Self-Determination Skills:  
Teaching Elementary Children to Help Themselves

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Concepts and Lessons Learned  
AGENDA

• What is Self-Determination?
• What Does the Research Say About Self-Determination and Post-School Outcomes?
• Is Self-Determination an Elementary or Secondary Concept?
• The SD Concept of Self-Talk
• Instruction and Materials
• Summary of Lessons Learned
**Definitions**

- “a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations, together with a belief of oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society” (p. 2). (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998)
- Volitional control-acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life; making choices and decisions (Wehmeyer, 2007)

**Casual Agency Theory**

- Causal Agency Theory: (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Forber-Pratt, Little, & Lopez, 2015)
  - (a) volitional (autonomy, choice making, decision making, and self-initiation),
  - (b) agentic (self-regulated, self-directed pathways, thinking in terms of goal and problems),
  - (c) action-control beliefs (psychological empowerment, self-awareness, and self-knowledge)
- depends on having the opportunity to practice skills
- repeated experiences of causal agency result in enhanced self-determination (Shogren, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 2017).
**Increased Self-Determination Equals**

- Increased High School Graduation (Powers et al., 2012)
- Higher postsecondary education & employment (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003)
- Access to general education (Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012)
- Increased quality of life (Powers et al. (2012))

**What Does the Research Say?**

- Secondary Level:
  - Studies found on promoting self-determination skills
  - effects of self-determination skills
  - student success relating to self-determination acquisition

- Elementary Level:
  - educators place importance on self-determination
  - do not provide time to teach (Carter et al., 2015; Stang et al., 2009)
Broad Concepts:
Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2011)

Survey of 407 elementary teachers

• Understood Self-determination concepts
• Believed other skills (academic) were more important
• Not enough time

Evidence Based for Self-Determination at the Elementary Level

Goal Attainment (Lee et al., 2006)
Choice-Marking (Shogren & Turnbull, 2006)
Family Involvement (Shogren & Turnbull, 2006)
Problem-Solving (Palmer, 2010)
Self-Awareness (Campbell-Whatley, 2008)
Self-Advocacy (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2000)
Engagement (Rowe et al., 2014)
IEP Participation (Danneker & Bottage, 2009)
Does Self-Determination = Indicator-13

- Indicator 13 Checklist Item #6: Teaching students to achieve their goals may be an annual IEP goal that supports a student’s postsecondary goals

Does Self-Determination = Indicator-14?

“One year after graduating from high school, students with disabilities who have self determination skills are more likely to have a job and/or be attending post-secondary education or training.”

“Three years after graduating from high school, students with disabilities with self-determination skills are more likely to have a job with benefits, a chance for promotion, and living someplace else besides with their parents.”

Michael Wehmeyer, 2009
What is “Self-Talk”

- When your brain tells your tongue to stay quiet?
- When your brain tells your tongue to give that person a piece of your mind.
- Successful adults have the skill of positive self-talk and self-regulatory self-talk.
- Some children have it and most must be taught.
- On a bad day, what does a child’s brain tell them?

Positive Self-Talk: “This is hard. Don’t quit. You can do this”.

Self-Talk in Adults

Fortune 500 companies have focused on the Emotional Intelligence (EI) more than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) for years. It is the ability of the person to motivate themselves, manage their moods, anxiety, and disappointment that are key to being a successful adult. (H. Weisinger, 2012).

Before our actions, come our thoughts so let’s help teach thoughts that are more likely to result in actions that lead to student success.

Self-Talk Lesson

Data Collection Without Instruction
· Before you begin teaching the Positive Self-Talk Lesson, take one day to take baseline data. Do this on the Tuesday before you begin the series of lessons.
· Use the “SELF-TALK FREQUENCY CHART” to collect the data.
· Collect data on the number of negative comments made by students, the number of times students go to the restroom or nurses station.
  o Record only one comment per student per period.
  o Record only one trip to the nurse’s station per period per student. Record the trip to the restroom/nurse is regardless of reason: necessity or as an escape mechanism.
  o On the day you collect the baseline data, write “Baseline Data” at the top of the form.
Collecting the Baseline Data

Tips for the Teacher:

1. First fill in the name of the subject for each class period. Then Xerox copies so you do not have to write the name of the subjects again.
2. Make “hash marks” during each class period under the corresponding columns. For example: if the student said “I can’t do this”, make the “hash mark” under # of Negative Statements column.
3. If a student makes multiple negative statements during one class period, only put one “hash mark” per student, per period. However, if the same student who said, “I can’t do this”, during reading, also asked to go to the restroom during reading, make a “hash mark” in both columns.
4. When time permits, please try to write examples of negative statements in the box below.

What is the problem created by the negative self-talk?
Describe the problem?

Setting the Stage: Baseline Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Period</th>
<th># of Negative Statements</th>
<th>Trips to the Restroom</th>
<th>Trips to the Nurse</th>
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<td>TOTAL (Record the # of hash marks)</td>
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What do the children know?

- Use Differentiated Instruction to organize students for group work (2 or 3 per team)
- Question: What is self-talk?
  ➢ Group report to the class
- Question: What is positive self-talk?
  ➢ Group report to the class
- Question: What is negative self-talk?
  ➢ Group report to the class

Bringing Self-Talk to Life

- Describe a time recently when you used positive self-talk to help yourself (Teacher)
- Describe a time when you used positive self-talk as a child.
  (Teacher)
- Think-Pair-Share: Have the children describe a time when they used positive self talk to help themselves.
- Homework: Come tomorrow prepared to share a positive self-talk experience that either you had, a friend, or family member had. What did the person say and how did it help?
- To build SD skills, “it may be more important to include families… at younger levels then with secondary children” (pg. 311). (Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, & Mitchell, 2015)
Next Lesson

• Spread the story telling throughout the day to keep positive self-talk at the forefront of everyone’s mind.
• Tell the students that in a few days they will learn more about self-talk.
• Homework: Have each child interview someone else for positive self-talk stories and how it helped the person.

Self-Talk and Successful People

• Ask students to think of examples of negative self-talk.
• Guide the discussion in order to help students understand how the negative thoughts in our brains hurt our performance.
• On a different day, conduct an exercise to describe successful adults (characteristics)
• Then describe successful children.
• What characteristics do they have in common?
Collecting Data

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**COLLECT DATA EVERY DAY AND WATCH THE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK AND BEHAVIORS DECREASE!**

**TOTAL (Record the # of hash marks)**

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**Mini-Lessons on Self-Talk Skills**

**"DETECTORING RE"**

Train Your Brain in Positive Self-Talk

**Steps:**
1. Read the list of self-talk below.
2. Think of a situation that makes you feel a certain way.
3. Write a positive self-talk statement to replace the negative self-talk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Self-Talk</th>
<th>Positive Self-Talk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I never feel this way!&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can handle this assignment. I'll feel better after I finish.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I don't know how to do this problem. I can't do it.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can do this problem. I'll figure it out.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm not very smart.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can learn and improve.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Why should I even bother to try? It's not important.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I'll do my best.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm too tired to do it.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I can take a break, but I'll come back to it later.&quot;</td>
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Make up your own example.
Students with Intellectual Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject or Activity Description</th>
<th>YES - Proactive Self-Talk</th>
<th>NO - Negative Self-Talk</th>
<th>Solutions?</th>
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What did I learn about myself?

How Can I help myself?

Self-Determination: Self-Talk Lessons

- "Why are we only doing this in 3rd grade through 5th grade? This needs to start earlier!"
- "We gave each of our table groups the Self-Talk sheets to collect data. This was effective because the students held themselves accountable."
- "My class recently took a book test and everybody passed the test. This was a first. The students had confidence in themselves. We moved the conversation from the "we can't do it, to the we tried'. The students took the self-talk to heart. Not one child failed."
- "It is making a difference in other areas too, like reading and the confidence to try. It's amazing."
Presenters

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