

A Longitudinal Investigation of Self-Determination among Adults with Intellectual Disabilities Enrolled in a Post-Secondary Education Program: Preliminary Findings

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Student thoughts on:

Autonomy

"To be independent, here and at home too." – Courtney

Self-Realization

"Knowing what you want to do when you leave college and whether you can do that or not." – Connor

Psychological Empowerment

"We have to think about what we want to do with ourselves, our college careers...it's a big step." – Felicia

"Problem solving, encouragement, solving problems without no drama." – Quinton

"...you're sad, angry, stressed out...you need to be able to solve it. You can't get sad and bitter." – Rodger

Self-Regulation

"I want to, like, I want to see my goals in my head and break it down how I'm going to achieve that goal or this goal, and I think Temple could help me improve on [setting] goals." – Connor

"If you achieve [one of your goals] you're on your way there!" - Felicia

INTRODUCTION

Wehmeyer (1996) defines "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. 632). Self-determination predicts positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities with high levels of self-determination have increased academic achievement (Erickson & Noonan, 2015). Similar effects were found for students with ADHD and learning disabilities (Konrad et al, 2007). In addition to academics, self-determination increases quality of life for individuals with disabilities (Mcdougall, 2009; Powers et al, 2012). Self-determination predicts employment and community involvement for adults with disabilities (Powers et. al, 2012; Shogren, 2015). Given the many benefits of self-determination it is essential to promote the skill within educational settings. Of particular importance is the promotion of self-determination in institutions of higher education.

METHODS

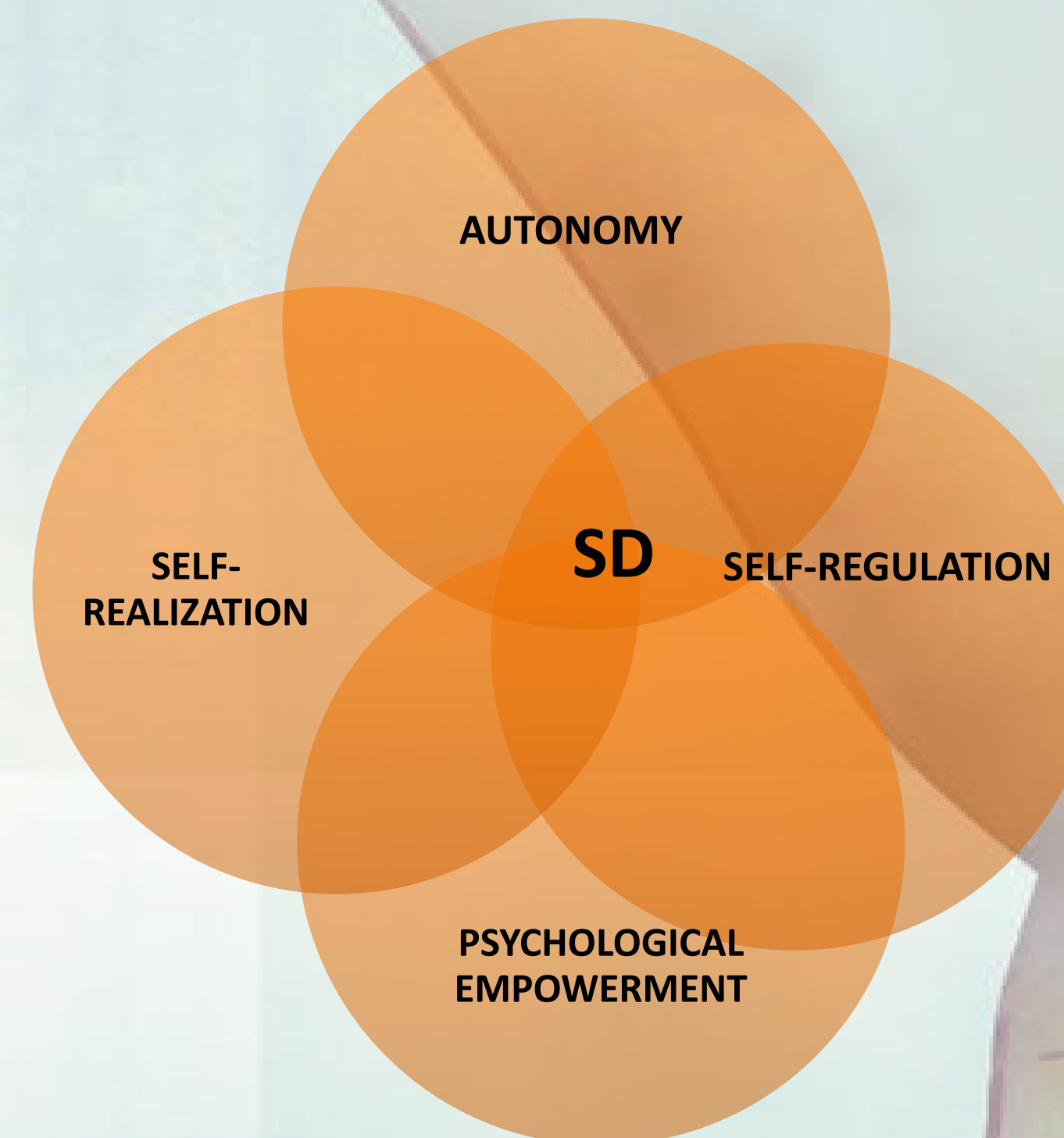
The Academy for Adult Learning (AAL) is offered by Temple University's Institute on Disabilities. Adults with intellectual disabilities are enrolled in academic courses as well as a seminar, which promotes skills necessary to achieve in the post-secondary environment. The weekly seminar focuses on career development and self-awareness, as well as fundamental computer and Internet proficiency.

The current mixed-method, longitudinal study follows students enrolled in the AAL through their two-year experience at Temple University. Utilizing both observations and the ARC self-determination scale, developed and normed by Wehmeyer and Kelchner (1995) the study seeks to determine the ways in which self-determination is promoted within the program. The study has concluded its first year and is now entering its second year.

The object of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a university-based postsecondary program for adults with intellectual disabilities in developing self-determination, specifically autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization.

ARC SELF-DETERMINATION SCALE

The ARC Self-Determination Scale consists of the four component parts of self-determination as defined by Wehmeyer (1996), and several sub-categories within those components. The four component parts are:



PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The next two tables present results for sections of the ARC Self-Determination Scale for 11 AAL students as a group, then self-determination for each student individually. Percentiles in both tables are calculated based on Wehmeyer and Kelchner's (1995) normed samples. Readers will notice that students as a group are strong in some categories (**Self-Realization**), but have room for growth in others (**Psychological Empowerment**). Individual students' normed self-determination percentiles vary greatly. Further testing and observation will determine whether self-determination is supported or stymied throughout students' time in the AAL program.

ARC SCALE – CLASS RESULTS

Category-sub-category	Mean – Year 1	Mean – Year 2
Auto – Independence – Self Care	63.45	60.91
Auto – Independence – Community	61.27	64.10
Auto – Choice – Leisure	65.0	63.90
Auto – Choice – Community	45.73	42.64
Auto – Choice – Post School	53.54	66.45
Auto – Choice - Personal	46.27	57.82
Autonomy	51.18	56.63
Self-Reg – Problem Solving	62.82	83.18
Self-Reg – Goal Setting	45.27	66.09
Self-Regulation	54.45	77.81
Psychological Empowerment	48.00	75.36
Self-Realization	48.00	75.36
Self-Determination	47.27	66.91

Table 1 – Percentile means from all subcategories and four component parts. n=11 for each category.

ARC SCALE – INDIVIDUAL RESULTS

Student	ARC SD% Year 1	ARC SD% Year 2	Student	ARC SD% Year 1	ARC SD% Year 2
Rodger	21	16	Latoya	39	42
Drew	22	91	Katrina	40	69
Alexander	26	75	Grace	44	53
Felicia	69	85	Quinton	90	91
Shanice	37	37	Connor	65	77
Courtney	67	60			

Table 2– Self-determination percentile for individual students in the AAL program. Names have been changed.

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November 16, 2015 AUCD Poster Symposium:
Self-Determination and Advocacy Leadership