

SELF-DETERMINATION AND

LEADER IN ME SCHOOLS:

A CASE STUDY

by

SHANDRA M. SHAW

KAGENDO MUTUA, CHAIR

NIRMALA EREVELLES

AARON KUNTZ

JOHN MYRICK

NICOLE SWOSZOWSKI

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Special Education
and Multiple Abilities
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2020

Copyright Shandra M. Shaw 2020
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

This investigation employed a qualitative single case embedded design to understand the teaching practices and self-determination experiences of students with high incidence disabilities in a Lighthouse elementary *Leader in Me* school. This study addressed the following research questions: 1) how do teachers in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; 2) how does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school; and 3) how does the social contextual environment of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities. Participants included four fifth-grade students with specific learning disabilities and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder who received special education services inside the general education classroom for at least 80% of the school day. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, student leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, observations, and artifact examination. Data were analyzed using common comparative thematic analysis. Results suggest that a culture of high expectations accompanied by teacher supports created an inclusive learning environment conducive for self-determined behaviors among

students with high incidence disabilities. Overall, students experienced positive self-determination outcomes with limited sustained impact. Recommendations for program considerations and further research are provided.

Keywords: self-determination, students with disabilities, *Leader in Me*, *7 Habits*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Now the Lord had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

Like Abram, God, You sent me on a journey into an unknown land away from the familiar to the unfamiliar. The journey toward a doctorate degree was full of uncertainty, but Father, You were with me for the entire journey. You are my Rock, my certainty in uncertain times. Thank you, God, for helping me to see in myself what You already see in me. Thank you for my loving and supportive family who You used to bless me through this process.

Husband, thank you for being my strength during many moments of weakness. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to persevere through the mental agony of fourth-quarter challenges and for pushing me to stay in the game when I periodically tapped my helmet for much needed sideline breaks. You are my God given coach, spiritual leader, and best friend.

Baby Girl, thank you for being you. God used you to encourage me when I needed encouragement the most. Thank you for your genuine, creative, and loving words of encouragement. Your cards and drawings lifted my spirits and gave me the push I needed to continue moving forward. Thank you for your unconditional love and support. You are an awesome young lady and my sweet blessing. I am proud to call you my daughter.

Son, I know you are proud of me as I am of you. Thank you for being my chauffeur when I needed to get to campus quickly without worrying about a parking space. You waited patiently until I completed my business, then returned me back to my vehicle. Thank you for running to the store for ink cartridges, copy paper, and other needed items. You are a good loving person, and I am proud to call you my son.

Mother, thank you for being my confidant, editor, counselor, and cheerleader. You are always there for me, and I thank God for you. I appreciate you reading all my papers and providing feedback. Thank you for pushing me to be the best I can be, beginning with first grade when I comfortably rode on the “good student” reputation of Andre and Teresa. You are a great mother.

Dad, thank you for being proud of me. Thank you for helping me to be proud of who I am. Keep fighting the fight toward true freedom.

Teresa, a conversation you and I had at Mya’s volleyball game encouraged me to follow through with my doctoral application. Thank you for being the person you are, one who sees possibilities and does not succumb to perceived challenges or listen to excuses. I am glad you are my big sister.

Andre, though you rest in peace, I know you would be proud of me because you always wanted what was best for Teresa and me. Thank you for loving and taking good care of us. I miss you on this side of Heaven and am looking forward to seeing you again.

Dr. Kagendo Mutua, my chair, thank you for being the vessel who led me to God’s open door. Thank you also for your support, advising, editing, and encouragement. Most of all, thank you for your friendship. To my dissertation committee, Drs. John Myrick, Nicole Swoszowski,

Aaron Kuntz, and Nirmala Erevelles, thank you for your guidance, suggestions, and making this process surmountable. You are among the best, and I am grateful for your commitment to my development as a doctoral student and as a person. Thank you all.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Research Questions.....	9
Delimitations	10
Limitations.....	12
Definition of Terms.....	13
Summary.....	16
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Self-Determination Theory of Motivation.....	17
Self-Determination Defined	21
Developmental Nature of Self-Determination.....	24
Impact of Self-Determination.....	27
Self-Determination and Pedagogical Considerations	30

Inclusive Education	37
Research Gaps	40
<i>Leader in Me Schools and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i>	43
Be Proactive.....	44
Begin with the End in Mind	44
Put First Things First	47
Think Win-Win.....	49
Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.....	50
Synergize	51
Sharpen the Saw	52
Conclusion	53
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	55
Researcher Locatedness.....	55
Research Questions.....	57
Methods	58
Participants	59
Research Site	60
Researcher’s Role	61
Subjectivities	63
Participant versus nonparticipant.....	65
Data Sources	66
Semi-structured Interviews.....	66

Leadership Portfolio Discussions	67
School Tours	67
Observations	68
Artifact Examination	68
Data Collections	68
Interviews	70
Student interviews	70
Teacher interviews	71
Leadership Portfolio Discussions	71
School Tours	72
Observations	72
Artifact Examination	73
Data Analysis.....	73
Verification.....	74
Trustworthiness.....	74
Credibility	75
Dependability.....	75
Confirmability	76
Transferability.....	76
Ethical Considerations	77
Autonomy	77
Justice	78

Beneficence	78
Conclusion	79
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	80
Participants	80
TJ	81
Lisa	81
Rainbow Sparkles	82
Coco Puffs	82
Mrs. Lexa	83
Mrs. Supreme	83
Mrs. Diesel	84
Research Question One	84
Autonomy	85
Competence	86
Relatedness	88
A Culture of High Expectations with a Student Driven Focus	89
A Culture of High Expectations Characterized by Teacher Responsiveness	92
A Culture of High Expectations Reinforced Through a Common Language	96
Research Question Two	99
Being Academically, Socially, and Behaviorally Accountable and Responsible	100
Exercising Self-Determination Skills	103
Goal setting and monitoring	103

Choice making, decision making, and problem solving.....	107
Self-advocacy	109
Relying on External Supports	111
Resisting Failure	113
Research Question Three	118
Transforming Student Mindset Toward Leadership	118
Learning About Self Through Expectations, Explorations, and Celebrations	124
Conclusion	131
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	132
Seeing Disability Differently	132
Reframing Failure/Reconceptualizing Difference	134
Resisting Negative Narratives and Empowering Students Through Causal Agency	135
Using <i>7 Habits</i> -Based Self-Determination Model.....	136
Exercising Self-Determination	137
Encouraging Leadership Through Transformational Processes	139
Summary.....	141
Implications	142
Implications for Research.....	142
Implications of Practice	144
Recommendations	145
Concluding Thoughts	147
REFERENCES	149

APPENDIX A: TEACHER RECRUITMENT SCRIPT	161
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH STUDY (TEACHER	163
APPENDIX C: PARENT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT.....	168
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH STUDY (PARENT	170
APPENDIX E: STUDENT ASSENT FORM.....	175
APPENDIX F: DECISION MAKING CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL.....	177
APPENDIX G: 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE SCREENER.....	178
APPENDIX H: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	180
APPENDIX I: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	183
APPENDIX J: MEMBER CHECK LETTER FOR TEACHERS	186
APPENDIX K: IRB APPROVAL	187

CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Background

Self-determination is a construct that has been studied for over forty years. Deci (1975) first studied self-determination in the context of human behavior and the social environmental conditions that cause individuals to act toward their own needs, interests, and preferences. Later, others explored this construct from the standpoint of educational practices and programs that facilitate the acquisition and utilization of self-determined behaviors and the educational and social implications resulting from such practices and programs for students with disabilities. Michael Wehmeyer (1996), one of the leading researchers in the field of special education, constructed a theoretical framework that describes essential components of self-determined individuals and strategies that promote self-determined behaviors. Later, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) established a causal link between self-determination and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities using randomized control trials. The common thread that ties these different studies on self-determination is that self-determination is a powerful construct with high leverage academic, behavioral, and social implications for students with disabilities. What is known is that self-determination can be taught; self-determination can be learned (Wehmeyer, Sands, Doll, & Palmer, 1997; Wood & Test, 2001); and the more environmental and social contexts foster self-directed actions, personal accomplishment, and a sense of connection with others, the more the quality of self-determined behaviors as students move on the self-

determination continuum from externally controlled behaviors that can lead to learned helplessness toward intrinsically motivated actions that can lead to learned helpfulness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 1998).

Self-determination is a mindset of personal agency resulting in self-caused actions originating from students' knowledge and beliefs about their personal strengths, limitations, abilities, skills, preferences, interests, and ability to impact their own outcomes (Wehmeyer, 2005). Research indicates that students with disabilities typically do not effectively employ self-determination skills without intervention and that their experiences of failure often materializes as helplessness and, at times, hopelessness (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, 2005). Self-determination capacity building for these students becomes possible when the social contextual environment fosters instruction, authentic practice, and risk-taking within a supportive culture where students develop the capacity to self-manage, problem solve, make decisions, and self-advocate. Promoting self-determination through instruction and opportunities to practice component skills (e.g., self-advocacy, leadership, problem solving, goal setting and attainment) can help students with disabilities come to rely on themselves and thereby positively impact their pre- and post-school outcomes (see e.g., Benitez, Lattimore, & Wehmeyer, 2005; Martin et al., 2006; Snyder & Shapiro, 1997; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Wehmeyer and Schwartz found that the more self-determined students are prior to leaving high school, the more likely they are to obtain employment, earn higher wages, and establish a savings account. Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little (2015) found that self-determined individuals are more likely to access community resources, and Wehmeyer, Shogren, Palmer, Williams-Diehm, & Little (2012) found that these individuals are also more likely to live independently and experience overall

quality of life. Academically, Erickson, Noonan, Zheng, and Brussow (2015) found that higher levels of self-determination including autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization resulted in higher levels of reading and math achievement for students with intellectual disabilities. Erickson et al. posited that when students with disabilities believe that they can impact their own outcomes and afforded opportunities to utilize their strengths while understanding their needs and limitations; act toward their own interests, preferences, and abilities; and learn to apply skills appropriate to the situation, they can improve their academic performance in the general education classroom. Likewise, Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, and Wood (2007) found that goal setting, a key self-determination skill component, had the greatest effect on math quality for students with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

Statement of the Problem

As evidenced in the research, self-determination is a powerful construct for students with disabilities as these students experience higher rates of academic and post-school success when provided opportunities to learn and practice self-determination skills prior to leaving high school. Without these opportunities, students with disabilities fall victim to learned helplessness resulting from experiences of failure characteristic of non-inclusive educational spaces. Yet, research efforts, which historically focused on individual and small group interventions designed to increase students' IEP participation and goal attainment, have only begun to touch on instructional and contextual possibilities and their impact. This investigation looks at self-determination through a schoolwide lens, that is, Steven Covey's (1989) *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* principles (hereafter referred to as *7 Habits* or *Habits*) implemented in *Leader in*

Me schools as the impetus for student empowerment, leadership, and overall positive self-change for all students. Covey's *7 Habits principles* create a self-determination skill-building framework and school culture conducive for autonomous actions, positive social relationships, and personal efficacy. All students receive training designed first to build positive self-perceptions, second to empower them to make positive choices and decisions regarding their behaviors, and third to engage interdependency in a way that is powerfully impactful to their social outcomes all within a school culture that reinforces leadership through self-governance. This preemptive idea of leadership characteristic of *Leader in Me* schools involves intentional teacher actions (e.g., teaching and modeling the *7 Habits*, creating opportunities for and reinforcing leadership development) leading to student leadership discovery and capacity building in a way that honors students' perspectives, cultures, values, and goals. Engaging the perspectives of students with disabilities and their teachers as well as observing the social context were necessary for understanding self-determination from a schoolwide approach and can add to scholarly knowledge for research and practice. By conducting this investigation in a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, I began to explore a social context that, to my knowledge, has received little research attention, and thereby opened scholarly discourse to the self-determination possibilities available to students with disabilities attending these schools.

Purpose of the Study

While much is known about self-determination (see, e.g., Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008; Lee, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2015; Wehmeyer and Schwartz, 1997), how to teach it (see, e.g., *ChoiceMaker*, Martin & Marshall, 1995; *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*; Reusen, 1996; *Whose Future Is It Anyway?*, Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995), and even how to

measure it (see, e.g., *The Arc's Self-Determination Scale*, Wehmeyer, 1995; *AIR Self-Determination Scale*, Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994), what is clear in all these efforts is that studies on self-determination have focused almost exclusively on individual students or small groups of students. The evidence on the import of self-determination to students' educational outcomes is clearly indisputable. What we do not know is how or whether a schoolwide model of teaching self-determination does indeed have impacts on the outcomes of students with disabilities.

Leader in Me schools take a ubiquitous approach to the development of self-caused behaviors and social competence by embedding Covey's (1989) *7 Habits* principles into daily classroom instruction. Students learn to become effective leaders of their own lives as they begin to embody the *7 Habits* principles which are explicitly taught, modeled, and reinforced (e.g., Leader of the Month, Caught Being a Leader) across grades, subjects, and school settings (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, playground). The first habit, *Be Proactive*, teaches students to become active participants in their own choices. Sparks and Cote (2012) suggested that choice making instruction should provide students with a sense of personal control and illuminate the consequences of their choices. Habit one initially trains students to transform their thinking from "Things happen to me" to "I make things happen." The second habit, *Begin with the End in Mind*, begins the preliminary stage of goal setting and attainment as students explore and construct their personal visions and goals. Habit three, *Put First Things First*, is the physical execution of actions where students plan, prioritize, monitor, and revise their goals and action steps. When students with disabilities who typically lack effective decision making, self-management (Sparks & Cote, 2012), and problem solving (Sands & Doll, 1996) skills are taught

to set goals and monitor their progress, they are more likely to meet and/or exceed their goals (Shogren et al., 2012) and improve their academic performance (Konrad et al., 2007).

The fourth, fifth, and sixth habits mark a shift from inward to outward thinking. According to Covey (1989), interdependence is the ability to work well with others and is essential to reaching optimal effectiveness. Thus, the fourth habit, *Think Win-Win*, teaches students the value of selfless decision making. To think win-win, students apply social problem solving, which has been linked to greater goal attainment for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). The fifth habit, *Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood*, teaches students the value of effective communication, that is, listening with the heart, open eyes, and an attentive ear. When students seek first to understand, then to be understood, they engage social problem solving, which is essential to the social engagement of students with disabilities (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). The sixth habit, *Synergize*, teaches students the value of collaboration. Students learn that a combination of energy while problem solving produces more creative and imaginative solutions than would be possible if working alone. Cooperative learning is important for children with disabilities, especially students exhibiting behavioral and social challenges who tend to shun social interactions because of past patterns of social failure (Zentall & Beike, 2012).

The seventh habit, *Sharpen the Saw*, teaches students the value of self-care. Students learn to sharpen their mental, physical, and emotional capacity to accomplish their goals. To sharpen the saw, Covey (1989) recommends that students take care of their physical health through proper diet and exercise, their mental health by taking part in leisure activities, and their emotional health by developing relationships. Solish, Perry, Minnes (2010) posit that building

relationships covers a multitude of needs for students with disabilities including quality of life, intellectual growth, and social support needs.

This research examined the impact of a schoolwide leadership model premised on an imperative of leadership development and empowerment for all students using Covey's (1989) 7 *Habits* principles as the impetus of change. Specifically, this research aimed to understand (a) how teachers in a *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; (b) how a schoolwide approach to leadership development using the 7 *Habits* impact students' with high incidence disabilities exercise of self-determined behaviors; and (c) how the social contextual environment of a *Leader in Me* school supports students exercise and expression of self-determination skills.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that undergirds this study brings together the self-determination theory as articulated by Deci and Ryan (1985) and Wehmeyer (1996) within the context of Covey's *Leader in Me* schoolwide self-determination model. Self-determination is about self-caused behaviors and the conditions that make self-caused behaviors possible. Deci and Ryan's theory is premised on the notion that human beings have a natural tendency toward learning which is optimized when the environment supports three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When the social context supports these basic needs, then individuals become intrinsically motivated to act on their own behalf or to act on their volition. Volition undergirds autonomous behaviors. According to Wehmeyer, Shogren, Toste, and Mahal (2017), autonomy involves “the need to feel that one's actions are volitional in

nature” (p. 296). In the classroom setting, teachers support students’ need for autonomy by creating conditions where self-caused behaviors become a natural product of the social space. Students feel free and are encouraged to make choices and decisions, solve problems, and, in special education, advocate for needed accommodations and supports. Competence involves “the need to successfully engage, manipulate, and negotiate the environment” (Wehmeyer et al., 2017, p. 296).

Deci and Ryan (1985) Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (SDTM) indicates that students need to feel competent in their ability to act autonomously and supported by and connected to their teachers and peers to intrinsically engage self-determination skills. Through Covey’s (1989) *7 Habits* principles, *Leader In Me* schools provide natural contexts in which self-determination instruction, practice, and feedback can authentically occur across the educational setting. Together, these theories suggest that *Leader in Me* schools can potentially produce students who successfully integrate self-determination skills, attitudes, and knowledge within themselves to positively impact their academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. Deci and Ryan’s theory describes social spaces necessary for optimal self-determined behaviors. These spaces are characterized by a sense of autonomy whereby students feel that their actions are self-caused rather than coerced (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). Additionally, such social spaces foster competent exploration whereby students are willing to take risks and persist through challenges. Teachers support students’ need for competence by providing challenging tasks that are within students’ individual abilities to attain with ongoing positive feedback and scaffold support that facilitates continuous progress toward their goals. Expectations along with skills needed to meet expectations are taught, modeled, and continuously revisited so that students feel competent in

their ability to meaningfully contribute to the learning community. Creating positive connections with students is also critical as students have a need for “close emotional bonds” (Wehmeyer et al., 2017, p. 296) which materialize in social spaces where purposeful communal engagements and interdependency are the norm as teachers routinely engage students in relationship building activities and model socially appropriate interactions. This study brings together Deci and Ryan’s and Wehmeyer’s theories of self-determination to form a framework for understanding teacher’s perspectives on their roles in the production of autonomy-supportive social spaces (Haakma, Janssen, & Minnaert, 2007) of the classroom and school and the impact of their efforts on students with disabilities. Of equal importance to my understanding of how self-determination operates within Covey’s *Leader in Me* schoolwide model, this study included an inquiry into how students in this school experienced these autonomy-supportive social spaces.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to understand the impact of a schoolwide approach that employs Covey’s (1989) *7 Habits* principles to produce leadership and empowerment on students exercise of self-determined behaviors. Specifically, I addressed the following research questions:

- 1) How do teachers in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students’ with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness;
- 2) How does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school; and

- 3) How does the social contextual environment of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities?

Delimitation

The purpose of this investigation was to examine and describe (a) the impact of schoolwide leadership training on the self-determination behaviors of students with high incidence disabilities within a local elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, (b) how the social-contextual environment created by teachers fostered autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and (c) how the social contextual environment of the school supported the expression and exercise of self-determined behaviors. Lighthouse schools are exemplary models of the *Leader in Me* model, have at least four years of *7 Habits* implementation, serve as collaborative partners to other schools in the early stages of implementation, and demonstrate evidence of student leadership development often resulting in academic, behavioral, and social progress. Participants included fifth-grade students who received special education support services under the categories of learning disabilities and other health impaired, specifically ADHD. I selected fifth-grade students for this study because it is around this age that, developmentally, self-determination knowledge, attitudes, and skills begin to stabilize (Sands & Doll, 1996). Four student participants and their teachers participated in this study which enabled me to provide a rich description of students' self-determination experiences, adequately compare findings across participants (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007; Yin, 2014), and develop positive researcher-to-participant relationships designed to reduce participant inhibitions and promote authentic interviews and observations (Tracy, 2010).

Case studies are useful for gathering qualitative data when there is no clear separation between the phenomenon (self-determination) and the context (*Leader in Me* school). Case studies also lend themselves to “the examination of the contextual conditions in relation to the ‘case’” (Yin, 2014, p. 50). In this study, the context was of interest as 7 *Habits* principles created the school’s culture and were very much a part of the school’s identity. Of interest was how this leadership culture impacted the expression and exercise of self-determination of students with disabilities who received instruction in the general education classroom for the majority (i.e., 80% to 100%) of the school day. I utilized an embedded single case study design to gather and analyze data and report findings collectively across participants (Yin, 2014). While specifically prescribed case study methods are nonexistent, I collected data for this research through semi-structured and unstructured interviews with students and teachers, leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, observations, and artifact examinations. Student leadership portfolios were personalized notebooks containing collections of samples that reflected students’ academic, behavioral, and/or social achievements, progress, and goals. I conducted school tours with each student participant and one teacher to gather information about the social contextual environment. Data were cross referenced and used to authenticate participants’ responses and to gain a holistic picture of the *Leader in Me* model and students’ self-determination experiences. Multiple points of data collection were useful for triangulation which added trustworthiness to findings, enabled me to look at all data through a critical lens, and reduced researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013; Roulston, 2014). Data analysis involved writing analytic memos of my preliminary thoughts and insights and questions for further investigation and keeping track of how I interpreted data throughout the data collection process. Data were analyzed using constant

comparative thematic analysis. Specifically, I engaged iterative inductive processes of repetitive listening to interview recordings, repetitive reading of transcriptions, sorting and resorting interview transcriptions coding, and viewing and reviewing field notes and photographs to generate initial codes, focused codes, and themes. Writing memos occurred throughout the study as a method for self-reflection and self-critique, generating follow-up questions, guiding initial and focused coding, solving problems, and keeping track of ideas. I used analytic memos to inform, generate, and revise codes and categories (Maxwell, 2013) and member checking to ensure accurate depiction of participants' comments as I assumed the role of distant observer solely responsible for data collection and analysis.

Limitations

Some potential limitations to this study included the following:

- 1) The limited number of disability categories included. This research was limited to students who received special education services under the categories of learning disabilities and other health impairments (i.e., ADHD).
- 2) The researcher's familiarity with the program. I received *Leader in Me* training, taught in a *Leader in Me* school, and maintained close affiliations with other teachers implementing the model. Keeping track of how I interpreted the data through memo writing helped to minimize bias and ensure accurate reporting (Yin, 2014).
- 3) The brevity of the research. Self-determination is a complex construct that requires ongoing instruction and interaction with one's natural environment. This study was limited by two months of research conducted over the course

of one school semester which may not be enough to obtain a full description of students' self-determination experiences and skill development.

Definition of Terms

Autonomy. Independently acting toward one's own interests, preferences, and abilities (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Ability to express oneself without outside pressure or forced guidance (Haakma et al., 2017).

Choice Making. The expression of preferences and/or autonomy (Wehmeyer et al., 1997).

Competence. One of three basic psychological needs in which the individual feels a sense of accomplishment and adequacy largely because of the social context to which he/she is exposed (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Haakma et al., 2017).

Decision Making. In-depth choice making process involving evaluating alternatives and consequences to determine the most effective course of action (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Wehmeyer (1995) identified four steps in the decision making process: (1) define the problem or issue, (2) gather information about the problem/issue including alternative solutions, (3) evaluate options and alternatives, and (4) execute action steps (p. 33).

Goal Setting and Attainment. Process by which students regulate their behaviors by setting goals, planning action steps, assessing progress, and adjusting goals and/or behaviors based on outcomes. According to Wehmeyer and colleagues (1997), this skill is at the core of self-determination and does not imply success in all situations. In other words, judging whether an individual is self-determined is not contingent on mastery of goal, but that he/she acts toward desired goals.

High Incidence Disabilities. High incidence disabilities refer to the frequency with which a disability category occurs among school aged students (Walker & Barry, 2018). These categories include, among others, students with specific learning disabilities and Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (Prince, Hodge, Bridges, Katsiyannis, 2018).

Learning Disabilities. “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations” (Heward, 2009, p. 173).

Problem Solving. Complex decision making process in which the solution may not be readily available. There are two types of problem solving: impersonal and interpersonal (social) problem solving. Impersonal problem solving typically has one solution that remains constant over time (e.g., puzzles, math problems). Interpersonal problem solving involves complex cognitive processes in relation to social interactions where the solutions are often situational with multiple possible solutions. Wehmeyer (1995) posit that interpersonal problem solving skills are the most critical for self-determined behavior as these skills enable students with disabilities to make sense of and cope with an ever-changing social world. Problem solving steps include: (1) identifying the problem, (2) understanding the problem through logic and explanation, and (3) generating solutions to the problem.

Psychological Empowerment. Disposition characterized by internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and outcome expectancy. Believing one has what it takes to reach his/her goals and that he/she can reach his/her goals when he/she tries (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). According to Wehmeyer (1995), “self-determined people act on the basis of a belief that they (a) have control

over circumstances that are important to them [internal local of control], (b) possess the requisite skills to achieve desired outcomes [self-efficacy] and (c) if they choose to apply those skills, the identified outcomes will result [outcome expectancy]” (p. 27).

Relatedness. One of three innate psychological needs identified by Deci and Ryan’s (1985) SDTM that involves the need to feel a sense of belonging in the social environment.

Self-Determination. The process by which an individual takes control of his/her own life by making choices and decisions that impact his/her quality of life free from undo coercion (Wehmeyer, 1996). Self-determination includes the following characteristics: autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. These characteristics are acquired and developed through instruction that focuses on choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy, leadership, self-awareness, self-knowledge, internal locus of control, positive attribution of efficacy, and outcome expectancy (Wehmeyer & Schwartz 1997).

Self-Awareness. One’s sense of identity deriving from an understanding of his/her uniqueness and separation from others (Wehmeyer, 1995).

Self-Knowledge. Knowledge of one’s strengths, weakness, abilities, limitations, emotions, and feelings and using this knowledge to positively impact one’s quality of life (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Self-knowledge is a prerequisite to self-help as individuals need to understand who they are in comparison to who they want to be (Wehmeyer, 1995).

Self-Regulation. Evaluating, choosing, and then responding to stimuli in the environment based on perceived outcomes (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Includes self-observation (monitoring one’s response to his/her social and physical environment), self-evaluation (judging acceptability

of potential behaviors—that is, what am I doing versus what should I be doing), and self-reinforcement (delivering a consequence based on one’s behavior; Wehmeyer, 1995).

Self-Realization. Acting in accordance with one’s knowledge of personal strengths and limitations in a way that produces the best possible outcomes (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Burke, Palmer, 2017). “Self-determined people are self-realizing in that they use a comprehensive, and reasonably accurate, knowledge of themselves and their strengths and limitations to act in such a manner as to capitalize on this knowledge. This self-knowledge and self-understanding forms through experience with and interpretation of one’s environment and is influenced by evaluations of significant others, reinforcements and attributions of one’s own behavior” (Wehmeyer, 1995, p. 28).

Summary

Chapter I established the importance of self-determination for students with disabilities and the need for instructional practices and environmental conditions that foster the development of self-determination skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The *Leader in Me* program, infused with Covey’s (1989) *7 Habits* principles, focuses on schoolwide leadership development for all students and, to my knowledge, has not been the subject of research in relation to self-determination development and students with disabilities. Thus, this study added to the literature opening discourse to the possibility of schoolwide leadership and student empowerment models that create social contextual and environmental conditions necessary for the acquisition and exercise of self-determination skills. In the next chapter, I provided a more detailed description of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) SDTM and a synthesis of the literature including research gaps.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I synthesized the literature, exposed research gaps, and discussed the need for additional research. The literature review represents an extensive examination of peer reviewed journals, books, and dissertations using a variety of databases and search engines including Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, EBSCOhost, PsychINFO, ERIC EBSCOhost, ERIC ProQuest, Scout, and Google Scholar. I also searched reference lists for articles pertaining to students with disabilities and self-determination, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Self-Determination Functional Model, Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (SDTM), *Leader in Me*, Covey's (1989) *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and inclusive education. Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDTM provided a theoretical lens for this research and is detailed below.

Self-Determination Theory of Motivation

Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDTM is a universal theory that attempts to explain the driving forces behind the choices people make and is concern with whether people's behaviors are self-endorsed (intrinsically motivated) or coerced (extrinsically motivated). The more self-endorsed, autonomous, and self-integrated the behavior, the more likely the behavior will be sustained even in the presence of challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, SDTM indicates that self-determined action is contingent on social-contextual conditions which can either enhance or hinder self-endorsed behaviors. Social contextual conditions consisting of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness stimulate intrinsically motivated self-determined behaviors in which students act of their own volition toward desired interests. Autonomous conditions enable students to feel like they have choices and can enact control and agency over their own lives. Competence is supported when environmental and social conditions present optimal challenges (not too easy and not too difficult) characterized by ongoing positive feedback (Young-Jones, Cara, & Levesque-Bristol, 2014). Relatedness occurs within spaces where people feel close to, connected, and dependent on others, and these feelings are reciprocated by others in the social setting (Camp Stomping Ground, 2014). All three conditions are innate for all human beings no matter their culture or disability and are needed on an ongoing basis for individuals to be psychologically healthy and maximize their potential (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory of Motivation include two sub-theories that attempt to explain the quality of human behavior—Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT). Cognitive Evaluation Theory involves the intrinsic driving forces inherent to the self that cause a person to engage in an activity simply for enjoyment, interest, and/or proficiency (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When behavior is intrinsically motivated, the individual is personally invested and wholeheartedly engages in the activity such that the activity becomes integrated with the self, making it difficult to separate the activity from the individual. Referred to as flow, or peaked intrinsic motivation, the activity becomes an end of itself like a child playing a video game or a person watching a football game. Deci and Ryan (1985) found that intrinsically motivated individuals were more creative, persisted through challenges, and experienced increased learning and higher self-esteem than individuals who relied on external controls. Moreover, CET indicates that all human beings have three basic psychological needs.

We have a need to feel like (a) we have choices and are in control of our own lives (autonomy), (b) we are good at something (competent), and (c) we are positively connected to others (relatedness). When these needs are met, then individuals become psychologically well. Intrinsically motivated behavior becomes likely when the environment supports all three basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Organismic Integration Theory involves extrinsic driving forces not inherent to the self. These forces range from amotivation (none self-regulated autonomous behavior done in the presence of a demand or reward) (e.g., a person who hates her job, but goes to work because she needs the money) to integrated regulation (self-regulated autonomous behavior resulting from goals extrinsic to the self) (e.g., a student who studies her notes each night in preparation for a test so that she can get good grades to go to college). Amotivation is the lowest quality of motivation described as simply going through the motions to get something you want or avoid something you do not want. Individuals who are amotivated do not value the activity, often do not feel competent or autonomous, and have no expectations beyond the receipt or avoidance of some external factor. Thus, the activity does not become integrated or internalized with the person's sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Externally regulated behavior, like amotivated behavior, is controlled. Actions occur as a matter of compliance (e.g., studying for a test to comply with parental rules) or rewards (e.g., taking a job because it pays a lot of money). Introjected regulation are controlled behaviors, though unconsciously adopted by the self, but are done as a matter of pride or to satisfy the ego (e.g., doing homework to avoid the stigma of being labeled as a bad student). A person who consciously adopts and values a behavior because it is personally important engages identified

regulation (e.g., taking a course in special education law to better understand how to serve students with disabilities). Integrated regulation is the highest external regulation as a person fully assimilates the behavior with the self. The one factor that distinguishes integrated regulation from intrinsic motivation is that the goal is external to the self. While the individual understands and values the activity, the activity is not an end to itself, but a means to an end (e.g., a teacher taking extra training courses to improve her job performance and to potentially get a raise) (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Taken with the notion that all human beings have a natural tendency toward growth and development and that optimal development occurs within environments that support the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (referred to as autonomy supportive environments in the research literature), SDTM maintains that authority figures such as teachers can create psychologically nourishing environments in which students can thrive. In an educational setting, this psychologically empowering environment does not seek to control students but set things in motion whereby students control themselves. In other words, the teacher creates conditions in which students enact their own internal tendencies to grow and develop rather than being teacher controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers become socialization agents who nurture students' needs, choices, and interests and engage relevant pedagogy—that is, teaching that capitalizes on students' own experiences, backgrounds, goals, and values—to move students on the motivational continuum from amotivation toward intrinsic motivation (Haakma et al., 2017). Autonomy supportive teachers demonstrate respect and appreciation for students' perspectives, support students' initiatives, and avoid using controlling language (e.g., “you should”; “you need

to”). Autonomy supportive teachers are not permissive, rather they provide choice within structure while remaining involved with their students (Kusurkar, Croiset, & Ten Cate, 2011).

Alternatively, when external factors are introduced as motivators, as often occurs in the educational setting, the natural tendency to want to learn for learning sake is hindered by the desire to obtain or avoid some external contingency (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, offering a student who enjoys reading for pleasure a piece of candy for each book he reads can over time negate the student’s enjoyment of reading causing him to read only for the external reward. Reading then becomes a chore only to be engaged in the presence of candy rather than engaged because of the inherent pleasure of reading. The more external controls utilized by teachers to motivate students to learn and behave, the more controlled students become. For students with disabilities who tend to exhibit learned helplessness—the tendency to attribute successes to external forces beyond their control and failures to internal forces (e.g., inability, lack of motivation) (Trainor, 2005; Valas, 2001)—external controls may potentially be detrimental to their perceived identities as autonomous individuals who by their own volition can develop and work toward their own goals (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). In summary, SDTM is a metatheory that attempts to explain human behavior and the conditions in which human behavior is at its best. This theory provided a framework that guided methodological considerations.

Self-Determination Defined

Several definitions of self-determination occur throughout the research literature. Broadly defined, self-determination is the ability to make choices without undue influence or interference from outside forces (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan explained that when a person feels free to choose his/her own actions, or to act autonomously, the natural tendency

toward self-fulfillment leads to psychological wellness. Often referred to as autonomy supportive environments, teachers become largely responsible for creating self-determining spaces whereby students feel free to choose their actions in an environment where they feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Wehmeyer (1996) defined self-determination as “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p. 24). Wehmeyer’s definition illuminated the agentic and empowering nature of self-determination which covers a multitude of needs (e.g., self-fulfillment, self-dignity, personal affirmation, quality of life). Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) offered a more comprehensive definition which frequently occurs in the research literature. Field et al. defined self-determination as:

a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have a greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society. (p. 2)

Conceptually, these definitions suggest that self-determination is a disposition that situates students with disabilities to seek liberties afforded to all citizens, without which, they become respondents, or receivers of information, rather than willful participants in their own lives.

Moreover, Nonnemacher and Bambara (2011) conducted a study to determine how self-advocating individuals with intellectual disabilities defined self-determination and to identify actions of adult agency staff members that inhibited self-determination. Participants defined self-determination as (a) speaking out to not only express their preferences, wants, and needs but

also being intentional about ensuring that their voices were heard and acted upon by staff members and (b) being in charge, that is making choices and decisions for themselves. One participant described how he acted on his right to move out of a group home once he learned that he had the right to not live there. The participants described being in charge as doing what they wanted to do be it engaging in intimate relationships or using their discretion about spending money. A consensus among participants was that self-determination did not occur in isolation. Rather, supports were often necessary but should be self-discretionary. Inhibiting self-determination factors included staff making decisions for participants (e.g., when to go to bed, when to eat), staff indifference to participants' voice and agency (e.g., ignoring participants' requests), and impersonable staff who frequently displayed patterns of retaliation toward participants who advocated for themselves and others. One implication of Nonnemacher and Bambara's study is the necessity of the social environment to produce trusting relationships among the actors.

According to Wehmeyer et al. (1997), to be self-determined, students must to some degree exhibit autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. Autonomy occurs when students act in accordance with their own volition toward preferences, interests, and abilities. Self-regulation occurs when students engage stimulus-response conditions through goal setting, problem solving, and observational learning in a way that positively impacts their desired outcomes. Psychological empowerment occurs when students believe that they have control over and can positively impact outcomes within their environment. Self-realization occurs when students act based on knowledge of their strengths and limitations. Wehmeyer et al. contended that these self-determination components—autonomy, self-

regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization—are largely impacted when instruction focused on the development and practice of certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Specifically, students need to understand their strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and limitations and how to regulate these attributes to positively impact their lives. Students need to possess attitudes that reflect internal locus of control (belief in their ability to control their own outcomes), self-efficacy (belief in their capacity to achieve outcomes), and efficacy of outcomes (the expectation of positive outcomes resulting from personal actions). Students also need to acquire skills including choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, self-advocacy, and leadership. Effective intervention programs consider self-determination characteristics and component elements as well as self-determination developmental tendencies as outlined by Sands and Doll (1996).

Developmental Nature of Self-Determination

According to Sands and Doll (1996), self-determination is developmental and requires cognitive (i.e., metacognition, self-perception) and social (i.e., social problem solving, decision making) capacities which begin to develop as early as age three. Metacognition involves introspection where self-aware students contemplate their own thought processes (e.g., am I using the right strategy; am I thinking about this problem correctly). This self-awareness enables students to address their own needs as they recognize when they are having difficulty, possible causes of the difficulty, and the effectiveness of their strategy. Sands and Doll found that older students were better able to use metacognitive strategies than younger students, but students with disabilities were less likely to develop effective problem-solving strategies on their own. By fifth-grade, typical students named and applied named strategies fairly consistently; whereas in

earlier grades, students were able to provide strategies, but their choice of strategies were often random and ineffective. Sands and Doll also posited that the more appropriately metacognitive strategies were applied, the stronger students' cognitive competencies became making instruction and practice essential to self-determination development.

Self-determination requires an accurate depiction of the self. Students need to know and be realistic about their strengths, needs, and limitations, which is often difficult in the face of lowered self-confidence. Sands and Doll (1996) maintained that students tended to experience lowered self-perceptions as they aged and their self-perceptions became less optimistic and more realistic. From age six to about age 10, students did not attribute success to effort and ability but to the amount of time required to complete a task. Self-perception tended to stabilize around fourth to fifth grade, an appropriate time to begin self-advocacy. It is also during the later third-grade years that higher order thinking began to develop and students began to compare themselves to their peers.

Self-determination requires social negotiation. Students with disabilities live in a contingent world in which they must apply social problem solving to access needed supports, interests, and preferences. This social problem solving involves assessment of their social environment to engage behaviors appropriate to the social situation. Students' ability to read and respond to social situations develop over time. Sands and Doll (1996) referred to this social intuitiveness as "social perspective taking" and explained that "social perspective taking" was "the ability to understand the point of view [i.e., feelings, thinking, and actions] of the other person" (p. 66) when developmentally they realize that others do not necessarily share their own perspective. The transition from an inward to an outward perspective develops around age seven

to eight in which students are not only able to anticipate what others are thinking, but also what others are thinking about what they are thinking.

Self-determination requires social reasoning (the ability to apply conflict resolution strategies in social situations) and social knowledge (knowledge that develops from personal experiences that teaches students how to act in varying social situations). Social reasoning enables students to work within acceptable limits and negotiate spaces of contention to access needed accommodations. For example, gaining access to accommodations is a social negotiation between the teacher and student in which the students may not always get what they need in the manner they want, but they get what they need in the manner the teacher deems appropriate. Sands and Doll (1996) posited that students' behaviors tended to reflect their own social experiences so there may be some developmental variation. Trial and error typically lead to more appropriate ways of responding or acting in particular social settings. However, social knowledge can be somewhat elusive considering that social mores are always shifting making social problem solving difficult.

Informed decision making is a foundational skill for self-determination. Decision making involves evaluative processes that enable students to make judgements based on goals in the presence and absence of choices as well as consider alternatives. As early as third-grade, students make decisions about whether to request assistance with their work. Sands and Doll (1996) suggested that decision making skills depended on student experiences and social adjustments more than age; however, students decision making capacity continued to develop over time. When the social environment supports students' cognitive and social capacity development, then students are more likely to persist in the face of difficulties. Sands and Doll

stated, “social-cultural context may be the single most important contributor to one’s ability to become an independent, efficacious, self-determined adult” (p. 69). Alternatively, lack of decision making opportunity promotes passivity and helplessness. In summary, targeted intervention should consider students’ developmental needs and begin early to ensure acquisition and solidification of self-determination component skills and characteristics. In the next section, I discussed research concerning the importance of self-determination as an educational outcome.

Impact of Self-Determination

Self-determination, often associated with freedom, agency, autonomy, and volition, is a cornerstone educational outcome for students with disabilities whose post school trajectories continue to fall well below their peers. Some scholars view self-determination as a basic human right and any alienation from that right a moral violation with negative implications (i.e., lower quality of life, higher unemployment; Ankey and Lehmann, 2011; Denny & Daviso, 2012; Wall & Dattilo, 1995). Through the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), the Federal government recognized self-determination as a basic human right and included student-centered transition planning based on students’ strengths, preferences, and interests (Cobb et al., 2009; Denny & Daviso, 2012). Subsequently, the Office of Special Education Programs began research initiatives that resulted in self-determination curriculums, interventions, and assessments. These studies and more recent studies established self-determination as a multifaceted and multi-dimensional concept requiring targeted and ongoing intervention (Cobb et al., 2009), which, according to Sands and Doll (1996), should begin during the elementary years when students begin to develop foundational self-determination capacities.

Research suggests that self-determination is positively correlated with academic performance (Chao & Chou, 2017; Erickson et al., 2015; Konrad et al., 2007; Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer, 2010), high school completion (Eisenman, 2007), employment, post-secondary education, community participation, financial independence, independent living, social relationships, and overall quality of life (McGuire & McDonnell, 2008; Shogren & Shaw, 2016; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Erickson et al. (2015), for example, examined the relationship between self-determination and reading and math achievement for high school students with intellectual disabilities and found that students exhibiting higher levels of autonomy, self-realization, and empowerment experienced higher levels of academic achievement. Self-determination was the strongest predictor of academic achievement among factors including gender, family income, and urban living.

Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) conducted a follow up study to examine the causal link between self-determination and positive post-school outcomes for high school students with learning and intellectual disabilities. Wehmeyer and Schwartz administered *The Arc's Self-Determination Scale* (a 72-item norm referenced self-report instrument measuring students' autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) and the *Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Scale* (a 40-item yes/no instrument used to measure locus of control; Nowicki & Duke, 1974) prior to the students leaving high school. Using these data, the researchers created a high self-determination group and a low self-determination group. Approximately nine months after the students exited high school, Wehmeyer and Schwartz surveyed the students and/or their significant others and

examined pay stubs when available. Wehmeyer and Schwartz found that students in the high self-determination group were more likely to be employed, earned higher wages, and maintained a checking and savings account than did students in the low self-determination group.

Shogren et al. (2015) followed up on two groups of participants in previous studies conducted by (1) Wehmeyer, Palmer, Lee, Williams-Diehm, and Shogren (2011) who employed randomized control trials to determine the effect of the self-determination curriculum *Whose Future Is It Anyway?* after one year of instruction, and (2) Wehmeyer et al. (2013) who used randomized control trials to determine the effects of different types of evidenced-based self-determination curriculums (e.g., *ChoiceMaker*, *Self-Advocacy Strategy*, *NEXT S. T. E. P.*, *The Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction*, *Whose Future Is It Anyway?*) which were selected and taught by teachers in different schools over a three-year period. Shogren et al. wanted to know the residual effects of the interventions on employment, community access, financial independence, independent living, ongoing education, and life satisfaction for the first and second year after the students exited high school. Both studies included students with intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities. Shogren et al. (2015) found that students having more self-determination prior to exiting high school, experienced higher levels of employment and community participation outcomes. Students employed one year after exiting high school were more likely to be employed two years after exiting high school.

Shogren and Shaw (2016), using data from the 2000-2010 National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, sampled 1,250 students from a range of disabilities (i.e., high incidence disabilities, cognitive disabilities, sensory disabilities, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disability, and orthopedic impairments) to examine the degree to which autonomy, self-

realization, and psychological empowerment predicted quality of life in adolescents transitioning to adult life. Results indicated that autonomy was a significant positive predictor of (a) financial independence, employment, social relationships, housing, and postsecondary education for individuals with high incidence disabilities, (b) postsecondary education for individuals with orthopedic disabilities and TBI, and (c) independent living for individuals with sensory disabilities. Self-realization (a) predicted emotional well-being of individuals with high incidence disabilities, (b) was a significant positive predictor of emotional well-being and postsecondary education for individuals with cognitive disabilities, and (c) was a significant positive predictor of health outcomes for individuals with sensory disabilities. Psychological empowerment predicted lower levels of financial support and higher levels of employment, emotional well-being, and postsecondary education for individuals with sensory, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities as well as positive emotional well-being for individuals with orthopedic disabilities. These findings suggest that autonomy plays a strong role in predicting adult outcomes in early adulthood for students with disabilities and that focusing on the development of autonomy may have the highest potential benefit, but not to the neglect of psychological empowerment and self-realization, which also have their benefits. Implications of findings support the need for educators to expect, create, and provide meaningful opportunities with appropriate supports (inclusive versus restrictive) within the school context to provide the greatest potential for positive postschool outcomes.

Self-Determination and Pedagogical Considerations

Research efforts not established self-determination as high leverage educational practice for students with varying disabilities, research efforts extended understanding of personal (e.g.,

age, gender, disability category, intellectual functioning, support needs) (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Chou, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Lee, 2017; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Paek, 2013) and environmental (e.g., service delivery model, time spent in inclusion setting, teacher perception of self-determination) (Branding, Bates, & Miner, 2009; Haakma et al., 2017; Hughes, Cosgriff, Agran, & Washington, 2013; Martin et al., 2006; Shogren et al., 2013) factors that support and/or impede a student's acquisition of self-determination skills, knowledges, and attitudes. Although results vary, the most consistent of findings suggest that older students are more self-determined than younger students (Shogren et al., 2013; Wehmeyer, 1994), and students with intellectual disability, learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorder, and autism are less self-determined than their nondisabled peers (Pierson, Carter, Lane, & Glaeser, 2008; Wehmeyer, 1994; Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2008). Several conclusions can be drawn from this body of research. First, teachers' perspectives of students' self-determination abilities may vary based on disability label and perceived competence. Branding et al. (2009) investigated the perception of special education teachers and rehabilitation practitioners on the self-determination capability of a high school student with a mild intellectual disability. Branding et al. randomly assigned teachers and rehabilitation practitioners to two different simulated IEP meetings in which the student assumed either a passive or an active role in the meeting. As a passive participant, the student sat in the IEP meeting led by the vocational rehabilitation counselor. As an active participant, the student conducted the meeting using cue cards. The participants who viewed the self-directed IEP meeting had more favorable perceptions of the student's self-determination ability.

Carter et al. (2006) examined the capacity of students with emotional disturbance to engage in self-determined behaviors and the opportunities educators and parents provide for such engagement. Eighty-five high school students receiving special education services for emotional disturbance (n = 39) and learning disabilities (n = 46) ranging in age from 14 to 19 years old participated in the study. Data were collected using the *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (an assessment instrument that measures students' knowledge, abilities, and perceptions for self-determined behaviors and their opportunity to engage self-determined behaviors at school and home). Results reflect a statistically significant difference in ability ratings of students with emotional disturbance and learning disabilities by parents ($p = .002$) and educators ($p < .001$). Educators' perceptions of students with emotional disturbance capacity for self-determination was significantly lower ($p < .001$) than their perceptions of students with learning disabilities. Educators' ratings of students with emotional disturbance knowledge of self-determination was significantly lower ($p < .001$) than their ratings of students with learning disabilities. Educators indicated that students with emotional disturbance have opportunities to engage self-determination at school which was minimally reflected in student and parent responses. In fact, students rated opportunities to engage self-determination skills at school lower than both educators and parents. Students with learning disabilities rated opportunities to engage in self-determination at school lower than their parents. Students ($p = .009$) and parents ($p = .011$) rated opportunities for students with emotional disturbance to engage in self-determination at school significantly lower than opportunities for students with learning disabilities.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from this body of research is natural settings (e.g., IEP, transition planning, functional assessment, behavior intervention processes) are highly

conducive to the acquisition and application of self-determined behaviors. Numerous studies demonstrate the benefit of teaching students to co-direct their own educational outcomes (e.g., *Self-Directed IEP*, Martin et al., 2006; Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015; *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*, Test & Neale, 2004). *The Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction* (SDLMI, an instructional tool designed to guide students through recursive problem solving strategies to derive at their own educational goals, action steps, and standards of evaluation) has received a lot of attention since it was first field tested by Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) and continues to show promise for improving teacher perception of students' agency (Shogren, Plotner, Palmer, Wehmeyer, & Paek, 2014), on-task behavior (Kelly & Shogren, 2014), career development (Benitez et al., 2005), and accessibility to the general education classroom (Shogren et al., 2012). After receiving SDLMI instruction, students in the Wehmeyer et al. (2000) study, increased their pre-instruction mean score for *The ARC's Self-Determination Scale* from 94 to 99 post-instruction which indicates students' increased perception of control. When given the opportunity to select their own goals, 30% of student participants met their goal; 25% exceeded their goal; 25% made progress toward their goal; and 20% made no progress.

Wehmeyer et al. (2000) maintained that failure was a natural part of decision making. With adequate adult support and problem-solving practice, students with disabilities could capitalize on their experiences within a structured and supportive environment. The researchers further asserted that failure while in school may lead to better post-school decision making and problem solving when teachers provided students with problem solving models that helped them navigate difficult situations. "The model provides a means of getting students actively involved

in the totality of their educational program and, presumably, will promote a greater commitment to that program by the student” (Wehmeyer et al., 2000, p. 450). One student stated, “This was one of the few times I have been able to make some decisions about what I want to learn to do at school. I’m proud of what I did this year, and next year I want to do as well.” (p. 450).

A third conclusion that can be drawn from this body of research is that tiered instructional supports may be necessary to move students on the self-determination continuum toward autonomous behavior. Chou, Palmer, Wehmeyer, and Skorupski (2017) examined whether disability category predicted self-determination scores in the areas of autonomous functioning, problem solving, and internal locus of control. Participants included middle, junior high, and high school students with disabilities (N = 96) who the researchers divided into two groups, cognitively impaired and non-cognitively impaired. The cognitively impaired group consisted of students with intellectual disability and the non-cognitively impaired group consisted of students with learning disabilities and emotional behavioral disorder. Chou, Palmer et al. found that 9% of the variance in self-determination scores could be explained by disability category (i.e., cognitively impaired versus non-cognitively impaired). The students did not show any difference in any one of the self-determination components (i.e., autonomous functioning, problem solving, internal locus of control). Taken together, however, the components could predict the two groups. These findings suggest that self-determination is a complex construct and the components should be studied as a unit rather than as individual contributors to self-determination perception. Also, because students with learning disabilities and emotional disorders had higher scores across the three components than students with intellectual disabilities, the researchers concluded that designing interventions and instructional approaches

should consider need differences because students with intellectual disabilities may require more self-determination supports, opportunities, and practice.

A fourth conclusion that can be drawn from this body of research is that teachers can positively impact students' self-determination skills, knowledges, and attitudes through directed instruction (Benitez et al., 2005; Kelly & Shogren, 2014; Reed, Thomas, Sprague, & Horner, 1997; Wehmeyer, Baker, Blumberg, & Harrison, 2004; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Cambell-Whatley (2008) found that elementary, middle, and high school students responded to self-determination instruction designed to build their self-concept and self-awareness by using a seven-part instructional model in which students (1) learned about their disability, strengths, and needs, (2) the impact of setting on their strengths and needs, (3) famous people with disabilities, (4) characteristics of disabilities as outlined by IDEA, (5) advocacy and problem solving techniques, (6) dealing with aversive situations, and (7) the eligibility process. Students increased their self-perception once they realized that their disabilities were real, and as a result, were more apt to seek assistance and speak openly about their disabilities. Students also expressed appreciation for the knowledge they gained about their disability.

Alternatively, without intervention, instruction, and support, students with disabilities tend to display lowered self-concepts (Ayres, Cooley, & Dunn, 1990; Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv, & Ziman, 2006; Orr & Goodman, 2010) and self-esteem, learned helplessness, depressive tendencies (Valas, 2001), and poor decision making skills (Jenkinson, 1999). For example, Sideridis (2004) wanted to know if students with learning disabilities differed in expressions of helplessness in the face of difficulty in comparison to students without disabilities. Students completed a self-report measure prior to and after engaging in math tasks. Half of the students

received 15 difficult math tasks, and the other half received 15 easy math tasks. Sideridis instructed students to work on the math tasks for five minutes, then he gave students the option to continue working or engage in another activity (e.g., going outside to play) for a maximum of 15 minutes. Sideridis found that as the math problems became more difficult, the math performance of students with learning disabilities significantly decreased ($p < .001$). Students with learning disabilities correctly solved 2.8 challenging problems compared to students without disabilities who completed 6.7 challenging problems. Following failure, the self-esteem of performance-oriented students (students whose goal is to demonstrate their ability) was significantly lower. Sideridis concluded that students with learning disabilities experience learned helplessness in the presence of failure which often materialized as little effort, hopelessness, lowered self-esteem, and depression.

Conversely, Hampton and Mason (2003) concluded that disability did not necessarily negatively impact math achievement, but the lack of supports students with disabilities had in the face of challenges. Using Bandura's self-efficacy theory (the belief that one's capacity to perform tasks influences one's choices, effort expenditure, and level of persistence) as a theoretical lens, Hampton and Mason examined the relationship among gender, self-efficacy beliefs, sources of efficacy (i.e., past performance accomplishment, exposure to and identification with role models and positive reinforcement, persuasion and support from others, emotional or physiological arousal during task performance), and learning disability status on academic achievement. High school student participants ($N = 278$) completed the *Sources of Academic Self-Efficacy Scale* (an 11-item instrument measuring four sources of efficacy: personal performance accomplishment, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and emotional

arousal; Hampton, 1998) and *The Self-Efficacy for Learning Scale* (an 11 item self-rating scale measuring student's perceived academic capability; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007). Results indicate that students with learning disabilities experienced less accomplishments than typical peers and had fewer role models ($p < .0001$), received less positive reinforcement from others and experienced higher anxiety ($p < .01$), had lower self-efficacy for organizing school related activities and earned significantly lower math and English scores ($p < .05$). Structural equation modeling explained 55% of the variance suggesting that learning disability status did not directly impact self-efficacy belief but indirectly impacted the availability and influence of sources of efficacy. These findings indicate that the more sources of efficacy students with learning disabilities are exposed to, the more efficacious they become resulting in increased academic performance.

Inclusive Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) mandates the provision of a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities which begins with consideration of the general education classroom as students' least restrictive environment. Inclusion considers not only the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law, that is, students' rights to an inclusive education in which they are valued, treated with human dignity, and their voices are heard, respected and acted on by responsible and caring adults. Inclusive education has been defined in multiple ways throughout the literature (e.g., ideology of integration; Bhatnagar, 2014; service delivery setting; Black & Simon, 2014; material access to curriculum, access to instruction, and social emotional access to peers; Theoharis & Causton, 2014); however, the consistency among definitions is equity treatment and fairness in the pursuit of good for all students (Baglieri &

Shapiro, 2017; Jorgensen, 2018). Black and Simon provided the following definition: “Inclusive practice denotes the institutionalization of practices and policies in which all students enjoy unfettered representation, opportunity, access, participation, and success in culturally responsive educational programs in a unified system of deliver of supports” (p. 156). Jorgensen (2018) maintained that fundamental aspects of inclusive education are, among others, presumed competence, high expectations, valued membership, full participation, and access to the general education curriculum. Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) suggested that inclusive education counters negative perceptions surrounding “difference, diversity, and disability that lead to prejudice and discrimination” (p. 3). Baglieri and Shapiro further explained that inclusive education is the deconstruction of barriers and the reconstruction of possibilities that enable full academic and social access to all students. This reconstruction involves a shift from the medical model of disability that constructs disability as a physiological and/or psychological defect within the individual to the social model of disability that constructs disability as a social problem stemming from discriminatory practices and historical knowledges that categorized and therefore disenable people with impairments. The literature indicates that schools can either support or implant inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

Bhatnagar (2014) found that teachers were mostly positive about inclusive education believing it to be “a blessing in disguise, an essential step in education, and a step toward equality” (p. 23). Mu, Hu, and Wang (2017) examined the impact of supportive and inclusive teachers on the resilience of students with disabilities. Mu et al. defined inclusive teachers as those who enacted agency by seeking outside resources to support students’ needs in the general education classroom. Mu et al. found that teacher supports and agency positively contributed to

students' resilience, and students with disabilities were more likely to experience educational and social exclusion in schools. Similarly, MacArthur, Sharp, Kelly, and Gaffney (2007) conducted an ethnographic study to understand the impact of school experiences on the identity of students with disabilities in New Zealand. The study included primary and secondary students and included semi-structured interviews and observations. MacArthur et al. found that teacher attitudes, expectations, beliefs, and lack of experience with students with disabilities resulted in exclusionary practices and negative constructions of disability and difference to which students enacted agency (e.g., requesting that paraprofessionals give them space in the classroom, speaking up about the level of difficulty they wanted or did not want in their assignments) to counter negative experiences (e.g., bullying, heightened discipline, social isolation/exclusion, low teacher expectations) produced by the social space. Students reported feeling different and being treated differently by teachers and peers in a way that produced feelings of social deviance. MacArthur et al. noted the importance of recognizing students' disabilities but not in a way that stratified their identity as students. The researchers also discussed the importance of school culture in supporting student agency.

Self-determination research indicates the importance of opportunity to build self-determination capacity. Thus, examining contextual factors that either support or impede students' self-determination is important. This study was conducted in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, a context that to my knowledge has not received research attention in relation to self-determination and students with disabilities. Findings indicate the richness for self-determination experiences for students with disabilities.

Research Gaps

While much has been learned about self-determination as a construct over the last two decades, research efforts consisted mostly of quantitative methods of inquiry (e.g., randomized control trials) (Martin et al., 2006; Seong et al., 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2013), quasi experimental designs (Campbell-Whatley, 2008; Jenkinson, 1999; Snyder & Bambara, 1997), and surveys, self-report measures, and questionnaires (Ayers et al., 1990; Carter, 2006; Chou et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2013; Seo, 2014; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Qualitative studies can provide more detailed understandings of students' self-determination perspectives and experiences and thereby bridge the gaps in the knowledge base. Haakma et al. (2017), for example, used multiple case design to examine the impact of need-supportive teachers on students with congenital deaf blindness. Haakma et al. video recorded teacher-student interactions for the presence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and found that teachers provided more structure (competence) and involvement (relatedness) than opportunities for input (autonomy) which was a common finding. Teachers tended to be less apt to give students opportunities to act autonomously. The authors attributed this tendency to high demands for standardized performance.

Ankey and Lehmann (2011) employed narrative inquiry to understand factors that govern how students with learning disabilities and intellectual disability understand their disability and delimiting social aspects of student agency. The researcher interviewed four high school students who attended a community college transition program focused on employment skills. Using Field and Hoffman's self-determination components: know yourself, value yourself, plan, act, and experience outcomes, and learn as a lens for analysis, Ankey and Lehmann identified

environmental contingencies that promote and hinder self-determination development. Encouragement from parents, friends, relatives, and teachers, provided needed external motivation until students began to value themselves and develop the inner strength to push through adversities toward self-selected goals.

A transfer of control from adults to student marked a shift from learned helplessness to reliance on self once students became more self-aware. Self-awareness positioned students as causal agents rather than passive recipients of unsolicited supports. Students engaged goal directed behaviors when supported by relatives, friends, and teachers and when given the opportunity to pursue and become gainfully employed in their careers of interest. The college setting also fostered conditions that led to the development of self-determination. One student discussed his improved attendance from 25 absences in the school setting to zero absences in the college setting. All students reported IEP participation as empowering and generalized leadership roles to other aspects of their lives. Ankey and Lehmann (2011) concluded that self-determination evolved over time as students are afforded opportunities to learn about themselves, and power is gradually relinquished to their control by well-intended adults who provide continuous supports.

Eisenman, Pell, Poudel, and Pleet-Odle (2015) used grounded theory methods to describe the self-determination experiences of high school students with disabilities in a new career-technical school—the only one in the district to offer an all-inclusive learning support model and career academies. Eisenman et al. selected four students (two top performing and well-behaved and two low performing with disciplinary infractions) each year of the study from the freshmen class (N = 16) and followed the students throughout their high school years and one year beyond.

The researchers interviewed students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and building level and district administrators, examined students' academic and discipline records, school newsletters, and brochures, and conducted classroom and school observations. After iterative data analysis processes, Eisenman et al. determined that all students engaged agentic behaviors.

Anthony, referred to as the “high flyer,” was one of the top performing and well-behaved students who exhibited self-determined behaviors from a young age. He aspired to become a wildlife biologist and managed to secure a spot in the biotechnical career academy (one of the most challenging career academies). Anthony's learning disability appropriated the need for additional time to complete assignments, and his easy-going personality, the motivation to keep pushing forward. Jay, referred to as “the phoenix,” was a timid lower performing student who failed a few classes and participated in credit recovery during summer school. He earned a poor grade in physical education because he was too shy to ask for help with his combination lock. Jay decided that he was going to graduate and began to implement measures to achieve his goal. Focusing on his strength (remembering things well enough to get good grades on tests), Jay earned a 3.00 GPA during his senior year and graduated with his class. Jenny, referred to as “the poster child,” experienced failure throughout her school years. She aspired to attend college until she reached high school, then determined that college was not for her. Her career aspirations varied, and she secured a spot in her third career academy choice (culinary arts). Jenny was the poster child for a high school dropout; yet, she enacted resilience and persistence to arrive at graduation. Like Jay, Jenny decided to focus on her strength (notetaking) and interest (reading fiction books) and completed extra credit work during her senior year resulting in the attainment of a high school diploma. Jenny said, “I think it was just a matter of me growing up

and choosing my own decisions...I have one rule—get over it and just study” (Eisenman et al., 2015, p. 108). Jenny made the choice to set a goal for herself despite negative school experiences.

While much has been learned about self-determination through quantitative and qualitative methodologies, little research has studied the impact of self-determination as a schoolwide initiative. This study, to the best of my knowledge, was the first to explore self-determination within the context of a *Leader in Me* school and the resulting impact of *7 Habits* training. Therefore, this study likely contributed to research knowledge both theoretically and practically.

Leader in Me Schools and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Leader in Me schools have been around since the early 1990s and are premised on the notion that all students have leadership potential and need guidance to discover the leader within themselves. Students explore various leadership responsibilities (e.g., teacher assistant, classroom material manager, parent greeter, hiring committee, morning announcer, bathroom monitor, peer helper) throughout their educational experience and are guided toward self-accountability academically, behaviorally, and socially using personal leadership portfolios, which are developed and maintained by students and reviewed during student-led conferences.

Leader in Me schools also apply Covey’s (1989) *7 Habits* principles to the everyday business of school. Many of the *7 Habits* principles align with the component skills of self-determination discussed in Chapter I (e.g., when learning to be proactive, students learn the value, dignity, and freedom in choosing their own actions; when learning to begin with the end in mind and put first things first, students engage decision making, problem solving, and goal

setting and attainment; when learning to seek first to understand, then to be understood, students learn self-advocacy skills); thus, *Leader in Me* schools appear to be congruent with the instruction and practice students with disabilities require to become self-determined.

Be Proactive

Being proactive is active participation in one's own choices. Covey (1989) explained that at the core of proactivity is taking responsibility for our own lives. He further explained that to take responsibility, we must believe that we can control of our own lives. Research has indicated that students with disabilities tend to adopt learned helplessness and external locus on control (e.g., Sideridis, 2004). Jenkinson (1999) asserted that students who demonstrate learned helplessness do not connect their actions to outcomes and that learned helplessness can lead to hopelessness when individuals repeatedly experience helplessness. Valas (2001), while investigating the psychological impact of being identified with a learning disability, found that students with learning disabilities had lower self-esteem and expectations, showed more helplessness than low achieving students, and attributed math achievement to ability rather than work. Valas concluded that being identified with a learning disability may have a stigmatizing effect that worsens the effects of low achievement that often characterizes students with disabilities.

Begin with the End in Mind

Covey (1989) posited that this is the habit of leadership (deciding what "first things" are) as individuals who begin with the end in mind know where they want to go and take actions to ensure that they are headed in the right direction. Goal setting and attainment is a foundational self-determination skill component identified by Wehmeyer, Sands, and colleagues (1997) and is

largely studied as part of the IEP and transition planning process (Benitez et al., 2005; Martin et al., 2006; Test & Neale, 2004). Past and current studies focus on models of instruction (e.g., *Self-Directed IEP*, *Self-Determination Model of Instruction*) to guide students through the process of identifying goals, planning actions toward goals, assessing progress, and adjusting goals as needed. This body of research indicates that when students are taught to set goals and assess their own progress, they are more likely to meet and/or exceed their goals (Agran, Blachard, Wehmeyer, & Hughes, 2002; Kelly & Shogren, 2014; Wehmeyer et al., 2000) and are better able to access the general education curriculum (Lee et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2012).

Using a revised version of the SDLMI, Benitez and colleagues (2005) examined the impact of the *Self-Determination Career Development Model* (SDCDM) on the ability of students with emotional and behavioral disorders to set career goals, develop a plan to meet their goals, and adjust plans when needed. The participants included six male high school students ages 15 to 17 with emotional behavioral disorder attending an alternative school. Prior to gathering baseline data, the first author met with each student individually to discuss career and employment interests and needs. During this phase, the students identified a career/employment goal and developed a goal attainment measure. Mark indicated that he had a problem maintaining jobs because of his anger problems and difficulty responding to conflicts. Mark's self-selected goal was to communicate effectively in the face of conflict. His goal attainment measure was conflict resolution. Jeff indicated that he often became hostile when he got frustrated by the demands of others and tried to provoke others to wrath. Jeff's self-selected career/employment goal was to use assertive communication. His goal attainment measure was assertiveness. Rodger had difficulty expressing his feelings especially when he needed to

communicate something difficult. Rodger's self-selected employment goal was to use assertive communication. His goal attainment measure was assertiveness. Will never had a "real job" because he did short term work (e.g., lawn care, selling fireworks) with family members. Will's self-selected employment goal was to research careers for the purpose of learning about other jobs and gaining work knowledge and general and specific career requirements. Ron also self-selected researching careers because he wanted to know more about how to get jobs. Will and Ron's goal attainment measure was career exploration.

During phase two, students developed action plans to meet their goals. Mark's goal involved learning a ten-step conflict resolution process (i.e., identify the problem, examine the other person's side of the story, and brainstorm ideas to meet the needs of everyone involved) with an emphasis on assertive communication. Jeff and Roger's action plan involved self-monitoring. Will and Ron used a career exploration training package to guide their career exploration.

Data were gathered after the students set their goals during phase one. Benitez and colleagues (2005) developed personalized scenarios to measure student progress. Each student responded to his/her scenario in writing. To obtain percent scores, the authors divided the number of correct responses by the total number of responses and multiplied by 100. Data were analyzed using five AB designs for each student's target goal. Results indicate all students improved their scenario responses from baseline and demonstrated high rates of maintenance. Mark (conflict resolution) improved his mean baseline score from 7.5% correct responses to 49% during instruction and 90% during maintenance. Jeff (assertiveness) improved his mean baseline score from 12.5% correct responses to 64% during instruction and 87.5% during maintenance.

Rodger (assertiveness) improved his mean baseline score from 29% correct responses to 69% during instruction and 87.5% during maintenance. Will (career exploration) improved his mean baseline score from 8% correct responses to 74% during instruction and 89% during maintenance. Ron (career exploration) improved his mean baseline score from 15% correct responses to 70% during instruction to 86% during maintenance. The students indicated that they used the skills they learned in real situations. Marked stated, “I asked someone to leave me alone instead of being passive-aggressive with them. I told them why they were bothering me this time” (p. 442). Benitez et al. (2005) postulated that role-play alone does not adequately support skill generalization. Rather, students need real experiences and are more likely to engage skill development when the skills are meaningful to their own lives.

Put First Things First

Putting first things first involves practicing effective self-management (Covey, 1989). This habit is the physical creation of the goals envisioned in habit two. Habit two naturally preceded habit three because, according to Covey, you must know where you are going to determine how to get there. Underlying this habit is the ability to make choices and decisions and acting in accordance with one’s own volition toward them. Wehmeyer et al., (2017) maintained that “self-determined people...act based upon their own volition rather than the will of other people or the pressures of circumstances or environments” (pp. 295-296). Self-management, choice making, and decision making are skill components essential to self-determination and are widely researched. Self-management involves self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement (Wehmeyer, Sands et al., 1997) and has been shown to positively impact academic performance (McDougal & Brady, 1998). Choice making

and decision making are overlapping constructs, but different in their own right. Choice making not only involves selecting and/or stating preferences but is an expression of human dignity (Wall & Dattilo, 1995). Sparks and Cote (2012) defined choice making “as a right, privilege, or opportunity in which an individual freely selects or decides what he or she wants (p. 291). Sparks and Cote further asserted that without choices, students with disabilities cannot advocate for themselves. Field (1996) and Field and Hoffman (1994) identified potential barriers to choice making: poor self-awareness, learned helplessness, and lack of knowledge concerning strengths and weaknesses. Affording students with disabilities the opportunity to make choices and evaluate the consequences of their choices positively impacts their school experiences (Sparks & Cote, 2012; Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2009). Choice making instruction presumes a level of risks which are better served inside a structured and supportive environment prior to leaving school (Sparks & Cote, 2012). Research indicates that without intervention, students with disabilities typically do not develop these skills (Sparks & Cote, 2012).

Jenkinson (1999) investigated the decision-making of young adults with intellectual disabilities by presenting the participants with three decision making vignettes: (1) vignettes only, (2) vignettes with options, and (3) vignettes with options and consequences to determine if participants with less learned helplessness exhibited more appropriate decision making than participants with more learned helplessness. Participants included 48 young adults from a vocational preparation center (N = 20), a career technical center (N = 18), and adult training center (N = 10). Jenkinson randomly assigned participants to one of three decision making conditions (vignettes) after splitting the participants into high and low learned helplessness groups. Data were gathered from a 14-item self-report questionnaire in which the participants

provided Likert-type responses (e.g., true of me, somewhat true, not true of me) to statements like “If my supervisor says I’ve done a good job, it’s because I worked hard” (p. 322).

Participants also responded to four vignettes depicting everyday situations and scored on a scale of zero (no reason provided, response did not match vignette), one (vague reason provided, selected from options), and two (makes choice from options given within socially acceptable norms).

Jenkinson (1999) found that participants in the high learned helplessness group exhibited less appropriate decision making. These students did not seek additional information nor did they consider consequences for their decisions. Jenkinson concluded that a lack of decision-making opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities leads to learned helplessness which leads to poor decision making as individuals who experience learned helplessness do not “see [the] relationship between their own actions and the outcomes of those actions” (p. 321). Jenkinson further asserted that learned helplessness (lack of present expectations) can lead to hopelessness (lack of future expectations) in the absence of self-determination training, which involved teaching individuals to engage decision making as a process of assessment and evaluation. Jenkinson found no significant difference in the three decision making conditions as students did not show any difference in decision making in the presence of options and consequences.

Think Win-Win

Covey (1989) called this *Habit* “the habit of interpersonal leadership” (p. 109). This is the first habit in which students apply social problem solving to build their relationship with others. According to Covey, this *Habit* is premised on a philosophy of mutuality and develops in

an environment that supports mutual learning, influence, and benefits. Sands and Doll (1996) maintained that social intelligence (knowing how to conduct yourself in various social settings and situations), social competence (the ability to adapt to social situations), social negotiation (give and take relationships), social reasoning (application of strategies to resolve social conflicts), and social problem solving (assessment of the social situation to interact appropriately) are essential components of self-determination that develop with instruction and experience as students with disabilities tend to demonstrate deficiencies in all areas in comparison to their nondisabled peers (Toro, Weissburg, & Guare, 1990). Social problem solving has been linked to decreased externalizing behaviors, access to career resources, job retention, and greater goal attainment among students with disabilities (Crites & Dunn, 2004; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995). Pinkney, Murray, and Lind (2012) contended that social problem solving interventions should consider the present (school) and future (job) social needs of students and should cover multiple social skills after finding that locus of control, social skills, and social problem solving contributed to school and career adjustments of students with learning disabilities, mild intellectual disability, autism, emotional disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood

Habit five is the habit of effective communication with empathetic listening at the core (Covey, 1989). Listening empathetically involves understanding the perspectives of others before commenting on what is said. Social perspective taking, “an understanding that others’ perceptions and beliefs may be different from one’s own perceptions and beliefs” (Belisle, Dixon, Stanley, Munoz, & Daar, 2016, p. 965), is characteristic of self-determined behavior and

begins development around age seven to eight (Sands & Doll, 1996). Research has primarily focused on teaching students with mild forms of autism to recognize and respond to the perspective of others and has had some success (Belisle et al., 2016; Rehfeldt, Dillen, Ziomek & Kowalchuk, 2007; Weil, Hayes, & Cuppero, 2011). Social stories, for example, have been widely used to teach students with autism how to respond in social situations. Social stories are short written stories that describe “what happens, when it happens, how it happens, why it happens, and who are involved in it, and how people feel or think about what happened” (Okada, Ohtake, & Yanagihara, 2010. p. 207). Belisle and colleagues used elements of the *Promoting the Emergence of Advanced Knowledge Transformation Model* (PEAK-T, Dixon, 2014) Program Deictic: Single Reversal I and You, a standardized curriculum used to teach deictic and other relational skills, to teach perspective taking skills to three high school students with autism (IQ scores ranging from 59 to 74). Each student increased his score from baseline and transferred skills to novel stimuli.

Synergize

The idea here is that working together is more generative than working alone. Covey (1989) asserts that synergistic classrooms consist of creativity, imagination, enterprise, and intellectual networking which produces a new genre. Covey stated, “synergy is almost as if a group collectively agrees to subordinate old scripts and to write a new one” (p. 135). The energy produced by this new genre creates a space of new insights, options, alternatives, and ideas. The classroom becomes a place of and for synchronized energy, that is, students are moving in a positive direction (not necessarily the same direction) toward some desired end.

Teachers are largely responsible for the creation of the classroom climate and culture. Is the classroom climate and culture conducive to freedom of expression? Are teachers creating spaces for positive academic and social interactions? Do students feel free to be themselves? Covey (1989) asserts that teachers who recognize the importance of human interdependency, create spaces of trust and cooperation. Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDTM suggested that quality behavior, or intrinsically motivated behavior, derived from social spaces conducive to the expression of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. When students are given choices within a structured environment where constructive feedback is the norm, then they tend to exhibit more creativity, improved academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

After conducting a search using the following key words: synergy, teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation and students with disabilities, I found most research articles were concerned with adult-to-adult collaboration, cooperation, and teamwork or student-to-adult collaboration with IEP and transition planning. My search also generated many how-to articles (e.g., how to increase participation in the inclusive setting; how to improve students with disabilities academic performance in the inclusive setting) suggesting that additional research is needed to understand how students with disabilities respond in environments conducive to student-to-student synergistic communication.

Sharpen the Saw

This *Habit* is about self-investment—taking the time to develop one's mental, physical, and psychological well-being. Covey (1989) stated

This is the single most powerful investment we can ever make in life -- investment in ourselves, in the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute. We are the instruments of our own performance, and to be effective, we need to recognize the importance of taking time regularly to sharpen the saw. (p. 147)

Sharpening the saw involves taking care of the body with physical exercise and a healthy diet, the mind with mental exercise (e.g., reading, writing, observing nature, engaging stimulating conversations), and the emotional self with relationship building and laughter. Covey contends that laughter connects us to others, wards off stress, and increases creativity. Likewise, Solish et al. (2010) maintained that building relationships covers a multitude of needs including quality of life, intellectual growth, and social supports for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, research also indicates that students with disabilities typically have difficulty making and sustaining relationships. I utilized the following databases Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, EBSCOhost, PsychINFO, ERIC EBSCOhost, ERIC ProQuest, Scout, and Google Scholar to locate research articles dealing with self-improvement, self-help, and self-care, which only generated articles dealing with teaching students with moderate to severe disabilities daily living skills (e.g., cooking, hygiene). This suggests that consideration of basic human needs for self-renewal and self-improvement is lacking in the research. Future research should consider interventions that support the need for daily renewal for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

Research largely supports self-determination as an educational outcome for students with disabilities. Research also suggests that high quality instruction for these students targets multiple rather than single self-determination component skills, knowledges, and attitudes.

Covey's (1989) principles begin with a change of mind. A proactive attitude is one that centers on self-endorsed actions (i.e., I make things happen rather than things happen to me). With a proactive mindset, students can more clearly map their own direction, or determine what is important to them, and begin to work their way toward their goals by prioritizing their actions and engaging self-management strategies. Beginning with habit four, students understand that they exist in the world with others, and therefore need to hone their social skills—that is, understanding others' perspectives and appreciating others' perspectives because of the potential for greater more meaningful understandings and solutions to problems. Habit seven reminds students to continue in self-renewal so that they can be at their best. The purpose of this investigation was to determine the impact of these principles on the self-determination skills of students with high incidence disabilities. In the next chapter, I discuss methodological and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III described the qualitative research methods and ethical considerations undertaken in this investigation. I provided a discussion of my role as the researcher and the selection criteria for participants and the research site. I described data sources, data collection, and data analysis procedures and verification procedures designed to ensure trustworthiness of findings. Ethical considerations included ensuring the autonomy of participants, acting justly toward participants, and ensuring no harm came to participants who volunteered for this study. I began by locating myself within the research and follow up with revisiting my three research questions.

Researcher Locatedness

The methodological mechanisms employed in this study were informed by my training in qualitative research approaches and readings of scholarly literature as a doctoral student, personal and professional experiences as a mother and teacher, and values as a Christian with a desire to seek the good of others. As a doctoral student, my training included extensive engagement with qualitative research and special education literature and practice conducting research methods (e.g., interviews, observations, artifact examination). Engagement in qualitative research approaches naturally lends itself to locating myself ontologically and epistemologically. I situate myself within a constructivist paradigm that values the knowledge, experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and values of others and uses multiple mechanisms with

which to engage these knowledges such that new genres of thought into phenomena are constructed. Thus, listening to and engaging with participants and respecting their perspectives through interviews, discussions, and conversational inquiries were foregrounded in this investigation and informed by the literature review in chapter two.

As a former special education teacher with approximately 20 years of teaching experience, I brought knowledge and skills to this investigation that also facilitated data collection and analysis. I received three years of training in Covey's (1989) *7 Habits* and was instrumental in the initial implementation of the *Leader in Me* Model in the middle school where I taught students with high incidence disabilities in the general education classroom. This experience provided insider knowledge that enabled me to make decisions about data collection (e.g., including leadership portfolio discussions as these are traditional aspects of *Leader in Me* schools that speak to goal setting and attainment) and analysis (i.e., knowing what a code is) and to pose interview and follow-up questions leading to more insightful dialogue.

The idea for this research began with my passion and advocacy for students with disabilities. Having become a mother before I became a teacher, I vowed to love and care for my students in the same manner I wanted my children's teachers to love and care for them. I define love as wanting what is best and purposefully seeking good for others. Loving my students meant treating them as dignified human beings deserving of a quality education within nurturing and supportive environments that honored their voices, differences, desires, and personhood. I wanted my students whose disabilities made them vulnerable to predatory politics and impeding social structures to effectively navigate spaces of contention. I wanted to provide my students with a quality education that enabled them to live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. I believe

this desire drove my passion toward Wehmeyer's (1996) Self-Determination Theory and Covey's (1989) *7 Habits*, which I encountered while reading scholarly literature in search of my research focus. Wehmeyer's theory essentially says that the power to change the lives of students with disabilities for the better is within teachers' instructional grasps. Covey's *7 Habits* provides a schoolwide venue for students with disabilities to access self-determination instruction and practice. This study aimed to understand the self-determination experiences of students with disabilities within the social context of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school. Specifically, I wanted to know how students experience Covey's *7 Habits* principles and how the social contextual environment within a *Leader in Me* school impacted their ability to make choices and decisions; solve academic, behavioral, and social problems; set and attain school and personal goals; and engage self-advocacy and leadership to their own academic and personal ends. In other words, I wanted to know how students with disabilities who receive instruction in the general education classroom experience Covey's *7 Habits* principles and whether and to what degree these experiences manifest as choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting/attainment, self-advocacy, and leadership.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this investigation:

- 1) How do teachers in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness;

- 2) How does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school; and
- 3) How does the social contextual environment of an elementary *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities?

Multiple data sources and methods are used to address these questions and are discussed below.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative paradigm applying a single case embedded design. A single case embedded design examines several cases to understand and compare similarities and differences across cases to create a holistic picture of what is going on within a particular context (Yin, 2014). According to Yin, a single case study is appropriate when the case is critical to the researcher's theoretical proposition as he states, "The single case can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory" (p. 51). My first proposition was based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self Determination Theory of Motivation (SDTM) which posits that individuals engage self-determination when the environment is characterized by autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I proposed that a schoolwide focus on leadership development and student empowerment created an autonomy supportive culture conducive to the autonomy, competence, and relatedness students need to exercise self-determined behaviors. Selecting a *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school as the site of my investigation was essential to exploring SDTM. *Leader in Me* schools profess a relentless focus on the leadership development of all students and utilizes Covey's (1989) *7 Habits*

principles as the impetus of leadership building. My second proposition was based on Michael Wehmeyer's (1996) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which posits that students with disabilities need both self-determination instruction and opportunities to practice self-determination skills to become causal agents of their own lives. I proposed that a combination of *7 Habits* instruction and opportunities to practice the *7 Habits* principles made possible the ability of students with disabilities taught in the general education classroom to learn and use self-determined behaviors to positively impact their own outcomes.

Participants

In qualitative research, samples are small to permit more intensive study (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000) and purposefully selected to generate “information rich” data from knowledgeable informants who can articulate their knowledge in a reflective manner (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling was used in this case study. Participant selection criteria included (a) enrollment at the research site during the second semester of fourth-grade and all of fifth-grade, (b) special education support services for specific learning disabilities, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and/or other health impairment including Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), (c) special education support services in the general education classroom for 80% to 100% of the school day, and (d) knowledge of the *7 Habits* principles as measured by student's ability to define five of the *7 Habits*. Using these criteria, four fifth-grade students with specific learning disabilities and ADHD and their teachers participated in this study.

Research Site

The selection criteria for the research site (hereafter referred to as Ascension Elementary School, Ascension, or AES) included (a) exemplary status as a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, (b) years of implementation (over five years) of the *7 Habits* principles, (c) location to the researcher, and (d) the pre-established relationship the researcher had with administrators, faculty, and staff. Lighthouse *Leader in Me* schools are considered exemplary models of leadership and require two to three years of committed focus on leadership development through the *7 Habits* principles with documented success of students' academic, behavioral, and social progress and ongoing parent and community involvement (theleaderinme.org).

Leader in Me schools apply Steven Covey's (1989) *7 Habits* principles to establish a culture that cultivates leadership in all students. Ascension Elementary School adopted the *Leader in Me* program in the early 2000s and officially became a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school three years later. Leadership echoed in their mission statement, which faculty and staff posted throughout the school and operationalized in an attempt to unearth, activate, and refine the leader within their students. Teachers provided direct instruction, teacher modeling, and constant reinforcement of the *7 Habits* principles, which were everywhere all the time. That is, the *7 Habits* principles occupied much of the discourse in the school. Teachers reviewed and defined the *7 Habits* with examples during morning and afternoon announcements. The bulletin boards, walls, doors, and windows saturated the school with *7 Habits* and leadership decorum (e.g., Leader of the Month portraits line the wall in the cafeteria, Caught Being a Leader certificates line the walls in the office). Teachers integrated *7 Habits* principles in their lessons, rules, and procedures. As a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, AES achieved recognition as an

exemplar among *Leader in Me* schools for outstanding student academic outcomes and thus served as a collaborative partner, or a beacon of light, to other schools implementing the program.

Ascension Elementary School was in the heart of the city not far from a major university and surrounded by small mom-and-pop businesses, popular food chains, and an array of large and small churches with community outreach programs. Centrally located, AES was typically the site for professional development and summer school programs for the school district. Ascension Elementary School consisted of approximately 500 students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Black, White, Hispanic, Asian). Almost half of the student population were from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ascension Elementary School was in a middle-class community of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (i.e., White, Black, Hispanic). Several houses were rented to college students; however, the neighborhood tended to be quiet and well kept. I frequently observed individuals with and without pets and couples walking along the city developed walking trail before, during, and after school hours. Retirees and middle-aged working class families occupied the surrounding homes. A few students lived in the surrounding neighborhoods, but most students bused in from an adjacent lower socioeconomic community consisting of mostly Black and Hispanic residents.

Researcher's Role

As the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and reporting, the researcher must consider how she will negotiate and renegotiate her evolving relationship with participants (Maxwell, 2013). One critical aspect of this negotiation involves gaining access to the research

site and participants. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), gaining access is contingent on the researcher's professionalism and personal characteristics and being constantly aware of how participants are perceiving her. If participants deem the researcher worthy of their time, resources, and efforts, then the data are considered more trustworthy. The researcher must also ensure the integrity of her access throughout the study as she influences and is influenced by the social context under investigation. Writing memos enabled me to mindfully interact with participants and maintain consciousness of relational changes (i.e., too close and/or too distant) to avoid extremes that threaten the trustworthiness of the study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

Yin (2014) explained that the researcher should use her experiences and knowledge to inform and advantage her research rather than separating herself from them. As a former teacher, I know that the administrator sets the tone of the school and gaining the principal's trust and commitment to my research likely resulted in a trusting and committed relationship with teachers and other school staff (e.g., secretary, custodians). I began this study building on the already existing positive relationship I have with the principal and fifth-grade teachers. I requested the principal's permission to conduct this study in her school prior to requesting permission from the Superintendent. I visited with fifth-grade teachers twice to become socially reacquainted prior to beginning the study. Yin (2014) also contended that trusting researcher-participant relationships are premised on the researcher doing what she says she is going to do. During the consent and assent process, my interactions with all participants involved discussing the purpose of my research and explaining my data collection procedures, what I planned to do with the data collected, and how I would protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality. I was personable and respectful during these interactions offering clear explanations and giving participants

opportunities to ask questions. Additionally, Dyson and Genishi (2005) urged researchers to respect school and classroom schedules and routines, which is critical to gaining access. I scheduled interviews, observations, leadership portfolio discussions, and school tours with teachers and students by appointment.

Subjectivities. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), preconceived ideas the researcher brings and imposes on her investigation threatens the trustworthiness of findings. Thus, another critical aspect of researcher-participant relationship negotiation is to examine and address how the researcher's assumptions, perspectives, experiences, and identity may impact her research. As a former special education teacher with 17 years of experience, I taught students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities ranging in ages from 11 to 17 years. My first teaching experience (one semester) involved facilitating the development of daily living skills and fostering community participation through real-world experiences for students with severe disabilities attending a separate day school in the district. While this placement was a valuable learning experience for me as a first-year teacher, most of my training and experience was with students with mild to moderate disabilities who received special education services inside the general education classroom. I incurred about seven years of experience when I learned about the *Leader in Me* model through a visionary principal tasked with the responsibility of establishing an identity for a new middle school to which I was being transferred. For me, change is difficult and often met with initial resistance before curiosity; however, this model was different and seemed to offer more positive possibilities for students with disabilities than previous school and district initiatives, though well intended. I liked the idea of students as leaders, which was the primary focus of the model. Specifically, I liked the

idea that *all* students were included in the conception and production of leadership. This reframing of *who* rather than *what* offered my students opportunities to develop positive identities that could enable them to move beyond the social stigma of being *what* (academic, behavioral, and social liabilities), to being *who* (academic, behavioral, and social assets) in the general education classroom. Moreover, the program appeared to offer students a) the ability to increase their self-sufficiency so that they relied on their knowledge of themselves and their capacity to make things happen in their own lives rather than deferring the responsibility to others (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals, parents) whom they deemed more capable and b) opportunities to optimize their capacity so that they could effectively navigate life's complexities for the betterment of themselves and others.

I received three years of *Leader in Me* training and participated in the first three years of implementation at my school. The program seemed to create a change in teachers' attitude toward students and a change in students' attitude toward teachers, which created an overall positive and productive school climate and culture. Unfortunately, the program began to fade because of a change in administration and continuous changes in teaching staff. The program could not survive these changes because of the small size of the school and the difficulty of training new teachers every year. Now, I experience the *Leader in Me* model as an outsider as several schools in the district are implementing the model and achieved Lighthouse status three years into implementation. My curiosity about the program, particularly how students with disabilities experienced *7 Habits* instruction, heightened as a doctoral student with a research interest in self-determination and students with disabilities. While my experiences with the

program were mostly positive, I minimized my personal biases by writing memos and consulting with my Dissertation Chair during the research process.

Participant versus nonparticipant. Dyson and Genishi (2005) explained that the researcher's role depends on how she positions herself and how the participants position her. I assumed a nonparticipant observer role. As a nonparticipant observer, I closely observed the classroom environment and social interactions with the understanding that the social interactions and classroom norms could possibly change because of my presence. An advantage of conducting my research in a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school was that visitors were a common presence in the learning environment. Central office personnel maintained regular presence in the school as they worked routinely to build student literacy and teacher capacity. Moreover, the district worked collaboratively with the local university, so the presence of professors and pre-service teachers were a part of the school's daily norms. I used these norms to my advantage and assumed a natural presence in the school to minimize the observer effect and thereby reduced the threat to the trustworthiness of my findings (Yin, 2014).

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), the goal of the case study researcher is to get as close as possible to participants to understand and learn how they interpret their realities. Proactively, I talked with teachers and students about my presence in the classroom, specifically that I was in the environment to learn about *Leader in Me* schools and the *7 Habits* so that I could better understand what took place in these schools and that this learning involved looking around and recording what I see and hear. Assuming the role of a curious observer, I wanted to gain access to students' and teachers' knowledge relying on my own knowledge that teachers tended to be more open to addressing curiosity rather than judgement about their teaching practices and

would typically go beyond expectations to satisfy that curiosity with detailed explanations accompanied by products that clarify their explanations. Additionally, assuming the role of curious observer positioned me as a person the students could relate to as they tend to understand curiosity being naturally curious themselves (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Like teachers, I believe students revealed information that enabled me to understand and therefore write their stories. Also, talking to students and teachers about my role limited the expectation of my instructional and administrative assistance while in the school.

Data Sources

This qualitative case study involved a constructivist assumption that people have their own perceptions of truth based on their own experiences and interactions with others. My goal was to understand the perspectives and experiences of students with disabilities and examine the social and environmental setting to gain insight into the lives of student participants attending AES. According to Cresswell (1998), case studies should incorporate the use of multiple sources of information. One strength of case study research is the ability to employ multiple data sources and triangulate findings across data sources (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Data sources for this case study included teacher and student semi-structured interviews, school tours, and leadership portfolio discussions as well as observations and artifact examinations. I cross-referenced all data to address data gaps, verify findings, and ensure I created a holistic picture of students' experiences.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured student interview data consisted of open-ended questions that enabled me to engage with student participants about their experiences and to understand the practices

and circumstances surrounding their experiences. Semi-structured teacher interview data consisted of open-ended questions that enabled me to engage with teachers about their practices, the circumstances surrounding their practices, and the impact of their practices on student experiences.

Leadership Portfolio Discussions

Leadership portfolio discussions were unstructured conversational inquiries between the researcher and the student where I asked the student to discuss the contents of his/her portfolio. In the past, student portfolios housed pertinent work samples that reflected student's goals, progress monitoring, and attainment. As such, portfolios were accountability sources where students monitored and reflected on their own leadership progress and goal attainment. Thus, the aim of student leadership portfolio discussions was to understand the extent to which students engaged goal setting, monitoring, and attainment as this skill is at the core of self-determination (Konrad et al., 2007).

School Tours

School tours were unstructured engagements between the researcher and participants which consisted of the researcher asking each student participant and teacher to individually take her on a tour of the school. Specifically, I asked participants to show me things around the school that spoke to leadership and helped participants define and build their own leadership. Through school tours, I intended to understand and describe the social contextual environment from students' and teachers' perspectives.

Observations

Observations were naturally occurring data collection of what I saw, heard, and felt each time I entered the research site. Observations occurred throughout the data collection process and involved informal observations of classroom practices and social engagements among teachers and student participants primarily inside the general education classroom setting but also in the hallways as students transitioned to other classes and during my interactions with participants. My primary focus was to get a feel for the learning environment and observe student and teacher behaviors. I recorded observational data as reflective memos which informed my impressions of teacher supports and student experiences.

Artifact Examination

Artifact examination occurred in conjunction with student leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, and the math teacher's semi-structured interview. Artifact examination involved viewing and photographing, with participants' permission, students' leadership portfolios, math data folders (provided by the math teacher during her semi-structured interview), and pertinent displays referenced by participants during their school tour. Through artifact examination, I aimed to verify and expound upon interviews, tours, discussions, and observations.

Data Collection

After gaining Internal Review Board permission to conduct my research, I requested access to the research site by first talking with the school's principal then talking with the district's Superintendent. Next, I met with fifth-grade teachers in person to schedule a time to gain their consent, inquire about potential student participants, and request assistance with

contacting parents. To gain teacher consent, I met with each teacher in her classroom, read verbatim the Teacher Recruitment Script (see Appendix A) followed by the Informed Consent for a Research Study teacher form (see Appendix B), answered questions, and obtained signatures. One teacher contacted parents by phone to arrange meeting times and places. To gain parental consent, I met with each parent in person, one at the school, two in their homes, and one on her job. I read verbatim the Parent Recruitment Script (see Appendix C) followed by the Informed Consent for a Research Study parent form (see Appendix D), answered questions, and obtained signatures. I scheduled a time with teachers to meet with students after gaining parental consent. To gain student assent, I met with each student individually at school, read verbatim the Assent form (see Appendix E), answered questions, and obtained signatures. I individually administered the Decision-Making Capacity Assessment Tool (see Appendix F) followed by the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* Screener (see Appendix G) after gaining student assent. Data collection began immediately after gaining informed consent from teachers and parents and assent from students and occurred over the course of two months (April and May).

I utilized multiple sources of qualitative methods to understand the self-determination experiences of students with disabilities in an elementary *Leader in Me* school. Data collection began with student and teacher semi-structured interviews followed by leadership portfolio discussions and school tours respectively. Observations occurred throughout the data collection process, and artifact examinations occurred during and after the semi-structured interview with the math teacher and school tours. Combined, these data collection procedures informed my interpretations of participants' responses, actions, and artifacts. I provide more detail about these data collection procedures below.

Stake (2005) encouraged researchers to “place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on. The brainwork ostensibly is observational, but more critically, it is reflective” (p. 449). Stake also posited that the researcher comes to know the case “by being ever reflective” (p. 449). That is, tuning into impressions and considering participants’ comments and records. I wrote memos that included my hunches, questions, and insights throughout data collection and data analysis (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Maxwell, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Interviews

Interviews are “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (Yin, 2014, p. 110). Yin contended that interviews operate on two levels: (a) asking questions according to one’s interview protocol, and (b) posing questions in an unbiased and/or accusatory manner such that respondents become defensive. Posing “how” rather than “why” questions was less threatening and created friendlier researcher-participant interactions. Interview protocols guided semi-structured interviews and ensured participants’ responses addressed the research questions (see Appendix Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Student interviews. Student interviews were conducted individually in empty yet familiar classrooms where students felt free to engage with the researcher. An interview protocol of open-ended questions guided student interviews and allowed flexibility for follow-up questions that probed deeper into student responses and clarified words and phrases (see Appendix H). To break the ice, interview questions began with conversational questions about the student’s demographics (e.g., age, grade), family dynamics, and interests. Student interviews occurred during the first month of data collection, and I audio recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim for more accurate findings (Maxwell, 2013; Roulston, 2014). Houghton and

colleagues (2003) recommended that member checks occur during the transcription phase so that participants' comments could be examined within context rather than after decontextualization of data analysis. Thus, I met with each student participant individually, read over their interview transcriptions, and made note of recommended changes.

Teacher interviews. I conducted teacher interviews individually in their classrooms to minimize potential researcher-participant power dynamic and allow for free-flowing uninterrupted conversation. An interview protocol of open-ended question guided teacher interviews and allowed flexibility for follow-up questions that probed deeper into teacher responses and clarified words and phrases (see Appendix I). To break the ice, interview questions began with conversational questions about the teacher's years of experience and grades taught. Teacher interviews occurred within the first month of data collection, and I audio recorded and transcribed interviews for more accurate and reliable findings (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Roulston, 2014). I enclosed each teacher's transcription with a letter explaining member check and follow up procedures in a large manila envelope that contained a self-addressed envelope (see Appendix J). I hand delivered each teacher's envelope.

Leadership Portfolio Discussions

Leadership portfolios were leadership resumes containing material compilations of students' academic, behavioral, and/or social progress in relation to students' self-selected goals. I conducted leadership portfolio discussions with each student participant individually and, at teachers' request, with teacher participants collectively. I asked students to take me on a tour of their portfolio explaining the contents and how the contents helped them grow as leaders. With permission, I photographed pictures of pertinent portfolio contents for later viewing. Teacher

portfolio discussions consisted of teacher participants and I having general conversations about leadership portfolios and the *Leader in Me* model because teachers were moving away from portfolios toward *7 Habits* leadership agendas and data folders as reflected in the sparse data contained in students' portfolios and lack of regular engagement.

School Tours

I asked students to take me on a tour of the school showing things in the school that spoke to leadership and that facilitated their leadership development. Most school tours occurred on the same day directly after leadership portfolio discussions. At teacher participants' request, I conducted one teacher school tour. I asked the teacher to show and discuss artifacts and norms in the school that encouraged students to be leaders. With permission, I photographed artifacts for later viewing.

Observations

Classroom and school observations were informal and occurred throughout the data collection process. I made mental note of things that gave me a sense of what was going on in the learning space. Among others, I looked for student expression of self-determination skills such as making choices and decisions, solving academic and social problems, self-advocating, and discussing goals. I also made mental notes of and inquired about the physical space including decorum and displays in the classroom and school and how these contributed to student leadership and empowerment. I recorded memos and reviewed my thoughts during data analysis.

Artifact Examination

Yin (2014) contended that artifacts are a gateway for understanding a context's cultural features. I conducted artifact examinations in connection with student leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, and one semi-structured teacher interview in which the teacher provided and discussed with me the contents of students' math data folder. Artifact examination consisted of viewing and discussing the contents of leadership portfolios with individual participants. Artifacts included student leadership portfolio and math data folder contents and photographs of school displays. I viewed and reviewed artifacts as a means of understanding participants responses and behaviors.

Data Analysis

I initially analyzed data by writing analytic memos of my preliminary thoughts, insights, questions, and interpretations. Memo writing began the first day I entered the research site and continued through data analysis. Maxwell (2013) suggested listening to recordings, reading transcriptions, and writing "memos on what you see or hear in your data, and develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships" (p. 105). In general, I listened to recordings prior to transcribing and wrote memos during and after transcribing interviews, leadership portfolio discussions, and school tours. I read transcriptions and wrote memos of my preliminary thoughts including potential themes. I used constant comparative thematic analysis to generate themes for each research questions. The mechanisms for coding derived from the literature, my teaching experiences, and training in the *Leader in Me* model. I addressed research questions one, how do teachers in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, using teacher

semi-structured interviews. I addressed research question two, how does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, using student semi-structured interviews. I addressed research question three, how does the social contextual environment of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities, using teacher and students' school tour data. According to Yin (2014), when analyzing qualitative data, the researcher seeks meaning from all available data. Thus, for each research question, I cross referenced all data to bridge gaps in participants' responses and verify my interpretations.

Verification

Verification is a process whereby by the researcher ensures that her interpretations and conceptualizations of data truly reflect what took place (Given, 2008). Verification processes included writing reflexive memos to be mindful of how my values, beliefs, and biases impact how I interpreted data; corroborating the accuracy of interview transcriptions through transcription member checks; and cross-referencing data sources relying on consensus of data to inform my interpretations. Also, I applied qualitative techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to increase the trustworthiness of my findings.

Trustworthiness

Multiple standards for assessing the quality of qualitative research exist in the literature (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & Pierre, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Rolfe, 2006; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2014). Widely used in qualitative research are Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four

approaches to qualitative rigor—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—which I applied in this case study as described below.

Credibility. Credibility necessitates conducting research in a manner that reflects believable findings. Strategies that promoted credibility include prolonged engagement at the research site, triangulation, and member checking. I spent two months at the research site and gathered data from multiple and varied sources including semi-structured interviews, student leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, observations, and artifact examinations from students with specific learning disabilities and ADHD and teachers with varied experiences to gain a more holistic understanding of the self-determination experiences of students with high incidence disabilities. Data analysis included triangulation across sources. That is, I cross referenced semi-structured interview responses with leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, observations, and artifact data. I cross referenced school tours with semi-structured interviews, leadership portfolio discussions, observations, and artifact data. Additionally, data analysis included triangulation across methods. Interview protocols guided semi-structured interviews which I audio recorded and transcribed. I provided all participants the opportunity to respond to their own words by reviewing their own interview transcriptions. This member check process also enabled me to ensure that I accurately captured participants' experiences. I sent each teacher participant a copy of her transcription with a letter to contact me with questions or concerns (Houghton et al., 2013). I met with student participants individually, read over interview transcriptions with them, and recorded changes.

Dependability. Dependability involves transparency of the researcher's methodological and interpretive decision making. The reader, who does not need to agree, needs to see how all

aspects of the research led to the researcher's final conclusions. UA Box houses all data including recordings, transcriptions, memos, photographs, and a data analysis Excel spreadsheet for readers to view upon request (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014).

Confirmability. Like dependability, confirmability involves the degree to which data findings can be confirmed through methodological audits. The researcher achieves confirmability when she explicitly links findings to methodological decisions allowing the reader to follow her chain of rationale (Houghton et al., 2013). Upon request, readers have access to my database which houses raw data and data analysis processes. The researcher also achieves confirmability when she ensures avoids misrepresentation of participants' experiences and minimizes bias. I utilized member checking and unstructured interviews to clarify participants' statements, views, actions, beliefs, and experiences. Stake (2005) defines triangulation as a process of examining different perspectives to clarify meaning as "the qualitative researcher is interested in diversity of perception, even the multiple realities within which people live" (p. 454). Data triangulation across sources and methods confirm my interpretations, reduce misinterpretations, and add trustworthiness to findings.

Transferability. Transferability occurs when the researcher provides the reader with examples of raw data and enough descriptive information about the research context and methods to determine the applicability of findings to other contexts. The final report included direct quotes from participants and detailed descriptions about the context. Transferability also occurs when the researcher ties her research to theory. This case study applied Wehmeyer's (1996) SDT and Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDTM. The final report connected findings to these

theories by providing a detailed description of how findings converge and/or diverge from the tenets outlined in both theories.

Ethical Considerations

“Qualitative researchers are guests in the private space of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (Stake, 2005, p. 459). Stake referred to the researcher-participant relationship as a covenant with the researcher responsible for avoiding participants’ embarrassment and loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem. This covenantal process begins with prior consideration of potential consequences and risks for participants and purposeful acts by the researcher to ensure autonomy, justice, and beneficence (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001) so that harm does not come to participants before, during, and after the investigation.

Autonomy

The researcher must take measures to ensure that the tension between her research goals and the rights of participants do not lean toward her own ends. Rather, the participants’ rights to self-determine and freely engage in the research are of paramount importance. I gained prior informed teacher and parental consent and student assent. Through IRB approved Teacher and Parent Recruitment Scripts, Informed Consent for a Research Study parent and teacher forms, and student assent forms, I informed participants of, among others, the purpose of the research and their role in the research process. I detailed participants’ expectations and potential risks for their participation (e.g., loss of time) in language appropriate for their level of education (Yin, 2014). I informed participants of the voluntary nature of the study and of their right to withdraw

their participation at any time without penalty. Participants selected pseudonyms that I used throughout the study to protect their privacy.

Justice

Orb and colleagues (2001) define justice as acting fairly to avoid exploiting and abusing participants who are vulnerable to the researcher's decision making. I acted justly toward participants by consciously avoiding impartial actions. Interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour for most participants and an interview protocol afforded opportunities for participants to respond to similar lines of questioning. I remained conscious of my evolving relationship with participants through memo writing and attempted to divide my time equally among them.

Beneficence

Ethics in qualitative research involves going beyond preventing harm toward doing good. Doing good overlaps with informed consent, confidentiality, and adhering to participants' right to privacy. Doing good also considers intentional actions that enhance the lives of participants. Freeman (2000) refers to beneficence as an "active kindness" (p. 4) one in which the researcher tasks herself with promoting good for others. "Active kindness" manifested as treating all participants with human dignity by being kind, cordial, and respectful. I engaged small talk conversations with participants and displayed genuine interest in participants' thoughts and ideas. I attended the fifth-grade graduation because student and teacher participants extended the invitation. I scheduled meetings during noninstructional times and was careful not to schedule meetings during physical education even with students willing to give up that time. I met with one teacher during her planning time and watched the clock to ensure she retrieved her students on time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined my research methods and methodology. I situated this study within a qualitative paradigm, namely a qualitative case study, to gain an in-depth understanding of the self-determination experiences of students with high incidence disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom in a *Leader in Me* school. Primary data collection procedures included semi-structured interviews, student leadership portfolio discussions, school tours, observations, and artifact examination with corroboration occurring across data sources. I implemented member checking and memo writing procedures to increase trustworthiness of findings. Ethical decisions focused on the necessity for participants to engage self-determination and my role as the sole researcher to protect participants' rights. In the next chapter, I provided a discussion of my research findings.

CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS

This research study employed a single case embedded design to address three research questions: 1) how do teachers in a *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; 2) how does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school; and 3) how does the social contextual environment of an elementary *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities? In this chapter, I provided an interpretation of the data beginning with a description of the research participants followed by a synthesis of themes for each research question presented in numerical order for clarity.

Participants

This study included four fifth-grade student participants with high incidence disabilities attending an elementary *Lighthouse Leader in Me* school and their three teachers. All student participants received special education services in the general education classroom for at least 80% of the school day. All student participants attended Ascension Elementary School (pseudonym given to the school by the researcher) since kindergarten. Student participant information included in this section was self and teacher reported during semi-structured interviews and reflective of my perspective of their personalities as I engaged with them for

several weeks. Semi-structured teacher interviews provided information about teacher participants. To protect participants' privacy, participants self-selected their pseudonym prior to engaging in semi-structured interviews.

TJ

TJ was a 10-year old male student who received special education support services under the category of specific learning disability. He liked to play soccer and basketball, read, relax, and spend time with his family. He appeared quiet and timid until he became comfortable, then he began to show his sense of humor. He lived with his mother and sister who were sources of support. At the beginning of the school year, TJ displayed passive learning tendencies and appeared ashamed of his academic struggles. As the year progressed, he gained confidence, established friendships, and began displaying more active participation in the classroom. He engaged positive peer relationships and seemed to be liked by everyone. He aimed to please and seemed to prefer the company of adults over peers.

Lisa

Lisa was a 10-year old female student who received special education support services under the category of OHI. Specifically, Lisa had a diagnosis of ADHD and needed specialized intervention to progress in the general education classroom. She lived with her father, two sisters, and niece. She liked to play outside with her dog and play games on her computer. Her favorite colors were pink and purple, and her favorite foods were pizza and chicken. Like TJ, Lisa demonstrated passive academic engagement, learned helpless tendencies, and lack of confidence at the beginning of the school year. Despite positive praise, she continued to be hard on herself which manifested as crying and feeling like she could not complete tasks. As the year

progressed, she begun employing self-help strategies and advocating for academic supports in a more prosocial manner. Her teachers reported that she was demonstrating more maturity. She engaged positive peer relationships and associated mostly with male peers. She was articulate and thoughtful and always had a serious look on her face.

Rainbow Sparkles

Rainbow Sparkles was an 11-year old female student who received special education support services under the category of OHI. Specifically, she had a diagnosis of ADHD and needed specialized instruction to progress in the general education classroom. She lived with her mother and pet bulldog. She enjoyed spending time with family and friends and took dance classes after school. She had a supportive family who helped her build her academic and social skills. Rainbow Sparkles had a mothering nature that sometimes got her into trouble because she wanted to help everyone else with their work and forgot to help herself. This behavior typically led to incomplete assignments. She liked to hug, play with trinkets, and engage in conversations with adults. At the beginning of the school year, she displayed passive learning and learned helpless tendencies, lacked confidence, and depended a lot on the special education teacher for support. Her teachers expressed concern about her social awkwardness indicating that she thinks and therefore acted like the world was full of glittering rainbows and ponies. Academically, she showed more academic independence in the general education classroom but continued to exhibit below grade level social behaviors at the time of this study.

Coco Puffs

Coco Puffs was a 10-year old male student who received special education support services under the category of OHI. Specifically, he had a diagnosis of ADHD and needed

specialized supports to progress in the general education classroom. He liked playing games and watching movies on his fire stick and doing Prodigy on the computer. Like all student participants, Coco Puffs demonstrated passive learning tendencies at the beginning of the school year. He took medication for hyperactive tendencies; however, he continued to be easily distracted and hyper. Teachers carefully monitored his diet because certain foods would negatively interact with his medicine causing him to display higher levels of hyperactivity. He aimed to please and had difficulty dealing with negative feedback possibly because of the trauma he experienced at an early age. He needed intensive often one-to-one support to complete assignments because of attention and memory deficits. As the year progressed and medications adjusted, he became more focused and attentive.

Mrs. Lexa

Mrs. Lexa was new to AES (first year) where she taught fifth-grade science and social studies. She had a general education elementary background with four years of teaching experience—two years as a fifth-grade teacher and two years as a sixth-grade teacher—and taught all subjects across three different schools. She was tech savvy and often in charge of creating class videos.

Mrs. Supreme

Mrs. Supreme had 25 years of teaching experience all in elementary grades. She taught all subjects but had an affinity for reading. At the time of the study, she taught fifth-grade reading at AES. The only fifth-grade teacher instrumental in the implementation of the *Leader in Me* model from the beginning, Mrs. Supreme witnessed the model's progression at AES. She believed that Covey's (1989) *7 Habit* principles could change anyone's life when given the

opportunity. She often shared personal testimonies about how she applied the principles to her own life.

Mrs. Diesel

Mrs. Diesel had 14 years of teaching experience across four different states. She had a background in elementary and K-12 special education, particularly behavior modification. Special education was her first love. She had experience with co-teaching and resource instruction as well as teaching eighth-grade Pre-Algebra. While she missed special education, she appreciated the opportunity to “reach the masses” as a general education elementary teacher currently, teaching fifth-grade math at AES.

Research Question One

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are cornerstone psychological needs that, when satisfied, support students’ autonomous functioning. When students feel a sense of control and self-expression (autonomy), a sense of self-adequacy and accomplishment (relatedness), and a sense of belonging (relatedness) in the social environment, they become motivated to self-govern (Deci & Ryan, 1985). To determine how teachers in a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school supported autonomy, competence, and relatedness for students with high incidence disabilities in the general education classroom, I cross referenced teacher interviews with observations, artifacts, portfolio discussions, school tours, and student interviews. These efforts generated three themes: 1) *A Culture of High Expectations with a Student Driven Focus*, 2) *A Culture of High Expectations Characterized by Teacher Responsiveness*, and 3) *A Culture of High Expectations Reinforced Through a Common Language*. These themes provide a conceptual understanding of how teacher participants, by their own definitions, supported autonomy,

competence, and relatedness for students with disabilities. I began this section with a discussion of how teachers understood these terms followed by a discussion of themes.

Autonomy

Generally, teachers understood autonomy as learning to be academically, behaviorally, and socially responsible for oneself by utilizing self-management and self-help tools and acting with integrity to produce quality outcomes. Self-management involved things like having needed supplies and managing classroom materials. Among others, students applied self-help when they used agenda books to record assignments, math folders to find examples, and peer assistance to complete work. Quality outcomes involved things like engagement in positive social interactions and the production of high-quality work. Specifically, Mrs. Supreme said autonomy was “where children can learn to write their assignments down, be responsible for getting their work, making sure they have what they need, be it academically, even be it socially, depending on what they’re doing.” Mrs. Diesel said autonomy was

student independency. It’s students being able to review their data, not only look at their data, but compare that data to another peer, or to have a student-teacher conference, or to have them to lead the data conference where they talk about their strengths and their weaknesses. And, if they have weaknesses, what are some ways or strategies that we can implement? Or, what went wrong?

Mrs. Lexa said autonomy was

kids taking responsibility for their own behaviors, understanding when something is appropriate and when something is not and them self-correcting a lot and understanding what it means to really internalize the *7 Habits* rather than just know what they are. Many of the things we do tie back into the *7 Habits* as simple as them doing their work on time, turning it in. Is it the best of your ability, or is it just skating by? Is it truly being proactive, or is it being reactive?

Students gained the capacity to be autonomous when they increased their self-knowledge, that is, their academic, behavioral, and social strengths, deficits, abilities, and preferences. Essentially, students needed to know themselves to be able to help themselves. Sometimes self-knowledge developed when students faced tense moments or peer conflict and nudged by the expectations of the classroom to engage problem solving to arrive at difficult but necessary decisions. During these moments, teachers provided feedback to facilitate effective decision making. Mrs. Diesel explained,

An example today, they had to do group work, and one group was just not getting it together. The teacher support from my standpoint is I'm hearing it, but I'm allowing it to work itself out as a team because if you can't work with a team, it's a struggle for you. So, I'm walking around the room, and one point a student calls me, and then, you know, they're telling me what's going on, and I said, 'You know what I said. You know this is a perfect time for you to see how you can work this out. I get it.' I said, 'Right now there's a conflict. You guys can't decide on anything, but the reality is, the whole point of you being collaborators is to be able to work together. Come together to a mutual understanding so you can accomplish the goal.'

Mrs. Diesel's example indicates that there is an expectation of student autonomy. Teachers expected students to use problem solving strategies to arrive at a consensus when synergizing. As Mrs. Diesel made her rounds, she supported the students by reminding them of group work expectations and left them to work things out for themselves under her distant but watchful eye or, in her words, "I pretend like I'm doing something, but I got my eye on them."

Competence

Teacher definitions of competence varied. Mrs. Diesel viewed competence from a leadership perspective and offered the following definition: "Competence is the children being able to take on leadership roles." She followed her definition by describing the multiple leadership opportunities students had at Ascension, such as leadership jobs, student council,

African American Challenge, and Bicentennial team. Mrs. Supreme viewed competence from an academic lens as the ability to retain, apply, and transfer knowledge in new ways and generalize knowledge to nuanced situations. Specifically, she said “Competence is analyzing and synthesizing information to be able to utilize it in more than one way.” For example, competence was applying knowledge of fact and opinion in different contexts and different situations. Like Mrs. Diesel, Mrs. Lexa defined competence as having the capacity to do something. Competence was “the students’ ability to know what they need to do.” Despite varying definitions, teachers agreed that accommodations and social supports like conversation stems, peer encouragement, and sidebar conversations that involved debriefing about social engagements facilitated competence for students with disabilities. Self-knowledge and high expectations where students focus on and follow through with what they can do and request support for areas of struggle enhanced and cultivated competence. Teachers saw their role as focusing on and supporting the ability of students rather than their dis-ability. Thus, common supports like repetition of previously learned skills and concepts through spiraled instruction and encouraging students to use available tools like math folders and peer buddies represented general education classroom norms. Teacher definitions also suggested that competence produced self-sufficiency. Failure, within a leadership lens, created conditions for competence because failure was one gateway to learning. Minimized as a character flaw, failure became an optimized learning opportunity under their watchful eye of teachers who readily facilitated discussions aimed at leadership capacity building characterized by better judgement, understanding, and increased self-efficacy for students.

Relatedness

Teachers understood relatedness as being empathetic, demonstrating empathy toward others, and considering the perspectives of others whether the perspectives converged or diverged from one's own perspectives, values, beliefs, and understandings. Mrs. Diesel said,

When I think of relatedness, I think that empathy is the biggest part because, as I stated earlier, it has been a huge transition for children when you have been at this campus since kindergarten and to have to come in and adapt to other children and their way of life and be empathetic toward them even when it may not be the easiest thing to do.

Mrs. Diesel's definition reflected the new student dynamic resulting from zoning changes in the school district. According to Mrs. Lexa, students from six different schools came together in one building, and teachers struggled to maintain the leadership culture. Mrs. Lexa defined relatedness with stories and analogies. She said relatedness was like "circling the wagons."

When someone, teacher or student, hurt or had a bad day, students "circled the wagons" to protect the person from further harm. She provided an example of when her child became sick at 7:30 one morning. Rather than being elated about the teacher leaving to tend to her child, which translates as no class and free time, the students all circled around her inquiring about her daughter. Even the rough and tough students cared enough to ask and send well wishes for her child. Mrs. Supreme viewed relatedness as students seeing similarities in themselves as they have opportunities to interact with Others. Teachers connected with students by being responsive to their academic, behavioral, social, and cultural needs and creating safe spaces where students felt free to be vulnerable and to take social risks. Promoting difference was a large part of how teachers supported relatedness and nourished identity development. Teachers also connected with students through personal stories and supported student to student

connections through team building exercises, intentional grouping to bridge social gaps, and giving students space to “find their niche, their people, their group, their voice, and their place” (Mrs. Lexa, interview, 2019) within a familial community that supported one another.

Teacher definitions for autonomy, competence, and relatedness embedded into the ways they supported students’ needs. Three themes describe the infrastructure of supports for students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom. I discuss these themes below.

A Culture of High Expectations with a Student Driven Focus

A well-oiled machine runs without interruption as all parts work efficiently and effectively together to function as a unit. Teachers supported autonomy, competence, and relatedness by establishing classrooms designed to run like “well-oiled machines” lubricated and strengthened by a culture of high expectations rooted in a leadership ideology that produces, generates, and lends itself to a student driven focus. This student driven focus encouraged self-knowledge, self-reflection, self-sufficiency, self-management, self-discipline, self-efficacy, self-improvement, decision making, and problem solving. “Our goal is to get them to a point to where they are independent, and they don’t need the support as much. We don’t want to enable them. We don’t want to give them a crutch” (Mrs. Diesel, interview, 2019). Teacher participants held students to high expectations; that is, teachers expected students to operate with autonomy and demonstrate competence as they embodied the *7 Habits* principles. The first theme, *A Culture of High Expectations with a Student Driven Focus*, involved teacher expectations for student self-sufficiency, self-management, and ownership. Teachers supported these expectations through multiple student engagements in and conversations about their own data

(e.g., data talks, intentional conversations, self-assessment using rubrics). Consequently, student participants understood their academic, behavioral, and social standing and engaged goal setting, monitoring, and action step planning.

Data talks were commonplace in Mrs. Diesel's math class and guided by data folders which "are an in-depth look at your standards that you are learning on a fifth-grade level." Mrs. Diesel unpacked standards as learning targets (e.g., "I can multiply fractions. I can add and subtract decimals"). Students used the data folders to rank themselves on a scale of one to four (i.e., 1 = Novice, 2 = Apprentice, 3 = Proficient, 4 = Distinguished) based on scores received from daily and weekly calculation quizzes and data from the Scantron according to Mrs. Diesel who further explained,

They're having data talks. They're having math talks. So, at the beginning of the year, we used [stems] a lot...So I would walk around and say, 'Okay this is math talk time. This is the situation. This is what you've got. Use those stems.' So, in the beginning, they were using them verbatim...But now, they don't even hesitate. They was like, 'Well how did you get this?' And they was like, 'Because I thought of it this this this and that.' And they're like, 'Oh okay, I understand.' So, they're learning more than one way to do a problem. Duh, that's what math is. Some of them draw, and they do their tallies, and they're not ashamed to do their tallies. They're not ashamed to do their repeated addition because they look at it as, it's a different strategy cause that's what we call everything in here, strategies.

Among others, data talks were 80/20 discussions facilitated by Mrs. Diesel to create student autonomy and ownership for their learning and the learning of others. That is, students owned 80% to the teacher's 20% of the learning work. Rubrics and other self-monitoring tools aided the student driven focus where students drive their own learning. Students frequently interacted with their data as they used rubrics to grade their own projects and assignments and monitored their daily minutes of reading.

Intentional focused teacher-to-student conversations provided immediate, personal, and corrective feedback that facilitated student decision making, problem solving, self-reflection, and self-management. Teachable moments provided qualitative feedback necessary for self-assessment. Teachers communicated feedback in a manner that honored students' dignity. Mrs. Diesel seized moments to have

just those intentional conversations. Sometimes they're just teachable moments like something happens in the classroom, you take the opportunity to either use it to teach the class, or with kids you know that may get embarrassed, you're like, 'Sidebar.' They're like, 'What is that?' 'It means you come to the side and we have a conversation.' And, every single moment, every single opportunity is taken.

Interdependency and mutual accountability were high leverage classroom norms expected among all members of the classroom community. Mrs. Supreme credited classmates for the academic growth TJ displayed as she explained "classmates have helped to support him to make him want to learn and to make him want to be more independent as much as he can because he realizes that he has some limitations." Teachers expected TJ to be an active learner who attempted to complete his work rather than sit idly by and wait for someone to come to his rescue. Mrs. Diesel used mutual accountability norms to change typical peers' perspectives of students who struggle academically, behaviorally, and/or socially. The excerpt below was her response to the interview question dealing with how she supported relatedness. She stated,

So, that's what I was saying. Like empathy is a big word for me because the beginning of the year, 'hee hee hee,' funny. I was just like okay, no big deal. That's what they need. And they'll come and they'll ask me a question, and I'll say, 'Are you done? Go work with so and so.' And they take them, and they work with them, and they come back and say, 'Oh, he's finished.' I say, 'Did you do the work for them?' 'No ma'am. I showed them.' And it's so funny how I can look over and I see them mimicking my behaviors when they're teaching.

Mrs. Diesel explained that, at the beginning of the school year, students laughed when other students struggled with math skills. So, she worked to change the culture of her classroom. In addition to having students teach their peers as described in the excerpt above, she created intentional problem-solving engagements where students divided group work to complete timed breakout box activities. Mrs. Diesel explained,

They had problems that they had to do for a breakout box, and it looks like this. I said, ‘Okay what I need you to do as teammates is, I need you to look at the problems. I need you to think about the different levels that you have within your group because you’re not going to give me a problem that you know I struggle with because that’s going to eat away at your time.’ So, hearing them talk about, ‘hey, can you do this problem?’ And it never fails. They would go to those kids first...Some of them, like TJ, no problem. Like, he picked the one he could do. He rocks on that. The only one was this one [pointing to Lisa], and her response was, ‘I’ll try.’ Then, I heard a young lady. She said, ‘that’s all we can ask you to do.’

Empathetic teamwork appears to be an implication of Mrs. Diesel’s effort as indicated by the student who said, “That’s all we can ask you to do.” Mrs. Diesel further explained that group members were to “check everybody else’s work and to help them finish the problem.” She delighted in seeing students mimic her corrective feedback mannerisms and the fact that peers “give [students with disabilities] constructive criticism in a playful way so that it’s not condescending.” In addition to a student driven focus, teacher participants supported autonomy, competence, and relatedness by being responsive to students’ academic, behavioral, and social needs which I discuss in the next section.

A Culture of High Expectations Characterized by Teacher Responsiveness

Teacher participants responded to students’ academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and cultural needs by accounting for and affirming students’ individual differences as Mrs. Lexa powerfully asserted,

I think some of them know I'm different, but letting them see that different is okay, and you still have a voice, and you still have power, and you still can be a leader no matter your diagnosis. We've had a couple of them struggle with that. A couple of them, 'Well, I'm different so I don't have any friends.' Or, 'I'm different and nobody will listen to me.' And getting them to understand it's perfectly fine to be different. It is not perfectly fine to give up. And I think a lot of them have taken that and gone, 'Oh, well, yeah, I might do this differently, but they do it differently than their best friends so why does that make me feel like I'm less of a person or less of a student or less successful. And so, giving them that power back has been a big thing this year...They have power over what happens. They have power over their own learning. Just because they have a disability, or just because they have a diagnosis does not mean that they cannot be as successful or more successful than their general education peers.

Teachers worked to change the personal narratives for students with disabilities who struggled to see themselves as empowered, who struggled to embrace difference, and who struggled to see the power in difference. Instead, teachers endorsed empathy and empowerment among all members of the classroom community. To change a common practice among students of saying negative things (e.g., "Dude, that's trash, or you trash") that disempower, Mrs. Diesel assigned the students shout outs (sending positive messages) using a computer program called Padlet because she believed that

it's something about you speaking these words over people, and even though they sit there and laugh with you, they internalize it. And, it's a problem. The special education population is probably ten times as worse because they already know that they're different. They already know it. So, student empowerment is a great phrase to describe what happens between the *7 Habits* and them building that self-confidence because it does empower them to come into the classroom and say, 'I know I need help. I know I'm going to sit at the back table with Ms. Diesel, but at the end of the day, I'm going to get this work.'

Mrs. Supreme believed that the demographics of Ascension Elementary produced "empathetic opportunities" for students to "be kind and accepting" of students from different cultures and students with disabilities because

they're able to see okay, well you know, they may not be good at that, or they may learn a different way, but that doesn't mean they're not learning. That still doesn't mean that they're not smart because they don't process like someone else processes it. . . . I think this school setting, being a *Leader in Me* school, has set them up for just a myriad of opportunities for them to go and to serve and to help others and see that learning is taking place even though their learning may not look like you're learning.

In addition to changing typical students' attitudes toward students with disabilities, teachers promoted the beauty in and the importance of difference to students with disabilities. Mrs. Supreme highlighted "that all of us have deficits in some aspect, whether it be socially, academically, or whatever. We all have deficits." She believed highlighting the universal nature of deficits created conditions where students with disabilities more aptly implemented self-help strategies. That is, if I looked like everyone else, then I would likely stop hiding my deficits to gain a better view of myself. Self-knowledge is critical to self-help. At AES, self-knowledge enabled students to set and monitor goals. When teacher anchored self-knowledge with "rapport and relationships with students" then vulnerability to deficits became more likely for students. To use Mrs. Supreme's words, students "feel comfortable expressing what they don't know how to do" in settings where they feel affirmed which "empowers them" to deal with their struggles.

A critical aspect of teacher responsiveness was teacher agency aimed to change the paradigm of difference and self-imposed limitations of learned helplessness to manifest an overall transformation from disempowered to empowered, from helpless to hopeful. Mrs. Lexa believed that "every single person has a strength" that they need to find and build. Mrs. Supreme stressed,

even though you have a disability, you still are able to do. And, what you can do, you do it. Then, when you get stuck or get to a point where you can't, we can step in but not sit and be waiting on somebody to pick up the pencil to make me think.

Likewise, Mrs. Diesel recalled TJ's behavior at the beginning of the school year:

He would sit in class, would not ask any questions. Of the four, I feel like he was the one that was most ashamed of the fact that he has to be pulled out. His communication...is a problem too, so he was very reluctant to ask questions, to use words. I looked at him and I was like 'Un un. You need to use some words with me cause I don't understand. If you don't know it, you need to tell me you don't know it. If you need help, you need to tell me that you need help.'

Previously, TJ, who had a language deficit that impeded his expressive communication, relied on facial expressions rather than words to communicate his need for assistance. Being relentless with her expectations for self-sufficiency, Mrs. Diesel asserted, "I don't understand anything but that smile that you have on your face, which is a beautiful smile, but I need more. She reasoned that TJ lacked confidence "because he struggled overall, across the board." But, she quickly established the expectation, or in her words, "Un un. Nope. You have more to offer." By seeing the ability in his dis-ability, Mrs. Diesel helped TJ use self-advocacy skills in a culture that expected self-help.

Teachers would not allow students to wallow in self-pity and succumb to learned helplessness tendencies. Rather, teachers saw their role as standing in the gap as a temporary bridge that lead students with disabilities from anti-social coping strategies to socially appropriate coping strategies, from low expectations to high expectations, from an imposter syndrome to genuine learners who reframe failure as gateways to success, from self-destructive mindsets to self-constructive attitudes of "I Can and I Will." Of the four student participants, Lisa vocalized the most negative emotion about her disability challenges. Mrs. Diesel said, "Ms. Lisa would cry every day. And, I get her some tissues and say, "I get it. Wipe it up." And, she'd look at me, "You don't understand." Mrs. Diesel wanted Lisa and the other student participants "to feel

comfortable with who they are and with the deficits that they have.” The goal was for students to grow rather than remain unproductive and stagnant.

Teachers described all student participants as having no confidence at the beginning of the school year but demonstrated at the time of this study more active learning, participation, and self-initiated academic and social engagements with peers largely because teachers worked to reframe students’ understanding of failure and mistakes. One of Mrs. Diesel’s favorite quotes says, “Mistakes are valuable, a necessary learning experience,” which was strategically posted over her dry erase board in the back of the room where she worked with small groups of students because she wanted students “to understand that it’s okay to make a mistake.” She told the students:

I don’t want you to be dependent on me. I want you to know that you’re going to make mistakes and sometimes, you are going to fail. I want you to know that first and foremost. But, it’s how you respond to that failure that’s going to determine whether or not you succeeded cause you may not get them right. But, did you succeed in this time instead of shutting down that you actually went back and looked over your work, and you asked for help?

Teachers wanted students to know that mistakes are a natural part of learning. Therefore, teachers believed that mistakes lead to a “growth mindset” produced by learning and growing and not allowing our mistakes to define us. A common language rooted in *7 Habits* principles helped bridge the gap between expectations and students’ deficits.

A Culture of High Expectations Reinforced Through a Common Language

A common language centered around the *7 Habits* principles created conditions where students with disabilities navigated the academic and social terrain with some degree of

competence. When asked to reflect on how teachers support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, Mrs. Diesel explained:

It's those conversation pieces. It's the lower grade teachers. Half of them I don't know, but when the kids see them, they light up. First thing, 'Are you demonstrating those leadership qualities?' And then, they're like, 'Well, you know I'm talking too much.' And, they say, 'Well, what you need to do?' And they're like, 'Oh, I need to sharpen the saw.' Like, they're using the language...But, I feel like outside of this classroom everywhere they go, it's being enforced. In the cafeteria, even the cafeteria they're not using that language, but the things that they are saying to them aligns with what they're being taught. So, it's not like they get it within walls of the classrooms, and then it's forgotten. And because our kids know what is expected of them, and they know how to implement them into their everyday life, it builds character. It builds independency. It builds confidence.

Mrs. Diesel's comments reflected an embedded *7 Habits* language and culture that routinely communicated high expectations, accountability, and leadership in a way that students with disabilities understood and needed—that is, daily, repetitively, in different settings, and in different situations. According to Mrs. Diesel, “the more you have those intentional talks with them, and you are always taking it back to the *7 Habits*, the more those children learn and the more they process. Sometimes, they are unaware that it's happening.”

Teachers used *7 Habits* language as a problem solving tool that, through questioning, helped students evaluate choices and decisions, arrive at viable solutions, establish and monitor goals and action steps, and self-assess progress. Mrs. Diesel supported Lisa, a strong reader but a struggling math student, through her lack of math confidence with teacher-student conferences where *7 Habits* language reminded her of self-help options. Mrs. Diesel explained the carryover of the *7 Habits* to Lisa's problem solving:

Math was just below second grade I believe. Sitting and having teacher-student conferences and reminding her about what it means when you need to synergize. 'What does synergizing mean?' And, she can tell me. And I'm like 'How can you apply that?'

And she's like, 'Instead of whining and complaining, I can work with my group, and if I need help, I can ask them. And, I always want to go to the special education teacher. I need to stay in the classroom.'

Well stated, Lisa's explanation admittedly surprised Mrs. Diesel and suggested that she understood her academic responsibility. Conversations with Lisa during her interview, school tour, and leadership portfolio discussion indicated that she tried to change her ineffective coping strategy of self-pity to more proactive problem solving.

Mrs. Supreme used *7 Habits* language to increase students' social competence:

So, as a *Leader in Me* school, we recognize that...if you don't support them in the social arena, they can have lots of difficulty when it comes to academics. So, every day we're talking about ways to handle when you have a problem, when you have a situation, when it arises, what are some things that you can do? How can you be proactive about it? How can you begin with the end in mind? What's a better way to handle that problem?

Mrs. Lexa used *7 Habits* language to help students with behavioral issues:

Whenever there is a behavioral issue, we ask them are you being leaders, and we started the year in saying here are the aspects of a leader, and a lot of that tied back into the *7 Habits*. What are we expecting to see from them? What are we expecting them to do? What are we expecting them to be able to do? And showing them, while all this may be hard to see at the very beginning, it's what we're expecting you to do by the end. If there is a behavior concern or something like that, then were you proactive? Were you reactive? Did you put first things first, or did you get in our own way? Did you begin with the end in mind? Or, did you just think about this is what I want now? And so, teaching them that long-term goals, you have to work at them every single day. They don't just happen. So, if the child has a behavior, then they need to know this is what I need to do every single day to reach whatever my goal is.

As the above excerpts demonstrate, *7 Habits* engagements were commonplace at AES making the social context routine and predictable for students with disabilities who typically thrive in these types of environments. The repetitive language reiterated teacher expectations and provided a common platform to communicate expectations. Mrs. Supreme explained Lisa's transformation from a dependent learner to an independent learner by "having lots of

conversations about [her] being proactive, beginning with the end in mind, putting first things first...because [she is] more capable” than she credits herself. Instead of “trying to put some effort into [doing the work],” Lisa gave “herself her self-fulfilling prophesy,” which was not permissible by any of the teacher participants. Teachers used *7 Habits* language to encourage Lisa to initiate self-help behaviors, including social negotiation involving self-advocacy. That is, teachers expected Lisa to do what she could, then request the support of the special education teacher rather than whine about not being able to do the work.

Mrs. Supreme said that Habit Five: *Seek First to Understand, then to Be Understood* helped curtail negative peer interactions:

I think socially that focus on leadership has certainly empowered the children. I mean to, especially student-to-student [relationships] because you know we see so many struggles as educators with children not being able to get along, wanting to fight, wanting to argue, you know...I see that 100 times during the day, and learning how to seek first to understand, then to be understood. Okay so you try to understand the person’s point of view, and then they will try to understand you as well...I think a lot of that, you know, it just affects their relationships and their socialization and knowing how to get along, and if somebody said something or if somebody was mean, you’re knowing how to act.

Students with disabilities need consistency to learn and grow academically, behaviorally, and socially. Teacher participants used *7 Habits* language to help students reflect on their choices and decisions thereby supporting students need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as they understood these terms.

Research Question Two

Leader in Me schools embed Covey’s (1989) *7 Habits* principles into the schools’ culture. The everyday business of school consists of teaching, modeling, and applying the *7 Habits* principles. To ascertain the influence of this schoolwide model on the self-determined behaviors

of students with high incidence disabilities receiving services in the general education classroom, I conducted a qualitative case study consisting of teacher and student semi-structured interviews, formal and informal classroom observations, student leadership portfolio discussions, and school tours. To address research question two, how does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behavior among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school, I asked students a series of questions aimed at getting them to reflect on how they use the *7 Habits* principles and how they engaged self-determination skills. Using iterative processes of categorizing initial codes to find patterns in the data, I arrived at four themes: 1) being academically, socially, and behaviorally accountable and responsible, 2) exercising self-determination skills, 3) relying on external supports, and 4) resisting failure. I discussed these themes below in the order listed.

Being Academically, Socially, and Behaviorally Accountable and Responsible

At Ascension Elementary School (AES), students reported training in the *7 Habits* principles as instrumental in their learning and social relationships as they learned and was expected to be accountable and responsible for their academic progress, social interactions, and behavior. TJ said that engaging habit six: *Synergize* helped him to be academically responsible:

The way I use the *7 Habits* I work first then I play then I synergize with my partners that I work with for center work then I understand what the teacher is saying, then I do it. When we take tests...in math class, sometimes we get to use our journals to help us and that stuff [the teacher] wrote down I decide to use it to find the answer to the question.

As discussed in the previous section, teacher participants, having high expectations for all students, expected students to help themselves first prior to requesting assistance. Mrs.

Supreme's mantra was "Ask three before me." Teachers expected students to take ownership for

their learning as students first, attempted the work on their own, second consulted material resources provided by the teachers and located in specific areas in the classrooms, and third consulted a peer buddy before requesting assistance from the teacher. TJ's statement suggested that he took responsibility for his learning when he chose to use his math journal as a reference when completing tests. Mrs. Diesel indicated that students have the choice, and teachers encouraged them to use resources to promote self-help and accommodate their forgetfulness. TJ explained his process when he came across a question he did not understand, "I sometimes have to figure [the answer] in a different way or read back on something or guess at it."

Rainbow Sparkles' comment indicated the academic and behavioral responsibility she demonstrated as she used habit seven: *Sharpen the Saw* to focus on her work when presented with distractions. She stated, "It helps me focus [on] what I'm doing. Sometimes *Sharpen the Saw* helps me when somebody says something funny. I ignore it." Her statement indicated her attempt to self-manage to acclimate herself for learning. She also said that habit four: *Think Win-Win* helped her get along with classmates because "when we talk about math and math skills that we've learned so far...I like to hear my friend's idea first to see if their idea is better than mine." Rainbow Sparkles learned to be considerate of others' ideas and perspectives, and she learned multiple math strategies through peer talk, which seemed to be a common aspect of each teachers' classroom culture as they frequently engaged habit six: *Synergize*. When asked to reflect on how the *7 Habits* helped her with her behavior, Lisa stated,

I'll say that one of the *Habits* I think it's habit four or five to *Synergize* I'm not sure which number it is. To synergize, well, I just think it means that you work together and cooperate and if you're in a group and working on a project or on an activity you have to synergize with the group and not just like you can't be mean to them or anything.

In her statement, Lisa combined habit four: *Think Win-Win*, habit five: *Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood*, and habit six: *Synergize* to reflect on being responsible for her group behavior and for how she treated her peer partners. Like Lisa, student participants talked about the *7 Habits* principles holistically rather than as individual unrelated concepts suggesting their embodiment of the principles and the deeply embedded nature of the principles within the school's culture. Lisa further contended that

You can't have a certain attitude it's like saying that you're better than them if you win or it's like something where you can win or lose but you can't say things like that because it won't be fair to them and they'll feel bad about themselves.

By governing herself in accordance with the *7 Habits* principles, Lisa assumed ownership for her social and academic behaviors. Coco Puffs said he used the *7 Habits* principles to "help others" and to "be kind to others." He shared a time when he helped two of his classmates during Mrs. Lexa's class. Coco Puffs equated the principles with social relationships and the need to think outside of self. As he further reflected on how the *7 Habits* principles helped him, he said, "[I] work first then play. Like at home, when I'm at home, I do my work first then my mom lets me have a little time on my TV." Coco Puff's parent permitted him to engage in a preferred activity because he demonstrated academic responsibility by choosing to complete his homework first. Noteworthy in all the students' responses was that they defined all the *Habits* in affective terms like "being kind," "helping others," and "not being mean" which may be the result of a culture of interdependency characteristic of AES previously discussed.

Along with being accountable for their academic progress, social interactions, and behavior, student participants exercised self-determination skills. Teachers nor students referred to their behavior as self-determined, yet practicing skills like goal setting and monitoring,

making informed choices and decisions, problem solving, and self-advocating were commonplace. I discuss these behaviors in the next section.

Exercising Self-Determination Skills

Skills like choice making, problem solving, and self-advocacy are essential to student agency. The more students learn and practice these skills, the more likely students are to embody and therefore exercise the skills in their daily lives (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). Student participants exercised self-determination skills, particularly goal setting and monitoring, choice making, decision making, problem solving, and self-advocacy as they acted on self-knowledge and teacher expectations of self-sufficiency. These skills are discussed below.

Goal setting and monitoring. Goal setting and attainment are fundamental self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, Sands, et al., 1997). At AES, students routinely set goals and monitored their progress based on their self-knowledge (i.e., strengths, deficits, preferences, interests), achievement, and performance as measured by standardized tests, grades, and teacher feedback. Without observable hesitation during semi-structured interviews, all students informed me of their goals. In fact, Rainbow Sparkles told me about her reading goal during the assent process. When I asked Lisa to tell me about her goals, she stated,

Well, one goal that I'm really really focusing on is getting better at math. I have a big struggle with division, sometimes fractions because when I try to do a division problem, I'm not really sure about how it's supposed to work. I do know that I'm supposed to make something like equal.

Numerous interactions with Lisa indicated that she worked to strengthen her math skills, specifically fractions, and division. Her decision derived from her analysis of her own math performance:

Well, it was my decision cause I actually get bad grades on my math. I got a C in math so I was figuring that I should work on it more and study at home and look up how to do this stuff.

Lisa knew her specific struggles with division which is a necessary step in mastering her goal.

Lisa's response also reflected evaluative self-determined decision making and knowledge of needed actions to meet her goals. Lisa made progress toward her goal as she stated, "I've gotten a tiny tiny tiny extremely tiny bit better at division." She based her performance analysis on her recent ability to solve some division problems on her own. As she reflected on her goals, Lisa further stated, "I'm actually super. I'm really good at reading, but I already reached that goal.

But, I just want to work on science." Particularly in science she said,

there's an activity, well not an activity a kind of thing that we have to do every week, it's like a newspaper or a studies weekly and we have to write crosswords on those and also our science tests that are really difficult but you can make them easier by reading the newspapers, the studies weekly.

At Ascension, the classroom culture provided provisions for self-exploration and self-examination as student participants keenly knew their academic and behavioral standing. Lisa's comments reflected goal setting and monitoring and decision making based on her self-knowledge and grades. Her comments also suggested that she acted with some degree of autonomy in the goal setting process.

Although Coco Puffs had academic needs, his hyperactivity and difficulty focusing negatively impacted his participation and performance in the general education classroom. He worked to improve his behavior as he said, "My first goal is not to get in trouble. My second goal is to do my work. My third goal is to do great." Coco Puffs self-selected and wrote his goals in his leadership portfolio as he asserted, "I just made them up." Teacher feedback and grades helped Coco Puffs decide to work on "doing all my work" so "the teacher won't get mad

at me” and “doing all my work [to] get my grades up.” Coco Puffs explained that he earned all As and a C on his report during the third nine weeks. Although he thought a “C is kind of good,” he wanted to do better. As indicated by his interview responses and leadership portfolio discussion, Coco Puffs wanted to improve his behavior. His responses indicated that he believed improving his behavior lent itself to improvement in his grades. He also credited the *7 Habits* for helping him to “be in charge of [himself]” as he talked about a recent incident where two peers called him a name, but he decided not to fight. When asked which of the *Habits* helped him with his decision, he advised, “all of them.” Coco Puffs said that he acted with autonomy toward his goals. However, based on observed hyperactive behaviors during his leadership portfolio discussion and school tour and teacher verbal and nonverbal language during interviews and observations, I found that Coco Puff’s goals may be more reflective of teacher behavioral feedback and his grades. He monitored his progress by teacher comments written in his daily agenda.

TJ talked about his long term goals of “finishing school and going to college.” He also understood his academic deficits and developed an action plan: “Right here is my goals: one, reading, second, math, third, learning to write. To reach my goals [I need to] read more, learn, and listen.” TJ wrote these goals in his leadership portfolio and discussed them during his semi-structured interview. He said, “I decided [on these goals] cause I want to be good at school, have an education, then finish school, and like go to college.” TJ worked to build his reading, writing, and math skills to proactively prepare for post-school outcomes: “If I didn’t get good grades or go to college, I wouldn’t be smart enough or wouldn’t have enough money to rent an apartment or something.” He credited his mother for helping him understand the importance of long-term

goals and the *7 Habits* for helping him move toward his goals, particularly, “synergizing with somebody. It’s like me and my friend working together. We’re a great team so we get work done.” He worked toward his goals by, “working hard, never getting into trouble, doing all my work, and doing what the teacher says.” TJ, like the other student participants, understood his support needs and found comfort in working with his peers.

Rainbow Sparkles worked on improving her reading skills and not only identified reading as a goal but also stated specific areas of focus (i.e., idioms, themes). Her decision to focus on reading was not only based on grades as she stated, “The grades are my data” but also on her personal desire to read on grade level.

I’m good at everything else, but I want to be better at reading cause I’m at table three. I didn’t have a good point. I think it was three point something.” I think table three is like the fourth-grade table of reading, and fourth grade, I was doing so good in reading.

Rainbow Sparkles appeared to be driven by the social stigma of leveled reading group norms typical in elementary school settings. She also had a personal goal “to keep trying so that I can get my dance moves better.” Rainbow Sparkles participated in extracurricular activities, one of which was dance class. She said she came up with the dance goal on her own because “sometimes I mess up the move.” She was “happy” with her progress as she believed she got better with her dance moves, but she did not specify how she measured her dance progress.

Kelly and Shogren (2014) posit that when students with disabilities are taught to set and monitor their goals, they are more likely to meet and/or exceed their goals. Student participants made academic and behavioral gains in the general education setting. Mrs. Diesel reported, “And, all of my children showed growth, special education students, showed tremendous growth in math and reading.” Specifically, Lisa improved her math skills by 385 points according to her

standardized test performance. Rainbow Sparkles met her reading goal and worked on a seventh grade level in math. Specific performance indicators were not available for TJ and Coco Puffs; however, Mrs. Diesel said that TJ was the poster child for the *7 Habits* principles as she described, “Like TJ, he don’t need the *Leader in Me* traits...because he has all of them already... He can model them for other people.” Mrs. Diesel’s observations of Coco Puffs’ behaviors and classroom performance indicated that “he is improving.”

Choice making, decision making, and problem solving. In addition to goal setting and monitoring, students made informed choices and decisions about their schoolwork, behavior, and social interactions. Largely externally motivated (e.g., not wanting to get in trouble or expelled), students made choices based on personal preferences (e.g., academic, behavioral, and social goals), and their decisions and problem solving reflected reasoning and evaluative processes that they deemed helpful to their academic, behavioral, and social performance. TJ said, “if my behavior is bad, I usually fix it.” He posited that his behavior became bad “when people make me mad.” He talked about a time in an earlier grade when someone pushed him down, and his first reaction was to hold up his fist in preparation to punch. Instead of fighting, he said, “I just walked away [because] if I hit him, I would’ve got in trouble.” TJ made the choice not to hit the other student because he preferred not to get into trouble. After considering his options, he decided that walking away was the best alternative for him to meet his goals and not disappoint his teachers and parent. To build students’ leadership capacity, teachers placed students in groups with peers who they knew students may not get along with so that students potentially learned to be productive even within moments of conflict as Mrs. Diesel explained,

Problem solving. They do that on a daily basis especially when they're trying to mix up the groups, and I try to put them together with people that I know that they are probably not going to get along with. But, I need to see that you're able to do conflict resolution and get the job done. So far this year, it has been successful. I only had to like jump in maybe three times with two individuals, little boys, and I'm still like I made them work together today, and they did a good job.

When TJ worked in the presence of peer conflict, he resolved to divide the work thereby minimizing potential conflict:

If somebody don't like you, then that means that you can't get along with them. And, you might want to get your work done, so sometimes I might want to just like do my own thing...like he or she do one side and I do the other part.

Coco Puffs said that when given choices in assignments, he "do Prodigy last and do the other two [assignments] first because the work that Mrs. Diesel give you is more important than the math games." His statement reflected responsible choice making and understanding of personal accountability as Prodigy was a supplementary educational game used by teachers to reinforce previously taught skills. Likewise, when given choices of assignments, Rainbow Sparkles said, "Like when there's a fun activity, I like do my work first." When faced with negative peer behaviors, she chose her own behavior because "if I follow somebody else's behavior, I think I was thinking that they might get in trouble, so I follow my own behavior."

Lisa said that if she had trouble with peers, "then I just don't talk to them anymore and I'll just talk to someone else or just not talk to anyone at all unless they're my friends though. I can try to fix the relationship." Lisa chose to withdraw herself from negative peer conflict unless she deemed the person to be a friend, in which case, she said, "I try to get along with them. I'll tell them about things we used to do and try to get them to do it again so that they'll like want to be friends with me again."

Like Lisa's statement suggests, students exercised social problem solving, be it influenced by well-intended teachers wanting to increase student conflict resolution strategies or a natural occurrence within the social classroom environment. TJ recalled a time when he had difficulties with a friend:

I think I was following that time where with this dude being mean to me. We were friends, then he started being mean to me. So, I didn't talk to him. I just like I didn't sit [with] him, and then he stopped talking. Then, he said sorry to me, then we became friends again.

TJ's solution resulted in reuniting his friendship relationship. Rainbow Sparkles said that she used social problem solving to help her friends feel better "by like saying a joke or making a funny face" because she had an unwritten goal of making her friends happy. When asked, "what if you have difficulty getting along with a classmate," Rainbow Sparkles replied, "we use our heads together." Her response indicated her embodiment of habit four: *Think Win-Win* and prosocial problem solving. Lisa's comment reflected her confidence in her own ability to make good behavioral choices.

Shaw: Is there anything that goes on in this school that help you make good choices about your behavior?

Lisa: Well not necessarily. We can think of that ourselves.

As indicated by her response, Lisa spoke confidently about her own ability to make good behavioral choices. Her comment suggested that she felt that she had the autonomy to make her own behavioral choices.

Self-advocacy. Student participants knew their academic and behavioral struggles. Typically, after attempting self-help strategies, students requested support either from the general education or special education teacher. Coco Puffs' responses indicated that while there were

times when he completed his work on his own, he knew and requested assistance when he ran into difficulty.

Coco Puffs: Sometimes I be independent.

Shaw: Sometimes you're independent. And when are those times?

Coco Puffs: In math class...like on my division...sometimes I'll try to do them on my own, but if I don't get it, I'll ask the teacher.

Coco Puffs' body language and tone during this engagement suggested that he was proud and confident about his strong math skills, but he recognized that even the best math students needed support. TJ also said, "I usually when I was young and having problems, I just raise my hand, walk up to the teacher, and tell her [the student] being mean." He stated that he conducted himself in this way since early elementary school and that he learned this problem-solving strategy on his own. When I asked Lisa to reflect on what she did when she had problems with her schoolwork, she advised,

Well, sometimes I get frustrated...sometimes I start to cry...sometimes I don't want to do it anymore. But, sometimes to help me with [math], I have to tell my teachers that I don't understand, and I have a education teacher, his name is Mr. P, sometimes he helps me understand the math question that I need help with.

Lisa said she worked on using her voice rather than her emotions to deal with her academic difficulties. Rainbow Sparkles said that if she felt bullied, she talked to the principal after requesting permission from her teacher. Overall, students enacted agency in the classroom and school environment. Knowledge of their academic, behavioral, and social needs supported students' agentic responses. However, students needed continuous supports to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of their self-advocacy.

At AES, students learned and moved toward becoming academically, behaviorally, and socially responsible and accountable as they learned and practiced the *7 Habits* principles and exercised self-determination skills. However, as they move toward self-governance, student participants continued to need and relied on external supports, namely teacher perception and grades discussed in the next section.

Relying on External Supports

While student participants learned to become self-sufficient and self-reliant as they built their leadership capacity, their behaviors reflected external motivation driven largely by teacher perception and grades. Lisa practiced math skills at home not only because she wanted to get better with mathematical computations but also because “my teachers want me to get better at math and get better grades.” Lisa appeared to be at a transitional stage with goal setting where she acted on her own preference to improve her math skills while also wanting to please her teachers. Lisa became emotional about wanting to please me (the researcher) with more varied and diverse answers:

Lisa: Well I know what I’m saying is not very understandable.

Shaw: It’s very understandable. I mean it’s very understandable and I’m appreciating everything that you’re telling me. It’s helping me a lot to learn a lot about this school.

Lisa: But sometimes when you ask me about the *Habits* and like how they like impact my work, I think I have to think really hard about that.

Shaw: Okay, well I do really appreciate you thinking very hard. I have to think really hard. I’m much older than you are and I have to think really hard if I want to give a good answer too. So that’s perfectly okay.

Lisa: Some of the *Habits* are kind of the same...like I’ve already mentioned those the two *Habits* before the synergize one and the proactive one. Those are kind of the same, but “I’ll just say some more *Habits* because if I just say them over and over again you

already know what I'm going to say about the *Habits* so I need to figure out another *Habit*.

Like Lisa, all student responses suggested that they aimed to please others. Being responsible with schoolwork to show good behavior was common among all student participants. Coco Puffs said he did his work "so the teachers won't get mad at me." Coco Puffs aimed to be a good student, which he perceived as someone who made good grades by doing all his/her work and having good behavior. Rainbow Sparkles ignored distractions to avoid getting into trouble. When faced with peer conflict, TJ's made decisions based on his desire to avoid negative consequences. TJ synergized to get work done, meet his goals, and get play time. He defined habit four: *Think Win Win* as "completing your work [to] get to play" and doing what the teacher said to get what he wanted, which was usually time to engage in a fun activity like Prodigy or going on a field trip.

If you don't do your work, then we have a Chattanooga field trip coming up. So, it's about behavior and issues, so if you don't like it, there is no refunds, and if you don't act right, then you won't be able to go, but they keep your money and if you do the right thing then you are able to go.

Leader of the Month assemblies are student-led award ceremonies that occur each month. Students earned accolades for displaying the *7 Habits* leadership quality of the month. August was a celebration of habit one: *Be Proactive*. September was a celebration of habit two: *Begin with the End in Mind*. This pattern continued each month until teachers and students celebrated all *7 Habits*. Being Leader of the Month was a major honor for students at AES as teachers perceived and nominated students as having displayed noteworthy leadership qualities. Three student participants talked about looking forward to the ceremony and the accompanying rewards:

That [is] when you're Leader of the Month you get to have a sticker and a paper that say congratulations. And for your breakfast, you get to have a Bo Berry Bojangles' Breakfast and you'll get to have pizza with the principal. (Rainbow Sparkles, interview, 2019)

Students felt a sense of pride having earned teacher recognition and having their picture mounted on the Wall of Fame displayed in the cafeteria for all to see. These assemblies were traditional practices at AES, a support structure designed to increase student embodiment the 7 *Habits* principles and the idea of student accountability and responsibility toward their own end.

In addition to being externally motivated by teacher perception and grades, student participants exhibited negative self-perceptions as they dealt with the social presence of their disability and learned helpless tendencies. The struggle to resist failure ever presented challenges for students.

Resisting Failure

As previously mentioned, student participants aimed to please their teachers. Additionally, they wanted to be considered typical parts of the classroom's social context; however, they saw their disability, which is known to them by their academic, behavioral, and social struggles, as a negative influence on how teachers and peers perceived them. Rainbow Sparkles believed that being academically and socially competent was a prerequisite to feeling a sense of relatedness in the classroom:

Shaw: How do you make choices about getting along with your classmates?

RBS: [silence]

Shaw: Are there ever times when you haven't gotten along with a classmate?

RBS: Sometimes they don't get along with me. I try to be smarter so they can get along with me.

Shaw: Okay. What do you mean by that? You try to be smarter. What does being smarter look like?

RBS: That trying everything on your own like I'm trying like my math teacher, she hands out our quizzes and then number two I didn't really understand it until she told me to go where the apples are, count six of them and then my friend told me that you have to if you split them it will be zero point five

Shaw: Okay. Alright. Okay

RBS: and then now I understand it.

Rainbow Sparkles' responses indicated that she believed that being smarter, being independent with assignments, and understanding her work helped her better connect with peers.

According to his teachers, Coco Puffs required intensive supports in the general education classroom to achieve grade level standards. I asked the students to reflect on how they use the *7 Habits* principles at school. Coco Puffs explained that he synergized with classmates and "helps them do their work." He says "being kind" was an essential aspect of this synergistic relationship. I deduced from his responses that he believed "when you're nice to others, they're going to probably be nice to you." To which he said, "they do." He then described a recent incident in Mrs. Lexa's science class where he helped his friends complete their work. The following engagement ensued:

Shaw: Okay. So, you like helped some people yesterday with their work. Is it that when you're kind to some people, then they are more likely to help you when you're having problems with your work?

CP: I never need help. Well sometimes I do but not never in math.

Coco Puffs' response reflected a sense of pride, the shame he felt because of his support needs, and his need to save face. Like Rainbow Sparkles, Coco Puffs believed that academic, behavioral, and social competence were prerequisites to relatedness in the classroom. Lisa was

“trying [her] hardest” to make good grades at school “because if you don’t get good grades then you won’t be successful in school so you have to get good grades so that you are.” For Lisa, being a successful part of the school social context meant getting good grades. Her struggles with math impeded her social connection with peers and teachers, which was probably why she became emotional (e.g., crying from frustration) when engaging math computations. TJ seemed to prefer teacher attention more so than peer attention; thus, putting his competence on display for his teachers, particularly his math teacher, was important to him. TJ enjoyed engaging in the breakout box activity:

A breakout box is when you have a code on a block on the box and you have to figure out the code. Then after you figure out the code in the big box, then you got to unlock a small box.

TJ was proud that “[his] group became the first ones to win.” The competitiveness with which he engaged the activity appeared to be a social display of competence for his math teacher.

Working collaboratively with his peers to get the job done was one avenue toward gaining social approval.

In resisting failure, student participants also contended with learned helpless tendencies, namely poor self-perception. Lisa needed constant reassurance during her semi-structured interview as she questioned her responses and continuously made negative statements about herself such as

I know what I’m saying is not very understandable.

I really don’t know if that was a very good explanation. I tried my hardest.

Well, sometimes I get frustrated so I don’t really know how I solve [math problems]. I know that’s not a very good thing. I just get frustrated a lot if I don’t accomplish what I want and I get mad.

Sometimes, well not sometimes but, I don't really know how I'm going to explain it. It's going to be kind of hard when I try to explain stuff so I feel like you don't understand. Well I'm not very good at explaining a lot of things. Sometimes I get really confused.

She talked about the internal struggles she had when her behaviors do not align with having a good day.

Well, it's just like thinking if you want to have a good day or you can think like I might not get into trouble today. I'll try my best to do good, but even though you think that sometimes, you still can get in trouble cause sometimes you might forget but at the same time you know you're supposed to do good. It's just that you think you did good and it ends up being something bad and you get in trouble for it. I have experience doing something like that, so that's why I say that I always think that I might have a good day and end up getting in trouble later.

Lisa's outcome expectancy was in jeopardy of succumbing to learned helplessness because her attempts at success typically led to failure and disappointment. Mrs. Lexa described Lisa's self-limiting attitude as follows: "Lisa, unfortunately, always had the mentality of I can't, and if I can't then, I'm not going to try." Like Lisa, Rainbow Sparkles discounted her accomplishments. For example, she talked about a math activity where the students were to count their number of free throws out of 15 for a culminating *Hidden Figures* unit. She recalled, "I only made three." Rather than being proud of the three she made, she focused on the low number. She compared her reading performance in fourth grade with her current reading performance and said, "I think it's like sometimes all my smart ideas of reading is good in fourth-grade, but in fifth-grade, it's gone." This statement implies that she felt a sense of failure with her reading performance and the social failure of having a disability as she attempted to make herself look smarter to draw near to her peers. TJ's learned helplessness tendencies were more implicit than the other student participants but visible to his teachers. Mrs. Lexa described TJ as a reluctant participant whose

preference was to fade into the background because he was aware of his academic limitations. Mrs. Supreme described TJ as “more on the passive [side], waiting for somebody to tell him what to do.” Mrs. Diesel said, “of the four [student participants], I feel like he was the one that was most ashamed of the fact that he has to be pulled out.” TJ’s support system in the general education classroom were his general education and special education teachers and peers: “I synergize with my partners that I work with for center work then I understand what the teacher is saying, then I do it. [My friends] help me with my schoolwork cause I synergize with my friends.” Among others, this comment indicates that he utilized peer support to get work done, grasp instruction, study for tests, and improve his performance. TJ did not mention getting support outside the general education classroom. Rather, his interview responses focused on the support of his general education teacher and peers.

Despite a schoolwide focus on leadership and student empowerment, student participants did not escape the need to resist the social presence of failure common to students with disabilities that manifests as negative self-perception and learned helpless tendencies. Student responses indicate that demonstrating competence in all aspects of the classroom was their avenue toward typicality, sameness, and having appearances of whole students rather than visibly flawed students. Social contextual environmental supports were essential to students disentanglement with the social presence of their disability. In the next section, I describe the social contextual environment characteristic of Ascension Elementary School as I address research question three.

Research Question Three

I cross referenced data collected from teacher and student school tours with interviews, classroom observations, and leadership portfolio discussions to address research question three, how does the social contextual environment of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities. After transcribing the data, I used iterative inductive coding processes to arrive at two overlapping themes: 1) *Transforming Student Mindset Toward Leadership* and 2) *Learning About Self Through Expectations, Explorations, and Celebrations*. Social contextual environment refers to the physical and social context in which students learn and interact. By design, the social contextual environment at AES aimed to both transform students' mindset toward leadership and to produce learning about the self through expectations, explorations, and celebrations. I detailed these themes below beginning with theme one.

Transforming Student Mindset Toward Leadership

Student participants at Ascension Elementary learned and interacted within a social context focused on leadership and empowerment. This staunch leadership focus created conditions where students potentially saw themselves as empowered leaders able to control their own outcomes. Michal Fullan (2013) referred to the process of making something, in this case leadership, naturally visible and easily observed as nudging. The physical environment created a visible nudge as AES was enriched with *7 Habits* paraphernalia, inspirational quotes, and pictures of student and community leaders. Each hallway consisted of *7 Habits* street signs as a means of "leadering up the school" according to Mrs. Supreme who further stated,

So, there are several things throughout the school that encourages kids to be leaders. From, as you notice, from the very beginning where it talks about [Ascension] being awarded this certificate of being the Leader in Me School...As you can see, as you walk through the school, you will always see every hallway has something about leading like, 'Look at these Leaders.' And we are trying to show [the] kids that, hey, we lead too. The physical environment does more than just "leadering up the school" in a decorative way.

The physical context nudged student participants to think about themselves differently. To be self-determined, students must see themselves as capable of positively influencing their own outcomes (Wehmeyer, 1996). TJ remembered a *7 Habits* display from his earlier grades that hung over the water fountain. As TJ and I reached the downstairs hallway consisting of pre-kindergarten through first grade, the following interaction ensued,

TJ: One of these hallways, I think it's one of these hallways has a tree that has like the *7 Habits* on it.

Shaw: Oh, okay.

TJ: It's one of these. It's right up the hallway. Yeah, right here.

Shaw: Okay.

TJ: These are like the *7 Habits*. Let you light shine. It means like never be down or always try your best or something.

As indicated, this *7 Habits* display was special to TJ as it, above all others we passed on our way to this one, inspired him to try, to give his best effort. Teachers described TJ as a passive learner who relied on teacher support to attempt to do his work at the beginning of the year. As the school year progressed, TJ began to actively participate in his own learning and occasionally assisted peers with their work. Implicit in TJ's last statement was his transformation toward an empowered leadership mindset. Being connected with others was important to Rainbow Sparkles who indicated her connection to the social contextual environment as she talked about

baking cookies in the home economics room, remembered her friends as she gazed at the Leaders of the Month mural in the cafeteria, and spoke proudly about their African American Challenge and soccer teams.

Inspirational quotes strategically placed throughout the school motivated student participants to engage self-help. Inspirational quotes displayed throughout the school were decorative wall murals in varying fonts and colorfully laminated wall décor. Perhaps the most strategic placement of the quotes was along the high traffic stairwell beside the cafeteria. All student participants read the quotes, and three participants began to embody the spoken messages. Lisa, who struggled with acquiring math skills, said,

There's some quotes down here too. They're really inspiring. I've read all of them. My favorite is this one. It says that "It's not that I can't. It's I can" because I've been through that before. Like if there was a math problem that would be too hard for me, I would be like, "I can't do it! It's too hard!" But now, I realize if I can try, it might be easier.

This inspirational quote along with the quote that read, "It's not I don't know. It's I'll give it a go," helped her proactively deal with her disability challenges because the quotes motivated her "to try even if there's like something hard that I didn't [understand], I have to try." Likewise, the quotes "If at first you don't succeed, you're normal" and "There is a difference in not knowing and not knowing yet," helped TJ see his disability challenges differently "because sometimes people don't succeed in life and like you're still normal if you don't succeed." Implicit in TJ's statement, "like sometimes you don't know stuff like in math. I struggle in math a little bit sometimes, and you won't know yet until you try" was his knowledge that failure and challenges were a natural part of life. The quotes instrumentally helped him develop a mindset of persistence in the face of difficulties. In general, Rainbow Sparkles said that the stairwell quotes

meant “don’t give up on yourself.” More specifically, the quote, “It’s not I can’t. It’s I can” helped her develop a mindset of self-advocacy especially when faced with naysayers who told her she “can’t do [something].”

In addition to inspirational quotes, other visible displayed nudged student participants toward a leadership mindset. Lisa recognized and appeared to be proud of the specialness of her school. She asserted, “Well, just know this is a leadership school,” as she showed me the leadership award banners strategically exhibited in front corridor for all who enter the school to view. She further stated, “I think this school is a special school because it’s so many people here.” Using her own language, Lisa alluded to the fact that Ascension Elementary was a Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school that served as collaborative partners with other schools implementing the *Leader in Me* model. Thus, educators from abroad often visited the school. Moreover, when asked to show me things in the school that speak to leadership, Lisa took me to the cafeteria and showed a picture display of students earning Leader of the Month recognition. The pictures aligned the wall with precision, having all appearances of an imaginatively creative mural and being evident that someone, with great love and care, took the time to design a work of art that covered an entire wall and part of another. Lisa explained, “Here’s some neat pictures of all the leaders that like were in the leadership assembly, but these are really old up here. Down here, these are like new ones, but they happened last year.”

Further into the conversation, Lisa explained why no additional pictures affixed the wall, but I excluded her explanation from this discussion to maintain the confidentiality of the research site. I could tell that the wall of leaders was something the students and teachers took pride in as each student led me to the wall on the tour.

We're in the cafeteria and you can see over there that there are photos of people who were Leader of the Month. And of course, I'm over there but I'm over, you see that red line, I'm over there somewhere. And the reason people are picked for Leader of the Month [is] because they follow the *7 Habits*, like Be Proactive, Synergize, and the teachers pick the people that do the *7 Habits* every day (TJ, interview, 2019).

Interestingly, TJ said, “people that do the *Habits*.” His comment suggested that he understood the *Habits* were a way of doing and being. The *Habits* were not just something on display in the school, but a way of conducting oneself. The picture display seemed to provide a sense of connectedness for Rainbow Sparkles who, when asked about the significance of having her picture on the wall, responded, “to remember your friends when your friends are gone to another school or they're sick.” Conversely, Coco Puff appeared to distance himself from the Leader of the Month assemblies. While he seemed to have bought in to the *7 Habits* idea, he said he did not care much about having his picture on the wall. He recalled only being Leader of the Month in fourth grade but attended the school for most of his elementary years. Thus, I found that he distanced himself from the assemblies because the criteria for being Leader of the Month was more than he believed himself capable of doing. To be Leader of the Month, students must exhibit sustained leadership behaviors for several weeks. For example, if the *Habit* of the month was Think Win-Win, then students must demonstrate social problem solving and decision-making behaviors. These behaviors must be sustained over time to win the nomination. Coco Puff's disability characteristics of forgetfulness, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity, as reported by his teachers and observed by me, presented challenges to his ability to sustain leadership behaviors over time.

The physical contextual environment not only nudged student participants to think about themselves differently, the social contextual environment attempted to “plant the *7 Habits* seed” for students to embody the principles according to Mrs. Supreme who also asserted,

we still try to instill in them, you know, about some of [the *Habits*]. And, you know, well, I always look at it. We plant the seeds. We may not see them grow this year, but hopefully we plant enough seeds, you know, there they will start to emerge somewhere else.

Teacher participants aimed to create student buy-in to the leadership process, setting the stage for sustained leadership transformation. Teacher participants believed in the *7 Habits* principles’ power to transform students’ lives. For Mrs. Supreme, “the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People or Children* is something that we all have to have.” Throughout my interactions with Mrs. Supreme, like the other teacher participants, she reiterated her belief in the principles’ power to transform the lives of individuals who embodied them. Sharing personal stories with students evidenced Mrs. Supreme’s conviction. She recalled a time:

when the policeman pulled me over on my way to school...He could have given me a speeding ticket, but instead, because I didn’t have my insurance card, my updated insurance card, he gave me a ticket. But, the ticket was to, I have so much time to go and show them that I have proof of my insurance. So really, I didn’t get a ticket at all...even though he kind of stopped me and made me a little late. But in the end, I thought, hey, I won on this because...I was speeding. I could have gotten a ticket for [speeding] and no insurance.

Mrs. Supreme further explained that her proactive attitude enabled her “to move on” rather than take out her frustrations on the students when she arrived at school. For Mrs. Supreme and the other teacher participants, the *7 Habits* principles fostered better life outcomes. The social contextual environment mirrored Mrs. Supreme’s sentiments concerning the essentialness of embodying the *7 Habits* principles and reflected in the eminence of leadership expectations, explorations, and celebrations.

Learning About Self Through Expectations, Explorations, and Celebrations

Self-determination is about knowing one's self and who one wants to be. Self-determination is also about engaging one's will to impact one's outcomes. Self-determination is the quality of being human and able to choose to govern oneself toward one's own desires. Students who are self-determined act on their world rather than being passively acted on by the world. Being self-determined does not mean students have control over everything and every aspect of their lives. However, students can choose how to respond to the material and social world and implant themselves with it. At Ascension Elementary School, the social contextual environment provided student participants opportunities to learn about themselves through expectations, explorations, and celebrations. These opportunities derived from teachers' belief that "everybody has some leadership qualities," so there was an expectation for students to develop a leadership mindset and exhibit leadership character (i.e., academic, behavioral, and social autonomy and competence) as they discovered their leadership identity.

One strong tradition at Ascension Elementary School was their monthly Leader of the Month assemblies where teachers expected students to lead the assembly, engage public speaking, and exhibit leadership characteristics (e.g., respect and consideration for others, personal integrity, accountability). Coco Puffs said he earned Leader of the Month in fourth grade for "helping others." TJ explained the expectation for public speaking of all Leader of the Month recipients including pre-kindergarten students:

And they call us up, and sometimes, like if you're in like third, fourth, or fifth, you have to say what you wrote. Or, pre-k through second, they say what [is] on the paper, what the teacher, I guess the teacher wrote what they did. And the reason that how you get Leader of the Month is by doing the *7 Habits* or working hard for like doing your work. I wrote some of my [speech], but my mom helped me. But I wrote it myself.

Students, no matter the age, received no exemption from the public speaking expectation. As indicated by his comments, TJ learned to be academically autonomous and competent as he took responsibility for writing his own speech. Rainbow Sparkles talked about her personal public speaking experience:

We have to write a speech...and so we wait until they call our names...I have to say [my speech] into the microphone. I was nervous when I was saying it. I felt like butterflies [were] in my stomach.

In addition to delivering speeches, teachers expected students to run the assembly from start to finish.

It is totally student-led. We have speakers. They read off the names. They talk about the characteristics of the children. It is totally student-led...That has been a work in progress, but it has been so rewarding because it gives children who may not have an opportunity to speak in public. And you know, you think about it, we've got 600 kids here. That's a lot. Even, you know, there are most adults who don't get a chance to speak in front of that many people at one time. (Mrs. Supreme, interview, 2019)

Being student-led was the newest aspect of Leader of the Month assemblies. As Mrs. Supreme explained, student-led assemblies provided additional opportunities for students to explore, practice, and hone their talents, skills, and abilities. According to Rainbow Sparkles, a group of students played musical instruments; student workers distributed armbands and stickers; and two students called Leader of the Month recipients to the stage to receive their certificate. Students applied for these jobs and others through the leadership job process detailed below.

The social contextual environment integrated varied opportunities for student participants to explore and develop leadership skills. Students at AES had multiple opportunities to explore their creativity in the Lego labs, their identity through the African American Challenge, and their job interests by participating in leadership jobs. Two student participants took me on a tour of

the Lego lab which looked much like a science lab with multiple tall, black, rectangular countertop table spaces made for standing and arranged for collaboration. Rainbow Sparkles, who seemed most eager to provide a tour of the lab, explained, “We build with Legos. We build like what we want to build like a house.” For the most part, students had autonomy to create. TJ said, “if you want to be a builder, you could easily come in here...and learn how to build stuff through like Legos construction.” In addition to the Lego lab, student participants had access to a Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) lab where, according to TJ, “we usually like we build stuff or we do activities in here.” One activity that took place in the STEAM lab was the African American Challenge which was a voluntary extracurricular activity where students learned “about black African Americans, what they did; what they was famous for; what they believed in; and, I think, what they fight for.” The STEAM lab was also a space for creativity as Rainbow Sparkles’ explained:

RBS: Now this is the STEAM room.

Shaw: Okay. What happens in here?

RBS: We do like projects.

Shaw: Okay. Like what kind of projects?

RBS: Fair projects. Last time in fourth grade we had to go in partners and what kind of fair games we have to do?

Shaw: Fair games? What do you

RBS: You know, like, do you know that dart game?

Shaw: Oh! Yes. So, you mean games like you play at the fair?

RBS: Um hum.

Student participants learned about themselves (e.g., likes, dislikes, strengths, interests) through STEAM activities as described above by Rainbow Sparkles. Opportunities to learn and explore careers were necessary for students like Rainbow Sparkles to reflect on who she was and who she wanted to be as she prepared for a self-determining future. Consequently, in addition to opportunities for creative exploration, student participants had opportunities to discover and hone their talents, skills, and abilities through leadership jobs.

This is really important. This is our leadership board, and what it does is it is a board that has all the different jobs, and they are posted on the needs of whomever needs a leader. It could be a fifth [or] a kindergarten teacher [who] may need leader readers to come and read to their kindergarten or listen to their kindergarteners read. It could be something as simple as that where teachers just need a lot of extra bodies and there are children that are responsible enough, well our fifth-graders are capable enough to do that, and our fourth-graders, also our third-graders are capable of doing that so. (Mrs. Supreme, interview, 2019)

Teachers expected students to be “responsible enough” and “capable enough” to handle the task. Mrs. Supreme’s statement highlighted the academic, behavioral, and social expectations of the social space previously discussed. Teachers expected students to exhibit leadership characteristics and embody a leadership mindset.

The children would take an application and turn it in to the office, and then those persons, whoever have posted jobs, then would go through those application and chose students accordingly. The application process is pretty lengthy because after the children complete the application, then they also have to get recommendations from their teachers to see if they have been doing so. For instance, you may be really good in this, but are you academically being a leader? Are you socially and emotionally being the leader that you’re supposed to be?

Although students had the autonomy to apply for leadership jobs (e.g., safety patrol leader, compose and recycling leader, public speaking leaders, office leader, *7 Habits* leader, post closet leader, garden leader), teacher expectations determined who qualifies for the jobs.

I say, you know, I don't think you're ready for that now, but I think that will be a good goal that you can work toward. So, if this is something you know you want to do, I need you to start showing some of these leadership qualities so you can work up to that. (Mrs. Supreme, interview, 2019)

Student participants either worked toward a leadership job, or they had no interest in leadership jobs because all but one, TJ, did not mention having a job in the present or in the past. Rainbow Sparkles did not talk about the leadership board or leadership jobs outside of the jobs observed during the Leader of the Month assembly. By his own admission, Coco Puffs knew nothing about the leadership board and stated that did not have a leadership job. Lisa and TJ knew the purpose of the board. Lisa even gave a description of some of the job responsibilities.

Lackadaisically, she stated, "Ah, actually, I don't have a job in these that are on the wall." She later mentioned that she did not have a job at all. TJ provided no straightforward answer, but his responses suggested that he helped with recycling as indicated below.

Those trash cans, we recycle like stuff like can, wrappers, milk bottles, and like the bowls that like has the cereal. We recycle those. We get from every grade, and we put them in those trash cans, and they're empty right now cause we already, cause we haven't done it in a long time.

TJ struggled academically, yet he qualified for a leadership job suggesting that qualifying job components are holistically calculated and relative to students' capacity and embodiment of the 7 *Habits* principles. Student participants, therefore, learned where they fall on the leadership continuum as the social context communicated contingencies for leadership jobs. In other words, teachers either approved or prepared students for leadership roles. Celebrating small wins moved students toward an empowered mindset.

Celebrations helped to foster immediate and long-term motivation for students to continue learning about themselves and work toward embodiment of the *7 Habits* principles.

Spotted Being a Leader was a daily practice of celebrated leadership behaviors.

We even have Spotted Being a Leader every day. I can see a child who may have helped someone pick up something off the floor or tied somebody else's shoes, and I say, 'Baby, what's your name? I want to spot you being a leader.' Then, during the morning announcements, it's read off. 'You've been spotted being a leader, please come down to the office to get your prize. (Mrs. Supreme, interview, 2019)

Prizes included things like school supplies and gift certificates. "But the fact that they're spotlighted, that's the main thing." Spotted Being a Leader worked well for Coco Puffs who had difficulty sustaining leadership behaviors necessary for Leader of the Month assemblies which were monthly celebrations for students who exhibit sustained *7 Habits* behaviors. Through Leader of the Month assemblies, students learned about themselves as they self-reflect to write their own speeches then deliver their speeches before a crowd of about 600 people, including parents. Rainbow Sparkles talked about being nervous but persisted through the challenge. TJ did not appear to be nervous and spoke proudly about writing his own speech. Lisa learned to focus on what she could do rather than what she could not do, which was a work in progress.

I was Leader of the Month last year. It's kind of hard for me to be Leader of the Month. I feel like it's easier for everyone to do, but I'm like I don't do everything perfectly, so I can't be Leader of the Month if I don't do anything good. You have to do something good to be Leader of the Month. And I tried to, but it's still kind of hard.

Celebrating difference was also important as student participants, like Lisa, dealt with the presence of their disabilities. In the front entrance was a man-size light bulb constructed of royal blue paper with a "Light It Up Blue" caption above the highest point of the bulb. Fourth- and fifth-grade students and teachers created the bulb in celebration of Autism Awareness Month.

Surrounding the lightbulb were student-made puzzle pieces with the caption “I am unique because...” Students completed the statement with their own ideas and decorated their puzzle for the display. Rainbow Sparkles, who liked to feel connected with others, wrote, “I am unique because of my smartness.” Rainbow Sparkles needed to see herself as smart because being smart, in her mind, made her more like her peers. Thinking about autism enabled TJ to see beyond the autism as he said, “they’re really smart too.” Lisa focused on the uniqueness of her name. Coco Puffs showed no interest in the display and said he did not create a puzzle piece; however, he struggled to focus during the school tour and was characteristically forgetful.

As alluded to earlier, Leader of the Month celebrations were “a really big deal” as teachers recognized students for exhibiting the monthly *Habit* of focus. The celebration included parents’ invitations, pictures with the principal, and special meals like “pizza and a Bo Berry Biscuit.” Students also received armbands, stickers, and certificates.

They call people’s names, and they’re like such and such was spotted being a leader by helping his friends do their work or being a nice friend. So, that’s something that they would probably say, and they would give them a bracelet and a little sticker with a little paper flap on it. And, I think it just like says they were being a leader, and they would give a paper that would like congratulate them, and they would take a picture. (Lisa, interview, 2019)

Mrs. Supreme added that Leaders of the Month were “also invited to eat pizza with the principal later that day as a separate award...and parents are invited to come.” Leader of the Month celebrations aimed to reinforce embodiment of the 7 *Habits* principles. Students who earned the recognition wrote and delivered speeches before a large audience. Teachers expected the student audience to exhibit leadership characteristics as they celebrated with award recipients because, at

Ascension Elementary, student participants learned and interacted within a social contextual environment in which teachers expected, students explored, and everyone celebrated leadership.

Conclusion

This study aimed to describe the impact of a schoolwide model of student empowerment and leadership development on the self-determination experiences of students with disabilities.

This chapter detailed emergent themes for each research question. In the next chapter, I discussed themes in relationship to the literature review in Chapter II.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

In Chapter IV, I provided an analysis of findings for three research questions: 1) how do teachers in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school both understand and support students' with high incidence disabilities need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; 2) how does training in the *7 Habits* principles impact self-determined behaviors among students with high incidence disabilities in an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school; and 3) how does the social contextual environment of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school support the exercise and expression of self-determined behaviors for students with high incidence disabilities? For this chapter, I discussed the themes outlined in Chapter IV in relation to the literature with implications for research and practice.

Seeing Disability Differently

The *Leader in Me* model begins with the assumption that all students are leaders, and teachers enact this leadership, which is operationalized as ownership, accountability, and responsibility, through *7 Habits* training. This assumption creates relentless focus on, not only changing students' self-perceptions, but more powerfully, their paradigms—the lens through which they view and respond to situations, circumstances, successes, and failures. Shifting students' paradigm from reactive to proactive empowers students to see themselves as capable, able to positively impact their own outcomes and deal with issues inside their circle of influence. Findings suggest that the assumptions of competence embedded within the *Leader in Me* model

produced inclusive practices where teachers challenged the deficit model to create contexts of presumed competence thereby enabling students with disabilities to experience more success in the classroom. The presumption of competence manifested as high expectations supported by teacher responsiveness and agency as teachers refused to allow student participants to succumb to passive learning tendencies of nonparticipation and withdrawal from the classroom community. Rather, teachers expected students to operate with autonomy and demonstrate competence as they embodied the *7 Habits* principles. Teachers saw and talked about student participants as capable learners not separate and apart from the rest of the students but first as general education students in need of specialized supports. Teachers treated students as valued members of the classroom community and expected students to assume their role with full participation and as mutually accountable to the academic and social health of the classroom and school. This finding aligns with the core elements of inclusive education outlined by Cheryl Jorgensen (2018) who argues that inclusive education is “more than just being in.” Rather, inclusive education requires a paradigmatic shift from prevalent practices in schools that label and enclose students with disabilities in sealed boxes labeled damaged goods, buys into common narratives that characterize these students as deviant miscreants only fit to be educated in back rooms and closets because of their perceived needs and inabilities, and as high stakes testing liabilities who blemish perfectly good test results with their low cognitive abilities. These teachers demonstrated second order change which begins at the belief and attitude level. Second order change challenges and disrupts the status quo, in this case discriminatory practices resulting from hegemonic ideas endemic in schools that produce disablement. Teacher resisted

normative conceptions of failure and challenged common narratives of disability that produce deficit thinking and deviant conceptions of difference.

Reframing Failure/Reconceptualizing Difference

The social presence of having a disability was real and produced challenges for student participants. Lisa struggled to see herself as a capable math student, and Rainbow Sparkles believed that her reading deficit impeded her relationship with peers. All students exhibited passive tendencies at the beginning of the school year that negatively impacted their performance in the general education classroom. This finding is consistent with previous research which indicates students with disabilities struggle with low self-concepts (e.g., Lackaye et al., 2006; Orr & Goodman, 2010; Valas, 2001). Orr and Goodman found that individuals with learning disabilities reported feeling “stupid, embarrassed, and/or ashamed” (p. 217) of their learning challenges for most of their secondary education. Like Lisa, who typically resorted to crying when attempting to do math computations, participants in Orr and Goodman’s study became emotional as they discussed their experiences. To produce autonomy, competence, and relatedness, teachers worked to reconceptualize difference, failure, and mistakes so that all students understood and experienced these things differently than the traditional ways in which they are understood and experienced (e.g., exclusion, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem). Teachers encouraged students to embrace the power in difference and to view failure and mistakes as character building and learning opportunities. This notion aligns with Wehmeyer and colleagues’ (2000) assertion that failure is a necessary consequence of decision making as failure creates authentic opportunities for students with disabilities to evaluate their decisions and use problem solving to navigate difficult situations under the supportive guidance of teachers.

These negative experiences may lead to more effective post-school decision making and problem solving. Wehmeyer's (1994) concluded that failure alone does not determine students' level of efficacy and outcome expectancy but students' actions after failure—that is quit or use the experience as a starting point to do something different. Sparks and Cote (2012) added that students' natural environments should contain some degree of risk so that students with disabilities can learn to use failure as a learning tool within a structured and supportive setting.

Resisting Negative Narratives and Empowering Students Through Causal Agency

Teaching students to respect who they are and how they learn changed the way students approached their disability challenges. Instead of crying, Lisa demonstrated persistence as she first attempted math problems on her own, second asked her peers for support, third requested teacher support, and fourth requested resource support. By helping all students reframe their understanding of difference, failure, and mistakes, teachers created conditions where student participants developed an appreciation for their difference as they began to understand themselves and break through negative narratives. According to Campbell-Whatley (2008), “How students respond to teaching and how they react to success and failure is determined by the attitudes and beliefs they have about themselves” (p. 137). After teaching students with learning and intellectual disabilities about their disability and celebrities with the same or similar disabilities, students in Campbell-Whatley's study increased their self-concept and self-awareness resulting in a sense of pride and inclinations to advocate for accommodations. In the current study, teachers worked to help all students, especially students with disabilities, develop empowering self-perceptions that resulted in students' active classroom participation, positive friendship relationships, and improved academic performance stemming from normative

synergistic relationships produced by teacher expectations. Consequently, students operated with more autonomy, experienced more competence, and felt connected to the learning environment which supports my first proposition that a schoolwide focus on leadership development and student empowerment created an autonomy supportive culture conducive to the autonomy, competence, and relatedness students need to exercise self-determined behaviors. Students were comfortable asking for support and using strategies (e.g., finger counting, repeated addition) that enabled them to complete their work.

Using *7 Habits*-Based Self-Determination Model

Covey's (1989) *Leader in Me* is a proactive support model with a philosophical underpinning of self-change. Covey contended that change happens from the inside out beginning with one's overall perception or paradigm. Our paradigm determines how we respond to situations which determines our results. Self-examination is therefore fundamental for self-improvement. Teachers encouraged students to use the *7 Habits* principles as a guide for self-reflection, choice-making, problem-solving, and decision making. Socratic in nature, teachers questioned students using *7 Habits*-based language, as discussed in chapter four, to facilitate evaluative thinking, decision making, problem solving, choice making, self-management, and leadership. In the process, students gained self-knowledge and self-awareness supporting my second proposition that a combination of *7 Habits* instruction and opportunities to practice *7 Habits* principles made possible the ability of students with high incidence disabilities taught in the general education classroom to learn and use self-determination behaviors to positively impact their own outcomes. Student participants purposefully made choices and decisions, engaged social problem solving, and self-advocated for needed accommodations. Research

indicates the effectiveness of using curriculum guides and models to support students' exercise of self-determination skills (see, e.g., *ChoiceMaker*; Martin & Marshall, 1995; *The Self-Advocacy Strategy*; Reusen, 1996; *Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction*, Mithaug, Wehmeyer, Agran, Martin, & Palmer, 1998). These curriculums and models provide students with choice making, decision making, problem solving, self-advocacy, and goal setting frameworks that positively impact students' participation and academic performance in the general education setting. For example, the *Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction* (1998) has been widely studied as a guide for self-directed problem solving. Similarly, the *7 Habits*-based language and principles embedded within the *Leader in Me* model became a mechanism through which teachers guided students toward effective goal setting, choice making, decision making, problem solving, and self-advocacy. All teachers used the *7 Habits*-based language for this purpose. Mrs. Diesel guided Lisa through a self-reflection process by simply posing *7-Habits* based questions to which Lisa arrived at proactive solutions to her math difficulties. Lisa's proactive solution empowered her to first believe in her own ability to solve math problems then use material, peer, and adult resources to get the outcomes she wanted. The *7 Habits*-based language became the means through which students exercised and expressed self-determination skills.

Exercising Self-Determination

Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory of Motivation and Wehmeyer's (1996) Self-Determination Theory posit that students become self-determined when the social contextual environment produces opportunities for instruction, authentic practice, risks, and supports. These contexts *communicate high expectations and emphasize student strengths and*

uniqueness, create a learning community that promotes active problem solving and choice opportunities (Wehmeyer, 2002), value diversity, create safe social spaces where students feel free to express themselves, and turn mistakes into learning experiences rather than sources of ridicule (Sands, Kozleski, & French, 1999). Likewise, in this study, the social context produced a culture of possibilities at a schoolwide level that positively influenced students' expression and exercise of self-determination. At Ascension, the *7 Habits* principles were the impetus of self-change with emphasis on student leadership and empowerment. Expectations of self-governance, opportunities for authentic skill practice, and supports including teacher modeling and feedback, promoted students' exercise of self-determined behaviors. Students set goals, made choices and decisions, problem solved, and displayed leadership by advocating for themselves and others. Self-advocacy comprises an understanding of self—that is, the impact of disability on performance and the associated support needs (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy, 2005). Student participants exercised self-advocacy. Unlike previous research, participants' self-advocacy did not originate from their own disability knowledge. Rather, student self-advocacy was an implication of difference that manifested as needing academic, behavioral, and/or social support. In other words, student participants self-advocated without knowledge of their disabilities but with the understanding that they generally differed from their peers. Test et al. (2005) proposed four essential aspects of self-advocacy: 1) knowledge of self, 2) knowledge of rights, 3) communication, and 4) leadership. The researchers indicated that students with disabilities needed to understand their strengths, needs, and disability characteristics and be able to articulate their needs and the needs of others with appropriate assertiveness prior to leaving school. Research indicates that students need intentional

instruction in the four component areas to adequately seek liberties and necessities for themselves (e.g., Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Wehmeyer, 2002). In the current study, student participants primarily advocated for needed academic supports. Students requested support with assignments and tests from the general education and special education teachers. These supports occurred inside and outside the general education classroom.

Encouraging Leadership Through Transformational Processes

Wehmeyer's (1996) Self-Determination Theory indicates that students with disabilities can learn to become self-determined with instruction in component skills and practice utilizing the skills in their natural environment. Findings in this investigation support Wehmeyer's (1996) theory that self-determination capacity building does not happen in isolation. Students need to learn and practice component skills in real situations such as IEP meetings and the general education classroom using research based problem solving and goal setting models. Findings from this investigation extends Wehmeyer's theory to include schoolwide models, namely the *Leader in Me* model, premised on leadership and student empowerment and therefore adds to research knowledge concerning contextual factors that influence self-determination. The *Leader in Me* model assumes personal value in all students notwithstanding students with disabilities. This assumption produced a supportive social contextual environment where self-determined behaviors were taught, expected, and encouraged. Students experienced transformational change beginning with their sense of self. The *Leader in Me* model assumes that all students are leaders, individuals whose self-determining character enables them to be accountable and responsible community members who seek the good of others. Ascension's mission was to help all students see themselves as leaders. According to Covey's (1989) See-Do-Get model, students who see

themselves as leaders more likely behave like leaders. Subsequently, school décor, activities, programs, and traditions ran conjunctively with the school's mission and goals.

According to Michael Fullan (2010), a leading school improvement guru, transformation requires push, pull, and nudge processes. Push involves “I’m not taking no for an answer” mechanisms where, in this case, certain behaviors were nonnegotiable. For teachers, push processes manifested as high expectations where non-negotiables included student engagement in self-help, self-improvement, and collective agency (communal responsibility and accountability). Pull processes encouraged students to move toward seeing and operationalizing their own leadership potential. Nudge processes involved putting things visibly in place so that students naturally engaged leadership mindsets and behaviors. In this case, nudge involved the placement of 7 *Habits* paraphernalia, inspirational quotes, and pictures of community members and Leaders of the Month around the school. Mrs. Supreme called this process “leadering up the school.” Field and colleagues (1998) posited that “an understanding of ones’ strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination” (p. 2). A combination of teacher expectations, leadership explorations, and routine celebrations pushed, pulled, and nudged students toward gaining self-knowledge commensurate with establishing a leadership mindset and planting seeds to produce self-determined mindsets. Gaining self-knowledge work in tandem with self-help and self-determination because as students gain knowledge about themselves, they can work strategically toward their own goals (Wehmeyer, 1996). Covey’s (1989) habit two, *Begin with the End in Mind*, necessitates an understanding of self as students develop their personal mission and goals and strategically execute action steps to achieve their goals. At AES, student participants

constantly and purposefully learned about themselves (e.g., strengths, limitations, deficits, preferences, interests, abilities, values). Teachers challenged students to think beyond what they thought they could do and pushed students to utilize choice making, decision making, problem solving, self-advocacy, and other leadership skills to better themselves and the classroom community.

Summary

The *Leader in Me* model using Covey's (1989) *7 Habits* principles had an overall positive impact on students with high incidence disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom. Teachers held students accountable and responsible for their academic, behavioral, and social performance with nonnegotiable expectations that students demonstrate active participation in learning and leadership development. The culture of high expectations lent itself to students exercising self-determination skills, namely choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting/attainment, self-advocacy, and leadership. The social contextual environment supported high expectations, and leadership development in multiple ways. Leadership jobs provided opportunities for students to learn about themselves. Leader of the Month celebrations were opportunities for students to practice leadership skills and gain recognition for embodying specific *Habits*. The culture of high expectations, leadership exploration, and routine celebrations aimed to engage students' self-discovery. Despite leadership efforts, student participants dealt with negative self-perceptions associated with the negative social stigma of having a disability. Teachers and the social context attempted to reframe failure and difference for all students. Findings indicated that these attempts (e.g.,

inspirational quotes, teacher redefining difference and failure) had a positive impact on how students dealt with their challenges.

This research aimed to understand and describe a) the social contextual environment of a *Leader in Me* school, b) the import of *7 Habits* training on students with high incidence disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom for most of the school day, and c) teacher supports for students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Using iterative inductive data analysis processes, I generated and discussed themes for each research question. I concluded this chapter with implications of findings, recommendations, and my concluding thoughts.

Implications

This study aimed to understand and describe (a) the social contextual environment of a *Leader in Me* school, (b) the import of *7 Habits* training on students with high incidence disabilities receiving instruction in the general education classroom for most of the school day, and (c) teacher supports for students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Using iterative inductive data analysis processes, I generated and discussed themes for each research question. In the following sections, I discussed the implications of the study and my concluding thoughts.

Implications for Research

Overall findings suggested that the *Leader in Me* model created an environment conducive for the exercise of self-determination skills for students with high incidence disabilities who received instruction in the general education classroom. This qualitative study included four fifth-grade students with high incidence disabilities and their teachers. More

research is needed to determine the import of this model and *7 Habits* training on the self-determination of students with high and low incidence disabilities. Because *Leader in Me* schools are under studied, the research potential is great. Among others, future research should consider administering the *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (Wolman et al., 1994) and the *ARC Self-Determination Scale* (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) to measure students' self-reported self-determination opportunities and capacity. In addition, future research needs to further explore the *Leader in Me* and *7 Habits* as a model and guide for building students' self-determination capacity.

This study examined the context of an elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school through the lens of Wehmeyer's Self-Determination Theory (1996) and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (1985). Findings indicate potentially significant contributions for inclusive practices. Future research should examine these schools through the lens of disabilities studies and inclusive education.

Covey's (1989) habit six, *Sharpen the Saw*, highlight the necessity of taking care of the body with physical exercise and a healthy diet, the mind with mental exercise, and the emotional self with relationship building and laughter. After conducting an extensive literature review, I discovered the scarcity of literature addressing self-improvement, self-help, and self-care in relation to leisure activities for students with disabilities. Future research needs to explore these areas.

As it stands, the *Leader in Me* model did not sufficiently counter the negative self-perception and emotional challenges associated with having a disability. The presence of disability is real. Student participants struggled with their self-perception despite well-

intentioned teachers. All student participants attended the research site for most of their elementary school years, yet they demonstrated passive learning behaviors and learned helplessness tendencies at the beginning of their fifth-grade year. Chou et al. (2017) concluded that students with disabilities have different need levels and therefore may require tiered supports to move them on the self-determination continuum. Research is needed to determine if a tiered *Leader in Me* model of supports like schoolwide positive behavior support has positive impacts for students with disabilities.

Implications for Practice

Deci and Ryan (1985) identify three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The researchers contend that when students learn and interact in environments that support these needs, then students are more inclined to act in a self-determining manner. Findings from the current study suggest that these needs may exist on a hierarchical continuum where students may desire the need for relatedness more than the need for autonomy and vice versa. More research is needed to determine whether autonomy, competence, and relatedness exist on a hierarchical continuum. That is, does individual make up and/or disability characteristics impact whether one need outweighs the other needs, or are they needed equally by all individuals? In other words, do some students need to feel more competent and other students more autonomous? How much does individual make up factor into the importance of these needs? Do these needs exist on a hierarchical continuum?

The social context can either influence or thwart students' self-determination perception. When the context is accepting and invites open participation without judgement, then students are more likely to try on their own, add to discussions, and request support without feeling inept

and disadvantaged. Teachers in this study embodied the philosophical underpinning of the *Leader in Me* model and created inclusive spaces that rejected hegemonic narratives that tend to create spaces of contention for students inside the general education classroom. When teachers assume “those students” attitudes, they impede students’ full participation and access to high quality education as the classroom space assumes exclusion. Teacher preparation programs should consider training that encourages reflective teaching practices that reconstruct disability as a social problem rather than an individual problem.

Recommendations

Student participants made academic, behavioral, and social progress in accordance with current assessment measures (e.g., grades, progress monitoring); yet, the challenges of having a disability overwhelmed leadership supports received the previous years. Thus, one recommendation is to embed the *7 Habits* principles into already existing summer programs and Extended School Year supports.

To broaden teachers’ understanding of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and increase the potential impact of the *Leader in Me* model, a second recommendation is for professional development that focuses on increasing teachers’ understanding and implementation of supports in the classroom. Helping teachers unpack the definitions in a way that is meaningful to them may advance their teaching practices for the betterment of all students.

Teacher participants used informal data collection methods (e.g., observations, daily classroom performance) to assess students’ behavioral and social progress. A third recommendation is for Ascension Elementary School to use standardized social skills and

behavior assessment measures to gain more objective pictures of students' social and behavioral needs and to drive progress monitoring.

The *Leader in Me* model is about self-discovery and self-improvement using Covey's (1989) as a guide to unearth and build students' leadership capacity. Resisting the failure often associated with having a disability is an impediment that stifles their leadership growth. Campbell-Whatley (2008) used an instructional model to teach elementary, middle, and high school students about their disability. Campbell-Whatley designed the model to build students' self-concept and self-awareness. Learning that their disabilities were real, the students increased their self-perception and stated that they were more inclined to seek assistance and self-advocate. Thus, a fourth recommendation is for teachers to implement instructional practices that informs students about their disabilities. This added feature may have a positive impact on students' self-perception and active participation in the general education classroom. Understanding their disabilities may support students' navigation of the academic and social terrain of the general education classroom as they better understand themselves.

In keeping with the mantra "Nothing about us without us" of the disability community, a final recommendation is to include students with disabilities in the discussions about school traditions, programs, activities, and other fundamental changes occurring within the school. Student involvement may include interviews and focus groups discussions. As Mladenov (2012) says "individualized human beings need to have access to the infrastructures mediating his/her individualized problematization and reenactment. A condition for this is collective action—only collective action can keep the infrastructures mediating one's individualization open for access, problematization and readjustment" (p. 258).

Concluding Thoughts

An embedded single case study design was used to describe the impact of a schoolwide model of leadership development and student empowerment at a local elementary Lighthouse *Leader in Me* school. Ascension Elementary School implemented the *Leader in Me* model approximately 10 years ago as an effort to improve the school's culture and minimize the focus on testing accountability, which seemed to impede creativity and exasperate teachers and students. Ascension Elementary used Covey's (1989) *7 Habits* principles to create a culture of leadership designed to empower all students to take ownership for their own academic, behavioral, and social choices. This investigation aimed to describe the import of *7 Habits* training on the self-determined behaviors of students with high incidence disabilities. Self-Determination is a mindset of personal leadership that enables individuals to govern their own lives. Choices and decisions are mostly self-caused, initiated by the individual's own desires (Wehmeyer, 1996). Self-determination instruction is about positioning students with disabilities to obtain quality outcomes as research indicates that self-determination skills for students with disabilities are typically underdeveloped and poorly utilized without direct and explicit instruction and practice (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 1998; Wehmeyer, 2005). Previous research focused on individual and small group interventions using curriculums (e.g., The Self-Advocacy Strategy; Reusen, 1996) and models (e.g., SDLMI; Wehmeyer et al., 2000) to promote self-advocacy, self-directed IEPs, and goal setting/attainment. This investigation was an effort to find ways to assist the development of cognitive faculties and social supports for students with disabilities so that they can imprint on the world in their own self-determined way. Findings suggest that teachers and the social contextual environment created opportunities for students

with high incidence disabilities to exercise self-determined behaviors. This case study was one of few investigations into *Leader in Me* schools. More research is needed to understand the self-determination experiences that belies students with disabilities attending these schools.

REFERENCES

- Agran, M., Blanchard, C., Wehmeyer, M., & Hughes, C. (2002). Increasing the problem-solving skills of students with developmental disabilities in general education. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(5), 279-288.
- Ankey, E. M., & Lehmann, J. P. (2011). Journey toward self-determination: Voices of students with disabilities who participated in a secondary transition program on a community college campus. *Remedial and Special Education, 32*(4), 1-11. doi: 10.1177/0741932510362215
- Ayres, R., Cooley, E., & Dunn, C. (1990). Self-concept, attribution, and persistence in learning-disabled students. *Journal of School Psychology, 28*, 153-163.
- Baglieri, S. (2017). *Disability studies and the inclusive classroom: Critical practices or embracing diversity in education*. Routledge.
- Belisle, J., Dixon, M. R., Stanley, C. R., Munoz, B., & Daar, J. H. (2016). Teaching foundational perspective taking skills to children with autism using the PEAK-T curriculum: Single-reversal “I-U” deictic frames. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 49*, 965-969.
- Benitez, D. T., Lattimore, J., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2005). Promoting the involvement of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in career and vocational planning and decision-making: The self-determined career development model. *Behavioral Disorders, 30*(4), 431-447.
- Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014). Attitudes of secondary regular school teachers toward inclusive education in New Delhi, India: *A qualitative study. Exceptionality Education International, 24*(2), 17-30.
- Black, W. R., & Simon, M. D., (2014). Leadership for all students: Planning or more inclusive school practices. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 9*(2), 153-172.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research: An introduction to theory and methods*. Needham Height, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Branding, D., Bates, P., & Miner, C. (2009). Perceptions of self-determination by special education rehabilitation practitioners based on viewing a self-directed IEP versus an

- external-directed IEP meeting. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 30, 755-762.
doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.200810.006
- Campbell-Whatley, G. D. (2008). Teaching students about their disabilities: Increasing self-determination skills and self-concept. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(2), 137-144.
- [Camp Stomping Ground]. (2014, October 17). *What is self-determination theory?* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sRBBNkSXpY>
- Carter, E. W., Lane, K. L., Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B. (2006). Self-determination skills and opportunities of transition-age youth with emotional disturbance and learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 72(3), 333-346.
- Chao, P. C., & Chou, Y. C. (2017). Correlation and predictive relationship between self-determination instruction and academic performance of students with disabilities. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 5(5), 799-805.
- Chou, Y. C., Palmer, S. B., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Skorupski, W. P. (2017). Comparison of self-determination of students with disabilities multivariate and discriminant function analysis. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 61(2), 144-154.
doi: 10.1111/jir.12297
- Chou, Y., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., & Lee, J. (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. doi: 10.1177/1088357615625059
- Cobb, B., Lehmann, J., Newman-Gonchar, R., & Alwell, M. (2009). Self-determination for students with disabilities: A narrative metasynthesis. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32(2), 108-114.
- Covey Stephen, R. (1989). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Simon & Shuster, USA.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crites, S. A., & Dunn, C. (2004). Teaching social problem solving to individuals with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 301-309.

- Curtis, S., Gesler, W., Smith, G., & Washburn, S. (2000). Approaches to sampling and case selection in qualitative research: examples in the geography of health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(7-8), 1001-1014.
- Deci, E. L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation*. NY: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). The general causality orientation scale self-determination in personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 19, 109-134.
- Denney, S. C., & Daviso, A. W. (2012). Self-determination: A critical component of education. *American Secondary Education*, 40(2), 43-51.
- Developing leaders with 21st century skills. (n.d). Retrieved July 15, 2017, from <http://www.theleaderinme.org>
- Dixon, M. R. (2014). Promoting the emergence of advanced knowledge relational training system: direct training module.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Eisenman, L. T. (2007). Self-determination interventions: Building a foundation for school completion. *Remedial and Special Education*, 28(1), 2-8.
- Eisenman, L. T., Pell, M. M., Poudel, B. B., & Pleet-Odle, A. M. (2015). "I Think I'm Reaching My Potential" Students' Self-Determination Experiences in an Inclusive High School. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38(2), 101-112.
- Erickson, A. S. G., Noonan, P. M., Zheng, C., & Brussow, J. A. (2015). The relationship between self-determination and academic achievement for adolescents with intellectual disabilities. *Research and Development Disabilities*, 36, 45-54.
- Field, S. (1996). Self-determination instructional strategies for youth with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29(1), 40-52.
- Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (1994). Development of a model for self-determination. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 17(2), 159-169.
- Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). *A practical guide for teaching self-determination*. Council for Exceptional Children, CEC Publications, 1920 Association Dr., Dept. K0032, Reston, VA 20191-1589.
- Flyvberg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.

- Freeman, S. J. (2000). *Ethics: An introduction to philosophy and practice*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Freeman, M., deMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., and St. Pierre, Elizabeth A. (2007). Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse. *Educational Researcher*, 36(1), 25–32.
- Fullan, M. (2013). *Motion leadership in action: More skinny on becoming change savvy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Given, L. M. (Ed.). (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Haakma, I., Janssen, M., & Minnaert, A. (2017). The influence of need-supportive teacher behavior on motivation of students with congenital deafblindness. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 111(3), 247-260.
- Hampton, N. Z. (1998). *Sources of academic self-efficacy scale: An assessment tool for rehabilitation counselors*. Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin.
- Hampton, N. Z., & Mason, E. (2003). Learning disabilities, gender, sources of efficacy, self-efficacy beliefs, and academic achievement in high school students. *Journal of School Psychology*, 40, 101-121.
- Heward, W. L. (2009). *Exceptional children, an introduction to special education*. (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case-study research. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(4), 12-17.
- Hughes, C., Cosgriff, J. C., Agran, M. & Washington, B. H. (2013). Student self-determination: A preliminary investigation of the role of participation in inclusive settings. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(1), 3-17.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, P.L. 108-446.*
- Izzo, M., & Lamb, P. (2002). *Self-determination and career development: Skills for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment*. NCSET, http://www.ncset.hawaii.edu/publications/pdf/self_determination.pdf.
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., Ryan, R. M., & Kim, A. (2009). Can self-determination theory explain what underlies the productive, satisfying learning experiences of collectivistically oriented Korean students? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(3), 644.

- Jenkinson, J. C. (1999). Factors affecting decision-making by young adults with intellectual disabilities. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 104(4), 320-329.
- Jorgensen, C. M. (2018). *It's more than "just being in": Creating authentic inclusion for students with complex support needs*. Brookes Publishing, 2018.
- Kelly, J. R. & Shogren, K. A. (2014). The impact of teaching self-determination on the on-task and off-task behaviors of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 22(1), 27-40.
- Konrad, M., Fowler, C. H., Walker, A. R., Test, D. W., & Wood, W. M. (2007). Effects of self-determination interventions on the academic skills of students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 30(2), 89-113.
- Kusurkar, R. A., Croiset, G., & Ten Cate, O. T. J. (2011). Twelve tips to stimulate intrinsic motivation in students through autonomy-supportive classroom teaching derived from self-determination theory. *Medical Teacher*, 33(12), 978-982.
- Lackaye, T., Margalit, M., Ziv, O., & Ziman, T. (2006). Comparisons of self-efficacy, mood, effort, and hope between students with learning disabilities and their non-LD-matched peers. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 21(2), 11-121.
- Lee, S. H., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Soukup, J. H., Little, T. D. (2008). Self-determination and access to the general education curriculum. *Journal of Special Education*, 42, 91-107. doi: 10.1177/0022466907312354
- Lee, S. H., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2015). Effect of instruction with the self-determined learning model of instruction on students with disabilities: A meta-analysis. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 50(2), 237-247.
- Lee, S. H., Wehmeyer, M. L., Soukup, J. H., & Palmer, S. B. (2010). Impact of curriculum modifications on access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 76(2), 213-233.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- MacArthur, J., Sharp, S., Kelly, B., & Gaffney, M. (2007). Disabled children negotiating school life: Agency, difference, and teaching practice. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15,1-22.
- Martin, J. E., & Marshall, L. H. (1995). ChoiceMaker: A comprehensive self-determination transition program. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 30(3), 147-156.

- Martin, J. E., Van Dycke, J. L., Christensen, W. R., Greene, B. A., Gardner, J. E., & Lovett, D. L. (2006). Increasing student participation in IEP meetings: Establishing the self-directed IEP as an evidenced-based practice. *Exceptional Children, 72*(3), 299-316.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McDougall, D., & Brady, M. P. (1998). Initiating and fading self-management intervention to increase math fluency in general education classes. *Exceptional Children, 64*, 151-166.
- McGuire, J., & McDonnell, J. (2008). Relationships between recreation and levels of self-determination for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 31*(3), 154-163.
- Mithaug, D. E., Wehmeyer, M., Agran, M., Martin, J. E., & Palmer, S. (1998). The self-determined learning model of teaching: Engaging students to solve their learning problems. In M. Wehmeyer & D. J. Sands (Eds.), *Making it happen: Student involvement in education planning* (pp. 299-328). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Mladenov, T. (2012). Personal assistance for disabled people and the understanding of human being. *Critical Social Policy, 32*(2), 242-261.
- Mu, G. M., Hu, Y., & Wang, Y. (2017). Building resilience of students with disabilities in China: The role of inclusive education teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 67*, 125-134.
- Niemiec, C. P., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice. *School Field, 7*(2), 133-144.
- Nonnemacher, S. L., & Bambara, L. M. (2011). "I'm supposed to be in charge": Self-advocates' perspectives on their self-determination support needs. *Intellectual and developmental Disabilities, 49*(5), 327-340.
- Nowicki, S., & Duke, M. P. (1974). *Adult Nowicki-Strickland internal-external control scale*. ETS m 1977.
- Okada, S., Ohtake, Y., & Yanagihara, M. (2010). Improving the manners of a student with autism: the effects of manipulating perspective holders in Social Stories™—a pilot study. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 57*(2), 207-219.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33*(1), 93-96.
- Orr, A. C. & Goodman, N. (2010). "People like me don't go to college:" The legacy of learning disability. *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research, 4*, 1935-3308.

- Palmer, S. B., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (1998). Students' expectations of the future: Hopelessness as a barrier to self-determination. *Mental Retardation*, 36(2), 128-136.
- Pierson, M. R., Carter, E. W., Lane, K. L., & Glaeser, B. C. (2008). Factors influencing the self-determination of transition-age youth with high incidence disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 31, 115-125.
- Pinkney, C. J., Murry, C. J., & Lind, J. R. (2012). Individual skill predictors of the school- and career-related adjustment of adolescents with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 35(1), 39-49.
- Prince, A. M. T., Hodge, J., Bridges, W. C., Katsiyannis, A. (2018). Predictors of postschool education/training and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 41(2), 77-87.
- Reed, H., Thomas, E., Sprague, J. R., & Horner, R. H. (1997). The student guided functional assessment interview: An analysis of student teacher agreement. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 7(1), 33-49.
- Rehfeldt, R. A., Dillen, J. E., Ziomek, M. M., & Kowalchuk, R. K. (2007). Assessing relational learning deficits in perspective-taking in children with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder. *The Psychological Record*, 57(1), 23.
- Reusen, A. K. V. (1996). The self-advocacy strategy for education and transition planning. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 32(1), 49-54.
- Rolfe G. (2006) Validity, trustworthiness and rigour: quality and the idea of qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 53(3), 304–310.
- Roulston, K. (2014). *Analysing interviews*. The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis, 297-312.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field methods*, 15(1), 85-109.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. doi: 10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.68
- Sands, D. J. & Doll, B. (1996). Fostering self-determination is a developmental task. *The Journal of Special Education*, 30(1), 58-76.
- Sands, D. J., Kozleski, E., & French, N. (1999). *Inclusive education in the 21st century*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

- Seong, Y., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., & Little, T. D. (2015). Effects of the self-directed individualized education program on self-determination and transition of adolescents with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38(3), 132-141.
- Shogren, K. A., Palmer, S. B., Wehmeyer, M. L., Williams-Diehm, K., & Little, T. D. (2012). Effects of intervention with the self-determination learning model of instruction on access and goal attainment. *Remedial and Special Education*, 33(5), 320-330.
- Shogren, K. A., Plotner, A. J., Palmer, S. B., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Paek, Y. (2014). Impact of the self-determined learning model of instruction on teacher perceptions of student capacity and opportunity for self-determination. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 440-448.
- Shogren, K. A., & Shaw, L. A. (2016). The role of autonomy, self-realization, and psychological empowerment in predicting outcomes for youth with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 37(1), 55-62.
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Burke, K. M., & Palmer, S. B. (2017). *The Self-Determination learning model of instruction: Teacher's guide*. Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities.
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., & Paek, Y. (2013). Exploring personal and school environment characteristics that predict self-determination. *Exceptionality*, 21(3), 147-157. doi: 10.1080/09362835.2013.802231
- Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Rifenbark, G. G., & Little, T. D. (2015). Relationship between self-determination and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, 48(4), 256-267.
- Sideridis, G. D. (2004). On the origins of helpless behavior of students with learning disabilities: Avoidance motivation? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 497-517. doi: 10.1016/jijer.2004.06.011
- Snyder, M. C., & Bambara, L. M. (1997). Teaching secondary students with learning disabilities to self-manage classroom survival skills. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 30(5), 534-543
- Snyder, E. P., & Shapiro, E. S. (1997). Teaching students with emotional/behavioral disorders the skills to participate in the development of their own IEPs. *Behavioral Disorders*, 22(4), 246-258.

- Solish, A., Perry, A., & Minnes, P. (2010). Participation of children with and without disabilities in social, recreational, and leisure activities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 23*, 226-236. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-3148.2009.00525.x
- Sparks, S. C., & Cote, D. L. (2012). Teaching choice making to elementary students with mild to moderate disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 47*(5), 290-296.
- Stang, K., Carter, E., Lane, K., & Pierson, M. (2009). Perspectives of general and special educators on fostering self-determination in elementary and middle school. *Journal of Special Education, 43*, 94-106.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies (pp. 443-466). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Test, D. W., Fowler, C. H., Wood, W. M., Brewer, D. M., & Eddy S. (2005). A conceptual framework of self-advocacy for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(1), 43-54.
- Test, D. W., & Neale, M. (2004). Using the self-advocacy strategy to increase middle graders' IEP participation. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 13*(2), 135-145.
- Theoharis, G., & Causton, J. (2014). Leading inclusive reform for students with disabilities: A school- and systemic approach. *Theory Into Practice, 53*, 82-97.
- Toro, P. A., Weissburg, R. P., Guare, J. (1990). A comparison of children with and without disabilities on social problem-solving skill, school behavior, and family background. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 23*(2), 115-120.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837-851.
- Trainor, A. A. (2005). Self-determination perceptions and behaviors of diverse students with LD during the transition planning process. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 38*(3), 233-249.
- Valas, H. (2001). Learned helplessness and psychological adjustment II: Effects of learning disabilities and low achievement. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 45*(2). 101-114. doi: 10.1080/00313830120052705
- Van Wynsberghe, R., & Khan, S. (2007) Redefining Case Study. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 6*(2), 69-79.
- Walker, J. D., & Barry, C. (2018). Assessing and supporting social-skill needs for students with high-incidence disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 51*(1), 18-30.

- Wall, M. E., & Dattilo, J. (1995). Creating option-rich learning environments: Facilitating self-determination. *The Journal of Special Education, 29*(3), 276-294.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (2005). Self-determination and individuals with severe disabilities: Re-examining meanings and misinterpretations. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 30*(3), 113-120.
- Wehmeyer, M., (2002). Riding the third wave. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 15*, 106–116.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1996). *Self-determination in youth with severe cognitive disabilities: From theory to practice. Making your way: Building self-competence among children and youth with disabilities*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1995). *The Arc's self-determination scale: Procedural guidelines*.
- Wehmeyer, M. L. (1994). Perceptions of self-determination and psychological empowerment of adolescents with mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 29*(1), 9-21.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Baker, D. J., Blumberg, R. & Harrison, R. (2004). Self-determination and student involvement in functional assessment: Innovative practices. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 6*(1), 29-33.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Kelchner, K. (1995). *Whose future is it anyway? A Student-directed transition planning process*.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Lawrence, M. (1995). Whose future is it anyway? Promoting student involvement in transition planning. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 18*(2), 69-83.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Agran, M., Mithaug, D. E., & Martin, J. E. (2000). Promoting causal agency: The self-determination learning model of instruction. *Exceptional Children, 66*(4), 439-453.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Lee, Y., Williams-Diehm, K., & Shogren, K. (2011). A randomized-trial evaluation of the effect of whose future is it anyway? On self-determination. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 34*(1), 45-56.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Shogren, K., Williams-Diehm, K., & Soukup, J. H. (2013). Establishing a causal relationship between intervention to promote self-determination and enhanced student self-determination. *The Journal of Special Education, 46*(4), 195-210.

- Wehmeyer, M. L., Sands, D. J., Doll, B., & Palmer, S. (1997). The development of self-determination and implications for educational interventions with students with disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 44*(4), 305-326.
- Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A follow-up study of youth with mental retardation or learning disabilities. *Exceptional children, 63*(2), 245-255.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. (2008). Self-determination and learners with autism spectrum disorders. Educating children and youth with autism: *Strategies for effective practice, 2*, 433-476.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Palmer, S. B., Williams-Diehm, K. L., Little, T. D., & Boulton, A. (2012). The impact of the self-determined learning model of instruction on student self-determination. *Exceptional Children, 78*(2), 135-153.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Toste, J. R., & Mahal, S. (2017). Self-Determined Learning to Motivate Struggling Learners in Reading and Writing. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 52*(5), 295-303.
- Weil, T. M., Hayes, S. C., & Cappurro, P. (2011). Establishing a deictic relational repertoire in young children. *The Psychological Record, 61*, 371-390.
- Wiener, J., & Tardif, C. Y. (2004). Social and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities: Does special education placement make a difference. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 19*(1), 20-32.
- Wolman, J., Campeau, P., DuBois, P., Mithaug, D., Stolarski, V. (1994). *AIR Self-determination Scale and user guide*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.
- Wood, W., & Test, D. W. (2001). Final Performance report, self-determination synthesis project. Retrieved April 16, 2018.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Young-Jones, A., Cara, K. C., & Levesque-Bristol, C. (2014). Verbal and behavioral cues: creating an autonomy-supportive classroom. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(5), 497-509.
- Zentall, S. S., & Beike, S. M. (2012). Achievement and social goals of younger and older elementary students: Response to academic and social failure. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 35*(1), 39-53.

Zimmerman, B., & Kitsantas, A. (2007). Reliability and validity of self-efficacy for learning form (SELF) scores of college students. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie/Journal of Psychology*, 215(3), 157-163.

APPENDIX A:

TEACHER RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Self-determination is a mindset of personal responsibility and ownership that enables individuals to act on their own behalf toward personal goals and desires. As an educational outcome, thirty years of research suggest that self-determination for students with disabilities is best practice. Research also suggests that students with disabilities become self-determining when they have opportunities to learn and practice skills like choice making, problem solving, and self-advocacy. To date, there is little to no research that focuses on the impact of *Leader in Me* schools that use Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* principles to develop students' leadership capacity.

I am conducting this study to understand how training in the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* principles impacts students' with disabilities self-determination behavior. Additionally, I want to know how teachers and the school environment of a *Leader in Me* school support students exercise of self-determination skills. The study will include fifth-grade students with disabilities receiving most of their instruction in the general education classroom. Fifth-grade teachers at University Place Elementary School who provide core instruction to students with learning disabilities, mild intellectual disability, Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder, and Emotional Disorder are invited to participate in this study.

Please understand that participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Those who choose to participate may leave the study at any time.

The study will work like this: once participants give consent to participate, I will arrange a time to conduct an interview. After the interview, I will make arrangements to conduct classroom observations. During classroom observations, I will only be observing teacher and student participants who agree to participate in the study. I will ask informal questions about what I see and hear to better understand the classroom environment. Lastly, I will ask teacher participants to show me around the school so that I can better understand the school environment as it relates to students' self-determination experiences. I will ask informal questions about what I see and hear.

With participants' permission, formal and informal interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I will ask participants to look over their transcription to ensure I accurately captured their responses. Observations will not be recorded. With participants' permission, I will take photographs during the school tour to view later during data analysis.

To protect participants privacy and confidentiality, all audio recordings and transcriptions will be uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic space that only I and my dissertation chair, Dr. Kagendo Mutua, can access. Hard copies and photographs will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my locked office. Dr. Mutua will have access to all study data. Participants will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym that will be used to identify them throughout the study. In case there are questions about the study, all paper and electronic files will be kept for at least six years then destroyed. Paper files will shredded and electronic files erased.

What questions do you have?

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH STUDY (TEACHER)

Study title: Self-Determination and *Leader in Me Schools*: A Case Study

Investigator's Name, Position, Faculty or Student Status: My name is Shandra Shaw. I am a doctoral candidate and student with the College of Education at the University of Alabama. You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called Self-Determination and *Leader in Me Schools*: A Case Study. The study is being done by Shandra Shaw, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Mrs. Shaw is being supervised by Dr. Kagendo Mutua who is a professor of Special Education and Multiple Abilities at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study is being done to find out how Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (hereafter referred to as *7 Habits*) principles that are taught in *Leader in Me* schools influence students' with disabilities ability to make choices, solve problems, make decisions, speak up for themselves, set and monitor goals, and take charge of their own lives. This study is also being done to explore how teachers and the school environment encourage students to make choices and decisions, solve problems, speak up for themselves, set and monitor goals, and take charge of their own lives.

Why is this study important or useful?

This study is important/useful because it helps parents, school personnel, and the community better understand *Leader in Me* schools from the perspectives of students with disabilities. The results of this study may help school faculty and staff better understand what the *7 Habits* principles offer students with disabilities and how the principles support students use of skills that will help them later in life, especially after they graduate.

How many people will be in this study?

About three other teachers and eight students with disabilities will participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in one semi-structured interview. The interview will be audiotaped at your discretion. Interviews will be transcribed, and you will be asked to review your interview transcriptions to ensure that your responses are accurately captured.

- Have discussions with the investigator about student leadership portfolios. These discussions will be audiotaped at your discretion. Photographs will be taken of the documents, at your discretion, for the investigator to view while trying to make sense of the information provided.
- Permit the investigator to observe your classroom during instruction and address questions about what the investigator sees and hears.
- Lead the investigator on a tour of the school and talk about displays in the school and their meaning regarding student leadership. The school tour will be audiotaped at your discretion. The investigator will take photographs of the displays, bulletin boards, and artwork to look at while attempting to make sense of the information gathered if it is okay with you.

How much time will I spend being this study?

The semi-structured interview will take about 45 minutes to an hour. Reviewing your interview transcription should take about 30 minutes. The observation will take about 30 to 45 minutes. Discussing student, classroom, and school artifacts will take about 5 minutes per student participant you teach. The school tour will take about 20 minutes. Your total participation over the course of the study will be about 3 hours.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Can the investigator take me out of this study?

The investigator may take you out of the study if she feels that the study is upsetting you.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

There are little to no foreseen risks to your participation in this study. However, if you become uncomfortable during interviews, observations, or while talking about students' work, then you may request to discontinue interviewing, being observed, and/or talking about students' leadership portfolios.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I participate in this study?

While there are no direct benefits for your participation, you may find that the process provides you the opportunity to think deeper about *7 Habits* training and students with disabilities.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help stakeholders (e.g., educators, parents, community members) learn more about the *Leader in Me* model of leadership development and the impact of 7 Habits training on students' with disabilities self-determination (a mindset with skills that help students lead their own lives).

How will my privacy be protected?

Interviews, observations, and portfolio discussions will be one-to-one in a location you feel comfortable. You will not be required to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and you will not be required to show and/or discuss any documents inside student leadership portfolios that you do not deem appropriate to discuss with the investigator. Touring the school will be at your discretion. You can decide where you want to go during the tour and how much you want to discuss about displays and/or the school in general.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

You will select a pseudonym (made up name) that will be used to identify yourself throughout the study. Likewise, the names of student participants and the school will be changed to avoid identification. All recordings and photographs will be done on the investigator's personal password protected device then uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic file, and deleted from the investigator's personal device within 24 hours of collecting the data. Paper copies will be locked in the file cabinet in the investigator's locked office that only the investigator can access. Consent and assent forms will be locked in a separate file cabinet in the investigator's locked office. The investigator's Dissertation Chair, Dr. Kagendo Mutua, will have access to all study data. Research materials (i.e., recordings, paper copies, photographs) will be kept for at least six years, then paper copies will be shredded and electronic files erased.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the investigator Shandra Shaw at 205-454-7461 or the faculty supervisor Kagendo Mutua at 205-348-2609.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may e-mail the Research Compliance Office at rcompliance@research.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Audiotaping Consent

As mentioned above, interviews, leadership portfolio discussions, and the school tour will be audio recorded to make sure that your responses and comments are correctly captured. All recordings will be housed on the investigator's password protected personal recording device then uploaded to UA box and erased from the personal recording device within 24 hours of the recordings. Recordings will be transcribed (written in word form). Transcriptions will be stored in the locked file cabinet in the investigator's locked office to which only she has a key. All research information will be kept for at least 6 years in case there is a question about the research, then paper files will be shredded and electronic files erased.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped, and I give my permission to the investigator (Shandra Shaw) to record interviews, work sample discussions, and school tour discussions.

Yes, I consent to being audiotaped during interviews, work sample discussions, and while touring the school.

No, I do not want to be audiotaped.

Photograph Consent

As mentioned above, students' leadership portfolios and leadership documents on display in the school will be photographed so that the investigator can look back at the documents discussed when trying to make sense of the information provided by you and the students. Any information that has the students' name, your name, or the school's name will be marked out. Photographs will be taken on the investigator's password protected personal device then uploaded to UA box and erased from the investigator's device within 24 hours of taking the photograph. Photographs will be kept for at least 6 years in case there is a question about the research, then the electronic photograph files will be erased. Paper copies of photographs will be locked in the file cabinet in the investigator's locked office to which only she has a key.

I understand that the work I share with the investigator (Shandra Shaw) will be photographed by the investigator. I also understand that all identifying information, including my name, students' name, and the school name will be marked out.

- Yes**, photographs may be taken of the work samples and documents I share with the investigator.
- No**, I do not give permission for the work I share with the investigator to be photographed.

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C:

PARENT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Self-determination is a mindset of personal responsibility and ownership that enables individuals to act on their own behalf toward personal goals and desires. As an educational outcome, thirty years of research suggest that self-determination for students with disabilities is best practice. Research also suggests that students with disabilities become self-determining when they have opportunities to learn and practice skills like choice making, problem solving, and self-advocacy. To date, there is little to no research that focuses on the impact of *Leader in Me* schools that use Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* principles to develop students' leadership capacity.

I am conducting this study to understand how training in the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* principles impacts students' with disabilities self-determination behavior. Additionally, I want to know how teachers and the school environment of a *Leader in Me* school support students exercise of self-determination skills. The study will include fifth-grade students with disabilities who attend University Place Elementary School and receive most of their instruction in the general education classroom. I am requesting that parents of students who meet the study criteria provide permission for their child to be included in the study. Please understand that participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Parents can withdraw their child from the study at any time. Also, students who choose to participate may leave the study at any time. Moreover, parents can be present during student data collection if they choose.

The study will work like this: once parents grant consent, I will meet with students to gain their assent. Students who want to participate will complete a *7 Habits* screener. The first eight students who grant assent and pass the screener will be selected to participate in the study. Next, I will arrange times to conduct individual interviews with students. After interviewing students, I will conduct classroom observations of student and teacher participants and ask participants questions about what I see and hear. Lastly, I will ask student participants to individually show me around the school and ask questions about what I see and hear so that I can better understand the school environment as it relates to students' self-determination experiences.

With parent and student permission, formal and informal interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I will go over transcriptions with students and parents who want to be present to ensure I accurately captured their responses. Observations will not be recorded. With parent and student permission, I will take photographs during the school tour to view later during data analysis.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all audio recordings and transcriptions will be uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic space that only I and my dissertation chair, Dr. Kagendo Mutua, can access. Hard copies and photographs will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my locked office. Dr. Mutua will have access to all study data. Participants will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym that will be used to identify them throughout the study. In case there are questions about the study, all paper and electronic files will be kept for at least six years, then destroyed. Paper files will be shredded and electronic files erased. What questions do you have?

APPENDIX D:

INFORMED CONSENT FOR A RESEARCH STUDY (PARENT)

Study Title: Self-Determination and *Leader in Me Schools*: A Case Study

Investigator's Name, Position, Faculty or Student Status: My name is Shandra Shaw. I am a doctoral candidate and student with the College of Education at the University of Alabama. You are being asked to give permission for your child for whom you are a guardian/legal representative (*as appropriate*) to take part in a research study.

This study is called Self-Determination and *Leader in Me Schools*: A Case Study. The study is being done by Shandra Shaw, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Mrs. Shaw is being supervised by Dr. Kagendo Mutua who is a professor of Special Education and Multiple Abilities at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study is being done to:

- a) find out how Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (hereafter referred to as *7 Habits*) principles that are taught in *Leader in Me* schools influence students' with disabilities ability to make choices, solve problems, make decisions, speak up for themselves, set and monitor goals, and take charge of their own lives.
- b) explore how teachers and the lay out of the school encourage students to make choices and decisions, solve problems, speak up for themselves, set and monitor goals, and take charge of their own lives.

Why is this study important or useful?

This study is important/useful because it helps parents, school personnel, and the community better understand *Leader in Me* schools from the viewpoint of students with disabilities. The results of this study will help school faculty and staff better understand what the *7 Habits* principles offer students with disabilities and how the *7 Habits* principles support students use of skills that will help them later in life, especially after they graduate.

How many people will be in this study?

About seven other students and four teachers will be in this study.

What will my child be asked to do in this study?

If your child meets the criteria and agrees to be in this study, your child will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in formal (sitting down talking to each other) and informal (having conversations) interviews. Interviews will be audiotaped at your child's choosing. Interviews will be transcribed (written in word form), and you, if you choose, and your child will have the opportunity to review his/her semi-structured interview transcription with me to ensure that I accurately captured his/her response.
- Show and talk about his/her leadership portfolios—notebooks that students create and maintain that highlight their achievements, progress, and goals. These portfolio discussions will be audiotaped at your child's choosing. The investigator will take pictures, as permitted by your child, of the work, certificates, awards, and recognitions discussed to look at while trying to make sense of the information gathered.
- Lead the investigator on a tour of the school and talk about displays in the school and their meaning to his/her leadership development. This school tour will be audiotaped at your child's choosing. The investigator will take pictures of the displays, bulletin boards, and artwork to look at while trying to make sense of the information.

How much time will my child spend being this study?

Each formal and informal interview should take about 30 minutes, 90 minutes for all three interviews. I will observe your child's classroom from 30 to 45 minutes two times for a total of up to 90 minutes. Touring the school will take about 20 minutes and will happen one time. Talking to your child about his/her leadership portfolio will take about 10 minutes. Reviewing your child's transcript will take approximately 30 minutes. Your child's total participation will be approximately four hours over the course of the study.

Will being in this study cost my child anything?

The only cost to your child from this study is his/her time.

Will my child be compensated for being in this study?

Your child will not be paid for being in this study.

Can the investigator take my child out of this study?

The investigator may take your child out of the study if she feels that the study is upsetting him/her and/or your child withdraws from the school participating in the study.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to my child if he/she is in this study?

There are little to no foreseen risks to your child's participation in this study. However, if your child becomes uncomfortable during interviews, observations, or while talking about their

leadership portfolio, then he/she may request to discontinue interviewing, being observed, and/or talking about his/her portfolio.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if my child participates in this study?

While there are no direct benefits for your child's participation, he/she may enjoy the one-to-one attention from the investigator and may begin to think about his/her leadership skills.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help teachers make educational decisions to address the needs of students with disabilities.

How will my child's privacy be protected?

Interviews and other discussions with your child will be one-to-one in a location your child feels comfortable. Your child will not be required to answer any questions he/she does not want to answer, and he/she will not be required to show and/or talk about any work he/she does not want to show or talk about with the investigator. Touring the school will be at your child's choosing. In other words, your child can decide where he/she wants to go during the tour and how much he/she wants to discuss about displays and/or the school in general. Your child may also choose not to participate in the tour. Your child will select samples of his/her work and documents from his/her leadership portfolio that highlight his/her leadership skills to be photographed by the investigator for later viewing. Your child may also request that no pictures be taken of items contained in their leadership portfolio.

How will my child's confidentiality be protected?

Your child will select a pseudonym (made up name) that will be used to identify him/her throughout the study. For example, if your child's name is Jack, he may choose to call himself Sam. Likewise, the name of your child's teachers and school will be changed to avoid identification. All recordings and photographs will be done on the investigator's password protected personal device then uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic file, and erased from the device within 24 hours of collecting the data. Paper copies will be locked in the file cabinet inside the investigator's locked office that only the investigator can access. Consent and assent forms will be locked in a separate file cabinet in the investigator's locked office that only the investigator can access. Electronic files (files on the computer) will be uploaded to UA Box. The investigator's Dissertation Chair, Dr. Kagendo Mutua, will have access to all study data. Research materials (i.e., recordings, paper copies, photographs) will be kept for at least six years, then paper copies will be shredded and electronic files erased.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Does my child have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my child’s rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your child’s free choice. Your child can refuse to be in it at all. If your child starts the study, you and/or your child can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your child’s and/or your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the investigator Shandra Shaw at 205-454-7461 or the faculty supervisor Kagendo Mutua at 205-348-2609.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about you and your child’s rights as a person taking part in a research study, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/>. You may e-mail the Research Compliance Office at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

After your child participates, you and your child are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree that my child may take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

 **Yes**, I want to be present during the interviews, discussions, and observations.

 **No**, I do not want to be present during the interviews, discussions, and observations.

•

Audiotaping Consent

As mentioned above, interviews, portfolio discussions, and school tours will be audio recorded to make sure your child’s responses and comments are correctly captured. All recordings will be housed on the researcher’s password protected personal recording device, then uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic file, and erased from the device within 24 hours of the recording. Recordings will be transcribed (written in word form) and saved in UA Box. Printed transcriptions will be locked in the file cabinet in the investigator’s locked office to which only she has a key. In case there is a question about the research, all research information will be kept for at least 6 years then destroyed. Paper files will be shredded and electronic files erased.

I understand that part of my child’s participation in this research study will be audiotaped, and I give my permission to the investigator (Shandra Shaw) to record interviews, portfolio discussions, and school tour discussions.

- Yes**, my child may be audiotaped during interviews, portfolio discussions, and while touring the school.
- No**, I do not want my child to be audiotaped.

Photograph Consent

As mentioned above, students’ leadership portfolios and leadership documents on display in the school will be photographed so that the investigator can look back at the documents discussed when she is trying to make sense of all the information provided by your child. Any information that has your child’s name or any other information that can identify your child will be marked out. Photographs will be taken on the investigator’s password protected device then uploaded to UA Box, a password protected electronic file, and erased from the device within 24 hours. Photographs will be kept for at least 6 years in case there is a question about the research, then the electronic photograph files will be erased.

I understand that my child’s leadership portfolios and leadership documents on display in the school will be photographed by the investigator (Shandra Shaw). I also understand that my child’s personal information will be marked out.

- Yes**, my child’s leadership portfolio and leadership documents on display in the school may be photographed.
- No**, my child’s leadership portfolio and leadership documents on display in the school may not be photographed.

Signature of Parent

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E:
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

This research study, Self-Determination and *Leader in Me* Schools: A Case Study, is about learning how *Leader in Me* schools help build students' leadership skills. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If students decide that they want to be part of this study, they will be asked to talk about the kinds of things they are learning and doing at school that help them grow into a leader (a person who takes charge and makes decisions about his/her life). There will be one time when each student will talk with the investigator (the person doing the study) for about for about 30 minutes. There will be other times when each student will talk with the investigator for about 5 minutes. These times will be when the investigator wants to ask the student about something he/she is learning or doing and/or something that she saw or heard while looking around the classroom. These talks will be quick and help the investigator better understand the things students are learning and doing. The investigator will also ask students to show her around the school and talk about leadership things that are important or are interesting to them. This will take about 20 minutes and will happen only once. The investigator will take pictures of the things students show her, but only if it's okay with them. The investigator will also ask students to show and talk to her about their leadership portfolios that shows how they are using their leadership skills. This will take about 10 minutes. The investigator will take pictures of the things students show her, but only if it's okay with them. The investigator will also come to two of students classes to look around for 30 to 45 minutes. The talks and

discussions the students and the investigator have will be recorded (taped) so that she can make sure that she correctly writes down the things students. Students don't have to be recorded if they do not want to.

There are some things about this study students should know. Students may, at times, get tired or do not want to answer questions, talk about their work or the school, or be observed. If this happens, then students can just let the investigator know, and they can take a break or stop the discussion and/or observation. Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to a person. The investigator thinks students might benefit from having one-to-one time with her and thinking more about who they are as leaders.

When the investigator is finished with this study, she will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include students' names or that they were in the study. Students do not have to be in this study if they do not want to be. If students decide to stop after they begin, that's okay too. Students' parents know about the study too.

Students who decide they want to be in this study will need to sign their name below.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

Yes, it is okay for me to be recorded.

No, I do not want to be recorded.

Yes, pictures may be taken of my work.

No, I do not want pictures to be taken of my work.

Student signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's Signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX F:

DECISION MAKING CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL



DECISION-MAKING CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

INSTRUCTIONS: This form may be used to assess the decision-making capacity of potential subjects who may have or may be experiencing cognitive impairments.

Who should assess capacity? In general, the consent assessor should be a member of the research team or consultant familiar with dementias and/or cognitive impairment, and qualified to assess and monitor capacity to consent on an ongoing basis.

Potential Subject Name: _____ **IRB Protocol #:** _____

Study Title: _____

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS:

1. Does the individual understand he/she would be participating in research and that research is voluntary?
 Yes No
2. Does the individual understand what will happen to him/her if he/she decides to participate?
 Yes No
3. Does the individual know how long he/she will be in the research study?
 Yes No
4. Can the individual explain one or two risks associated with the research study?
 Yes No
5. Can the individual explain what he/she should do to stop being in this research study?
 Yes No
6. Does the individual know who to contact if he/she experiences problems or has questions about the study?
 Yes No
7. **Interventional studies:** Can the individual explain what alternatives there are if he/she chooses not to participate?
 Yes No

INVESTIGATOR EVALUATION:

8. Does the individual express a choice about whether or not to participate?
 Yes No*
9. Does the individual have the decision-making capacity to give informed consent for this study?
 Yes No*

Printed Name of Investigator _____ Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

* **NOTE:** Potential subjects who are found to have diminished capacity must be excluded **unless** the UCLA IRB has approved the use of surrogate consent from legally authorized representatives for the study in question.

Version 8-22-2012

APPENDIX G:

7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE SCREENER

Habit	School Definition	Student Definition	Definition Acceptable
Be Proactive	You carry your own weather. You determine if you are happy or sad.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Yes No
Begin with the End in Mind	Have a plan to accomplish your goal.		Yes No
Put First Things First	Work first, then play.		Yes No
Think Win Win	Everybody wins.		Yes No
Seek First to Understand, then to Be Understood	Listen before you speak.		Yes No
Synergize	Together is better.		Yes No

Sharpen the Saw	Balance your mind, body, and soul.		Yes No
------------------------	---------------------------------------	--	----------------------

APPENDIX H:

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Script

Thank you (participant pseudonym) for participating in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to help me understand how *Leader in Me* schools and the *7 Habits* impact your ability to take control of your own life. The interview will take about 30 to 45 minutes. If at any time you need to take a break or skip a question, please feel free to do so. Do you have any questions? Is it okay to record this interview?

Interview Questions

1. Without mentioning your name or the name of your school, tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g., age, grade, what you like to do for fun).
2. How long have you been a student at this school?
3. This school is a *Leader in Me* school. In a *Leader in Me* school, you learn about the *7 Habits*. In your own words, tell me how you use the *7 Habits* at school.
 - a. How has learning the *7 Habits* helped you at school with your schoolwork?
 - b. How has learning the *7 Habits* helped you with your behavior?
 - c. How has learning the *7 Habits* helped you with how well you get along with other students?

4. Goals are things that you work on because you want to get better at them. Tell me about your goals. These goals can be about your schoolwork, relationship with other students, behavior, and/or personal goals?
 - a. Tell me about how you decided on these goals.
 - b. How do you know how well you are doing with your goals?
 - c. Tell me about how the *7 Habits* help you with your goals.
5. What do you do if you are having problems doing your work or getting along with a classmate?
6. Tell me about how you make choices (choose the things you want to do) about your
 - a. School work.
 - b. Behavior.
 - c. Getting along with classmates.
7. Tell me about the things that go on in this school that helps you to take charge of your own learning.
 - a. That help you to solve problems.
 - b. That help you to ask for the things you need to help you learn, grow with your behavior, and get along with others.
8. Which of your teachers do you feel closest to?
 - a. What do they do that makes you feel close to them?
9. What does it mean to be
 - a. independent at this school?

- b. capable or able at this school?
- c. connected to others at this school?

10. Is there anything I haven't asked that is relevant to this topic that you would like to share?

APPENDIX I:
TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Script:

Thank you (participant pseudonym) for participating in this interview. I am conducting this study to understand how a focus on leadership and student empowerment through the *7 Habits* principles impact the exercise and expression of self-determination skills by students with high incidence disabilities in the general education classroom. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes. If at any time you need to take a break or skip a question, please feel free to do so. Do you have any questions? Is it okay to record this interview?

Interview Questions

1. Without mentioning your name or the name of your school, tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g, number of years as an educator, grades taught, etc.).
2. In a *Leader in Me* school, what does autonomy (independence, self-sufficiency, self-governing) look like?
 - a. Tell me how general education teachers support and encourage student autonomy in the classroom?
3. In a *Leader in Me* school, what does competence (proficiency, capability, know-how) look like?
 - a. Tell me about how general education teachers support and encourage student competence in the classroom?

4. In a *Leader in Me* school, what does relatedness (empathy, affiliation, connection) look like?
 - a. Tell me how general education teachers support and encourage student-to-student and teacher-to-student connections in the classroom.
5. In *Leader in Me* schools, there is a strong focus on the 7 *Habits* principles. How do the 7 *Habits* principles shape how you support your students' academic needs?
 - a. How do the 7 *Habits* principles shape how you support your students' behavioral needs?
 - b. How do the 7 *Habits* principles shape how you support your students' social needs?
6. What impact do you think a focus on leadership and student empowerment using the 7 *Habits* principles has on students with disabilities who are served in the general education classroom for most of the school day?
 - a. How do you arrive at this conclusion?
7. In *Leader in Me* schools, there is a strong focus on student accountability. How do you encourage student accountability (e.g., giving students choices about what they learn and how they learn; encouraging decision making, problem solving, self-advocacy; teaching goal setting, action planning, and self-monitoring)?
 - a. How do you measure whether students are moving toward self-accountability?
8. Think about one of the student participants. How would you describe his/her academic behavior at the beginning of the school year?

- a. How would you describe his/her academic behavior now?
 - b. What do you think contributed to this change or lack of change?
 - c. How would you describe his/her peer relationships at the beginning of the school year?
 - d. How would you describe his/her peer relationships now?
 - e. What do you think contributed to this change or lack of change?
9. How does a focus on leadership and student empowerment impact teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships?
 10. How does a focus on leadership and student empowerment impact the ability of students' with disabilities' to be self-determining?
 11. How does a focus on leadership and student empowerment impact students' with disabilities ability to connect with their teachers and classmates?
 12. Is there anything I haven't asked that is relevant to this topic that you would like to share?

APPENDIX J:

MEMBER CHECK LETTER FOR TEACHERS

Name of Participant
Name of School
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

(Date)

Dear (Participant)

I hope this letter finds you and your family well. Enclosed is a copy of the interview transcription for the interview I conducted with you on (date). Please review the transcription to ensure that I adequately captured your responses. If you would like to contact me about the transcription, please give me a call at 205-454-7461. If I do not answer the phone, leave me a message, and I will return your call. If I do not hear from you by (date), I will assume that the transcription represents and accurate reflection of your responses. I sincerely appreciate your participation in this study and wish you a productive remainder of the school year.

Sincerely,

Shandra Shaw
The University of Alabama
PhD Candidate

APPENDIX K:

IRB APPROVAL



Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

March 26, 2019

Shandra Shaw
Dept. of SPEMA
College of Education
Box 870232

Re: IRB Application #: 19-005 "Leader in Me School Case Study"

Dear Shandra Shaw:

The University of Alabama Non-Medical IRB recently met to consider your research request. The board voted to approve your application pending satisfactory completion of revisions. The IRB has requested the following information or changes.

- 1) There was concern among board members as it pertains to contacting the parent, that is, have parents already given permission to be contacted by persons other than school personnel? Please clarify. If not, then the school should contact the parents instead of the researchers.
- 2) Please review the consent form for typographical errors.
- 3) Please provide documentation of Tuscaloosa City School approval for the research in addition to your letter of support from Dr. Daria. This process should be navigated via Dr. Liza Wilson in the UA College of Education.

When responding to this request, please include a cover letter along with the modified application, indicating the page numbers or sections of the application where changes have been made in the revised document.

Please submit the requested information to me for review via the e-Protocol system within 60 days of the issue date of this letter. If the IRB does not receive the requested revisions within 60 days, you must submit a new request to the board for review.

If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer