preventative in nature (Mueller, 2009b). Further, Resolution Meetings are not

confidential which could further foster mistrust that one party will use the contents of the discussion against the other (Mueller, 2009a). Resolution Meetings are used in Stage IV of disputes (Moses & Hedeon, 2012).

Alternative Approaches

Alternatives to traditional methods of dispute resolution often begin in earlier stages of conflict and even before conflict arises (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). Numerous alternative dispute resolution strategies exist, including Third-Party Consultation, Parent-to-Parent Assistance, Case Manager, IEP Facilitation, and others (Henderson, 2008; Mueller, 2009b). However, SEAs and LEAs do not use alternative methods of conflict resolution as widely as they could (Hazelkorn, Packard, & Douvanis, 2008).

Facilitated IEP Meetings

Facilitated IEP meetings are useful in Stage III, the *conflict* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). However, use of a facilitator can occur earlier to avoid further animosity and tensions (Diliberto & Brewer, 2014). Similar to regular IEP meetings, Facilitated IEP meetings, include an additional participant, the facilitator. The facilitator is an objective member who maintains order, focus, and civility during a meeting. Facilitated IEP meetings are free to parents and more relaxed than traditional approaches to dispute resolution (Mueller, 2009b). Mueller (2009b) shares seven necessary pieces for fruitful Facilitated IEP meetings. First is a neutral facilitator. Second is an agenda. Lack of meeting agendas was one thing fathers of students with special needs found frustrating about the IEP process (Mueller and Buckley, 2014). Third are goals for the meeting developed by both parties. Next are guidelines for behavior, a collaborative environment, and a communication plan that prevents one party's domination of the meeting. Finally, the use of a "parking lot," which is an area to hold ideas or comments that are important to the meeting but not to the current discussion so the team can consider those ideas later, is an integral part of a facilitated IEP meeting.

States, such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and North Dakota have coordinated facilitated IEP meetings. Most states use trained mediators to serve as facilitators for these meetings (Henderson, 2008). Beginning in 2004 in Wisconsin, states found high success rates using Facilitated IEP meetings. Additionally, some LEAs provide Facilitated IEP meetings. Oregon and Maryland SEAs provide support for LEAs with lists of professional mediators or funding to promote IEP facilitation (Henderson, 2008).

Dispute Resolution Case Managers

Case Managers, personnel who manage formal or informal complaints by providing information about the dispute resolution process and procedures and respond to questions, are useful in Stage II, the *disagreement* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). After parents make a formal complaint, SEAs assign case managers to oversee the dispute issues in order to resolve the problems without going to a due process hearing (Mueller, 2009a). The case manager evaluates the conflict, answers legal questions, and determines the most appropriate dispute resolution procedure. In 2008, 13 states used case managers to help resolve disputes (Henderson, 2008). Related to case managers are Telephone Intermediaries who respond to phone calls requesting assistance. These

are used in several states, including Pennsylvania, North Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota (Henderson, 2008; Mueller, 2009a).

Third-Party Assistance

Third-Party Assistance is a process-focused approach used during bitter disputes. Third-Party Assistance in the forms of opinion and consultation is useful in Stage III, the *conflict* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). Trained consultants combine objectiveness and personal, intuitive aspects to solve current disputes and work to prevent future conflicts (Mueller, 2009a). Few states actively use Third-Party Assistance. Oregon, Washington, and Connecticut use the Third-Party Assistance approach. Connecticut uses the approach most frequently, and in the 73 meetings held between July 2000 and 2008, 92% of disputes did not go to due process (Henderson, 2008).

Parent-to-Parent Assistance

Parent-to-Parent Assistance programs are useful in Stage II, the *disagreement* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). Parent-to-Parent Assistance includes parent support groups, parent training and information centers, and mentorships (Henderson, 2008; Mueller, 2009a). Parent-to-Parent Assistance can provide legal assistance and support in navigating the IEP process, the special education system, and learning about parent rights (Mueller, 2009a). Parents are trained to support and help other parents prepare for meetings and provide support through meeting processes and during the meetings themselves (Henderson, 2008). In her study, Henderson (2008) found that at least 26 states use Parent-to-Parent Assistance.

Kutash, Duchnowski, Green, and Ferron (2011) found that, although there is limited research on the topic, parents of students with emotional disturbances show increasing interest in parent-to-parent assistance programs. Further, they found that Parent-to-Parent Assistance, in addition to supporting parents through the special education system, can aid in improved academic achievement and emotional function of students (Kutash et al., 2011). Additionally, Mueller, Milian, and Lopez (2009) found that Latina mothers of special needs children benefited from Parent-to-Parent Assistance, grew in their parenting skills, and increased confidence in their participation in the special education system and the IEP process.

Other Alternative Approaches

Ombuds, Alternative or Non-IDEA Mediation, and Stakeholder Management or Oversight Councils are other strategies to resolve special education conflict (Henderson, 2008; Mueller, 2009b). Ombuds are informal, neutral brokers of justice and conflict resolution who examine the issues with the parties, study the law, and recommend a resolution (Alcover, 2009; Magritte, 2009; Mueller, 2009a). Ombuds are useful in Stage III, the *conflict* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012).

Alternative or Non-IDEA Mediation is different from mediation mandated by IDEA 2004. In Alternative Mediation, two or more mediators work together to settle disagreements (Henderson, 2008; Mueller, 2009a). This type of mediation is useful in Stage II, the *disagreement* stage (Moses & Hedeon, 2012). Some states use Stakeholder Management or Oversight Councils to provide counsel on resolving special education conflicts. Stakeholder Management or Oversight Councils generally operate at the state level, rather than the local level. Some states use the

IDEA mandated advisory panel as an Oversight Council. Some states, such as North Dakota, meet on a regular basis to inspect dispute resolution data (Henderson, 2008).

Conclusions and Areas for Further Study

The originators of special education law anticipated disputes and provided due process hearings as a means to settle disputes. However, due process proved to be unfair, costly (financially and emotionally), and destructive to school-family relationships. Years later, lawmakers offered, and then mandated, mediation along with resolution meetings in attempts to lessen the usage of due process. While the number of due process hearings decreased due to mediation and resolution meetings, they may occur too late in the resolution process to repair broken trust and communication in relationships between families and school districts. Alternative approaches to conflict resolution exist and SEAs and LEAs use them with success in many states. Alternative dispute resolution strategies include Third-Party Consultation, Parent-to-Parent Assistance, Case Manager, IEP Facilitation, and others.

Although the literature mentioned Pennsylvania as using several alternative approaches to dispute resolution, I, as a 16-year special education teacher in urban, suburban, and cyber school districts and a parent of children with special needs, never heard of any of them as options to mediation or due process. Thus, several questions arise. Who on the local level is aware of alternatives that would be less costly financially and emotionally to parents, teachers, and school districts? If special education administrators are aware of alternative approaches to dispute resolution, which alternatives are used, how often are they used, and which are the most successful?

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Evaluating the Validity and Reliability of a Student Self-Advocacy Teacher Rating Scale

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Abstract

Self-advocacy skills are critical to high school and post-secondary success. Unfortunately, students with disabilities often times struggle with self-advocacy. While there are effective, evidence-based programs to teach self-advocacy skills, there are few scales that directly measure self-advocacy. The current research study was conducted to develop and evaluate a valid and reliable self-advocacy teacher-report scale. The scale was developed, piloted, and evaluated with high school students with disabilities. The study results from the study indicate that the self-advocacy scale is a valid and reliable measure of a student's self-advocacy behavior, and that the scale help explain a notable amount of variation of classroom success. Implications, future research and limitations are discussed.

Evaluating the Validity and Reliability of a Student Self-Advocacy Teacher Rating Scale

Self-advocacy can be defined as a person's ability to seek out and request supports based on his or her specific needs (Wood et al., 2004). When someone self-advocates, the individual recognizes that he or she has a need for support in one or more areas, is able to identify the types of supports required, identify someone who is able to provide said supports, and then actively request the supports (Wehmeyer, 2015). The actions are seen as explicit, purposeful, and intentional (Test et al., 2005). These behaviors can begin early in life, but it is during the high school and post-secondary years, when students are perceived to be more independent and better able to self-monitor, that the quality of self-advocacy, or lack thereof, has an increasingly noticeable impact on daily functioning (Wehman, 2013).

High school students are expected to independently seek out and request necessary supports (Powers et al. 2001), recognize when content is not understood and seek out clarification, reflect on the quality of their learning, request accommodations and modifications, and clarification and support on assignments and tests (Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994). Given these expectations, it is understandable that students with higher levels of self-advocacy tend to have higher rates of academic achievement and higher rates of productivity (Cobb et al., 2009).

Whereas self-advocacy skills are important to high school success, they are critical to post-secondary transition success (McCall, 2015; Seong et al., 2015). Individuals with well-developed self-advocacy skills have better levels of adjustment across both school and career (Doren & Kang, 2015); are more likely to live independently, acquire and maintain employment, and have higher earnings (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997); and are more likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy and resilience (Grover, 2005). In post-secondary academic institutions, students are required to seek out and request desired accommodations from universities, discuss those needs with professors, utilize university resources, and seek academic help from teachers (Brinckerhoff, 1994). Outside of post-secondary academic institutions, the responsibility to self-

advocate is placed primarily on the individual (Rothman, Maldonado, & Rothman, 2008), and the focus of the advocacy shifts towards more non-academic needs like such as searching out employment, transportation, health care, mental health support and living arrangements (McConnell et al., 2013).

Students with disabilities are found to frequently struggle with self-advocacy, both in high school and in post-secondary settings (Gil, 2007). It can pose an even more significant challenge for students enrolled in post-secondary academic institutions due to the higher expectations academically, behaviorally, and socially (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Potential reasons students with disabilities struggle with self-advocacy include not being aware of their own needs, not knowing what supports are available where to go to get supports, and how to request the supports (Schreiner, 2007). Often time they might feel self-conscious about asking for help, or be overwhelmed by the amount of academic or cognitive resources necessary to complete the tasks (Rothman, Maldonado, & Rothman, 2008).

Due to the nature of their specific needs, it is a common for high school students receiving support through an individualized education plan (IEP) to have instruction and goals on self-advocacy (Pham, 2013; Wehmeyer, Argan, & Huges, 2000). This is especially true those students with learning disabilities (Algozzine et al., 2001) and intellectual disabilities (Fowler et al., 2007). Research has shown that students with disabilities show an increase in self-advocacy skills after receiving direct self-advocacy instruction (Test & Neale, 2004). This instruction often takes the form of direct instruction within the classroom or on a consultative-basis (Newman, Madaus, & Javitz, 2016; Field et al., 1998), and instructional components include a focus on knowledge, skills training, and self-awareness (White, 2014). Students are better able to maintain and generalize the learned skills when the skills are directly taught and modeled, they are given feedback about their performance, and they are given the opportunity to practice their skills across different environments (Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994).

While there are multiple evidence-based programs to teach self-advocacy skills (Brinckerhoff, 1994; Phillips, 1990), there are few scales that directly measure self-advocacy. Among the few existing rating scales, almost all reflect the student's perception of his or her own abilities, and do not allow for valuable input from outside raters (Miller et al, 2014; Cleary & Callan, 2013). This poses a potential challenge to the validity of the transition assessment process because high school students can have a distorted view of their own abilities, may not be completely accurate in their reporting, and may be unreliable narrators (Bandura, 2012; Stone & May, 2002; Levine, Clarke, & Ferb, 1981).

One solution to enhance validity and utility of self-advocacy assessments is to utilize teacher-rating scales, which allows for comparison of behaviors across settings (Mazzotto et al., 2009; Neubert & Leconte, 2013). Teacher reports can assess student behavior across environments, helping teachers target a student's specific strengths and weaknesses (Hoge & Coladarci, 1989). The current research study was conducted to develop and evaluate a valid and reliable self-advocacy teacher-report scale that, in effect, can be used to evaluate the current level of a student's self-advocacy skills.

Method

Participants

The study included participants from a high school located inside an urban midwestern city. The high school has approximately 1,500 students. 77% of the students are Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 3% Black, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1% Pacific Islander. Approximately 23% of the students are on free/reduced lunch. It has a graduation rate of 93%.

All of the data were collected through the special education evaluation process. All of the students were in the process of a three-year special education reevaluation. From a group of 70 students going through a special education evaluation, a total of 24 students were randomly selected. Of those students, 10 were female and 14 were male. The ages of the students ranged from 14 to 18: 7 students were age 14, 11 were age 15, 3 were age 17, and 3 were age 18. The average student was in 9th grade: 18 students were in grade 9, 3 were in grade 11, and 3 were in grade 12. Of the population sampled, 10 were diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability, 11 with an Other Health Disability, and 3 with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. All of the students were Caucasian.

Materials

Test et al. (2005) developed a conceptual framework for self-advocacy consisting of four different components: knowledge of the self, knowledge of one's rights, communication skills, and leadership ability. Knowledge of self and rights provided the foundation to the framework, as one needs to know about one's self and their rights before being able to advocate for one's needs. Once this awareness exists, effective communication of those needs becomes the next component. Finally, one can advocate for the various rights of others (Test et al., 2005).

The scale was developed utilizing the conceptual model developed by Test et al. (2005). The items were reviewed by content experts (e.g. special education teachers, social workers, and school psychologists) to establish content validity, understandability, and usefulness, or the ability for the questions to be developed into IEP goals.

The scale then was piloted at the start of the school year. The initial scale had 19 questions all on a four-point Likert scale. Eight teachers, four special education teachers and four general education teachers, were randomly selected to complete the scale. Two teachers were sampled from each grade. Each teacher was asked to think of one general education student and one special education student who they felt performed at an average level, and fill out the scale, once for each student. The scale was provided to the teachers through an online format. Item analysis was run to identify questions that were least consistent with the overall concept of self-advocacy. Any item with a total correlation below .80 was deleted.

Procedures

Data collection occurred over the course of 6 month. During the data collection phase, the primary investigator reviewed the survey information with each teacher. The teachers were informed that they would be completing an assessment as part of a special education evaluation. An administrator described the purpose of the test to the teachers. Teachers were then sent a link to an online survey. The instructions on the survey clearly described the assessment procedures.

Results

A listing of test items can be found in Table 1. Descriptive information regarding students' scores can be found in Table 2 and Table 3. It is recommended that the scores be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. Overall, males showed slightly higher levels of self-advocating behavior when compared to females, and individuals with Other Health Impairments showed slightly higher levels compared to those students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Table 1.
Test Items

Item	Question
1	Asks adults for help with difficult tasks
2	Demonstrates he or she knows where to go for help
3	Accepts teacher help and corrections
4	Clearly communicates thoughts, opinions, wants, and needs
5	Uses emotional language and blame when receiving teacher feedback
6	Proactively requests support/clarification prior to the start of a task
7	Allows other to talk during a conversation without interrupting
8	Follows the procedure for asking for support
9	Has trouble understanding and applying feedback
10	Makes claims of unfairness, negligence, or personalization of attacks

Upon examination of the individual survey items, the highest scores were yielded from question four ("Allows others to talk during a conversation without interrupting") and question six ("Uses emotional language and blame when receiving teacher or student critiques and feedback"). The lowest scored item was question seven ("Proactively requests support/clarification prior to the start of a task"). The results indicate that the majority of surveyed students were able to hold a conversation and use calm or neutral language when conversing with a teacher, and that many students struggled with requesting help prior to starting an activity.

Table 2.
Descriptive Table of Total Score

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall Sample	31.96	7.07
Male	34.00	7.52
Female	29.10	5.51
Specific Learning Disability	31.60	7.35
Other Health Impairment	32.45	7.80

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Individual Questions for Overall Sample

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	2.04	.81
2	2.46	.78
3	2.67	.87
4	3.13	.74
5	2.33	.82
6	3.63	.65
7	1.71	.69
8	2.46	.72
9	2.50	1.14
10	2.63	1.01

Internal consistency of the scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha, and the value for the total number of items was .91, indicating that the test contains a set of reliable items assessing a similar construct. Next, multiple regression was run to test if the overall score for each student was related to the end-of-semester grade he or she earned in the class taught by the rater ($r^2 = .32$, $F(1, 22) = 10.2$, $p < .01$). The data indicates that a student's overall score on the scale can account for 32% of the variance in that student's earned letter grade.

Finally, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to explore the optimal number of factors presented by the data that represent student performance. Analysis was run using oblique rotation and the factor loadings were estimated using maximum likelihood. The results for the factor analysis can be found in Table 4.

Table 4.

Factor Loadings for Proposed Self-Advocacy Models

Item	Model 1	Model 2		Model 3		
	F1	F1	F2	F1	F2	F3
1	.81	.79		.42		.39
2	.75	.64	.19	.18	.26	.41
3	.72	.30	.54	.22	.59	
4	.72	.73		.81		-.11
5	.65	-.15	1.08		1.21	-.27
6	.82	.91		.52		.43
7	.78	.84		1.30	-.21	-.28
8	.66	.88	-.27	-.28	-.22	1.31
9	.83	.58	.31	.49	.31	.12
10	.63		.87	-.25	.99	

The factor loadings in Model 1 range from .63 to .83, in Model 2 range from -.27 to 1.08, and in Model 3 range from -.28 to 1.31. Using guidance from MacCallum et al. (1991; 2001), factor

loadings of .60 or greater were considered to have practical significance due to the small sample size. Models 2 and 3 have multiple loadings that fall below this threshold, indicating that Model 1, which utilizes a single overall factor, is a better representation of the data.

Discussion

The current research study was conducted to develop and evaluate a valid and reliable self-advocacy teacher-report scale. The overall results from the study suggest that the self-advocacy scale is a valid and reliable measure of a student's self-advocacy behavior. Analyses indicate that the scale has adequate reliability and validity. The internal consistency figure falls into what is considered the excellent range of reliability (Streiner, 2003), suggesting that scale's items shared covariance and may be measuring the same concept. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to further identify the possibility that the scale items represent one or more constructs representing self-advocacy behavior. The factor analysis results indicate that the scores best represent a single construct, and that the total scale yielded by the scale may likely be a good representation of one's self-advocacy skills. Finally, as a measure of classroom utility, the scale was evaluated as a predictive measure of classroom success. The results indicate that the self-advocacy scale may be able to explain a notable amount of variation of classroom success.

The results from the current study support the conceptual model of self-advocacy developed by Test et al. (2015) that proposed self-advocacy consists of knowledge of the self, knowledge of one's rights, communication skills, and leadership ability. The current assessment was developed around this framework. While results from the factor analysis suggest that a single score on the test is a more accurate representation of one's self-advocacy skills than using multiple scores to represent the different model areas, the different components are still representative of one's overall self-advocacy ability. The results also support the findings from Fowler et al. (2007) that levels of self-advocacy are correlated with academic achievement.

The results indicate that the proposed self-advocacy scale may be one useful tool when conducting transition assessments. In a secondary setting, the scale can likely be used to set goals and monitor progress on a student's self-advocacy skills, evaluate program effectiveness, and provide information on a student's classroom performance. The scale's uses in a post-secondary setting can be similar; it can be used to help gauge an individual's skills so appropriate programming and supports can be implemented.

When interpreting the results of the study, it is important to consider the study's limitations. First, the study used a small sample size. Typically, a minimum sample size of 50 individuals is recommended for exploratory factor analysis. However, smaller sample sizes have been found to be acceptable with factor analysis (de Winter, Dodou, & Wieringa, 2009). Further research should expand the sample size. The second limitation is that the sample utilized was a convenience sample of existing special education students. While special education students are considered the target population for the scale, further research should evaluate the statistics across a larger, more stratified sample. Third, while the scale was designed to be smaller and more practical for teachers to complete, fewer items may have an impact on the ability to establish more accurate factor loadings (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Future research should look to expand on the scale and develop new, more comprehensive assessments. Finally, the validity

and reliability of the scale was assessed in a limited environment. Future research should expand on those characteristics, including its construct and predictive validity outside of the school setting.

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