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## **Targeting Social, Academic, & Transition Needs of Young Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder**



**Guest Editor: Linda R. Schreiber, M.S., CCC-SLP, BCS-CL, ASHA Fellow**

**In partnership with American Board of Child Language and Language Disorders**



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## **Self-Determination and Transition to Adulthood: Promoting Autonomy and Student Involvement**

**Michael Wehmeyer, PhD**

Moderated by:  
Amy Natho, MS, CCC-SLP, CEU Administrator, [SpeechPathology.com](http://SpeechPathology.com)





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# Self-Determination and Transition to Adulthood

Promoting Autonomy and Student Involvement

Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ph.D.  
University of Kansas



## Learning Objectives

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Define self-determination and describe its importance in the education of adolescents with disabilities.
- Identify resources to implement practices that promote self-determination.
- Describe how to engage in practices that promote student involvement in educational and transition planning.

## Sources for Presentation

- Zager, D., Wehmeyer, M.L., & Simpson, R. (Eds.)(2012). *Educating students with autism spectrum disorders: Research-based principles and practices*. New York: Taylor & Francis
- Wehmeyer, M.L. & Webb, K.W. (Eds.)(2012). *Handbook of adolescent transition education for youth with disabilities*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Shogren, K.A., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (2018). *PRO-ED series on Autism Spectrum Disorders: Self-determination*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED

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## IDEA Transition Requirements

“Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the [student] turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills;
- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the [student] in reaching those goals; and
- Beginning not later than one year before the [student] reaches the age of majority under State law, ...a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B..., if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under §300.520.”

[34 CFR 300.320 (b) and (c)]

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## IDEA Transition Requirements

“Transition Services means a coordinated set of activities for a [student] with a disability that:

- (1) is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
- (2) is based on the individual [student’s] needs, taking into account the [student’s] preferences and interests.”

[34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]

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## IDEA Transition Requirements

“The LEA must invite a child with a disability to attend the child’s IEP Team meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.”

[34 CFR 300.321(b)] [20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(B)]

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[34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]

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## Determining an Evidence Base

U.S. Department of Education, Office of  
Special Education Programs Evidence-based  
Practice Initiative

National Technical Assistance Center in  
Transition Effective Practices and Predictors  
Matrix

(<https://www.transitionta.org/effectivepractices>)

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## Determining an Evidence Base

### Levels of Evidence

**Strong:** Multiple quality group experimental design studies and/or single subject design studies and sufficient effect sizes from meta-analytic studies.

**Moderate:** A few quality group experimental design studies and/or single subject design studies, multiple correlational studies, some systematic synthesis of findings.

(<https://www.transitionta.org/effectivepractices>)

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## Determining an Evidence Base

Follows Taxonomy for Transition Programming\* framework:

Five Transition Domains

**Student Development:** Includes strategies in life skills instruction, career and vocational curricula, structured work experience, and assessment.

**Student-Focused Planning:** Includes practices in the areas of IEP development, student participation in planning, and planning strategies.

**Interagency Collaboration:** Includes practices in the areas of collaborative frameworks and collaborative service delivery.

**Family Involvement:** Includes practices in family training, family involvement, and family empowerment.

**Program Structure:** Includes practices in program philosophy, policy and evaluation, strategic planning, resource allocation, and human resource development

\*Kohler, P. D., Gothberg, J. E., Fowler, C., and Coyle, J. (2016). Taxonomy for transition programming 2.0: A model for planning, organizing, and evaluating transition education, services, and programs. Western Michigan University. Available at [https://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/Tax\\_Trans\\_Prog\\_0.pdf](https://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/Tax_Trans_Prog_0.pdf).

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## Evidence Base: Student Development

- Strong Evidence for Practices:
  - Teaching Functional Life Skills
  - Teaching Purchasing Skills
  - Teaching **Self-Advocacy Skills**
  - Teaching **Self-Determination Skills**
- Moderate Evidence for Practices
  - Teaching Functional Reading/Math Skills
  - Teaching Independent Living (banking, cooking, food preparation, grocery shopping, recreation, etc.) skills.
  - Teaching life skills via community-based instruction
  - Teaching job-related social/communication skills
  - Teaching job specific employment skills.
  - Teaching job application skills
  - Teaching **self-management** for employment skills

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## Evidence Base: Student-Focused Planning

- Strong Evidence for Practices:
  - Teaching **self-advocacy skills**
  - Teaching **self-determination skills**
  - Promoting **student involvement** using the Self-Directed IEP
  - Promoting **student involvement** using Whose Future is it Anyway?
- Moderate Evidence for Practices
  - Involving students in transition planning meetings

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## Evidence Base: Family Involvement & Program Structure

### Family Involvement

- Moderate Evidence for Practices
  - Parent/Family attendance at IEP meetings

### Program Structure

- Moderate Evidence for Practices
  - Providing community-based instruction
  - Plan programs and curricula that are outcome-based and meet individual student needs
  - Extend services beyond secondary to post-school environments
  - Work experience during school years, either through school or holding a part time job
  - Participation in regular academic program

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## “High Leverage” Practices in Transition

Adolescents who:

- participate in general education and who take academic courses have improved post-secondary outcomes.
- have paid work experiences in high school have more positive post-school employment outcomes.
- have occupational courses during high school have more positive post-school employment and education outcomes.
- receive instruction to promote self-determination and leave high school as more self-determined achieve more positive post-school employment and community inclusion outcomes.

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## What is Self-Determination?

Self-Determination is a “dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the *causal agent* in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life” (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258).

- Causal agency
- Volitional action
- Determinism

Shogren, K.A., Wehmeyer, M.L., Palmer, S.B., Forber-Pratt, A., Little, T., & Lopez, S. (2015). Causal Agency Theory: Reconceptualizing a functional model of self-determination. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(3), 251-263

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## Misperceptions of Self-Determination

- Self-determination as control.
- Self-determination as independent performance.
- Self-determination as just making a choice.
- Self-determination as just running your IEP meeting.

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## Why is Promoting Self-Determination Important?

- People with disabilities consistently say it is important to them.
- Current transition-related outcomes for youth with disabilities are less positive than preferred.
  - This is true for adolescents with ASD who experience high rates of unemployment, social isolation, and high levels of dependence upon families.
- There is strong causal evidence of the impact of promoting self-determination on school and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.

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## What Does Research Tell Us About Self-Determination and Adolescents with Disabilities

Research documents that:

- adolescents with disabilities are not as self-determined as youth without disabilities.
- adolescents who are more self-determined:
  - achieve more positive academic outcomes and improve their ability to engage with the general education curriculum.
  - achieve academic and transition goals at higher rates.
  - attain more positive employment and community inclusion outcomes one and two years post-graduation.
- If adolescents are provided instruction to promote self-determination, they become more self-determined.

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## What Does Research Tell Us About Self-Determination and Adolescents with ASD?

- Youth with ASD have been included, proportionally, in several randomized-trial intervention studies, so there is no reason to believe that the interventions that have been shown to be effective cannot be effective with adolescents with ASD.
- Youth with ASD are less self-determined than either peers with intellectual disability or learning disabilities (Chou et al., 2017).

Chou, Y., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S., & Lee, J. H. (2017). Comparisons of self-determination among students with autism, intellectual disability, and learning disabilities: A multivariate analysis. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 32(2), 124-132

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## Promoting Self-Determination

- Infuse instruction on component elements of determined behavior throughout the curriculum.
- Promote student active self-direction.
- Promote student involvement in transition planning.
- Use evidence-based practices.

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## Instruction on Component Elements of Self-Determined Behavior

- Choice-making opportunities
- Decision-making skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Goal setting and attainment skills
- Self-advocacy skills
- Self-management skills
- Self-initiation skills
- Self-awareness
- Self-knowledge

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## Issues in Preference and Choice for Adolescents with ASD

- Adolescents with ASD may have fewer opportunities to learn about preferences based on personal experiences than their non-disabled peers.
- Adolescents with ASD with communication limitations may not be able to express preferences in traditional ways.
- Problem behavior as an expression of preference.
- Adolescents with ASD who have special interest areas may focus choices exclusively on that as opposed to wider range of options.
  - On the other hand, of course, special interest areas provide an opportunity to integrate choice making into almost any activity

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### Issues in Problem Solving for Adolescents with ASD

- Most problems involve interactions with other people (e.g., social problem solving) and involve interpreting others' actions and emotions, which may pose difficulties for people with ASD.
  - We should be focusing social skills training more on social problem solving.
  - Adolescents with ASD often have difficulty in determining social solutions to problems as well as difficulty in responding quickly in social situations.
- Adolescents with ASD generate fewer high quality solutions to problems and are less likely to choose the best solutions.

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### Issues in Decision Making for Adolescents with ASD

- Adolescents with ASD may have relatively more difficulty processing the emotions associated with the decision-making process, given that this is often a process characterized by uncertainty, which may be difficult for some students with ASD.

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## Issues in Goal Setting for Adolescents with ASD

- Adolescents with ASD may have a difficult time attending to multiple goals. Research has shown that students with ASD tend to be more sequential in their goal-directed behavior. They tend have difficulty engaging in multiple goal-directed activities concurrently, but also tend to jump from activity to activity in the process of goal attainment.

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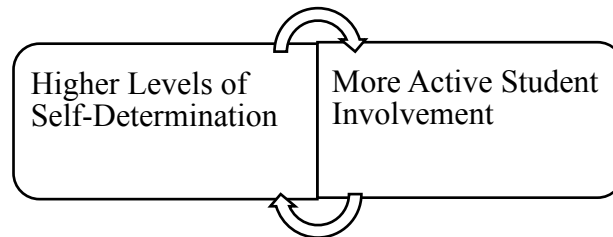
## Promoting Adolescent Self-Direction

- Self-instruction, self-monitoring, self-scheduling, self-reinforcement, and self-managed antecedent cue strategies.
- Research has shown that interventions using self-directed learning/self-management strategies have led to improved problem solving skills, improved communicative behavior, improved daily living skills, better academic performance, and reductions in disruptive behavior for adolescents with ASD.

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## Involvement in Transition Planning

- Student involvement promotes self-determination (and students who are more self-determined are more likely to be involved in their educational planning).
- Student involvement results in enhanced transition knowledge.
- Students who are involved in their transition planning feel more empowered.



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## Use Evidence-Based Practices

Data exists to support the efficacy of the following interventions/programs:

- Steps to Self-Determination (Hoffman & Field, 1995)
  - Published by ProEd (<http://www.proedinc.com>)
- TAKE CHARGE for the Future
  - Contact Dr. Laurie Powers at the University of Portland
- Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000)
  - <http://www.ngsd.org>
  - <http://self-determination.org>

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## Use Evidence-Based Practices

Data exists to support the efficacy of the following interventions/programs:

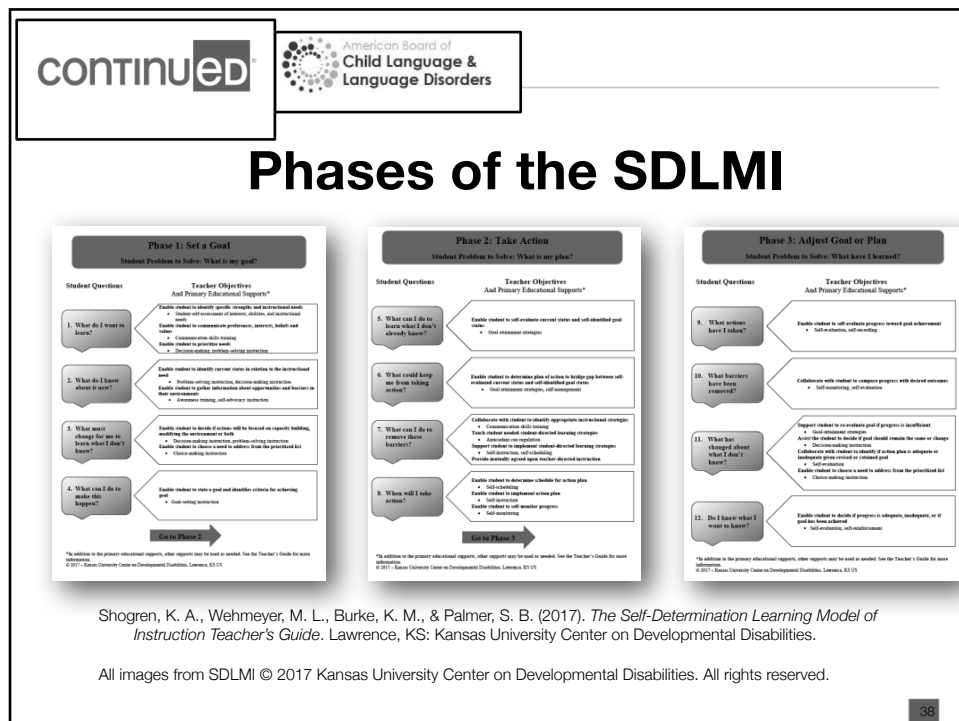
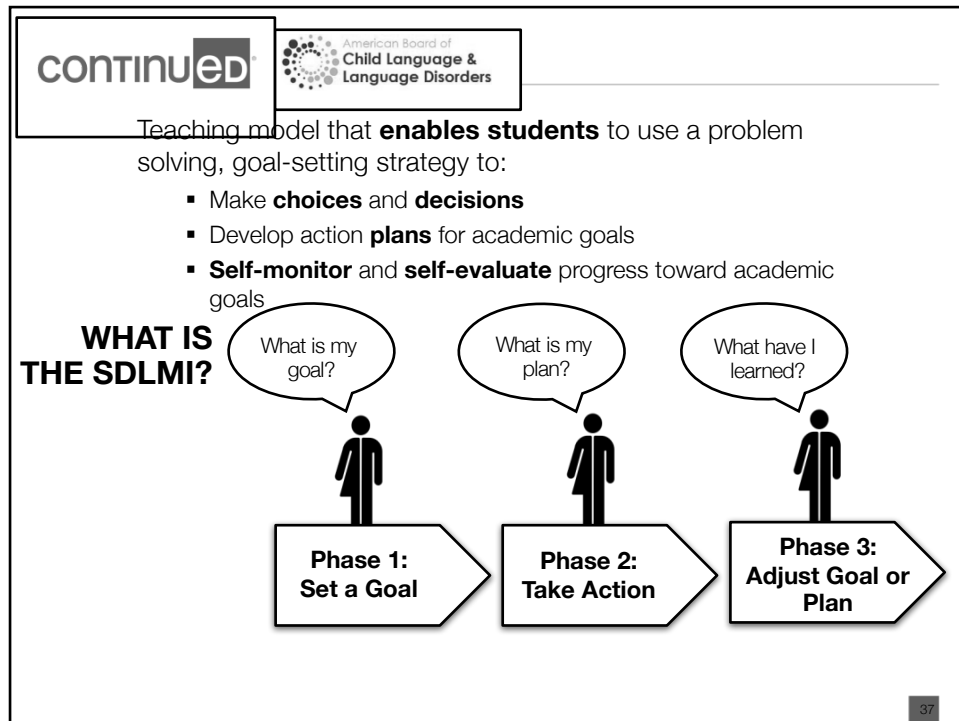
- Next S.T.E.P. (Halpern, et al., 1997)
  - Published by ProEd (<http://www.proedinc.com>)
- Self-Directed IEP (Martin, Huber Marshall, Maxon, & Jerman, 1997)
  - Information on Zarrow Center at OU website (<http://education.ou.edu/zarrow/>).
- Self-Advocacy Strategy (VanReusen et al., 2002).
  - Contact University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (<http://www.ku-crl.org/>).
- Whose Future is it Anyway? (Wehmeyer et al., 2005).
  - Available online at OU Zarrow Center (<http://education.ou.edu/zarrow/>).

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## Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI)



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Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction

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**[www.self-determination.org](http://www.self-determination.org)**

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