SELF-DETERMINATION:
BUILDING A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

Michael Wehmeyer, Ph.D.
Professor, Special Education
Director, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities
Associate Director, Beach Center on Disability
University of Kansas
A BRIDGE TO WHERE?
A BRIDGE TO WHERE?
“I had never had a place of my own. As a result, I had never worried about buying groceries and planning meals, paying the rent and the phone bill, balancing a checkbook, making appointments, figuring out how to keep the appointments I made – all the things adults just do. But starting out in society at the age of 28, I found these everyday tasks confusing, wonderful, and frightening.” (p. 202)
A BRIDGE TO A BRIGHT FUTURE...
...OR A BRIDGE TO NOWHERE?
WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT...

...to file all day.

...to be replaced on a whim.

...to be underappreciated.

...to be paid less for doing the same job.
A BRIDGE TO WHERE?
BUILDING THE BRIDGE TO A BRIGHT FUTURE: CHANGING HOW WE THINK ABOUT DISABILITY
Historically, disability was understood within a model that was an extension of the medical model, which conceived health as an *interiorized state* and health problems as an *individual pathology*; a problem within the person.

Within such a context, disability was understood as a characteristic of the person; as residing with the person.

- The person was seen as broken, diseased, pathological, atypical, or aberrant; as outside the norm.
- Perhaps unavoidably, people with disabilities were, consequently, associated with numerous negative stereotypes.
- Particularly with introduction of Mental Age estimates, led to “infantilization” of people with disabilities.
In the context of health care, it became apparent by the late 1970s that individual pathology models offered a far too narrow perspective for effectively describing, understanding, and addressing the problems of people experiencing chronic or pervasive health issues, including disability.

In 1980, the World Health Organization introduced the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH).

The ICIDH perspective for describing the impact of a health condition or pathology on human functioning were: (a) the exteriorization of a pathology in body anatomy and functions; (b) objectified pathology as expressed in the person’s activities (e.g. adaptive behavior skills), and (c) the social consequences of pathology (e.g. participation in social life domains).

Later, (ICF, 2001) it was recognized that besides the impact of health condition factors (pathology), contextual and environmental factors are of pivotal importance for understanding human functioning.

Human functioning is best understood in the context of a person-environment fit or interaction model.
Disability

Personal Incompetence
CHANGING EXPECTATIONS:
CHANGING UNDERSTANDING

Environment

Personal Competence
CHANGING EXPECTATIONS: CHANGING UNDERSTANDING

Disability

Personal Competence

Environment
IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF DISABILITY

- Strengths-based
- Focus on environment/context, not fixing individual;
- Emphasizes supports, not programs
EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION OF NEW PARADIGM IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
- Multitiered Systems of Supports
- Supported and Customized Employment
Resources and strategies that:

- promote the interests and causes of individuals with or without disabilities;
- enable them to access opportunities, information, and relationships inherent within integrated work and living environments;
- result in enhanced interdependence, productivity, community inclusion, life satisfaction, and human functioning.

Personalized array of supports
AN ARRAY OF SUPPORTS

- Specialized Services
- Generic Services
- Nonpaid Supports
- Family & Friends
- Person
BUILDING THE BRIDGE TO A BRIGHT FUTURE: TRANSITION
WHAT IS TRANSITION?

Life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments (Wehman, 2006, p. 4).

Transition principles for empowerment:

- Transition interventions should be designed to be maximally under the control of the individual, rather than others;
- Transition interventions should be designed to facilitate individual independence and autonomy;
- The least restrictive means that are still effective should be used; and
- The most natural interventions for the particular work environment should be used.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kohler’s taxonomy category</th>
<th>Evidence-based practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student-focused planning   | • Involving students in the IEP process  
                            | • Using the Self-Advocacy Strategy  
                            | • Using the Self-Directed IEP    |
| Student development        | • Teaching: functional life skills • banking skills • restaurant purchasing skills • employment skills using CAI • grocery shopping skills • home maintenance • leisure skills • personal health skills • job-specific employment skills • purchasing using the “one more than” strategy  
                            | • life skills using CAI • life skills using CBI • self-care skills • safety skills  
                            | • self-determination skills • self-management for life skills • self-management for employment • self-advocacy skills • purchasing skills  
                            | • functional reading skills • functional math skills • social skills  
                            | • purchasing skills • completing a job application skills • job-related social communication skills • cooking and food preparation skills  
                            | • employment skills using CBI |
| Family involvement         | • Training parents about transition services |
| Program structure          | • Providing community-based instruction  
                            | • Extending services beyond secondary school  
                            | • Using Check and Connect    |
| Interagency coordination   | • none              |

*Source: Used by permission (public domain), National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2010).*
### Table 1.2 Evidence-based predictors of post-School Employment, Education and Independent Living Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors/outcomes</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Independent living</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career awareness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit exam requirements/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion in general education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interagency collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational courses</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid employment/ work experience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy/self-determination</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care/independent living</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition program</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Used by permission (public domain), National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2010).
Massachusetts Student-Driven Secondary Transition Model

Postsecondary Success
- Education/training
- Competitive employment
- Independent living
- Community participation

Student
- Vision/PSG
- Opportunities

Self-determination
- Family, community & adult services
- Whole school, transition assessment, TPF, IEP
BUILDING THE BRIDGE TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE: SELF-DETERMINATION
WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?

- Self-determined behavior refers to *volitional* actions that enable one to act as the primary *causal agent* in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life.

- *Causal agency*: To make or cause something to happen in one’s life.

- *Volitional action*: Making a conscious choice or decision with deliberate intention.
IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DETERMINATION

"People with autism should be treated with the same dignity, respect, and equality as people without autism.” Jean-Paul Bovee

"We don't have to be told what self-determination means. We know it is just another word for a life filled with rising expectations, dignity, respect and opportunities.“ Robert Williams
Misperceptions of Self-Determination

- Self-determination is control.
- Self-determination is independent performance.
- Self-determination is just making a choice.
- Self-determination is something you do to someone else or a service delivery model (a way of doing planning, funding services).
“When I moved to New Bedford, I wanted to open a checking account. I went over to the bank and gave the $10 to open the account and asked them if there would be a problem. They said no. But, when I went back a couple of days later, they said they couldn’t understand my signature.”

Raymond J. Gagne
“I thought about this and realized that I had a checking account before I moved, and that had worked fine. The next morning, I put on a suit and tie and went down to the main branch. I asked to see the bank president. They told me he was in a meeting. I told them I would wait.”
“I waited for about 2 minutes and he came out. He brought me into a room and asked me what the problem was. I told him. I also brought my canceled checks and showed him that I had an account before. He apologized and I got my checking account.

That is why self-determination is important to me.”
Higher self-determination status at graduation predicts more positive adult outcomes for students with disabilities, including more positive employment and community living outcomes, and a better quality of life.

Students with disabilities who are more self-determined are more actively involved in their transition and educational planning process.

If provided instruction on knowledge and skills pertaining to self-determination, students across disability categories can learn them.
What do we know about the impact of self-determination?

- Five Year Longitudinal Study (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2013)
  - Purpose: Examine the effects of interventions to promote self-determination
  - Randomized trial, placebo control group design study
  - 50 school districts in six states (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas)
  - Students with diverse disability labels and their teachers participated
  - Student’s school campuses were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group

Do interventions designed to promote self-determination lead to improvement in the self-determination scores of students with disabilities?

- Multi-level latent growth curve models (LGMs)
  - IV: Treatment Group, Disability, Gender
  - DV: The Arc’s Self-Determination Scale, AIR Self-Determination Scale
FINDINGS

**AIR Self-Determination Scale**

**The Arc’s Self-Determination Scale**
Two Year Longitudinal Study of the impact of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction

- Randomized trial, modified placebo control group design study
- 20 school districts participated in three states (Kansas, Missouri, and Texas)
- Students with intellectual disability and learning disabilities and their teachers participated
- Student’s school campuses were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group
### KEY FINDINGS: IMPACT ON SELF-DETERMINATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
<th>Time 3</th>
<th>Latent d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIR Self-Determination Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>.00 (.00 – .00)</td>
<td>.07 (-.17 – .31)</td>
<td><strong>.30 (.08 – .52)</strong>*</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>.16 (-.10 – .42)</td>
<td>.11 (-.15 – .37)</td>
<td>.17 (-.10 – .44)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent d</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Arc’s Self-Determination Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Group</td>
<td>.00 (.00 – .00)</td>
<td>-.06 (-.21 – .10)</td>
<td><strong>.24 (.06 – .42)</strong>*</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>-.01 (-.27 – .25)</td>
<td>-.06 (-.32 – .21)</td>
<td>.03 (-.26 – .33)</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent d</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Least Square Means for Disability*Treatment Groups for Academic and Transition GAS Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic GAS Scores</th>
<th>Transition GAS Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability - Control</td>
<td>44.78</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability – Treatment</td>
<td>50.51*</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability - Control</td>
<td>48.07</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability – Treatment</td>
<td>48.30</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## KEY FINDINGS: ACCESS

### Estimates for Access Score Intercept and Slopes for the Disability and Treatment Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Access Score at the Beginning of the Year (SE)</th>
<th>Access Score at the End of the Year (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>2.2 (.44)</td>
<td>3.3 (.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>3.3 (.24)*</td>
<td>3.4 (.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>2.5 (.51)</td>
<td>4.6 (.52) †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>3.6 (.35)*</td>
<td>5.1 (.37)* †</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Promoting Self-Determination
PROMOTING SELF-DETERMINATION

- Instruction on component elements of self-determination;
- Self-determination curricula and assessment materials;
- Student-directed planning materials
Component elements of self-determined behavior are found in virtually all state, provincial, and local standards across multiple content areas.

Students who are self-determined are more likely to be able to successfully engage with the curriculum:

- Learning-to-learn or self-regulation strategies.
- Goal oriented, problem-solving focused.
- Study skills, organizational skills.
COMPONENT ELEMENTS OF SELF-DETERMINED BEHAVIOR

- Choice-making
- Decision-making
- Problem-solving
- Goal setting and attainment
- Self-advocacy
- Self-observation, evaluation and reinforcement
- Internal locus of control
- Positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy
- Self-awareness
- Self-knowledge
Research syntheses provide evidence that efforts to promote component elements of self-determined behavior (choice making, problem solving, decision making, goal setting and attainment, and self-advocacy skills) are effective with students with disabilities and result in enhanced self-determination.

There is a strong evidence-base for the use of self-directed learning strategies, including self-instruction, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, promote self-determination, enhance inclusion, and contribute to greater student involvement.
Data exists to support the efficacy of several self-determination-focused intervention models/programs, including:

- Steps to Self-Determination (Hoffman & Field, 1995)
- TAKE CHARGE for the Future (Powers et al., 2001)
- Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000)
- Self-Advocacy Strategy (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002)

Data exists to support the efficacy of several student-involvement related interventions/programs:

- Next S.T.E.P. (Halpern, et al., 1997)
- Self-Directed IEP (Martin, Huber Marshall, Maxon, & Jerman, 1997)
- Self-Advocacy Strategy (Van Reusen et al., 2002)
- Whose Future is it Anyway? (Wehmeyer et al., 2005)
A BRIDGE TO
A BRIGHT FUTURE!