

# Enhanced Self-Determination Instruction: Empowering Students with Disabilities

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## Introduction

- Research in the field of special education shows a correlation between self-determination skill development and positive post-secondary school outcomes for students with disabilities
  - Three main areas of post-school outcomes are (1) education, (2) employment, and (3) independent living
  - Navigating the transition to adulthood can be extremely difficult for young adults with disabilities and their family as they lose the structure of public schooling and care
- What is **self-determination** anyway?
  - Self-determination is knowing what one wants and how to achieve it
  - Self-determination skills encompass goal setting, problem solving, self-awareness, self-advocacy, and self-regulation
- Enhanced self-determination instruction**, as employed in this study, combines person-centered, small-group communication activities (exemplified by the C3ForMe resources) with standard self-determination curriculum
  - C3ForMe resources include “Conversation Cue Cards” and a “Personalized Playbook”—both activities are personalizable and build a sense of empowerment and efficacy within individuals
- Extending Dr. Janae Duclos’ pilot study, this study brought a fourteen-week, enhanced self-determination program to two middle school, special education classrooms in Gadsden County
- The purpose of the study was to assess how enhanced self-determination instruction affects the self-determination skills of transition-aged young adults with disabilities
- The hypothesis, drawing on results from the pilot study, predicted that there is a significant positive influence on students’ self-determination levels after receiving enhanced self-determination instruction

## Methods

- Participants in the study included 16 students (aged 11–15) in intellectual disabilities (InD) classrooms, as well as two special education teachers and two paraprofessionals
- Materials included: C3ForMe Conversation Cue Cards and a personalized playbook, *Self-determination is my Superpower*, weekly PowerPoints for an enhanced self-determination lecture, and the AIR Self-Determination Scale
- After receiving approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board, district approval for the schools in Northwest Florida, parental consent, and assent from student participants, the research team began conducting hour-long, twice weekly lessons on enhanced self-determination in two InD classrooms
  - 28 lessons were given over fourteen weeks, utilizing above materials
- During the first and final weeks of the study, the research team administered the AIR Self-Determination Scale as a pre- and post-assessment
- The AIR results were analyzed to assess the impact of self-determination instruction on students’ self-determination levels

## Results

- Results from the pilot study of Dr. Duclos and her research team demonstrated a statistically significant increase in students’ self-determination levels after receiving enhanced self-determination instruction
  - A pairwise t-test was conducted to compare the results from the pre- and post-assessments
- We hypothesize and predict a positive correlation between students’ self-determination levels and their engagement in enhanced self-determination instruction
  - Variables such as interruptions in self-determination instruction due to school cancellations may have influenced the study’s results.
- After collecting results from the AIR post-assessment, statistical analysis will assess the impact of self-determination instruction on students’ self-determination levels.



a) example of C3ForMe Conversation Cue Cards focusing on self-awareness

b) C3ForMe Conversation Cue Cards

c) C3ForMe Personalizable Playbook Activity



d) an example of student and teacher participating in an enhanced self-determination session

## Conclusion

- Though the results from this study are not yet determined, prior research and the pilot study suggest that self-determination can be highly effective for empowering students with disabilities and enhancing their capacity as individuals moving into adulthood.
- Self-determination skills can be developed over time and can be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities.

## Future Directions

- Future research on self-determination skill-building in special education classrooms could enhance the accessibility of self-determination instruction for students with diverse abilities.
  - For instance, it could focus on preparing and supporting students in attending and actively participating in transition individual education program (IEP) meetings, understanding their transition IEP, and becoming aware of their rights as recipients of special education services.
- Future studies should ensure consistent implementation of self-determination instruction to effectively support students, strengthen their skills, and enhance their post-school opportunities.
- Expanding the participant pool to include students with diverse abilities and from multiple schools could further build on the research conducted by Dr. Duclos’ team.

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## C3ForMe Website



## Resources

