

SELF-ADVOCACY AS A GOAL FOR EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research project reviews selected literature on self-advocacy instruction to highlight (a) its importance as a focus for education and (b) the barriers towards its implementation. Several studies have recognized that the transition from high school to PSE presents a series of challenges for students with disabilities (e.g., Madaus, 2005; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Results of research, however, associate self-advocacy skills with better transitions into PSE and adult life by students with disabilities (Norton, 1997; Roessler, Brown, & Rumrill; 1998; Satcher, 1995). A salient barrier towards self-advocacy education is a lack of sufficient training in preservice education. This paper concludes with recommendations for the development of such training and implications for educational research.

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Introduction

During my primary/junior teacher training in an Ontario Concurrent Education program, I observed that there is minimal to no instruction related to self-advocacy education. Furthermore, I noticed that the Ministry of Education of Ontario's Special Education *A Guide For Educators* (2001) curriculum, acknowledges that self-advocacy is critical for students with disabilities; however, there is no information for future and current educators on how to teach self-advocacy skills. During 2011/12, I collaborated with eight peers, four of whom are persons with disabilities, on a Self-Advocacy Workshop for 55 high school students with disabilities, as part of a social sciences directed reading course with Dr. Neita Israelite. This group enabled us to create and teach skills imperative for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. The project had a major impact on my understanding of the importance of self-advocacy skills for equitable learning.

Purpose of Project: The above experiences as well as the lack of discussion on self-advocacy in teacher training in the professional literature are the major impetus for this research project in which I review selected literature on self-advocacy instruction to highlight (a) its importance as a focus for education and (b) the barriers towards its implementation.

Although there is a range of definitions for the construct of self-advocacy (see pg. 10 for discussion), for purposes of this paper I have chosen to adopt the one proposed by Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, and Deshler (1994). These researchers define self-advocacy as "an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert this or her interests, desires, needs, and rights. It assumes the abilities to make informed decision. It also means taking responsibility for those decisions." This comprehensive definition is frequently referenced in

articles and handbooks related to self-advocacy and self-advocacy education (e.g., Astramovich & Harris, 2007; Schelling & Rao, 2013; Schreiner, 2007).

Rationale

Students with disabilities in North America have increasingly been attending post-secondary education (PSE) although they are still underrepresented in both Canada and the United States (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; McCoy & DeClou, 2013). For example, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) by the U.S. Department of Education found that 45 percent of the youth with disabilities attended PSE within 4 years of completing high school in comparison to 53 percent of their non-disabled peers (Newman, Wagner, Camelo, & Knokey, 2009, p. 14). In Canada, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics reported that 59 percent of disabled students between the ages of 18 and 21 in Ontario attended PSE in comparison to 72 percent of students without a disability (McCloy & DeClou, 2013, p. 7). Nevertheless, Ontario's numbers of students with disabilities in PSE have significantly grown in the past decade. Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities identifies that the number of students that registered with their university's disability services offices increased by 69 percent between 2003-2004 and 2010-2011 (McCloy and DeClou, 2013, p. 9).

Several studies have recognized that the transition from high school to PSE presents a series of challenges for students with disabilities (e.g. Madaus, 2005; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). In high school, students with disabilities usually have the support of parents and teachers, who support and advocate for them and their educational adaptations. A significant shift occurs when these students enter PSE and become primarily responsible for independently securing their own educational adaptations. Attempting to adapt to this new environment without preparation has contributed to a lack of persistence and retention of disabled students (Brinkerhoff, McGuire, &

Shaw, 2002; Gil, 2007; Getzel & McManus, 2005; Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Results of research, however, associate self-advocacy skills with better transitions into PSE and adult life by students with disabilities (Norton, 1997; Roessler, Brown, & Rumrill; 1998; Satcher, 1995). Therefore, it is important to review research on self-advocacy instruction to advance initiatives aimed at making the experience of PSE more successful for students with disabilities.

Language usage and models disability. There are conflicting views about how to refer to persons with disabilities in professional writing. As Dunn and Andrews (2015) explain, the American Psychological Association (APA) promotes the use of person-first language (e.g. person with disabilities) when referring to individuals with disabilities “in daily discourse and to reduce bias in psychological writing,” (p. 255). Conversely, advocates of Disability culture have questioned the implications and reasons for solely using person-first language and thus, promote the use of identity-first language (e.g., disabled person) to signify the importance of the label of disability to the life of the disabled individual (p. 255).

The two models of disability that are relevant to the use of language in this research project are the social model and the minority model. Both challenge the traditional medical model, which views disability as a problem within the individual to be fixed or cured by medical and/or educational intervention. In contrast, the social model posits that the “problem” of disability lies within the social barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in society rather than within the individuals themselves. Person-first language arose from the social model of disability through the advocacy work of Beatrice A. Wright. Wright (1983) argued that person-first language would “preserve disabled people’s humanity while promoting their individuality,” (Wright, 1983). Dunn and Andrews (2015) explain that person-first language is important because every person with disabilities has different experiences, and

that they should not be referred to by monolithic and stereotypical terms. The authors further discuss, however, that advocates of identity-first language do not agree with this perspective, claiming that the person-first language approach “subtly implies that there is something inherently negative about disability” and that it disassociates the person from their disability (p. 257).

The minority model (also referred to as the diversity model) views disability as a “neutral, or even positive, as well as naturalistic characteristic or human attribute-not a medical problem requiring a cure, nor a representation of moral failing,” (Dunn & Andrews, 2015, p. 259) The minority model views disability as another characteristic of diversity such as race or sexual orientation, that, therefore, should be valued as a part of a person’s identity (Dunn & Andrews, 2015, p. 259). Identity-first language stems from the minority model as it “construes disability as a function of social and political experiences occurring within a world designed largely for nondisabled people,” (p. 259).

In keeping with Dunn and Andrews’ (2015) suggestion for researchers and practitioners, in this MRP, I am flexible in my use of person-first and identity-first language. Disability is experienced differently and individually. Thus I use both person-first and identity-first language to respect individuals who identify as members of the disability culture as well as those who prefer being referred to with person-first language.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Definitions of Self-Advocacy

As stated previously, there is a range of definitions for self-advocacy in education, which, according to Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy (2005), “could understandably lead to confusion for anyone trying to design instruction to promote self-advocacy skills” (p. 51). Test et al.’s 2005 review indicated three predominant ways that self-advocacy is defined: (1) as a civil rights movement (2) as a component of self-determination, and (3) as a goal for education. In the following sections, I review these conceptualizations in further detail and provide a rationale for this paper’s focus on self-advocacy as an educational goal.

Self-Advocacy as a civil rights movement. Self-advocacy first found its roots in movements that fought for the participation of persons with disabilities, in particular those with intellectual disabilities, in everyday life. Traditionally, people with intellectual disabilities lived out their lives in segregated institutions. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, there was a shift towards models of normalization in Scandinavia, promoted first by Bank-Mikkelsen (1969) and then by Nirje (1969), which advocated for the placement of these individuals in settings that “normalized” their daily living conditions and recognized their entitlement to human rights of all other citizens,” (Nirje, 1969, p. 19). Wolfensberger (1972) was the first to introduce the principle of normalization to the United States and Canada. In his seminal work, *The principle of normalization in human services*, Wolfensberger advocated for the deinstitutionalization of *all* disabled persons, not only those with intellectual disabilities, and articulated the changes that would need to be made in the community to welcome these individuals (Lemay, 1995, p. 6; Wolfensberger, 1972, p. 28).

Self-advocacy movements in North America emerged in tandem with the evolution of the normalization model and were strongly influenced by the civil rights movements of marginalized groups such as African-Americans, women, as well as parents advocating on behalf of their disabled children (Williams & Shoultz, 1982). In the United States, the origin of self-advocacy is connected to a group of individuals with disabilities from Oregon, who coined the phrase “We are people first” (Caldwell, 2011, p. 315; Test et al., 2005, p. 43). This group, called *People First*, hosted the first international self-advocacy conference in 1974 (Edwards, 1982, p. 110). The impact of the conference rapidly spread to other parts of North America.

In Canada, the People First movement (People First of Canada) began in 1973 in British Columbia and spread throughout the country over the next several years. The first issue that this organization addressed was the right of persons with intellectual disabilities to live in their communities. Today, People First continues to bring issues of deinstitutionalization, equal employment, inclusive education, and citizenship to the forefront in communities across the country (www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca). People First self-advocacy groups as well as parent advocates of children with disabilities have been instrumental in shaping legislation that affects the education of students with disabilities in both Canada and the United States (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p. 219).

Self-advocacy as a component of self-determination. Several authors conceptualize self-advocacy not as an independent construct but rather as a subset of self-determination. Self-determination may be defined 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 of oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society. (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2)

It has been widely suggested that self-determination enhances disabled persons' quality of life (Gagne, 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998) by: providing them with a greater sense of autonomy (Gagne, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997), increasing their involvement in educational planning and goal setting, (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995), and increasing post-school outcomes such as employment (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The following paragraphs discuss the emergence of the construct of self-determination and how it has become an important focus in special education.

One of the first authors to relate self-determination to persons with disabilities was Bengt Nirje (1972). Nirje's (1972) chapter in Wolfensberger's (1972) seminal work recognized that services for students with intellectual disabilities should "provide an education that enables the student to become a socially competent and adjusted adult, and to make him as personally independent as possible" (p. 180). According to Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, and Stancliffe (2003), Nirje further identified "making choices, asserting oneself, self-management, self-knowledge, decision-making, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, and self-regulation, autonomy," as important characteristics of personal self-determination (p. 17).

Over the past few decades, Wehmeyer and colleagues have applied Nirje's concept of self-determination to research and pedagogy on educating students with disabilities (e.g. Wehmeyer, 1992 up to 2015). Based on their findings, these researchers have identified self-determination as an important educational goal, since self-determined individuals with

disabilities have better post-school outcomes such as meaningful employment, financial autonomy, and the ability to live independently (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Wehmeyer (1997) argues that self-advocacy, as well as several other interrelated elements, allows self-determined behavior to emerge (p. 182). From this perspective, teaching self-advocacy skills within education is seen as critical means of helping students with disabilities to become self-determined (Fielder & Danneker, 2007, p. 3), so that, over their life span, they can become “casual agents in their own lives,” (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).

It has been recognized that there is a lack of clear difference in the definitions of self-advocacy and self-determination (Field, 1996, p. 42). An example of the similarities between the two constructs is as follows. Wehmeyer, Kelchner, and Richards (1996) identified four necessary characteristics of self-determination: “(1) The person acted autonomously; (2) The behavior was self-regulated; (3) The person initiated and responded to the event in a psychologically empowered manner; and (4) The person acted in a self-realizing manner” (p. 6). When reviewing these characteristics, it becomes apparent that this conceptualization of self-determination is strongly related to Van Reusen et al.’s (1994) definition of self-advocacy (see pg. 1). Both self-determination and self-advocacy stress the importance of being self-aware of one’s needs, strengths, and desires. As well, both of the concepts require knowledge on how to effectively respond and communicate. Self-determination and self-advocacy both also assume that the individual is informed and acts independently.

A number of the articles I reviewed frame self-advocacy as an important component of self-determination. Some articles, however, use both terms interchangeably due to the

similarities in definition (e.g. Kalyanpur, 2009; Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Gil, 2007) For purposes of this paper, I focus on self-advocacy as a component of self-determination.

Self-advocacy as a goal for education. In the United States, self-advocacy training has become an important goal for education (e.g. Fieldler and Danneker, 2007; Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Test et al. 2005). Lynch and Gussel (1996) observed that the U.S. Department of Education funded a number of initiatives to help students make a better transition from high school to higher education (e.g. Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, & O'Reily, 1991; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). In Canada, self-advocacy is also recognized as a goal in education ministry documents in a number of provinces and territories¹. In particular, The Ministry of Ontario's *Special Education: A Guide for Educators (2001)* acknowledges that self-advocacy is critical for students with disabilities. As well, the importance of self-advocacy is emphasized in the *Ontario Transition Planning Process for Individual Students (2002)*. Nevertheless, there is little information for future and current educators on how to teach self-advocacy skills, even though research suggests that they require and desire this training (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009; Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004).

In order to understand the importance of self-advocacy as a goal in education, it is crucial to recognize that the concept emerged as a civil rights movement. The education of students with disabilities in North America would look vastly different if it were not for the efforts and voices of the disability rights community, scholars, and its allies. Self-advocacy continues to play a critical role in the movement towards the inclusion of disabled students in all levels of education. Furthermore, self-advocacy has been seen as a fundamental component of educating students to be self-determined. The research that Wehmeyer and colleagues conducted highlighted the

¹ Self-advocacy is recognized as a goal in ministry documents in the following provinces and territories: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.

school setting. Finally, self-advocacy has been defined as a goal for education as it is a tangible way of helping students with disabilities to be confident and self-determined in their life transitions.

Components of Self-Advocacy

To effectively teach self-advocacy, a conceptualization of its critical components is required. However, as mentioned earlier, there are many definitions of self-advocacy available to researchers and practitioners. The multiple definitions of self-advocacy definitions emerged prior to 1990 as a result of a number of research projects initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) to find strategies that increase self-determination skills of students with disabilities (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007, p. 3). As Fieldler and Danneker (2007) explain, Test et al., in their 2005 study, attempted to address this gap by creating a conceptual framework of self-advocacy from a literature review of twenty-five self-advocacy definitions with the purpose of progressing research and instruction on self-advocacy.

Test et al.'s (2005) conceptual framework of self-advocacy includes the following components: a knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (Test et al. 2005, p. 45). The authors identify that self-advocacy begins with the knowledge of one's own disability, strengths, needs, interests, learning style, and preferences (Durlak, Rose, & Bursak, 1994; Phillips, 1990; Roffman, Herzog, & Wershba-Gershon, 1994). As well, another step to self-advocating is being aware of one's rights as a citizen and a student with a disability. Once a student has self-awareness and knowledge of their rights, an individual can develop skills to communicate successfully. Test et al.'s (2005) review of literature identified that communicating effectively in self-advocacy includes "negotiation, persuasion, compromise," (Wehmeyer, &

Lawrence, 1995) and body language, and listening skills (Nezu, Nezu, & Arean, 1991; VanReusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1994). It is also important for disabled students to be aware of the difference between assertive and aggressive communication (Durlak et al., 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The final step of self-advocacy according to the authors is leadership. Although there are a small number of studies that relate leadership to self-advocacy, Johnson (1999) suggests that this occurs because one can be a good self-advocate without leading others (p. 51). Nonetheless, leadership is a critical component of self-advocacy especially in the area of Individual Education Plan (IEP)² and transition meetings (Snyder & Shapiro, 1997; Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995).

Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide context of recent research on self-advocacy instruction as well as to highlight current gaps in the literature with a focus on self-advocacy instruction in preservice education. Following a brief overview of current legislation impacting the inclusion of disabled students at all levels of education, the PSE transition issues of students with disabilities are reviewed to emphasize the significance of guaranteeing that self-advocacy instruction is provided in all Ontario classrooms. The reasons why students are not taught to self-advocate in the literature are discussed to highlight the need for sufficient teacher training on self-advocacy. An overview of the most recent findings on the benefits of self-advocacy interventions in elementary, middle school, and high school are included. The limited

² The IEP refers to a working document that explains a students' special education program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 5). The plan contains details on the students' educational adaptations (accommodations/modifications) based on their learning strengths and needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 5). IEPs are part of the planning process for students with disabilities in both Canada and the United States.

number of current studies on self-advocacy instruction in preservice education is also presented. Finally, a discussion on the gaps in research and suggestions for further research is provided.

Relevant Legislation

This section serves two purposes: (a) to discuss relevant legislation on the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ontario’s education system; (b) to discuss how self-advocacy plays a necessary role for students to acquire academic adaptations (accommodations and/or modifications³) in higher education.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Internationally, the inclusion of students with disabilities is emphasized in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRC) (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The article states that schools in their State Parties must provide inclusive education by focusing on:

- a. The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- b. The development of persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
- c. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

Although not explicitly stated in the article, the directions given to schools within the State Parties according to Article 24 are strongly related to notions of self-advocacy. Under the Article, students with disabilities should be aware of their strengths, needs, and rights.

Internationally, students need to self-advocate if they are not treated with dignity and if their

³ Accommodations refer to instructional strategies, human supports, and/or individualized technology needed to assist a student to learn and to demonstrate their learning. Modifications refer to “changes to the number and/or complexity of the regular course curriculum expectations,” (MOE, 2004).

participation is limited due to barriers. It is therefore important to examine the legislation that governs education in Ontario, namely the Ontario Education Act.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The legislation that federally supports Canadian students with disabilities from discrimination is Section 15 of The Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). The Charter protects the rights of students with disabilities to participate in educational institutions without discrimination. However, education in Canada is authorized provincially/territorially whereby each province and territory has the power to direct how their educational systems operate (Valeo, 2003, p. 18).

Ontario Education Act. In the province of Ontario, the Education Act governs how schooling is delivered to Ontario's students. The most significant changes to special education in Canada were in made in *The Education Amendment Act* of 1980, which is commonly referred to as *Bill 82* (Valeo, 2003, p. 18). As in the United States, parent and advocacy groups lobbied the government to integrate disabled students in the education system (Marshall, 1990). Through their efforts, the passage of *Bill 82* meant that Ontario school boards were responsible for providing funded special education programs and services to all students with exceptionalities between Kindergarten and Grade 12 for the first time (Morgan, 2003, p.10). *Bill 82* was a part of an international shift towards the availability of publically funded education for students with disabilities (Zegarac, Drewett, & Swan, 2008, p. 9). It was incorporated into the Education Act in 1990, which then included specific provisions on the identification and placement of students with disabilities. It is important to recognize that special education legislation in Ontario was highly influenced by United States legislation, namely the original *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (PL 94-142), now referred to as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Valeo, 2003, p. 19).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the special education law in the United States. According to the IDEA, all students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must participate in the transition planning process by the time they are 16 years of age. The IDEA requires that the transition planning process is “individualized, based on the student’s strengths, preferences, and interests, and include opportunities to develop functional skills for work and community life,” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013). Furthermore, before students with disabilities are legally recognized as adults in their respective state, the IDEA mandates that “the school must (1) alert the student of their new, upcoming responsibilities, and (2) provide notices of upcoming meetings to the student as well as the parents, while all other notices will go only to the student,” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013).

Transition planning in Ontario. Similar to the IDEA, the Ontario Education Act has regulations on transition planning for students with disabilities. Under Regulation 181/98 of the Education Act, students who are 16 years old and older must be involved in developing their IEP alongside parent(s)/guardian(s) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 12). Regulation 181/98 also requires that students with exceptionalities (except for students who are gifted with no other exceptionalities) have a transition plan for “postsecondary activities, such as work, further education” in their IEP at 14 years or older (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 4).

Ontario Human Rights Code. The Ontario Human Rights Code is legislation that governs educational adaptations for post-secondary students with disabilities, in addition to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The *Disability Policy* of the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) confirms that disabled students have a right to full participation and integration in PSE.

It defines an accessible educational system as one in which students with disabilities can “access their environment and face the same duties and responsibilities as everyone else, with dignity and without impediment,” (OHRC).

Accommodation process. For disabled students to gain equitable access, they typically require accommodations. An accommodation is defined as a “means of preventing and removing barriers that impede students with disabilities from participating fully in the educational environment.” (OHRC). The OHRC states that the principle to accommodate “involves three factors: dignity, individualization and inclusion.” The OHRC recognizes that the accommodation process is a “shared responsibility” where all parties must comply with the human rights standards under the *Code* within the Commission’s *Disability Policy*. Post-secondary institutions must guarantee that their institutions are accessible, have a non-discriminatory environment, and accommodation processes are appropriate effective, and dignified to the degree of undue hardship. According to the Commission, students with disabilities are responsible for: (a) registering with their post-secondary institution’s disability services office where they provide related medical documentation and information, (b) participating in discussions related to accommodations, (c) working with the accommodation provider on a regular basis, and (d) informing their course instructor of their accommodations with a letter of accommodation.

Because students are considered the age of majority (18 years old) when they enter PSE, parents and guardians are not permitted to participate in the accommodation process without their child’s consent. Therefore, it is imperative that disabled students learn self-advocacy skills in elementary and high school in order to fulfill their responsibilities in partnership with their

post-secondary institutions. However, this is often not the case. As a result, students with disabilities may experience barriers in PSE due to a lack of self-advocacy instruction.

PSE Transition Issues of Students with Disabilities

The three most noticeable themes arising from the literature concerning the transition of students with disabilities into PSE are (a) self-awareness of disability; (b) the difference between the accommodation process in high school and university; (c) disclosure.

Self-awareness of disability. Students with disabilities, educators, and PSE disability services staff report that disabled students often arrive at college or university not fully understanding their disability and how it impacts their learning (e.g. Brinckerhoff, 1996; Harrison, Areepattamannil, & Freeman, 2012; DaDeppo, 2009). This then impacts how prepared they are to explain their strengths, needs, and accommodations to PSE faculty and staff (Brinckerhoff, 1996). In an American qualitative study, Getzel and Thoma (2008) interviewed 34 students with disabilities that were registered with their respective disability student services office. The participants had diverse disabilities and were from different cultural backgrounds; 53 percent of the participants were female and 47 percent male. The participants reported that being self-aware of their disability (their strengths and needs) were critical to their success in PSE. Many of the participants said that they did not believe that they received enough preparation in high school to understand their disability and how it impacted their learning. These findings were reflected in a quantitative study conducted by Schreiner (2007) involving 49 secondary students with disabilities between the ages of 15 to 19 years old in south-central Pennsylvania, including 33 males and 16 females. The author found that the participants had difficulty explaining how their disability, strengths, and needs would impact their transition to PSE.

In a quantitative study in the United States, Janiga and Costenbader (2002) investigated

the perspectives of 75 disability service providers in PSE who worked with students with learning disabilities (LD) on their satisfaction with the transition services provided to high school students. The authors found that the disability services staff members were the least satisfied with the self-advocacy skills of their LD students. Some of the participants expressed that high school transition teams need to provide better preparation of self-advocacy skills by helping their students have a better understanding of their strengths, needs, and specific accommodations that they require.

The results of Cawthon and Cole's (2010) quantitative study suggest that these self-awareness issues may be due to a lack of student involvement in developing their IEPs. Cawthon and Cole's (2010) study consisted of 110 undergraduate participants with learning disabilities from the same post-secondary institution. While approximately 84 percent of the participants could identify the kind of learning disability they had, almost 91 percent reported that they did not recall having an IEP at all. Of those who could recall having an IEP, most did not recall going over basic transition areas, academic goals, and teacher responsibilities in their final IEP meetings.

Unprepared for the demands in the PSE accommodation process. Not being prepared for the different accommodation process in PSE was another prominent theme that arose from the literature. Students with disabilities are presented with a significant change of environment in PSE as they are expected to navigate the system independently and be their own self-advocates. However, because parents and teachers tend to advocate on their behalf in high school, students with disabilities tend to start their PSE being unfamiliar with how to advocate for their accommodations (Harrison, Larochette, & Nichols, 2007; Hitchings et al., 2010). In a qualitative study of a faculty mentorship program and transition experiences of disabled PSE students in a

mid-western university in the United States, Patrick and Wessel (2013) interviewed 10 female and 2 male PSE students with disabilities, including 7 students with physical disabilities and 5 students with cognitive disabilities. The authors identified that being unprepared for the accommodation process was a common transition issue for the participants because the students had to be responsible for seeking academic accommodations independently, which was different from high school. These results were echoed in Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte, & Trice's (2012) study where one of the participants explains, "In high school, when I needed help, it kind of magically appeared," (p. 170).

The factors that influence PSE outcomes for disabled students was considered in a qualitative study by Garrison-Wade (2012), who interviewed 59 students with disabilities and 6 disability resource coordinators in the United States. Both the students and coordinators recognized that preparation for PSE as a major "high school system weakness," (p. 119). In addition to experiencing problems being academically prepared for PSE, the students were unaware of how high schools and PSE institutions differed in the provision of disability supports and the roles and responsibilities between students, service coordinators, and faculty members. Similar to the aforementioned studies, the students presumed that the PSE support would be the same as in high school.

Disclosure issues. Disclosure has been identified as a salient transition issue for disabled students in PSE in the literature, and it is often closely linked to self-awareness and being unprepared for the accommodation process. Although legislation supports services to assist students with disabilities in receiving an equitable PSE experience, disclosure to their disability services provider is required to access these accommodations (Lynch & Gussel, 1996; Adreon & Durocher, 2007). Barnard-Brak, Lectenberger, and Lan (2010) explain that in order for students

to be eligible for accommodations, students with disabilities must disclose of their disability and provide relevant medical documentation to their respective disability services office (p. 413). The students will then receive a Letter of Accommodation⁴ (LOA) that they must present to their course instructors. Thus the act of providing their course instructor with the LOA involves disclosing that they are a student with a disability (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010, p. 413). Students with disabilities in PSE institutions in Ontario must undergo the same procedure if they wish to eligible for a letter or form that lists accommodations for their course instructors.

Disclosure of one's disability in PSE may be easy and satisfying for some individuals and/or a frightening and difficult process for others (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, and Lan, 2010; McCool, 2010). McCool (2010) conducted a qualitative inquiry that explored the oral histories of 10 undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities transitioning to PSE in the United States. The participants included 6 females and 4 males who identified as having Attention Deficit Disorders, hearing impairments, mental health diagnosis, and epilepsy. Results indicated that most of the participants had feelings of "vulnerability and fear of discrimination" before disclosing.

Students with non-visible or invisible disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities) also have a unique set of challenges in the quest of self-advocating by disclosing. Mullins and Preyde (2013) explored these issues through qualitative interviews with ten female Canadian university students with non-visible disabilities. The university students revealed a significant paradox in their feelings about their disability being invisible and disclosing. The university students often expressed a desire to have a visible expression of their disability to reduce questions about the validity of their need for accommodations when presenting their LOA to their instructors.

⁴ A Letter of Accommodation (LOA) is a "document provided by the Office of Disability Services that explains to faculty the reasonable accommodations to be provided to a student," (Rutgers University).

However, the participants also wished to choose when to disclose. Another significant finding was that the stigma related to their disability minimized some of the participants' desire to request accommodations.

Reasons Why Students with Disabilities Are Not Taught to Self-Advocate

A limited number of studies have focused on reasons why students with disabilities are not taught self-advocacy skills. It is important to note that of the articles that focus on self-advocacy instruction barriers, self-advocacy is mainly mentioned as a component of self-determination. Therefore, the following section will review articles that refer to self-advocacy but in the context of research on self-determination.

The literature revealed the following three prominent themes concerning why students may not be taught self-advocacy instruction: (a) a lack of student IEP involvement; (b) teacher attitudes; (c) insufficient training/preparation.

Lack of student IEP participation. General and special educators typically have mixed views on the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination as a topic of instruction (e.g. Cho, Wehmeyer, Kingston, 2011; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000). There seems to be a discrepancy between the values that educators place on self-determination and its instruction (Thoma, Nathanson, Maker, & Tamura, 2002). A salient reason for why students are currently not taught self-advocacy is because they seldom participate in IEP meetings. The Ministry of Education's *Individual Education Plan: A Resource Guide (2004)* states that, while a students' level of participation may differ:

Members of the IEP team should ensure that students understand the purpose of their IEP and how the goals and expectations in the plan are individually tailored, evaluated, reviewed, and updated. They need to be aware that their achievement of

the learning expectations will be reflected in their Provincial Report Card. Students must understand that they can participate in the IEP process and that it is important for them to take an active role in their learning. (p. 19)

Ontario's Ministry of Education recognizes that IEP meetings are critical opportunities for disabled students to develop self-advocacy skills (i.e. leadership, self-awareness, and communication). The research literature, however, widely suggests that most students are not participating in their IEP meetings.

In a quantitative study in the United States, Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) conducted a national survey of 1,219 teachers on their encouragement of self-determination. The authors found that only 22 percent of the participants reported their students having IEP goals in areas of self-determination. As well, the authors identified that one-third of their respondents did not involve students in educational planning at all. These results are echoed in a quantitative study conducted by Mason, Field, and Sawilowsky (2004) of 523 teachers, administrators, and related service professionals. The participants were from all 50 states in the United States, and 77 percent of the participants were general education teachers with an average of 10 years of teaching experience. The authors identified that while most of the participants viewed student involvement in IEPs as very important, they nevertheless reported minimal student involvement in the IEP process (i.e. meetings).

Martin et al. (2006) also considered student involvement in IEP meetings in a United States study in which they observed 109 IEP meetings in middle and high school along with administered post-meeting surveys to 627 IEP team members. The authors found that the students only spoke for 3 percent of the time during the IEP meetings. Furthermore, when it

came to IEP leadership, the authors observed that the students were never in leadership a role but rather just explained their interests.

In spite of the above, it is clear that the IEP contains critical information that disabled students needs to be aware of to self-advocate effectively. Student involvement and leadership in the IEP process is considered an effective way to develop and practice self-advocacy skills (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007, p. 3). Yet, the literature indicates that many students are not either not involved or do not speak-up during the IEP process. This means that they may not have enough opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills.

Teacher attitudes. Alongside a lack of student IEP participation, the attitudes that teachers' have towards self-advocacy instruction may be also be potential barrier and reason why students are not taught to self-advocate. In a quantitative study, Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2003) investigated elementary teachers' knowledge of self-determination and perceived barriers towards self-determination instruction across 30 states in the United States The participants consisted of 407 elementary teachers (32 percent were general educators, 58 percent special educators, and 10 percent other or unspecified). The authors found that the most salient barrier to self-determination instruction was that teachers perceived that students have more "urgent" needs in other areas.

Teachers' attitudes towards different disability categories may also impact how students receive self-advocacy instruction. In their study, Wehmeyer, et al. (2000) identified that a major reason their teacher participants did not teach self-determination was their belief that "their students would not benefit from instruction in these areas." Additionally, the participants who taught students with more severe disabilities (e.g. severe intellectual disabilities) rated self-determination instruction as less important than those who worked with students with mild

disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities). Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, and Little (2011) suggest that teachers may have different expectations for students identified with intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities. The authors suggest that it is likely that “teacher’s perceptions of possible adult outcomes for students with intellectual and learning disability affected the goals that were emphasized,” (p. 7). Given that teachers’ attitudes and biases may act as a barrier towards the promotion of self-advocacy instruction, all educators must receive training to address their perspectives on students with a range of disabilities.

Insufficient training. Another emerging factor that the literature identifies as contributing to students not self-advocating is a lack of sufficient teacher training on self-determination. The literature strongly suggests that, although teachers may be familiar with self-determination and self-advocacy, they are not receiving enough training to implement self-advocacy instruction (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003; Thoma et al., 2000). In a quantitative study in the United States, Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002) surveyed 43 special education teachers in 5 southwestern states on their knowledge of self-determination. The authors found that only 33 percent of the participants described having sufficient training to successfully teach self-determination. This is not surprising as Wehmeyer et al. (2000) found that their participants’ major sources of information on self-determination came from professional articles, workshops, and graduate training as opposed to required preservice or inservice instruction.

Grigel, Neubert, Moon, and Graham (2003) suggest that preservice education programs play an important role in the promotion of self-determination. The authors suggest that preservice programs should include both the theoretical and practical understanding of how to implement self-determination strategies. Grigel et al. (2003) solicited the opinions of 234 parents

or caregivers, and 248 general and special education teachers on self-determination. Their results were in line with Wehmeyer et al.'s (2000) findings in that their participants were only slightly familiar with the concept of self-determination. Special education teacher participants were more familiar with what self-determination was and how to teach it than the general education participants. Grigel et al. (2003) argued that training possibly played a role in this difference, as special education courses are more likely to introduce trainees to self-determination than general education programs.

While legislation supports the inclusion of students with disabilities in PSE, the review of the literature indicated that emerging PSE transition issues include: self-awareness, being unprepared for the demands in the PSE accommodation process, and disclosure. A contributing factor to these transition issues may be due to a lack of self-advocacy instruction. This is evident in the lack of students participating in their IEP meetings. Insufficient preservice training, and teachers' attitudes are also recognized as barriers towards teaching self-advocacy. Studies on self-advocacy interventions have been emerging in recognition of the lack of self-advocacy instruction in North America. Therefore, it is imperative to review the efficacy of such programs in addressing the transition issues that have been revealed.

Self-advocacy Instruction

Elementary and Middle School

In the following section, I review selected research on the associated benefits of self-advocacy instruction to disabled students in Elementary and Middle school. The literature identified the following three emerging benefits associated with self-advocacy instruction at the

elementary and middle school level: (a) increased self-awareness; (b) improved communication of wants and needs; (c) increased independence.

As recognized by Roberts, Ju, & Zhang (2014), there are a limited number of studies concerning self-advocacy instruction within elementary and middle school, as most of the focus has been on the high school level. Roberts et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of the self-advocacy practices in peer-reviewed journals from 2004 to June 2012. The authors recognize that some studies have opted to examine self-advocacy and self-determination interventions using participants from both middle school, and high school. Such studies that have a greater number of participants from middle school than high school have been included in this section.

Increased self-awareness. A prominent theme that emerged from the literature is that self-advocacy instruction may increase students' familiarity with their own disabilities. As earlier mentioned, a significant reported transition issue for high school students with disabilities arriving at PSE, has been a lack of self-awareness of their disability and how it impacts their learning. Self-advocacy instruction in elementary and middle school may be a strategy to address this transition issue. In a quantitative study conducted in the United States, Test and Neale (2004) administered an experimental study to measure how effective self-advocacy intervention was on 4 students with high-incident disabilities. The participants consisted of 3 males and 1 female in the 8th grade, which were instructed to participate in their IEP meetings using *The Self-Advocacy Strategy* (See Appendix A). The authors indicated that the participants were able to describe their IEPs more specifically following this instruction.

In addition to having a better understanding of a students' disability, an increased positive outlook on their disability appears to be a benefit of self-advocacy instruction. Literature widely suggests that students with disabilities are more susceptible to being socially excluded and being

victims of bullying (e.g. Carter & Spencer, 2006; Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994). Pearl (2004), a resource teacher, was told by the fourth grade students in her resource room, “They call us slow learning dorks,” (p. 44). Recognizing that students with disabilities may experience lower self-esteem and self-efficacy, Merlone and Moran (2008) evaluated a program that a learning specialist and a school counselor in the United States created and delivered to their fifth grade students in their school’s learning center (See Appendix A). The authors delivered post and pre surveys to their fifth grade students with learning disabilities (the number and demographics of their students were unspecified). The students indicated that being taught what a learning disability was as well as learning about famous people with disabilities was important to them. The authors indicated that a noticeable change occurred following the program where their students indicated that they now felt that they could go to PSE and obtain a career they desired.

Merlone and Moran’s (2008) observations are echoed in a quantitative study that Campbell-Whatley (2008) conducted on 13 United States students with learning disabilities from grade 5 to 9, who were taught lessons in self-advocacy and self-determination (See Appendix A). Results indicated that all the participants developed increased self-esteem and self-awareness. One of the middle school participants said, “I never knew so many different, famous people had the same problems I did,” (p. 142). Like Merlone and Moran’s (2008) findings, Campbell-Whatley’s (2008) participants appeared to be encouraged by learning about influential figures with disabilities. This illustrates a promising strategy to increasing a disabled student’s self-concept.

Increased independence. Another emerging benefit of self-advocacy instruction to elementary and middle school students is that students may experience an increased level of

independence. Independence is often closely discussed in relation to communication and self-awareness. In a qualitative study, Roberts (2007) explored the efficacy of peer mentoring as a strategy to develop self-determination and self-advocacy skills (See Appendix A). The mentee was a male in the fifth grade that was paired with a peer mentor in junior high with the same physical disability. The mentee participant lacked self-advocacy skills and independence according to his physical health disabilities teacher. The author reported that the mentee displayed a significant increase in independence and self-advocacy skills following the program.

It is suggested in the literature that self-advocacy instruction can help address a learned helplessness⁵ that disabled students may develop as a result of being unsupported or having authority figures consistently advocating on their behalf (e.g. Angell, Stoner, and Fulk, 2010; Avant, 2013; Fiedler & Danneker, 2007; Skinner, 1998). Avant (2013) conducted a quantitative study that assessed the self-advocacy skills of 4 elementary students with physical disabilities who received self-advocacy instruction (See Appendix A). Results revealed that 3 out of the 4 students displayed an increased level of independence where they effectively initiated requests.

Improved communication of wants and needs. Related to independence, another salient theme that arose from the literature on self-advocacy instruction in elementary and middle school is improved communication of wants and needs. Effective communication is considered critical to self-advocating (Test et al., 2005; Fielder & Dannker, 2007). In a Canadian mixed methods study, Mishna, Muskat, Farnia, Wiener (2011) examined the impact of a school-based program on self-advocacy implemented in seven schools (See Appendix A). The participants consisted of 68 middle school students including 50 males and 18 females, and their parents and teachers.

⁵ Learned helplessness refers to passive behaviour developed by disabled students due to being in high structured environments where they have a lack of autonomy and see themselves as less capable of academic achievement (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007; Walker & Bunsen, 1995).

The participants expressed that the self-advocacy program helped them to increase their ability to “advocate for themselves and their needs,” (p. 198).

The result of having improved communication skills were also observed by middle school teachers in a United States-based quantitative study conducted by Lee et al. (2011). The authors studied the impact of the administration of: *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* a curriculum, aimed at increasing student-directed transition planning (See Appendix A). The 168 middle school participants from Midwestern school districts were divided into an experimental group (n=86) and control group (n=82). Most of the teachers whose students received the intervention reported an improvement in their students’ communication and IEP preparation. One of the teachers of a students who experienced the program said that, “she liked this curriculum because her students became more aware of what their IEPs contained and how to verbalize their preferences and interests so that they were empowered to effectively participate in their IEP meetings in terms of working with the *WFA (Whose Future Is It Anyway)*,” (Lee et al., 2011, p. 114).

High School Students

The most salient themes that arose from the literature on the benefits of high school students with disabilities after receiving instruction related to self-advocacy were (a) increased leadership skills; (b) improved academic achievement; (c) enhanced preparation for PSE.

Increased leadership skills. It is integral for students with disabilities to have a sense of self-efficacy and ownership over their life choices. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as the belief of “one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments,” (p. 3). A prominent theme on literature concerning self-advocacy instruction is that students gain leadership skills. As recognized by Fiedler and Danneker (2007), literature

on self-advocacy instruction regularly cites that a common way for students to develop and apply their self-advocacy skills is through involvement in their IEP meetings (p. 12). However, as noted previously this does not happen enough.

In a quantitative study of 5 inner-city disabled high school students from the Southeast United States, Arndt, Konrad, and Test (2006) investigated the impact of an adaptation of the *Self-Directed IEP* program (See Appendix B). The participants included 2 females and 3 males with learning disabilities, autism, emotional and behavioral, physical, and mental-health related disabilities. The authors found that the students had increased their leadership skills with a stronger participation in mock and real IEP meetings. Arndt, Konrad, and Test (2006) anecdotally noted that one of their participants said that prior to the instruction, “I didn’t know what an IEP really was. I didn’t want to look stupid. I just sat there” (p. 200). These results were also seen in a quantitative study that Woods, Sylvester, and Martin (2010) conducted on 19 secondary school students with disabilities receiving *Student-Directed Transition Planning* lessons in three southwestern schools in the United States (See Appendix B). Twelve of the participants were males while 7 were females. The authors found that students who received the instruction, showed a statistically substantial increase in their self-efficacy to actively participate in their transition planning IEP meetings. These findings have strong implications for research on self-advocacy instruction as student participation in the IEP can help develop important components of self-advocacy such as self-awareness, communication, and leadership.

Improved academic achievement. Related to self-efficacy and leadership, a salient benefit of self-advocacy instruction in high school appears to be improved academic achievement. Self-determination and self-advocacy has often been discussed in literature in relation to better academic achievement (eg. Fowler, Kondra, Walker, Test, & Wood, 2007; Lee

et al., 2010; Martin; Zheng, Erikson, Kingston, & Noonan, 2014). Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, and Little (2011) conducted a group-randomized trial control group study to investigate the impact of the *Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction* (SDLMI) on the attainment of transition and academic goals, and access to the general education curriculum of students with intellectual and learning disabilities (See Appendix B). The participants were 312 high school students from Kansas, Missouri, and Texas, including 30 percent with intellectual disabilities and 70 percent with learning disabilities. At the start of the school year, the student participants had relatively low access scores to the general curriculum, as they were likely to not be working on grade-level curriculum standards. The authors found that the high school students that received the SDLMI demonstrated significant increases in their access to general curriculum scores. Shogren et al. (2011) identified that the access scores to the general curriculum were notably higher for students with intellectual disabilities that had access to SDLMI than the students with intellectual disabilities in the control group. Furthermore, the authors found that students with learning disabilities who received the intervention had achieved much higher in their academic goals at the end of the year but no change in their transition-related goals. The authors noticed that students with intellectual disabilities in the SDLMI group experienced an opposite pattern.

Academic achievement is an important benefit of self-determination instruction; however, Zheng, Erikson, Kingston, and Noonan (2014) notes that there needs to be more research on the impact that gender, family income, and urbanicity has on this relationship. Using data from the U.S. Department of Education's commissioned National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Zheng et al. (2014) developed a structural equation model to better explain the direct relationship between self-determination, self-concept, and academic achievement. The

participations consisted of 560 high school students across the United States with learning disabilities. 32 percent of the participants were female and 68 percent of the participants were male. Research identified that there is a direct correlation between self-determination and academic achievement. Interestingly, Zheng et al. (2014) found that gender, income, and urbanicity did not influence the level of self-determination and academic achievement. Rather, all of the participants who “acted as their own primary causal agents were able to set academic goals and reach those goals accordingly,” (p. 470).

Enhanced preparation for PSE. The benefit of enhanced preparation for PSE was another emerging theme from literature on self-advocacy interventions in high school. Self-advocacy skills have often been discussed as critical component of being prepared for PSE. As mentioned earlier, when students with disabilities transition to PSE, they are expected to be aware of their rights and responsibilities while requesting academic accommodations independently. Literature suggests that disabled students in high school can acquire knowledge on their rights and responsibilities in PSE as well as self-advocacy skills and apply them to a generalized setting (e.g. Durlak, Rose, & Bursak, 1994; Wood, Kelley, Test, & Fowler, 2010).

In a quantitative study, Wood, Kelley, Test, and Fowler (2010) examined the impact of an audio-supported test and explicit instruction on the accommodation process, rights, and responsibilities in PSE (See Appendix B). The participants included 4 high school seniors with learning and emotional and behavioural disabilities, 3 males and 1 female. The researchers found that the participants scored significantly higher in their knowledge of their rights, responsibilities, and the accommodation process when they received explicit instruction in comparison to the audio-supported condition. Wood et al. (2010) found that the participants were able to apply their self-advocacy knowledge to a generalized setting in the form of a disability

services mock interview.

It is important that students with disabilities are familiar with the accommodation process in PSE. Self-advocacy instruction may provide opportunities for disabled students to be more prepared to request accommodations to their course instructors in PSE. Quann et al. (2015) developed and implemented a model to annually increase expectations for self-determination at a high school in the United States (Appendix B). The authors reported that they observed students being more comfortable with requesting accommodations and advocating for why they required such supports. In a quantitative study, Rothman, Maldonado, and Rothman (2008) surveyed 21 disabled high school seniors who participated in a SUNY pre-college summer transition program in Albany, New York over 5 years (See Appendix B). The participants reported that they most valued learning about self-advocacy and understanding their rights according to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The authors observed that the program made an impact as a majority of the participants were either enrolled in PSE or employed.

Preservice Education on Self-Advocacy Instruction

A limited number of studies focus on the preservice experiences of teacher candidates learning about self-determination and self-advocacy. In a quantitative study, Wandry et al. (2008) delivered pre-semester and post-semester surveys to 196 United States teacher candidates to examine their understanding of self-determination through preservice studies in a special education program. The authors reported that, prior to taking transition-related coursework in the special education program, very few of the teacher candidates received any instruction on transition-related topics such as self-determination and self-advocacy.

It is imperative that all educators receive training on how to implement self-advocacy instruction. Preservice education can prepare future educators to teach their students to self-advocate. In a study conducted by Nevin, Malian, and Williams (2002), special education interns at Arizona State University were surveyed on their pre and post knowledge of self-determination. The interns belonged to a special education teacher preparation program in which they took courses on self-determination and student-led IEP programs. Ninety-one percent of the participants were female and 9 percent were male. The authors found that their participants' post definitions of self-determination were more accurate and closely resembled the research-based definition of self-determination⁶. As well, the participants were able to create lessons that infused self-determination skills throughout the curriculum while also differentiating their instruction. These results were echoed in Thoma, Pannozzo, Fritton, and Bartholomew's (2008) qualitative study of 50 preservice teachers enrolled in a graduate distance education course on secondary education and transition. The participants were able to accurately describe Wehmeyer's definition of self-determination in addition to knowing how to implement evidence-based strategies.⁷

The efficacy of self-advocacy training in preservice education is a topic that merits further research. In a Canadian qualitative study, Choi, Israelite, and Swartz (2016) investigated the efficacy of an experiential community practicum on self-advocacy instruction for 9 teacher candidates over a two-year period. The teacher candidates were 1st year concurrent education students who participated in: disability and self-advocacy awareness activities, mentoring

⁶ The definitions closely resembled Wehmeyer and colleague's definitions of self-determination involving choice and action.

⁷ The evidence-based strategies included: "Self-determined learning model of instruction (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000), person-centered planning (i.e., Cross, Cooke, Wood, & Test, 1999) and/or student-directed IEP processes (i.e., Martin et al., 1998)," (p. 100).

relationships with disabled university students, as well as developing self-advocacy workshops for fellow teacher candidates and high school students with disabilities. The authors found that learning about self-advocacy in real-life settings helped the participants to personalize and solidify knowledge on self-advocacy and teaching students with disabilities. One participant reported:

“I understand how important accommodations and self advocacy are. To learn to speak up for themselves and defend their rights. You have to say “You know what? I need this so that I can have an equitable experience.” Regardless of what they’re doing whether school or work.”

The participants indicated that they developed more positive attitude towards students with disabilities and increased knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies. The findings of this study suggest that learning about self-advocacy instruction in an experiential setting is an effective strategy for preservice learning.

Chapter 3: Summary and Discussion

Self-advocacy skills are critical to the life transitions of individuals with disabilities (Norton, 1997; Roessler, Brown, & Rumrill; 1998; Satcher, 1995) and therefore, should be recognized as an educational goal. The four major components of self-advocacy are: a knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (Test et al., 2005). The present literature review is a preliminary step in identifying the importance of self-advocacy instruction within schools and the barriers towards its implementation. The review indicated that the three prominent themes concerning PSE transition issues of disabled students are: (a) self-awareness of their disability, (b) being unprepared for the demands in the PSE accommodation process, and (c) disclosure issues. Although self-determination instruction is recognized as a best

practice in addressing the concerns above, literature suggests that North American students with disabilities rarely participate in their IEP meetings. Furthermore, practicing teachers may possess attitudes that hinder self-advocacy instruction. A salient barrier towards self-advocacy instruction is a lack of sufficient training on self-advocacy instruction during preservice education.

Nonetheless, there is emerging research on the benefits of instruction related to building self-advocacy skills and self-determination in elementary to high school. A few emerging benefits associated with self-advocacy instruction in elementary and middle schools are: increased self-awareness, communication of wants and needs, and increased independence. Likewise, high school students that receive self-advocacy instruction may increase their leadership skills; have improvements in academic achievement, and enhanced preparation for PSE. Considering the PSE transition issues of disabled students, and how the associated benefits of self-advocacy instruction addresses these concerns, it is imperative that researchers and practitioners address existing barriers towards the advancement of self-advocacy instruction.

A focus on self-advocacy instruction in preservice education is critical for the advancement of equitable experiences of disabled students in PSE. The literature found that a majority of practicing general and special education teachers reported having insufficient training to incorporate self-advocacy instruction. However, there is minimal research regarding this topic. It has not been discovered how self-advocacy instruction is being promoted in preservice programs in Canada, since literature on this topic is mainly from the United States. As well, a review of the literature related to self-advocacy instruction in preservice programs reveals that the participants were only from special education cohorts. Therefore, there are no studies to date on the experiences of preservice teachers in general education cohorts when it comes to self-

advocacy instruction. The literature reveals that teacher attitudes play a critical role in which students are taught to self-advocate. Conversely, there has yet to be research on how self-advocacy instruction in preservice programs informs the attitudes of preservice teachers.

Another concern related to current studies on self-advocacy research is that there is a lack of research on the interventions that incorporate all four components of self-advocacy. Building on the work of Test et al. (2005), Roberts, Ju, Zhang (2014) identified that out of all the peer-reviewed journals that were published between 2004-2012, there was only one intervention that incorporated all four components of self-advocacy (Rothman et al., 2008). This is surprising as there are a multitude of interventions that have been developed in the past couple of decades. A majority of the studies on self-advocacy instruction focuses teaching students to have knowledge of self and communication (Test et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2014). There appears to be minimal focus on equipping students with knowledge of their rights and leadership skills. However, all four components are important and should holistically be included in self-advocacy instruction. The inclusion of diverse participants is critical to a more representative and accurate study of this topic as well.

A limitation of reviewed literature may be a lack of diverse representation of the participants in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and disability. There seems to be a lack of ethnically and racially diverse participants in self-advocacy literature (Garrison-Wade, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs IDEA database reports that in 2012-2013, the percentage of students served under the IDEA was highest for Native Americans (16 percent) "followed by Blacks (15 percent), Whites (13 percent), children and youth of Two or more races (13 percent), Hispanics (12 percent), Pacific Islanders (11 percent), and Asians (6 percent)," (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

However, a majority of the studies had participants that were mainly White students. In addition to race and ethnicity, it appears that there is a lack of balanced representation of the participants' gender in the literature review. Roberts et al. (2014) argues for a more balanced representation of gender, as two thirds of the participants from the journals they reviewed were male. Roberts et al.'s (2014) observations were also echoed in this research project as all of the literature concerning the impact of self-advocacy instruction had a lot more male participants than they did female. Furthermore, transgendered students were not mentioned in the reviewed studies. Similar to Roberts et al. (2014) and Test et al.'s (2005) observation, students with learning disabilities were far more represented than any other disability category.

It is important to recognize that there is need for more qualitative studies in the area of self-advocacy research that privileges the voices of disabled students' lived experiences. A majority of the studies on self-advocacy instruction were conducted through a quantitative approach, which is useful to conceptualize the breadth of impact that self-advocacy instruction may have. Additional research that focuses on the narratives and experiences of students with disabilities would further inform self-advocacy research. Therefore, future studies in this area should consider conducting qualitative studies to investigate potential ways to enhance curriculum and pedagogy on self-advocacy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research project highlighted the importance of self-advocacy instruction as a goal for education as well as the barriers towards its implementation through a review of recent literature. Research reveals that although students with disabilities in North America are increasingly enrolling in PSE, they face considerable transition issues such as: self-awareness of their disability, being unprepared for the demands in the PSE accommodation process, and disclosure

issues. Literature thus far reveals that implementing self-advocacy earlier than high school can be beneficial as it prepares students to be more aware of their disability, have increased independence, and improved communication of wants and needs. Self-advocacy instruction directed to high school students may also help students build leadership skills, experience improved academic achievement, and have enhanced preparation for PSE. It is recommended that future research explore the efficacy of self-advocacy interventions that incorporate all of Test et al.'s (2005) components of self-advocacy and privileges disabled students' voice.

As demonstrated in the literature review, the Ontario Education Act's regulation 181/98 mandates that disabled students who are 16 years old and older must be involved in developing their IEP. Additionally, by the time students with disabilities are 14 years or older, they must have a transition plan as a part of their IEP according to regulation 181/98. As well, in the United States, the IDEA requires that all students participate in the transition planning process if they have an IEP by the time they are 16 years of age. Conversely, literature indicates that students seldom participate in these processes. Therefore, a gap exists between what is noted in legislation and its actual enactment.

Literature indicates that insufficient training in preservice is a major barrier that prevents students from developing self-advocacy skills. Nevertheless, this is a barrier that can easily be addressed if preservice programs provide more opportunities for their teacher candidates to acquire both a theoretical and practical of self-advocacy and self-determination instruction (Grigel et al., 2003). This project suggests that future research focuses on self-advocacy instruction to preservice educators in general education cohorts. Furthermore, the literature revealed that the attitudes teachers have towards students with disabilities and self-advocacy may also contribute to a lack of self-advocacy instruction. Thus, it is recommended that forthcoming

studies consider the efficacy of self-advocacy instruction in preservice education on preservice educator attitudes.

In conclusion, this research project was conducted to identify the importance of self-advocacy instruction in preservice. The concept of self-advocacy originated from a movement that campaigned for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of life. Although the self-advocacy movement made making significant gains towards the inclusion of students in education, students are infrequently taught to self-advocate. Practicing teachers also express that they received insufficient education on self-advocacy instruction in their respective preservice programs. Therefore, it is important that preservice program instructors, researchers, and schools consider the implications of self-advocacy instruction on the future trajectories of students with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Self-advocacy Instructional Programs in Elementary and Middle School

Reference	Instructional Strateg(ies)	Brief Description of Strategy
Test and Neale (2004)	<i>The Self-Advocacy Strategy</i> (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker &, Deshler, 1994)	“The strategy consists of five steps which are taught over a series of seven acquisition and generalization stages. The five steps are presented using the acronym “I PLAN” to help cue students to remember the steps for using the strategy,” (p. 140).
Merlone and Moran (2008)	<p>First five lessons from: <i>All Kinds of Minds</i> (Levine, 1993)</p> <p>Next five lessons from: <i>Who I Can Be is up to Me</i> (Campbell-Whatley, 2004)</p> <p>Final stage: Exit Interview with the guidance counsellor</p>	<p>“We identify parts of the brain and review some of their tasks. During the next four lessons, we focus on the brain’s functions as attention, memory, organization, and behavior,” (p. 4).</p> <p>“Teaches the students about special education and self-advocacy as it applies to them in fifth grade,” (p. 5).</p> <p>“Here, students may review their special education file, including test results, the IEP, and relevant documentation regarding response to intervention,” (p. 6).</p>
Campbell-Whatley (2008)	<i>Self-Concept Scale</i> (Piers, 1996)	<p>“The lessons were designed using the TARGET acronym as a basic framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> T-Target the Goals and Objectives of the Lesson A- Assess Students’ Knowledge and Implement Objectives R-Role Play Situations G-Generalize to Other School Situations

		<p>E-Evaluate Student Attainment T-Test Transfer of Skills to Other Environments,” (p. 138-139).</p>
Roberts (2007)	Peer Mentoring	A mentee was paired with a mentor with a similar physical disability to teach identified self-determination skills (p. 12).
Avant (2013)	<i>Environmental Arrangement</i> (Kaiser & Grim, 2006)	<p>The author used two of Kaiser and Grim’s (2006) strategies to promote initiation of requests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing materials out of reach • Arranging activities that will require assistance. (p. 55).
Mishna, Muskat, Farnia, Wiener (2011)	<p>School-based group treatment for students with LD (Mishna & Muskat, 2004a, 2004b)</p> <p>Manualized workshops</p>	<p>The group approach combined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal group treatment (Yalom & Lescz, 2005) • Mutual aid (Shulman, 1999) • Self-psychology (Kohut, 1984) • Self-advocacy (Brunello-Prudencio, 2001). <p>The workshops included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of learning disability and specific types of learning disabilities • Simulation the experience of each type of learning disability. (p. 191-192).

<p>Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Williams-Diehm, Davies, and Stock (2011)</p>	<p><i>Who's Future Is It Anyway?</i> (Wehmeyer et al., 2004)</p>	<p>The intervention involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having self-awareness and disability awareness• Decision making about transition-related outcomes• Identifying and securing community resources to support transition services• Writing and evaluating goals and objectives• Communicating effectively in small groups• Developing skills to become an effective team member, leader, or self-advocate (p. 107).
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Appendix B: Self-advocacy Instructional Programs in High School

Reference	Instructional Strateg(ies)	Brief Description of Strategy
Arndt, Konrad, and Test (2006)	<i>The Self-Directed IEP</i> (Martin et al., 1997)	“The Self-Directed IEP is a multimedia package designed to teach students how to direct their own IEP meetings. The package consists of 10 instructional lessons. Included in the package are two videotapes explaining the 10 lessons and a teachers’ manual with relevant background material on the program, easy to follow assessments, detailed lesson plans, and a teachers’ key to be used with the student workbook,” (Arndt et al., 2006, p. 198).
Woods, Sylvester, and Martin (2010)	<i>The Student-Directed Transition Planning</i> (Sylvester, Woods, and Martin, 2007)	“The Student-Directed Transition Planning lessons provide students with the transition knowledge and skills they need to develop and use their own summary of performance (SOP). In the final lesson of the instructional package students write their own SOP script that they can use at their transition planning IEP meeting,” (Woods et al., 2010, p. 107).
Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, and Little (2011)	<i>Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction</i> (Mithaug, Wehmeyer, Agran, Martin, Palmer, 1998, p. 10).	“The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) is a model of instruction based on the principles of self-determination that enables teachers to teach students to use self-regulated problem-solving strategies to achieve self-selected goals,” (p. 2).

<p>Wood, Kelley, Test, and Fowler (2010)</p>	<p>Scripted lessons created using information from:</p> <p><i>Students With Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities</i></p> <p>(U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2007)</p>	<p>Five of the scripted lessons were on accommodations and the next five were on rights and responsibilities.</p>
<p>Quann, Lyman, Crumlish, Hines, Williams, Pleet-Odle, Eisenman (2015)</p>	<p><i>The HAWK Highway model</i></p> <p>(Quann et al., 2015)</p>	<p>“The model was implemented through a combination of (a) individualized learning support coaching that was embedded in the school day and (b) brief, explicit small-group and individual instruction related to developing goals and leading an IEP meeting,” (p. 298).</p>
<p>Rothman, Maldonado, and Rothman (2008)</p>	<p><i>SUNY Albany pre-college</i></p> <p>Sponsored by:</p> <p><i>Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (1987)</i></p> <p><i>Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (1999)</i></p>	<p>The workshops were on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living • Advocacy Skills • Study Skills • Disabled Student Services • Transition Skills • College Systems (registration, financial aid, etc.) • Assertiveness Training • Reasonable Accommodations • Teen Sexuality (p. 76).