

A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION  
OF SELF ADVOCACY FROM FOUR EDUCATORS OF STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES

by

Heather Michele Burton Heap

A Dissertation Presented in Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the EDUC 990 Course

Liberty University

April, 2013

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

April, 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF ADVOCACY FROM FOUR EDUCATORS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES under the direction of Dr. Barbara Jordan-White, School of Education, Liberty University, April, 2013.

This qualitative study identified four educators' perceptions and their implementation of teaching advocacy to students with disabilities within a public secondary educational setting. Federal mandates, such as Public Law 94-142, requested educators including administrators, counselors, special educators, and general educators to help facilitate self advocacy skills in the public educational setting. Using observations, comprehensive interviews, and available documentation, this collective case study identified four educators' experiences (an administrator, a counselor, a special educator, and a general educator) in developing student self advocacy as it pertains to the educators' perceived role in working with students with disabilities. This study identified their perceptions of effective student self advocacy while describing their own actions and behaviors that promoted the skill. Prior research defined the framework, terminology, strategies, and usefulness from educator perceptions about the implementation of self advocacy. Still, there was insufficient research on how educators in different roles define, perceive, and facilitate self advocacy practices within a public secondary setting. This research addressed four specific participants' time preparation, implementation, and reflection as it pertained to teaching self advocacy. Data analysis included open and axial coding, natural generalizations, and data reduction to identify emerging themes, patterns, and relationships relevant to the perceptions of self advocacy from these participants.

Descriptors: Self advocacy, self determination, and secondary educator

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the following:

To my grandparents, Robert & Juanita Burton and Edgar and Anne Jimerson, I dedicate my work to you because of your sacrifices for my success and incredible testimonies of your love. I honor you and your teachings of unconditional love.

To my husband, Kevin Heap, I dedicate my work to you for your unrelenting support, love, and patience. Where we invest our love, we invest our life. Thank you for the opportunity to grow and share with you through these last twelve years together.

To my son and daughter, Cassidy and Kaia, who inspire me every day to be a better a mother, friend, and educator. Your positivity ignites infinite solutions and growth around your love and intentions.

To my parents, Randy and Janet Burton for keeping me grounded. I thank you for instilling the importance of education and fostering my self confidence.

Thank you to all of my friends and family who supported me through this season in my life. I am honored to call you my friend.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to my committee chair, Thank you to Dr. Jordan-White, for continually challenging me to develop my writing skills. Thank you to Dr. Grasty and Dr. Husby for serving on my committee and providing direction and encouragement. Your collaboration on this project was invaluable.

I would also like to thank my mentors Cindy Mendonca and Dr. Jim Markham.

To my immediate family and close friends: Thank you for going the extra mile to enable me time for focusing on this study and reminding me of the possibilities. Without you, this would not have been possible.

To my students, thank you for believing in me. We can create a more progressive and productive community together.

Thank you Jana Austin, Dawn Heap, and Stuart Heap for helping me to realize my full potential.

To my editor, Erline Voyard Jackson

Thanks for your guidance, mentoring, and support during the final stages of this arduous process.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vi
List of Tables.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Situation to Self.....	6
Problem Statement.....	8
Purpose Statement.....	9
Research Questions.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	11
Delimitations and Limitations of the study.....	16
Research Plan.....	18
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	24
Introduction.....	24
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Review of the Literature.....	32
Summary.....	54
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	56
Introduction.....	56
Research Design.....	56
Researcher's Role.....	59
Participants.....	60
Setting.....	62

Data Collection Procedures.....	62
Data Analysis Procedures .....	70
Trustworthiness.....	73
Ethical Issues .....	75
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES OF DATA.....	76
Summary of Methodology Used.....	76
Findings.....	78
Patterns.....	110
Themes.....	112
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, & FURTHER RESEARCH.....	121
Conclusions.....	121
Research Question Number 1.....	121
Research Question Number 2.....	124
Research Question Number 3.....	130
Research Question Number 4.....	134
Implications.....	137
Recommendations.....	139
REFERENCES .....	146
APPENDICES .....	160



## List of Tables

Table 1 Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions	67
Table 2 Connection between Research Questions and Interview Questions	69
Table 3: Total Observed Behaviors for each Defined Behavior	78
Table 4: Sub Categories of Total of Behaviors	80
Table 5: Total Recorded Behaviors for Each Participant	81
Table 6: Categories of Prompts towards Teach Advocacy	82
Table 7: A Summary of Educators' Strategies Used to Instruct Self Advocacy	85
Table 8: Comparison of Quantity of Significant Statements to Behaviors	111
Table 9: A Summary of Educators' Patterns about Self Advocacy	112
Table 10: Themes Emerged from Perceptions of These Educators	115
Table 11: Total Significant statements, Quotations, & Recorded behaviors	120

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

In order for an individual to fulfill needs and obtain desires, he requires the ability and willingness to express those desires effectively. Successful people recognize their weaknesses, identify their needs and desires, set plans to achieve goals, and advocate for their rights to meet these ends. Through these practices, the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered advocacy group (SABE) described self determination as expressing individual rights and responsibilities. This group seeks to empower all people with disabilities so that they make their own life style choices about occupations, relationships, and goals to obtain a desirable level of independence (Self Advocates Becoming Empowered, 2011). By comprehending and actively communicating one's rights through the use of available resources, effective self advocacy opens doors to greater success.

As adolescents enter secondary settings, they begin to identify the opportunity cost (the worth of the next best alternative) for their choices. According to Fiedler and Danneker (2007), teachers within classroom settings reported that along with the typical academic and social pressures of students in a secondary setting, students with disabilities often lacked the knowledge or direction needed when identifying resources to meet their needs. Likewise, Schelling (2010) reported that teachers also indicated that, while more pressure was placed on academic achievement and assessments, there was less time to develop functional skills such as self advocacy.

Self advocacy does not have a concrete definition agreed upon by scholars in the field. Advocacy groups coined the phrase, self advocacy, in reference to a civil rights

movement that helped people with developmental disabilities (Wrightslaw.com, 2011). According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), the self advocacy movement began in Sweden in the 1960s (AAIDD, 2012). The members of this movement empowered people with disabilities to speak out for themselves and others (AAIDD, 2012). Other researchers used the term to describe a skill (Pennell, 2001). Educationally, Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Wood (2005) defined the content and methodology of self advocacy through obtaining the following: knowledge of one's self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. Schreiner (2007) later embraced both definitions by expressing self advocacy as "the ability to speak up for what we want and need" (p. 300). Students lacking self advocacy skills continue to fall short of goals and standards expected within a traditional secondary setting.

Adding to the barriers and challenges already in existence, students with disabilities often lacked the advocacy skills to make decisions about their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) (Agran, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000). IEPs are legally binding documents designed to meet the individualized educational needs of each student with a disability. In 2006, the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center confirmed more than six million students with disabilities (nine percent of the total school population) received services in federal special education programs (Swanson, 2008). Many of these students receiving services had an average to above average cognitive ability. Thus, they strived towards a general education diploma. Swanson concluded that 56% of students with disabilities graduated with a regular education diploma as compared to 73% of the total population meeting the same requirements (Swanson, 2008).

Teaching students how to identify their needs, take responsibility for meeting those needs, and advocate for themselves may lessen this gap. Schreiner (2007) explained that advocating required recognition of one's limitations, wants, and needs. After this recognition, one must set goals and act toward obtaining the resources to meet those goals. Schreiner also described effective self advocacy as skills that should occur in authentic settings, not just in a practiced model (Schreiner, 2007). Being able to generalize self advocacy practices into practical life experience was essential.

Over the last twelve years, research indicated that students with disabilities struggled to achieve independent life skills. Promoting methods that teach independent life skills such as self determination and advocacy should be developed, evaluated, and shared with educators (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2007). More recently, research indicated students with disabilities experienced less post-school opportunities as compared to students not identified with disabilities (Cantley, 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2005). Many students with disabilities transitioning from secondary settings did not obtain competitive employment and did not access resources and activities within the community (Wagner, Marder, Blackorby, Cameto, Newman, Levine, & Davies, 2003). Wagner reported that students with disabilities struggled to live independently for an average of four years after leaving secondary educational settings (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). Because these individuals with disabilities did not possess the required independent living skills, the burden of care fell upon parents and caregivers (Cantley, 2011).

Through the lenses of the social learning theory and the self determination theory, researchers investigated the motivations and relationships that led individuals to

understand their rights and responsibilities, set appropriate goals, and actively seek resources to meet their goals and needs. Myles Horton, an educator and established minority activist during the civil rights movement, declared that educators should provide “experiences that stimulate their motivation—motivation is from within” (Graves & Horton, 1979). Likewise, the social learning and the self determination theory suggested self advocacy included examining authentic settings in order to understand social cues to obtain goals. Wehmeyer and Field (2007) suggested implementing self advocacy strategies so that individuals act “as the primary causal agent in one’s life and [make] choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p. 305). Moreover, they indicated that students who actively voiced their needs and utilized resources available to them had access to more opportunities and were more likely to have an independent, productive life.

Within existing educational literature, researchers defined and demonstrated specific components of student self advocacy, such as goal-setting and decision making through empirical quantitative studies (Bender, 2012; Fogg, & Harrington, 2009). In addition, qualitative researchers suggested models of instruction for self advocacy including direct instruction and portfolio development (Krebs, 2002; Beaulieu, 2012). These two components provided clear guidance as to how to support self advocacy particularly when paired with additional support. Research suggested that using structured self advocacy strategies with students with disabilities helped them function more independently by recognizing their areas of weakness and accessing resources to meet goals (Swanson, 2008).

Throughout history, court cases across the country established priority in creating legislative protections that helped students voice their needs and access their resources (Itkonen, 2007). Legislative protections, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-676) encouraged educators to promote practices of self advocacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Using parent and student input, secondary educators in different educational roles have made concerted effort to engage students in making transitional and educational goals and decisions (Van-Belle, Marks, & Martin, 2006). Unfortunately though, parents and students continue to report little satisfaction in self advocacy awareness (Caroff, 2007; Locke & Layton, 2001).

Despite the fact that administrators, teachers, and counselors influenced student responsibility, there was little research that suggested how educators in different roles perceived and facilitated self advocacy practices within a public secondary setting. It was certain, though, that for students with disabilities to understand their responsibilities, academic requirements, and occasionally IEP goals, administrators, teachers and counselors may not be necessary or known to parents or students. When examining a phenomenon in a case study, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) noted that research which reflected an in-depth study of one or more occurrences of the phenomenon in its real life context also reflected the participants' experiences and perceptions. A review of the literature revealed little evidence of one of more instances of self advocacy development in real life context, such as a secondary education setting, that reflected educators' experiences and perceptions guiding development of self advocacy strategies.

Therefore this case study gathered data from observations, face to face interviews, and available documentation of four participants to explore both perceptions and

implementation of self advocacy for students with disabilities. Researcher observations provided data to describe educators' perceptions and provided evidence of actual behaviors that promoted self advocacy. Educators' responses to questions provided ample data to describe the experiences and expectations educators in this study have toward self advocacy. Documentation, including lesson plans, curriculum, and reflective journals, was reviewed and analyzed to identify themes and patterns within the educators' perceptions and practices. Thus, this research case study explored the perceptions of self advocacy held by four educators at the same secondary school, expectations of student self advocacy, and actions related to the development of student self advocacy. These educators were employed in different roles within the school. Data collection focused on the participants' preparation for, implementation of, and reflection on self advocacy instruction. Data were collected from in-depth interviews, observations, and available documentation.

### **Situation to Self**

The motivation behind this collective case study was to determine what value four secondary educators acting in four different roles within the same school placed toward facilitating student self advocacy. Selection of a general educator and a special educator was designed to purposefully generate data on two different perspectives on the teaching and implementation of self advocacy. Selection of an administrator and a counselor was incorporated into the study to provide data regarding the school's expectations and how educators outside of the classroom facilitated self advocacy behaviors. In order to provide an accurate representation of the perceptions of these educators, observational

notes were examined for examples of defined behaviors that promoted self advocacy to students with disabilities.

Ontology was addressed in this study as the philosophical assumption. In elucidating Ontology, the research explored human relationships, perceptions, and opinions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, quotes and behaviors from educators helped create an analysis of themes that provided evidence of perceptions and opinions associated with facilitating self advocacy within secondary public education.

The unit of analysis within this collective case study involved four educators within one secondary educational setting. This decision was made for three reasons. First, parents and students were excluded from the study because they were less likely to provide the educators' views about teaching self advocacy. Second, while parents, students, and other supportive resources that were not employed by the school system were still involved in the educational process of students with disabilities, these members did not determine instructional delivery models or strategies. Also, because this study focused on public educators, the participant selection necessitated participation of not only teachers, but educators acting in different roles of participation of implementation of self advocacy.

Since I worked at the same setting as the participants, the site was chosen for convenience. It did, however, represent a large suburban public secondary school. There was no known data collected about the perception of self advocacy at this setting. My role in this study was to collect data, analyze outcomes, and provide conclusions to the study. I had no financial professional advantages over the participants. Although the participants varied in years and types of experience, I had a professional working



relationship with each participant for at least five years. Only one participant, the administrator, held supervisory responsibilities over the other participants and me. Observations occurred often in the classroom and school settings and participants' identities were protected.

### **Problem Statement**

In addition to typical academic requirements and social pressures of secondary settings, students identified with special needs are expected to participate in the development of individualized educational plans (IEPs). At the age of 14, students identified with disabilities may attend meetings and participate in decisions about their education and transition. Other members of IEP meetings may include, but are not limited to parents, administrators, counselors, transition specialists, general educators and special educators. When students reach the age of 18, the rights previously owned by parents transfer to the student. Despite legislative and academic protections, students who did not engage in their educational plan often missed opportunities for development of self advocacy knowledge and skills along with opportunity for employment and independent living.

Legislative protections such as the revisions to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2001) and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2004) replaced the Education of the Handicapped Act (P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457) (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). IDEA acknowledged the importance of student engagement in the IEP process as an attempt to close the achievement gap between students not receiving special education services and those that do receive services (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007). Components of these legislative acts addressed the importance of assisting students in

becoming more independent and capable of self advocating towards an independent life. “Self advocacy is having the opportunity to know [your] rights and responsibilities, to stand up for them, and to make choices about [your] own life” (Pennell, 2001, p.223).

Hence, the problem of this study was that while many students with disabilities continued to lack the knowledge and understanding to self advocate for resources and act with responsibility and ownership, there was little research of educators’ perception of teaching self advocacy in the secondary educational setting. Moreover, there was little evidence of educator feedback about their roles in teaching self advocacy or how educators perceived their role in self advocacy. Although advocacy was regarded as an important skill, there was little documented educator feedback about the skill used with students receiving special education services who were working towards a regular education diploma. Hence, to understand how to better develop student skill, an understanding of educator perspectives was necessary.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this collective case study was to identify the perception of four educators (an administrator, a counselor, a general educator, and a special educator) within a public secondary educational setting on teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities and strategies taught. These participants were a representation of the unit of analysis of educators that worked with students with disabilities. Via data collected from the observations and interviews from this representation, themes and patterns were identified to explain these educators’ perceptions about their experiences and expectations in instructing self advocacy to students with disabilities and how those expectations affected their behaviors in supporting self advocacy. Likewise, this research

also provided in-depth descriptions of self advocacy practices within the same school from different educators who worked with students with disabilities.

For purposes of this study, student self advocacy was defined as students who (a) “demonstrated understanding of their disability, (b) were aware of their legal rights, and,(c) demonstrated competence in communicating rights and needs to those in positions of authority” (Skinner, 1998, p. 279). Students demonstrated an understanding through their decisions and actions. By following rules and procedures, students demonstrated their awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Finally, students had to accurately identify the appropriate resources and communicate appropriately. Schreiner (2007) summarized self advocacy as “accurately and realistically understanding oneself and acting appropriately according to that awareness” (p. 300). Data collected from both observations and interviews illuminated instances when participants helped students better understand themselves in strengths and weakness and when educators helped students becomes self aware and act appropriately.

Self advocacy influences one’s ability to preserve an independent standard of living. It impacts one’s achievements within the school and the community. Particularly for students with disabilities, communicating rights and requesting appropriate accommodations have been areas of weakness (Swanson, 2008). As reported by the data from the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2), students with disabilities were regarded as capable of deciding their own futures. This study also suggested that this population was being encouraged to identify and advocate for their needs and wants (Wagner, et al., 2005). To further the Wagner’s study of the topic of student self advocacy, this collective case study examined specific educators’ experiences

and behaviors expressed regarding self advocacy for students with disabilities.

### **Research Questions**

The following four research questions were used in the investigation:

1. What do educators perceive students do in order to self advocate?
2. What are educators' experiences in developing student self advocacy?
3. What roles do educators perceive they have in developing self advocacy of students with disabilities?
4. What actions and behaviors do educators demonstrate to encourage self advocacy amongst students with disabilities?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study bridged the literature gap by examining educators' perceptions of self advocacy and how their perceptions affected their practices and behaviors related to teaching self advocacy to students receiving special education services within a secondary educational setting. Through prior quantitative studies, research identified specific components of effective self advocacy practices (Kosko, & Wilkins, 2009; Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010). Selected qualitative research had provided some teacher insight about the instruction, delivery model, and implementation of self advocacy (Test, et al., 2005). Still, little research suggested how public educators

from different educational roles perceived and addressed self advocacy implementation with students with disabilities.

An in-depth analysis of a collective case study was utilized in order to shed light on the phenomenon of teaching self advocacy in a public educational setting. To illustrate the distinctions between the different roles educators play, the experiences of each participant were compared to the other participants' experiences. To determine if their actions reflected their perceptions, the observational data were compared to interview data, and available lesson plans and curriculum materials.

The transformative approach of qualitative research helped explore the significance of the study. Mertens (2005) required “transformative scholars to assume that knowledge is not neutral, but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help improve society” (p.4). Through the transformative approach, educators who work with students with disabilities can compare their own experiences to the outcomes of this research.

Therefore, one of my responsibilities as the researcher was to carefully describe each experience accurately while systematically looking for patterns that suggested improvements for the educational system. Because this study incorporated observations, interviews, and available documentation, both relational patterns and causal patterns were searched to portray accurately the perception and actual implementation of each participant (Gall, et al., 2010). Consequently, the evidence provided from the interviews, observations, and available documentation created a macroscopic viewpoint of four educators' perspectives and practices for teaching self advocacy. The collected data and

analysis addressed these educators' perceptions and their represented practices in instructing self advocacy including time preparation, implementation, and reflection as to the value of teaching self advocacy. By identifying perceptions from different educational roles and their practiced implementation, this qualitative research explored the value these participants placed on self advocacy instruction and how their perceptions affected strategies they employed to help students with disabilities voice and aid their needs.

This study included four comprehensive interviews, analysis of available documentation, and observations of the four selected secondary educators. In order to collect ample data of defined behaviors, the general educator and special educator were observed during four different 55 minute blocks. For the purposes of this study, Schreiner's (2007) definition of self advocacy was employed. Behaviors were documented (1) when the participants helped students better understand themselves in strengths and weakness and (2) when they helped students act appropriately according the advocacy awareness. Selection of four different 55 minute blocks of observation for the teachers was determined as proportional to the amount of instructional time teachers spend with students with disabilities in given day. Because the administrator and counselor did not provide direct instruction about self advocacy, these participants were observed for one school day, with data collected for the same defined behaviors.

The participants were selected based upon holding "Georgia Clear and Renewable" teaching certificates as required by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC, 2012). As such, the selected educators had met the state requirements and any specific content requirements for professional licensure in their

respected field. The Clear and Renewable certificates issued were valid for a five year period. Certificates were issued after completing a higher institution's approved teacher preparation program or through reciprocity of a credential held from another state, in addition to passing certification exams (GAPSC, 2012).

All participants of the study were selected because they were educators who worked with students with disabilities who were working towards a regular education diploma. A regular education diploma required 23 units, including four units of language arts, mathematics, and science and three units of social studies and languages and/or fine arts and/or technical units as required by the state of Georgia. Health and physical education requirements and four other electives had to be obtained. In addition, students had to meet standardized testing requirements at the state and district levels.

The location selected represented a suburban secondary school in Northeast Georgia. The secondary school was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and did not meet the requirements for consideration as a Title One school. In 2011, this secondary school graduated over 700 students achieving at least minimal requirements to continue their education at a higher learning institution. Less than 10 % of these students received special education services.

Each selected participant provided specific input regarding students with disabilities as to their present levels of performance, their goals, and the strategies that helped students progress toward mastering their goals. Likewise, each participant's role in students' lives helped create a path for obtaining the regular education diploma. Themes garnered from this research may yield directions for future research. Although this case study cannot be generalized, educational leaders could use the collected data to

shape educational legislation and policy in advocacy for students with disabilities and provide direction for curricula provided to teachers, counselors, and administrators to promote self advocacy.

Through the interviews, observations, and available documentation, the intent of this research was to examine how knowledge, beliefs, obstacles, rewards, and ecological factors influenced educators' practices with regard to promoting self advocacy for students with disabilities. Although participants identified specific categories of eligibilities that students have within their school, they did not provide the identities or identifying details about individual students. The participants discussed how they promoted self advocacy strategies and how their school leaders helped support them. The research questions explored the attitudes, implementation strategies, and reflections of participants promoting student self advocates. This research can provide information about the challenges, obstacles, and/or rewards perceived by educators who work with students with disabilities.

The anticipated benefit of this research was to address issues that educators in Georgia might have when implementing self advocacy instruction effectively in order to meet the needs of a student identified with a disability. In Virginia, school districts were supportive via the Department of Education Training and Technical Assistance Center at James Madison University and its statewide network Transition Advocacy program (Virginia Department of Education Training and Technical Assistance Center, 2012). Through the program, "I'm Determined" project, direct instruction, models, and opportunities to practice skills associated with self determination were provided throughout the student's educational career. This program helped parents, educators, and



students understand specific personal strengths of students and how to get support for areas of need. In the state of Georgia, the Department of Education addressed helping students with disabilities through a program called “Parent to Parent of Georgia.” This program provided parents of children with disabilities access to information and resources that may help them advocate (Parent to Parent of Georgia, 2012). Although this state program did equip parents with available information, it did not provide guidance to school systems regarding planning of instruction for or opportunities to practice self advocacy.

In this collective case study, the school district did not provide self advocacy programs to support the state guidelines. Because this secondary school valued empowering students to understand the resources around them, educators discussed self advocacy and character building within the school’s existing support programs. Therefore, through detailed descriptions from each educator, using analyzed and coded data with supporting examples of perceptions and implementation, this study provided insight regarding instruction of self advocacy toward students with disabilities. Further, the common themes identified could help researchers, educators, policy makers, schools, and community members provide self advocacy tools that help students be more independent. This may aid, specifically, in increasing of post-secondary educational opportunities and reducing unemployment for individuals with disabilities.

### **Limitations of the study**

**Delimitations.** This study involved educators in a secondary setting who educated students with disabilities pursuing a regular education diploma at the same

school. The participants did not include secondary educators working in self-contained units in which students were not pursuing a general education diploma. Participants were considered and selected based upon experience, credentials, ethnicity, background, and role within the school and IEP process. The setting selected was a secondary public school in Northeast Georgia with a student body of approximately 3300 students and approximately 250 certified staff. Eligibilities of students receiving special education services on a general education diploma track at this site included speech/language impairment, specific learning disability, emotional behavioral disorders, other health impairment, and autism spectrum disorder. All participants held Georgia Clear Renewable leadership and/or teaching certificates. The participants all worked within the same public secondary setting, but no participant was identified such that others would know who participated in the study. All participants were over the age of 18. The rationale behind the decisions in this study shaped the scope and focus of data collection and analysis.

**Limitations.** Some specific limitations were identified within this study. First, there was a possibility that the participants experienced additional stress because of participation and observation of the research. Second, behaviors and discussion responses may have been impacted based upon awareness of the study. Because these participants fit the criteria of the study, they had knowledge about students with disabilities and some awareness of self advocacy. To minimize bias, I observed the participants in their natural working environments first and interviewed them after the completion of the observations.

Although there may be no personal benefit for individual participants, members of

the community and educational field can use this research to address self advocacy practices within public secondary settings. By participating in the interviews, the participants may become more reflective about their practices, providing a residual benefit, to the participants and their students.

Due to conditions surrounding the study, protecting the privacy of all participants was a priority. The identities of educators were closely protected and not identified. Data were stored in a locked and password protected file. Furthermore, no identifying information from the participants was discussed across participants or within presentation of data and results.

### **Research Plan**

The qualitative research design selected for this study was a collective case study. This type of design was selected because the research questions required (a) “an in-depth study, (b) one or more instances of the phenomenon of self advocacy in schools, (c) real life context, and (d) the questions reflected the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, et al., 2010, p.447). Further, a case study leads to consideration of the contextual factors that influenced behaviors while developing causal explanations based upon tracing the process by which specific aspects affected other aspects, rather than showing a relationship or correlation as in quantitative research. Other qualitative research methods rely on surveys and a larger sample size would not have provided the in-depth discussion necessary to examine the experiences and actual behaviors of each participant.

Also, this design method drew from the academic disciplines of education, psychology, and law. As stated by Creswell (2007), “a collective case study, otherwise known as multiple case study, involves one issue selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (p. 74). Similarly, using teacher interviews, observations, and available documentation provided for more in-depth of description analysis of participants’ perceptions and implementation of self advocacy. Data were collected through interviews and available documentation including lesson plans, the curriculum, and reflective journals about perceptions on self advocacy. Also, the data were compared to observations of self advocacy instruction and participant behaviors within the school setting. Participant behaviors identified as teaching self advocacy met the following definitions (a) behaviors that helped students better understand their strengths and weaknesses and (b) behaviors that helped students act appropriately according to that awareness. Four educators (an administrator, a counselor and two teachers) that were identified as responsible for educating students with disabilities that were working towards a general education diploma participated in sharing their perceptions in instructing self advocacy.

*Definition of Key Terms.*

*Asperger’s Syndrome* is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction, paired with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. Under Georgia eligibility, students who are diagnosed with this disability, receive special education services. It differs from other autism spectrum disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*. The Georgia Department of Education defined autism as a developmental disability that adversely affects a student's educational performance and significantly affects verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction, and participation (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Students with autism vary widely in their abilities and behavior identified on a spectrum.

*Bi polar disorder* refers to the behavioral condition of manic and depressive behaviors. Some students may be eligible to receive Special Education services for an emotional behavior disorder if the documented condition impedes their education (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Direct instruction* was discussed in the literature as an instructional strategy used by educators in various educational settings to promote self advocacy. Direct instruction was defined as guided discussion giving specific direction about obtaining resources for needs (Krebs, 2002).

*Emotional behavioral disorders (EBD)*. Eligibility in the state of Georgia included the inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and/or teachers not caused by intellectual, sensory or health factors (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP)* was defined as a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in accordance to the law. This plan included the student's performance levels, goals, accommodations, and implementation of a student's educational career (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Inventory of expectations* was discussed in Hammer's study (2004) as a strategy used in daily practice to reinforce self advocacy. Educators reminded students to monitor the expectations about the tasks presented to them.

*Inventory of performance levels* was one component of teaching students how to understand their baseline levels of performance. The literature defined this as "verbalized statements about their strengths and areas for improvement" (Hammer, 2004. p. 299). Students articulating their performance levels can determine their needs.

*Other health impairment* refers to students who display limited strength, vitality or alertness that affects the student's performance and environment negatively. Some examples given included asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficient hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, or heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, Tourette Syndrome, and autism spectrum disorder (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Role modeling* was an instructional strategy used to promote self advocacy in practical settings discussed within the prior research. Role modeling was defined as demonstrating appropriate skills in practical settings using listening skills, appropriate humor, and interdisciplinary teaching to demonstrate the effectiveness of self advocacy (Field & Hoffman, 1996).

*Self Advocacy*. Skinner (1998) defined self advocates as people who (a) "demonstrated understanding of their abilities and disabilities, (b) were aware of their legal rights, and (c) demonstrated competence in communicating rights and needs to those in positions of authority" (p. 279).

*Self advocacy Continuum* refers to the developmental milestones required for people to successfully obtain resources to meet their needs (New Hampshire Council for ASD, 2012).

Some issues addressed during this progression having a realistic and positive self concept, increased capacity for complex relationships, and continual independence.

*Self determination* was discussed in the literature as a component to self advocacy. Self determination was discussed as free choices to promote growth within oneself without external force (Wehmeyer et al., 2010). Students articulate self determination through speaking out to meet their needs.

*Self regulation* was articulated as the process by which people monitor their behaviors in order to progress and meet needs. Students begin to regulate their behaviors at an early age. Skinner concluded this step towards progression of independency and growth was the result of control, direction, and repetition (Skinner, 1953).

*Special Education* was defined in Georgia as additional services and supports provided for students with disabilities in order to accommodate for areas of weaknesses that negatively affect students' educational performance (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Speech/language impairment* eligibility refers to a communication disorder. The Georgia Department of Education provided examples such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language or voice impairment. This impairment must negatively affect a child's educational performance (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

*Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)* refers to an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects the student's educational performance. The

term applies to head injuries resulting in impairments immediate or delayed in one or more areas including cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, perceptual and motor abilities, speech and information processing (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This literature review was based on a collection of academic resources used to address the topic of self advocacy while providing the framework for answering the research questions. Resources included accessible databases of the Liberty University online library and databases from local public libraries. Searched terms included *self advocacy, self determination, special education laws and regulations, special education eligibilities, post-secondary transition, self advocacy instruction and practices, high school graduation requirements, graduation rates, educators' perceptions, and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) participants such as parents, students, administrators, teachers, counselors, and case managers*. Articles were selected based upon how they related to educators teaching self advocacy to students receiving special education services who were working toward state requirements of mastery for a high school diploma. Most articles were written within the last ten years with many written within the last five years.

The literature review was designed to address the research questions of this study. Within the introduction, the evolution of the definition and the significance of self advocacy were addressed. Second, the research examined the theoretical framework of self advocacy and summarized previous literature that discussed the components of self advocacy techniques. Further, because this study addressed educators who worked with students with disabilities that have average cognitive abilities, this literature review provided common eligibilities of students eligible for services who were working toward state requirements for a high school diploma.

Next, the review of literature provided a historical background of legislative protections for students with disabilities. In addition, specific guidelines for transitioning students with disabilities from secondary education and motivating environments that supported self advocacy were addressed. Major themes that emerged in the literature included the need for self advocacy strategies, the impact of transitional barriers, and the importance of educators IEP participation in facilitating self advocacy (Flynn, 2010; Vanbelle, et al., 2006; Van Dycke, Greene, Gardner, Christensen, Woods, & Lovett, 2006).

Bersani (1996) concluded that the definition of self advocacy evolved over the past 150 years to include both group self advocacy and individual self advocacy. Williams and Shoultz (1982) defined group self advocacy as individuals who work together to speak out for a common cause. Although self advocacy awareness increased during the civil rights movement, Hayden (2004) argued more emphasis and training should be placed on advocacy for people with disabilities. Individual self advocacy was defined as speaking up or acting for oneself and deciding what was best in daily decision making (Williams & Shoultz, 1982). People with disabilities embraced both uses of self advocacy to suggest that independent groups of people with disabilities who worked together for justice could help each other take charge of their lives and the resources they need to progress (Dybwad, 1996).

Because of the discrepancies in the definitions of self advocacy, this study used the operational definition positioned in Michael Skinner's research. Skinner (1998) defined self advocates as students who (a) "demonstrate understanding of their disability, (b) are aware of their legal rights, and (c) demonstrate competence in communicating rights and needs to those in positions of authority" (p. 279). In order for students to

understand their disabilities, they must be aware of how their weaknesses affect their progress. In order for students to demonstrate an understanding of their disabilities, they need to accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses and understand how their disabilities impact daily activities. Also, effective student self advocates understand their educational and civic rights and responsibilities, particularly related to safety and opportunity. Moreover, effective self advocates communicate to adults and peers appropriately and then act upon those decisions and plans. Historically, people with disabilities have had assistance from others in making such advocacy decisions (Dybwad, 1996).

Through the educational experience, students' capabilities and willingness to communicate their needs and wants to teachers and staff impacted their success within the school and the community. Specifically for students with disabilities, the purpose of advocacy was to assist them in accessing essential resources while also supporting decision making and planning for their futures (Flynn, 2010). Students who assessed their resources and created future plans made more independent decisions.

In a similar view, Test' et al. (2005) research established a conceptual definition and framework for self advocacy that included "four components: (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of rights, (c) communication, and (d) leadership" (p. 102). Knowledge of self included understanding strengths and weaknesses. In order to assess strengths and weaknesses, students needed to self regulate and inventory their performance levels academically and socially. Second, self advocacy required knowledge of student rights. This component included understanding civic responsibility to the community and educational responsibility to progress toward independence. The last two components

indicated the ability to obtain needed information, specifically via communication and leadership. Communication included appropriate use of voice to describe opinions and concerns to adults and peers. Leadership included taking initiative to access resources and voice concerns (Test, et al., 2005).

Educationally, the development of these components of self advocacy began in elementary and middle school for most students. By the time they began secondary school, students were expected to have reached a higher level of maturation than in middle school. However, some students still lacked the direction and/or knowledge to locate the resources necessary to meet their needs (Milsom, 2007). As such, work of administrators, counselors, and teachers at all educational levels was necessary to help students with disabilities better understand their disabilities and rights in order to promote student independency.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study encompassed two specific psychological theories: the social learning theory and the self determination theory. Through the lenses of these two theories, psychologists with various research interests demonstrated how effective communication assisted people in meeting their needs and wants. B.F. Skinner examined the recognition of capabilities and motivation. Bandura studied how individuals learned new information. Test researched maturation, and Deci and Ryan focused on the development process. The work of these researchers through the lenses of social learning theory and self determination theory established the theoretical framework for the current study.

B.F. Skinner's (1953) studied the importance of recognizing one's weaknesses and achieving one's goals. Explicitly, he suggested that self regulation and self advocacy occurred as a result of control, direction, and repetition (Skinner, 1953). Through this theory, Skinner (1953) suggested self advocacy occurred as a result of desire, ability, and willingness to accomplish a task.

Like B.F. Skinner, Albert Bandura studied how people learned new information and behaviors by watching them. Through social cues, Bandura argued, people gained a greater understanding as to how to advocate for their rights and obtain resources (Snitker-Magin, 2011). Additionally, presented through his social learning theory, Bandura presented the fundamental concepts of the following: observational learning, social cues, rules of information, and self efficacy (Schelling, 2010). Bandura indicated that students used observational learning to understand how to acquire new responses through watching others and modeling. Social cues they used included verbal and nonverbal responses. Verbal cues included a change in vocal tone or a verbal command. Nonverbal cues were indirect, such as facial expressions, dress, proximity, mood, or body gestures. Bandura asserted that through social cues, society reinforced its rules of procedures. This included what was appropriate behavior and acceptable conditions.

Pairing Bandura's concepts with self efficacy has proven to provide for the greatest opportunity for achievement (Schelling, 2010). However, despite the expectations of independence for students leaving secondary education, students with disabilities continued to lack the observational skills necessary to transition into the community independently. Research indicated, like other transitioning skills, students with disabilities needed effective direct instruction and modeling of advocacy with

purposeful opportunities to learn and practice self advocacy skills throughout their entire K-12 schooling and career (Van-belle, et al., 2006).

Utilizing the social learning theory, Schelling (2010) recognized how educators' perceptions impacted the instruction. Educators who worked daily with students with disabilities influenced how students obtained self advocacy skills. Educators influenced students' behaviors through daily modeling socially accepted behaviors. Secondary educators who worked with students with disabilities guided students through the school's rules and procedures both academically and behaviorally. Student use of these skills led to self efficacy and independence (Schelling, 2010). Using the social learning theory provided insight about perceptions, opinions, actual behaviors, and interactions of educators.

Going beyond B.F. Skinner's and Bandura's work, Test, et al., (2005) sought to develop a deeper understanding of what actions nurtured self advocacy strategies. The result of their study was the development of the self determination theory in the 1980s (Test, et al., 2005). This theory described the stages of self determination. In the early stages of self determination, children submitted to structure in order to determine and obtain wants and needs. As children matured, they exhibited specific components of self determination that helped them self advocate successfully and manage life transitions. These components included knowledge of educational expectations and current performance levels, problem solving, and increased assertiveness skills (Test, et al., 2005). During transitional periods, people strengthened each of these components and matured. Interestingly, Test argued that maturation was not instinctive, but it could be facilitated.

Within their research, Test, et al. (2005) discovered within the educational settings, educators aided children in building foundations, provided practice, and supported healthy psychological development with the intent for youth to enjoy more independence. Strategies such as structured discipline and positive reinforcement provided an understanding as to how environmental conditions affected the development of the maturation process (Test, et al., 2005). Teachers reported that when students were provided immediate feedback about academic and behavioral expectations, students displayed more assertiveness toward their goal. Test, et al. (2005) also reported that post-intervention surveys indicated generalization of the skill.

Comparably, Deci and Ryan (2000a.) described self determination as the "primary energizer of the developmental process" (p. 76). These researchers connected the theory of self determination to pragmatic application by identifying how educators can model, instruct, and assist students with self advocacy through integrating the skill within the educational setting. Specifically within this research case study, the social learning and self determination theories connected the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness willingness of obtaining goals. Educators and students alike were self motivated by similar psychological needs. Both required some kind of gratification to motivate them. Deci & Ryan (2000b.) argued that intrinsic motivation brought satisfaction and willingness to continue to self promote. Without this satisfaction, "significant negative consequences will happen towards the individual's vitality, integrity, and health" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.231). Deci and Ryan (2000) further argued that the development of self determination was not prewired. Rather, motivational variables, both positive and negative, provided a framework for understanding how

ecological conditions affected developmental adjustment. Ecological pressures for students included environmental conditions affected by home supports, cultural backgrounds, and peer and social pressures. Data collected through interviews, observations, and available documentation, provided an understanding of how these four educators who worked with students with disabilities perceived teaching self advocacy to this population.

Using the self determination theory provided an understanding of actions that nurtured self advocacy skills as youth developed maturation in practical and transferrable application (Test, et al., 2005). Researchers explored the importance of educators' participation in self determination and advocacy in school settings (Lee, Palmer, & Wehmeyer, 2009; Wehmeyer, Argan, & Hughes, 1998). Following this theory Argan and his team suggested that students who were provided and used self advocacy skills in turn became more productive adults. Self determination programs' influenced higher levels of achievement academically, socially, and vocationally (Argan, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000).

A few contemporary studies focused specifically on self advocacy through the lenses of these same two theories. Educators' perceptions of self advocacy across school settings were explored (Lee, Palmer, & Wehmeyer, 2009; Wehmeyer, et al., 1998). Participants reported that overall, through the application of strategies, students created and facilitated more opportunity to live independently. In a similar study by Wehmeyer, et al. (1998), educators reported that students with disabilities increased the post-secondary opportunities through employment and education using self determining skills.



To summarize, through the lenses of the social learning theory and self determination theory, research indicated that emerging learners of self advocacy developed skills by watching and overt modeling (Skinner, 1953; Schelling, 2010). Further, the implication from research by Test, et al. and Deci and Ryan indicated that while learning of skills was a continuum development, it was not pre-wired necessarily (Test, et al., 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Researchers indicated that awareness and advocacy could be taught, and teachers reported that students had employed such skills. The preponderance of evidence indicated that using the social learning and self determination theories as lenses to understand thinking, practicing, and developing skills was a fruitful framework for research in the area of self advocacy. In alignment with previous research on this topic, the two theories were selected as the theoretical framework for the current research.

### **Review of the Literature**

In today's society, American students must compete locally and globally in order to maintain their standard of living. Thus, they have to identify their needs and access means to fulfill them to be successful. Specifically for students with disabilities, the increase in employment requirements over recent decades has raised concern regarding the need for statutory safeguards related to advocacy (Flynn, 2010). Because of delay in achievement, students with disabilities struggled more than students without disabilities in mastering required building skills. Flynn (2010) examined the importance of empowering people with disabilities to make their own decisions. Within his review of the legislative requirements of Ireland for advocacy services, he noted that like the United

States, Ireland's citizens suffered if they did not possess advocacy strategies (Flynn, 2010).

The landmark court case, *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989) determined that students with disabilities have the right to be included in the public educationally and socially. The court's decision required schools to offer a continuum of services in the least restrictive environment for students to be successful. Services and placements could vary, according to the courts, based on a student's weaknesses. A student may be placed in general education for some classes and small specialized settings for others. Placement could include assignments of students who have one or more disabilities within the general education population. Many students with disabilities work toward a regular education diploma. Within Georgia secondary settings, some of the more common disabilities included specific learning disabilities (SLD) speech/language impairments (SLI), other health impairments (OHI), and emotional behavior disorders (EBD). Other less prevalent disabilities included autism spectrum disorder (ASD), visually impaired (VI), hearing impaired (HI), and traumatic brain injury (TBI) (Smith, 2007). Because each student required an individualized educational plan with appropriate accommodations and/or modifications in order to make progress, educators of these students required diverse instructional strategies and resources to help students with disabilities achieve their goals.

## **Legislation Protections**

Both at the national and state level, legislation protections have been enforced to ensure that students with disabilities' rights were protected. The Handicapped Children Act of 1975, otherwise known as Public Law 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), was the first major legal protection passed involving the education of students with disabilities. Tied closely to the civil rights movement, the idea behind the legislation was the opportunity for all to make future life decisions, and the inalienable rights of United States citizens applied to students with disabilities. Evidence of this legislative priority was displayed in several subsequent acts, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, 1997, and 2004; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; and the Rehabilitation Act of 1992 and 1998.

Guidelines set forth under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 [IDEA] protected parents and professionals in which many of the existing legal mandates (e.g., Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) required self initiative to be obtained (Hannon, 1997). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1992 (PL-102-569) declared that disabilities occurred naturally within societies measurements of norms. Therefore, individuals with disabilities should have the right to live independently, participate in political, social, cultural, educational, and economical parts of society (Skinner, 1998). Rights of individuals with disabilities included the right to pursue meaningful careers, contribute to society, and make future goals. Consequently, such legislative protections as those provided by the IDEA amendments of 1990 and 1997 required that this population have access to a continuum

of placement options in order to maximize potential for students to be educated in the least restrictive environment (Barnard & Lechtenberger, 2010).

More recently, the passage of the IDEA (P.L. 101-676) and NCLB in 2002, along with 2004 amendments to IDEA, emphasized providing appropriate transition from school to the workplace (Weimer & Cappotelli, 1994). In the secondary setting, post-secondary goals and transition activities were required for students with disabilities. All states met these requirements (Patti, 2010).

In 2007, the United States Department of Education (2007) further discussed PL94-142 by explaining students' rights to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The purpose of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) was to ensure that all children with disabilities had available to them a free appropriate public education. This law emphasized special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability and prepare him for further education, employment and independent living. Also, this act established the concept of educating students in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and provided guidelines for evaluations. This legislation also established IEPs, set up procedural safeguards, and encouraged parental participation with the goal to better equip these individuals to act more independently (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). During this time, positive views toward self advocacy emerged. Parent and student support groups began to shift their focus toward child centered advocacy (Bersani, 1996; Wehmeyer, Hank, & Gagne, 2000). This involvement reflected society's changing attitude toward people with disabilities.

Although legislators attempted to set expectations, their advisement gave little direction as to how to help these students advocate (Phillip, 1990). Much of the

responsibility for ensuring their rights were observed under these laws shifted from the school district to the student and parent. Consequently, students must now understand their disability, communicate their needs, and request accommodations. In summary, these guidelines encouraged individual protections for students with disabilities, but provided little direction or follow up to ensure that these students with disabilities understood how to self advocate and transition effectively out of secondary education. Further, there was no system of accountability or instructional training or guidance related to self advocacy within the legislations.

### **Transitional guidelines and barriers**

In addition to the legislation protections implemented to promote better transition for students with disabilities, educational research reinforced the importance of teaching advocacy to students with disabilities. As reported in the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) from *The Life Outside the Classroom for Youth with Disabilities* (2003), regardless of their disability, youth were viewed as capable of determining their own futures. Researchers concluded that youth with disabilities should be urged to recognize and advocate for their needs and wants (Wagner, et al., 2003). Despite the efforts of parents, educators, and researchers, Greene & Kochhar-Bryant (2003) suggested students with disabilities continued to struggle upon leaving secondary school. Invested members of community, including legislators, began to address the need for assistance as students with disabilities transitioned into adulthood (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003). One area of focus for research was student involvement in transition planning, including student involvement in IEP meetings (Lehmann Bassett, Sands, 1999, Martin, Greene, Borland, 2004; & Thoma, Rogan & Baker, 2001).

Through a qualitative study, Lehmann and his team (1999) explored the degree in which students with disabilities were involved in the transition process. Participants included students in secondary education, with varying degrees of disabilities, along with their parents and educators. Across observations of classrooms, transition meetings and interviews, the researchers compared participants' perceptions to their behaviors in the educational setting. Lehmann and his team concluded that students did not appear to be actively involved during transitional planning or the transitional process (Lehmann, et al., 1999). Data from the interviews from all participants supported the conclusions. Both educators and parents agreed student involvement was important to the transitional process (Lehmann, et al., 1999).

To add specific discussion of self advocacy implementation, a detailed analysis of educators' perceptions and observed practices of self advocacy instruction to students with disabilities provided feedback about the skill used with students with disabilities. By analyzing the data through descriptions of self advocacy, themes were derived regarding educator's knowledge, beliefs, obstacles, rewards and support. Further, these themes were cross-analyzed based upon observed behaviors.

Other transitional barriers were discovered in Karvonen's team's (2002) research. In researching self advocacy strategies used with students with learning disabilities, they found several barriers within implementing self advocacy practices (Karvonen, Wood, Test, Lambros, Pocock, & Martin, 2002). First, there was a limit to resources, instruction, and training. Second, the staff received limited administrative support. Third, some students displayed resistance behaviors that impeded self advocacy such as quitting easily or not attempting a task. Students struggled with self advocacy behaviors.

Lastly, evidence suggested many students with disabilities were resistant to seeking help or understanding more about their disability. The data suggested that students who practiced self advocacy skills did so because they focused on stronger voices of maintaining those skills (Karvonen, et al., 2002).

In another study about student involvement in transitioning, Martin, et al. (2004) found middle and secondary school students with disabilities were unaware of their responsibilities and expectations of them related to transition planning and IEP planning. The researchers surveyed IEP participants over a three year period. Participants included students with disabilities, parents, related service providers, and educators such as administrators, special educators, and general educators. Participants completed a 10 question survey addressing statements about transition. Students reported low levels of knowledge in several areas of transition including understanding purposes for IEP meetings, speaking up in meetings, understanding educational jargon, understanding the format of meetings, addressing strengths and needs, and understanding expectations (Martin, et al., 2004). The students' responses indicated that they lacked preparation to make meaningful contributions to their educational process. The significance of this research indicated a lack of support in self advocacy during transitional planning from the students' perception (Patti, 2007).

In 2005, the NLTS-2 reported, while 80% of students with disabilities wanted to participate in post-educational opportunities, only 30% of this population actively participated in post-secondary education opportunities within two years of graduation from secondary education (Wagner, et al., 2005). Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott's (2008) research supported these statistics and elaborated that those students who were aware of

and used self advocacy skills reported higher secondary graduation rates and higher post-secondary graduation rates. In alignment with Wagner's team's findings, several other studies provided evidence that minority students with disabilities faced barriers in career development and post-secondary opportunity, noting specifically a lack of identified resources as a concern (Astramovich, & Harris, 2007, Leake, & Boone, 2007; Walker & Test, 2011). In summary, recent research suggested that self advocacy increases educational and employment opportunities.

### **Research based self advocacy strategies**

Within the empirical literature, both quantitative and qualitative research studies supported the value of building blocks of self advocacy strategies. Suggested strategies varied based upon different components and varied populations of participants.

Quantitatively, research suggested self advocacy has increased opportunities for youth (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002). Van Ruesen, et al. (2002) analyzed data to determine the effectiveness of training of groups of secondary school students with learning disabilities in self advocacy strategies and IEP participation. The overall results of the study indicated that when secondary school students with learning disabilities were taught how to advocate for their needs, they systematically provided more input during their conferences than did students who did not learn the strategy.

Algozzine and his team (2001) researched two primary approaches to promote better self advocacy skills and outcomes for youth with disabilities. One approach included a classroom based curriculum using direct instruction to implement specific skills encouraging self determination and self advocacy. The second approach included student involvement in educational planning (Algozzine, et al., 2001). This avenue,



facilitated through the IEP, helped students become aware of their needs and resources. Algozzine's team (2001) found that involving students in the educational process was crucial to the development of their decision making skills. As educators acted as the lead participant in facilitating avenues of resources and opportunities, their value and perception of advocacy guided their implementation of self advocacy strategies (Weimer, & Cappotelli, 1994). Educators' experiences and training affected their strategies in working with students with disabilities.

One classroom based curriculum that used self advocacy practices, *Steps to Self Determination*, supported both the curriculum and student involvement with empirical validation (Field & Hoffman, 1996). This program was designed for all students with or without disabilities. To incorporate both approaches, this curriculum used an 18-session program based on a self determination model. Through this model, the instructional and educational planning addressed five components including knowledge of self, value of self, planning, acting, and experienced outcomes. Each exercise supported self determination and advocacy.

Through their research, Field and Hoffman (1996) concluded several components were crucial to the program. The first component was establishing a co-learner role for teachers. This included providing opportunities to model real life experiences. Other components included the use of modeling and cooperative learning as instructional strategies while promoting experiential learning. They added integrated or inclusive environments and accessing support from family and friends to encourage self advocacy. Other components included importance of listening skills, appropriate humor, interdisciplinary teaching and capitalizing on teachable moments (Field & Hoffman,

1996). Following the process of the Steps to Self Determination curriculum, students established and achieved goals through their knowledge and practiced skills. Because educators were considered co learners with the students, they acted as role models by creating a collaborative classroom environment for the students to practice self advocacy. Parents and other adults were encouraged to participate.

Denney (2011) discussed a program focused on attainment of transition related goals and the student's level of self determination toward goal attainment. The Career and Self Advocacy Program (CASAP) used the Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) to measure how well participants achieved their goals. Parents, educators, and students completed the AIR Self Determination Scale which served to help assess the students' self determination skills. In his research study, Denney studied ten students with learning disabilities, their parents and educators. He collected data on the students' goals and rated the students upon completion of the program. In this quantitative study, Denney examined the descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and correlation methods. Denney concluded the students displayed mastery of transition related goals as implemented through the GAS. Data suggested a difference in baseline data and implementation data. Students with disabilities easily connected with opportunities in instruction to practice self advocacy (Denney, 2007).

Another study that supported classroom based curriculum paired with student involvement in educational transition planning was IPLAN program (IEP conferences). Hammer (2004) used an experimental design to collect data on self advocacy and student participation in educational planning through the *Self Advocacy Strategy*. Using the *Self Advocacy Strategy* (Lancaster & Lancaster, 2003) teachers regulated five areas

of student self advocacy. First, students were asked to inventory strengths, areas of improvement, goals, and choices. Next, the students were asked to provide input before the IEP conferences. Later, the student learned to listen to what others said and responded at the appropriate times. This step focused on how and when to ask questions during a conference. Lastly, students summarized the goals they planned to master in the given time frame. Students were provided inventory information and asked to listen and respond, ask questions, and name goals (Lancaster, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002).

In Hammer's study, teachers reported that one effective strategy for promoting the use of self advocacy in students with disabilities was using a specific type of direct instruction called strategic learning (Hammer, 2004). Teachers used this strategy in daily practice reinforcing five components: inventory of performance levels, inventory of expectations, reminding students to ask questions, reminding students to respond to questions, and summarizing goals. Strategically, the teachers modeled to students how to assess an inventory of self performance levels and expectations throughout the school day. The teachers encouraged this by reminding students to ask questions and to respond to questions. Summarization was a strong component. "Students were more involved with writing goals and participating in their own IEP conferences" Later, she stated students could, "verbalize statements about their strengths and areas for improvement" (Hammer, 2004. p. 299). Through this study, Hammer suggested strong educational and practical significance for teachers using these self advocacy practices. Data indicated the program increased student participation and self advocacy for students within the study (Hammer, 2004).

In building an emerging conceptual framework of self advocacy, Hammer's (2004) research affirmed that successful students with disabilities (1) identify their needs, (2) locate the resources, (3) understand how to satisfy those needs, and (4) act to meet those needs. Cho (2009) emphasized the importance of teaching self determination and advocacy to students as early as primary school age. Myers and Eisenman (2005) also confirmed the need for self advocacy before students entered secondary school.

More recently, Patti (2007) examined a computer based self advocacy curriculum, *the Self Advocacy Strategy* to help students with emotional behavior disorders understand levels of performance and expectations. Students were asked to respond to statements about transitioning and independency. Students gave different values to each statement of skill, such as a strength, area to improve, or not applicable. Statements explored transitional areas including independent living, career and employment, finances and consumer spending, social and family living, citizenship and legal responsibilities, health and wellness, community resources, leisure and recreation, and age of transfer of rights. Students responded to each area and developed related goals. Later, inventories were printed and kept by the students and teachers for easy access in case of adjustment. Students categorized their transitional skills in categories of strengths, areas for improvement, and goals based upon their knowledge and skills. Patti reported that some students contributed more in mock transition planning meetings after strategy instruction as compared to before strategy instruction (Patti, 2007). Overall, the students were able to better respond to transition- related probe questions and scored higher on a self-reported measure of self advocacy.

In another quantitative study, Test and his team suggested using self advocacy techniques to enhance student participation in the IEP process in early adolescence (Test & Neale, 2004). Using an experimental design, the researchers demonstrated a functional relationship between using self advocacy strategies and the quality of student's contributions. The quality of student participation in their educational planning increased. Wehmeyer and Lawrence (1995) expressed that understanding how the disability impacted the students' learning was half the student's problem. Having the courage to request appropriate accommodations and modifications based on the learning disability of the individual was the other half (Wehmeyer & Lawrence, 1995).

Looking at generalization of advocacy skills across classes, Schelling (2010) used a multiple baseline design to determine if the self advocacy skills actually changed behavior across settings. A teacher questionnaire instrument analyzed how teachers witnessed students' expressed interests and needs, asked and responded to questions, collaborated with peers, set goals, asked for assistance, and negotiated with problem solving skills. Through her computer-based study, she determined that using directed organizational reinforcements, reminders of performance levels, and choice making, students advocated to fulfill needs (Schelling, 2010). Organizational reinforcement included graphic organizers that students kept with their materials and graphic presentations displayed in the classroom to remind students of self regulation and self advocacy. Reminders of expectations were displayed in the different educational settings where students were instructed. Finally, students were provided choice during the instruction. Schelling concluded that when students with disabilities used the self

advocacy strategies consistently, the skills transferred to at least two other educational settings.

Research indicated planned transition across settings as particularly important when students moved from secondary to post-secondary settings. Many students with disabilities continue their education at post-secondary institutions, and self advocacy research has been crucial in understanding suggested factors that promoted or discouraged self advocacy among students with learning disabilities at the post-secondary level (Villanueva, 2009). Students with disabilities and faculty members at the University of Texas-Pan American participated in a survey that addressed accommodations as well as students' self perceptions regarding their knowledge of their learning disabilities. The study included five questionnaires that collected data from the descriptions of students' and faculty members' perceptions regarding learning disabilities and the accommodation process at the post-secondary level. Data suggested an increased understanding and awareness of the factors of self advocacy but a decrease in the students' participation of accommodations (Villanueva, 2009).

Karvonen, et al. (2002) reported through descriptive research, that educators who worked with students with disabilities found specific strategies such as role play, student directed IEPs, affective support groups, and guest speakers to help remind students of resources helpful in promoting student self advocacy (Karvonen, et al., 2002). Role play presented students with prompts and directed instruction. Students acted out appropriate situations with peers. Students directed IEPs, similar to other discussed strategies, provided more opportunities for the students to be more heavily involved in the educational planning process. Via affective support groups, all students learned to ask

questions in a safe environment. Teachers could also supplement instruction by inviting community members into the classroom to help students connect to community resources. The researchers reported that teachers clearly described the methods used to empower students; the tools needed for success and planned instruction that focused on generalization of learned skills for the future. They noted instruction included role playing to build a foundation of confidence and structured choice making activities (Karvonen, et al., 2002).

In contrast to a full program, Kling (2000) reported on simple, strategic sayings to help students remember self advocacy skills. The ASSERT Strategy used the mnemonic phrase to employ help to students to remember to (1) be aware of the disability, (2) state of disability, (3) state the strengths and limitations, (4) evaluate problems and solutions, (5) practice a solution, and (6) try it in a real setting. Teachers used this strategy to provide visual representation in various educational settings to remind students of the components of the self advocacy strategy (Kling, 2000).

Qualitatively, researchers explored how teachers practiced self advocacy instruction with students in various settings. Within the qualitative discussion, both approaches of self advocacy were addressed: classroom based curriculum and implementation of specific skills encouraging self advocacy and student involvement in educational planning (Algozzine, et al., 2001). Fiedler and Danneker's research (2007) surveyed teachers' perception of examples of addressing self advocacy issues. In discussing student involvement in educational planning, one example they included suggested "student led IEP meetings positively changed the participant interaction dynamics" (Fiedler & Danneker, 2007, p. 3). Appointing the student as leader of the

meeting facilitated the educational discussion specifically around the student. Involving students in the educational process early in their career increase decision- making skills for students related to planning for the future (Myers, & Eisenman, 2005).

Research by Mason, Field, and Sawilowsky (2004) supported the need for student involvement in educational planning. From their study, the Council for Exceptional Children reported only 8% educators and related services professionals were satisfied with student involvement in IEP meetings. Similarly, Mason, et al. (2004) reported that these participants were dissatisfied with their schools' support in developing self advocacy and involvement of students with disabilities in the IEP process. Although special educators placed high value on self advocacy and student involvement in the IEP process, teachers reported there was little direction given at the district level. Walker and Test (2011) and Myers and Eisenman (2005) reported increased involvement occurred when students had opportunities to respond to educational questions and participate in collaborative problem solving with participants involved in the educational process.

Researchers have implemented school based studies to examined self advocacy knowledge of both elementary and middle grades students (Cho, 2009; Mishna, Muskat, Farnia, & Wiener, 2011). Cho (2009) reported on the emerging self advocacy skills in elementary schools. Specifically, at this level, educators encouraged students to develop appropriate communication skills to seek resources around them. In the middle school setting, educators expected students to be more familiar with their weaknesses and how to seek help if needed. Data indicated some students with disabilities struggled with both of these areas due to their weaknesses and performance levels. Mishna, et al.



(2011) reported students with disabilities needed to be able to have knowledge of their strengths, rights and responsibilities, accommodations needed to communicate needs, and required accommodations.

School based research at the secondary level provided a direction for secondary school students. As students transition into secondary settings, research supported implementing self advocacy interventions that promoted enhanced student involvement (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2010). Students with disabilities who practiced self advocacy skills over a three year period self reported more positive patterns of growth in self determination and goal planning than those students not exposed to the interventions during the same time period.

Providing additional guidance, Karvonen, et al. (2002) suggested specific goal implementation examples to help students better address their needs with the resources around them. (Karvonen (2002) and his team also described the program, *Learning and Education About Disabilities* (LEAD), that promoted self advocacy through collaboration in creation of self advocacy goals with students that have learning disabilities. Programs, such as LEAD involved the school's community to improve the efficacy of self advocacy (Beaulieu, 2007). The intent of the program was to facilitate student ownership. Karvonen's team determined that student directed self-awareness instruction, leadership, and self advocacy was more effective than teacher directed instruction in what educators presumed to be students' needs (Karvonen, et al., 2002). Similarly, in his work with students with learning disabilities, Sebag (2010) also concluded that self advocacy was crucial to students expressing their concerns. He reported that the primary purpose of teaching self advocacy instruction was to provide

students with the tools necessary to become self-sufficient and independent agents academically, personally, and socially.

Beaulieu (2007) specifically examined the experiences and perceptions of secondary students with disabilities regarding self advocacy instruction. He concluded a main concern was the lack of input from students with disabilities in the evaluation of curricula used in self advocacy instruction. In his study, the 19 students with disabilities revealed a result of lack of knowledge and instruction by parents and teachers. Students reported that they were unfamiliar with the term, self advocacy, but that they did possess an understanding that they needed to speak up to address needs. In addition, students reported little direct involvement in planning of the IEP process. Students were unaware about their disability and how to seek resources.

Further, data suggested students were more likely to accept a passive role in the process and felt that little could be done to impact change (Beaulieu, 2007). Students reported self advocacy materials such as their self reports were beneficial in aiding them outside of the classroom. Some instances reported students failed to appropriately approach adults to obtain the appropriate resources to meet their needs. As a result, special education teachers, acting as case managers, were in some instances the only vessel for students to access resources to fulfill needs. Ergo, this provided more evidence of the need for effective practices in developing student self advocacy within the educational decision making process (Beaulieu, 2007).

In a similar vein, Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger (2010) emphasized the positive association between student IEP participation and academic outcomes for students with disabilities. They concluded that including students in the educational planning process

promoted the development of student decision making skills and subsequent regarding their future.

### **Importance of Educators IEP participation in facilitating self advocacy**

Along with student participation, educators with different educational roles helped students access the knowledge, resources, and strategies for decision making. Defur (2012) explained that the IEP process for students with disabilities required a partnership with “intentional development” from specific mentors (p. 58). However, even though parents were encouraged to participate with their students in educational planning (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007). Many parents and students reported they felt the educational jargon, a lack of knowledge of resources, and the perceptions that meetings were professionally driven, document focused, time limited, and structured based on professional and compliance needs made it hard to make educational decisions about the students’ education (DeFur, 2012; Collet-Klingenberg, 1998).

Grigal, Nuebert, Moon, & Graham (2003) also researched parents’ perceptions of student involvement in self advocacy. They reported that parents felt students should be involved as an active participant in educational planning. Although parents varied in level of involvement, 98% of participants in the study reported they felt the school should teach self determination and self advocacy skills. In addition, 78% of parents reported they supported more opportunities to apply self determination and advocacy skills at school (Grigal, et al., 2003).

In addition to parents’ perceptions, researchers examined teachers’ attitudes toward self determination and self advocacy. Agran, et al. (1999) surveyed teachers in Utah about the value they placed on teaching practices of self determination and

advocacy. In their study, the researchers asked teachers about the development of self advocacy related IEP goals and objectives. Of the educators that responded, 77% responded that self advocacy was an important area in the curriculum. These educators expressed a lack of self advocacy on the part of students with disabilities. Additionally, 55% of educators reported self advocacy skills were not always included in IEPs as a part of the transition plan, while 59% of participants indicated actively discussing the need for self advocacy skills with their students. Overall, Agran, et al. (1999) reported educators of students with disabilities felt self advocacy skills were important; however, little emphasis was placed on this area in curricular and planning activities.

In another study, Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (2000) surveyed educators about their degree of awareness of self advocacy in secondary educational settings. In their research, they examined the impact of the classroom setting and students' disabilities as they influenced teachers' promotion of self advocacy strategies. The collected data presented a portrait of the extent as to which research self-directed learning strategies were included during instruction. Educators were asked to rate the importance of instructional domains, including choice and decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, self advocacy, self regulation and awareness and self knowledge. All domains were reported moderately important or very important.

Within the categories, decision making, and problem solving received the highest concern. Educators reported that the most frequently taught strategies were self reinforcement and goal setting strategies. While some educators reported they felt some students did not benefit from direct instruction on self advocacy strategies because there was insufficient training/information for staff to support these strategies. Others reported

they structured the classroom environment to support student directed learning. The teachers also reported that they provided students with disabilities instructional activities in non-school settings to promote self advocacy practices and implemented mentoring programs (Wehmeyer, et al., 2000).

Van Reusen, et al. (2002) supported the value of training for education. They discovered many educators may participate in a student's IEP process; however, special educators were most likely to act as facilitators of resources. As educators facilitated opportunities and avenues of resources, their value, perceptions, and support guided their participation in self advocacy strategies (Van Reusen, et al., 2002). Thoma, et al. (2001) noted that special educators acted as the primary advocate for their students' needs and rights. This study underscored the importance of case managers when students were unaware of how to voice their concerns or ask for resources.

In a similar study conducted by Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, and Tamura (2002), 243 special educators were asked to rate the following domains: familiarity with self determination and advocacy, resources about self advocacy practices, and strategies and determination tools used during instruction. Of the participants, 75% reported that they were familiar with the term self determination, but they did not feel they had adequate training to instruct proper implementation of self advocacy practices. Educators reported they were familiar with these skills because of resources outside of their school. Resources included graduate level courses (33%), journal articles (25%) workshop/conference presentations (23%), books (11%), undergraduate courses (16%), and school district in-services (14%) (Thoma, et al., 2002).

Because of legislative design, parents, students, special educators, and other educators were included in the educational decision making for students with disabilities. Any variety of school based participants including teachers, counselors, administrators, and personal staff aid students within their educational career. Because the IEP team was designed to allow different viewpoints of the students' abilities and performance, teachers were expected to provide grade appropriate expectations for individual students. By practice, counselors provided transitional planning and academic counseling for educational decisions (Milsom, 2007). Administrators typically acted as the Local Education Agency representative or LEA. Although perceptions of their roles of participants differed within each case study, administrators reported that they were invited and understood they should participate in the educational planning of students with disabilities (Martin, et al., 2004).

Despite the legal expectations for IEP participation, attendance of participants generally occurred based upon role expectation (Van Dycke, et al., 2006). Van Dycke's team also reported that special educators made up about 51% of the participant group within the IEP meeting, compared to parents' participant group of 15%, general educators' at 9%, administrators' at 9%, other supportive staff such as counselors at 9%, and students at a lesser degree (Van Dycke, et al., 2006). In closing, despite the spirit of the law, routine practice at IEP meetings indicated students generally did not attend. This fact punctuates further the need for more research in the area of self advocacy.

## Summary

Independent adults access self advocacy skills to meet their needs and progress socially, economically, and personally. In elementary and middle school, students begin to develop these skills to meet their objectives and desires. Particularly for students with disabilities, the lack of direction or knowledge to access resources confirmed the need for self advocacy practices (Myers, & Eisenman, 2005). Further, this lack of knowledge and practice clearly affected student decision making about educational goals, accommodations, and needs (Griffin, 2011).

Hammer noted that by developing student self advocacy strategies, educators helped students identify their weaknesses, set goals, and obtain resources for a more independent lifestyle. Prior research suggested effective self advocacy practices included inventory of performance levels, direct instruction, modeling, cueing, and choice making to help aid students in becoming more vocal in requests (Hammer, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Schelling, 2010).

In closing, research illuminated the importance of student self advocacy. Likewise, research discussed effective practices implemented in the classroom. In addition, researchers illuminated the different roles educators played in the IEP process and how each of the participants aided parents and students with disabilities about their resources (DeFur, 2012; Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). Still, little research described how educators of students with disabilities valued teaching self advocacy in a secondary setting as it pertained to their professional role and experience. Therefore, this research addressed the perceptions and values of educators who worked with students with

disabilities. The study focused exclusively on perceptions and values of educators in the general curriculum who work with students with disabilities.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This collective case study explored how four educators in different roles defined, perceived, and facilitated self advocacy practices to students with disabilities within a public secondary setting. Utilizing the social learning theory, this study analyzed observations, comprehensive interviews, and available documentation of four secondary educators about their knowledge, beliefs, obstacles, rewards, and ecological factors toward instructing self advocacy. This chapter described the research design, research questions, setting, and participants. Furthermore, this section provided a sequenced description of data collection, data analysis, and a summary of conclusions with ethical considerations. The intent of this research was to explore the perceived challenges, obstacles, and/or rewards for these educators.

The following four research questions were used in the investigation:

1. What do educators perceive students do in order to self advocate?
2. What are educators' experiences in developing student self advocacy?
3. What roles do educators perceive they have in developing self advocacy of students with disabilities?
4. What actions and behaviors do educators demonstrate to encourage self advocacy amongst students with disabilities?

## **Research Design**

This qualitative research was a multiple case study. As stated by Creswell (2007), “a collective case study, otherwise known as multiple case study, involves one issue selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (p. 74). This study focused on the case itself, the perception of four educators regarding their role in teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities.

Patton (2002) suggested using a case study to inquire about the insight and understanding as to why a phenomenon occurs rather than to determine empirical generalizations. Using this approach helped the researcher gather vital information from careful participant selection, rather than a statistical representation of sampling from quantitative studies. Quantitative research required limited bias because it affected the reliability and validity. In qualitative research, bias strengthened and enriched the data to provide credibility (Patton, 2002).

The goal within a case study considered the contextual factors that influenced behaviors while developing causal explanations based upon tracing the process by which specific aspects affect other aspects, rather than showing a relationship or correlation, as in quantitative research (Creswell, 2007). Since each educator’s role in advocacy was exclusive to job experience and perception, using a multiple case study purposefully identified similarities and differences in educators’ perceptions about self advocacy. Likewise, random selection did not take place within this study because this study required the participants to hold a specific position that aided students with disabilities. Because the research questions required in-depth descriptions from each participant,

other qualitative research that might use surveys and a larger sample size, would not provide the in-depth discussion that would examine the experiences of each participant.

A case study was also used because the inquirer had clearly definable cases with boundaries and sought to provide a deeper understanding of the case or a comparison to several cases (Gall, et al., 2010, p.447). In this study, the defined case was the perception of self advocacy as it pertained to four educators at the same school representing different roles. Gall, et al. (2010) suggested using this design when the intention of this research was to provide a better understanding and exploration of perceptions: Each educator was observed in real life context in order to reflect real experiences of self advocacy and how they helped students with disabilities self advocate.

Although both quantitative and qualitative research methods were valid and worthy, this qualitative collective case study sought to describe how four educators acting in different roles valued teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities through in-depth analysis. Patton (2002) concluded that a case study should not be used to make generalizations for larger groups. Rather, this design provided information-enriched data in establishing credibility through structural corroboration and consensual validation (Eisner, 1991). Eisner defined these measures to provide validity to qualitative research. Structural corroboration required the researcher to look for recurring behaviors or actions and consider disconfirming evidence and contrary evidence. Consensual validation was an agreement among competent peers that the description, interpretation, evaluation of the educational situation was right (Eisner, 1991).

Since self advocacy was not required or emphasized formally, it was undetermined what value educators who actively worked with students with disabilities

placed on teaching self advocacy. This study collected data on perceptions of teaching self advocacy within a public secondary education and the strategies used by these educators who worked with students with disabilities. The information collected from the observations was compared to detailed interviews and available documentation such as lesson plans, provided curriculum, and reflective journals. The data were analyzed for similarities and differences looking for themes between participants and behaviors in order to understand the complexity of the case.

The anticipated benefit of the research was that it may shed light on how educators perceived, implemented, and reflected about self advocacy instruction in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, this study better informed researchers, policy makers, educators, and communities about providing self advocacy tools in order for this population to become more independent. Further, this provided more evidence of skills to increase employment in students with disabilities and encourage post-secondary schooling.

### **Researcher's Role**

As an educator to all students, I, as the researcher, sought to better equip students to act and live more productively within their community. Specifically, I have taught students with disabilities in resource, inclusion, and community-based settings in California (three years) and Georgia (nine years), primarily at the secondary public education level. I currently teach vocational training, Economics, and American Government and hold a specialist's degree in Educational Leadership.

Particularly within this study, my role as the researcher was to observe, interview, collect, and analyze data. Because I served as the primary instrument, having familiarity

with setting and content with strong conceptual interests helped validate my research. Likewise, by using a multidisciplinary approach drawn from the academic disciplines of education, psychology, and law, thorough investigative skills supported my selection of participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994). My research focused on a better understanding of these four educators' self advocacy perceptions. The findings aid teachers in educating students about self advocacy. Led by my faith and creed in Christ, I hoped to educate young adults about the ways and means to live independent productive lives for peace.

### **Participants**

Using a stratified purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) helped to identify four educators to provide a true representation of educators actively involved with students with disabilities in different educational roles. Creswell suggested using this sample method when the characteristics of a particular subgroup (educators) and facilitates comparisons between the different participants. The site employed over 250 certified staff. Within the staff, there were seven counselors and one interim counselor, 14 administrators, 30 special education teachers (24 teachers teach inclusion) and 210 general education teachers. Within this study, four participants were selected presenting one role from each of the following: administration, counseling, general education and special education. The participants consisted of male and female educators with different years of experience and backgrounds. Further, convenience sampling (Mertens, 2005) was used because the participants and I worked in the same school. Although these educators may not come in contact with the same students and may not share a planning

or lunch period, convenience sampling will also be considered because these educators do interact in a working relationship with one another.

The three criteria for selection of participants:

1. Participants held a “Georgia Clear and Renewable” teaching certificate and had at least three prior years of experience in their current educational role.
2. Participants were one of each of the following: administrator, counselor, general educator, and a special educator with a shared relationship within the IEP process. A shared relationship was defined as having a legal commitment to educate a student with one or more disabilities.
3. Participants were willing to participate.

In this study, the sample size included four participants. The selection of this sample size included educators holding a Georgia educational credential. The administrator held a Leadership credential (L), while the other educators held Teacher (T) credentials. Patton (2002) also noted that purposeful sample allowed creditability for a sample size. Each educator provided insight of the student’s achievement (Van Dycke, et al., 2006). The special educator facilitated the legal obligations of each committee member while leading the educational planning. The general educator offered academic, behavioral, and instructional insight for the expectations of the student in meeting standards and requirements of the general education curriculum. The administrator provided leadership insight and advisement. The counselor recommended opportunities for transitioning, career planning, and resources. In 2007, researchers recommended school counselor participation in the IEP process so that each student has a contact for accessible resources and post-secondary opportunities (Milsom, 2007). Using

participants with different roles in education helped depict different perceptions of how self advocacy was addressed toward students with disabilities.

### **Setting**

The study was conducted at a large suburban secondary school located in Georgia. In 2004, this school opened with approximately 2500 students. Over the last seven years, the school's population has fluctuated. This school's current student enrollment was approximately 3380 students. The breakdown of ethnicity was 61% Caucasian, 13% African American, 13% Asian, and 13% other (U.S. State University, 2011). In addition, students receiving special education services made up 8% of the population, which was comparable to the national ratio of students receiving special education services in public education (U.S. State University, 2011).

Comparable districts across the nation had a variety of economical statuses among the student body. Living outside of an urban community, people tended to relocate further north to get away from the congestion and crime of the city. Therefore, communities such as this one community, despite receiving students from a large children's shelter in the state, welcomed several affluent families of the community (Howard, 2011).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This case study used several rigorous and varied data collection techniques. The primary sources for this study were observations, recorded interviews, and available documentation such as curriculum, lesson plans, and reflective journals. Merriam (2009) promoted using interviews and observations to support qualitative research. Participation was voluntary. No participants were less than 18 years of age; hence, I did not need to

obtain consent from a parent or legal guardian. First, I requested permission from the district office and/or local school to conduct the study. Likewise, I submitted an application to request approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with the study. Upon approval of the IRB, I requested the district's approval from the principal of the school. I acquired a list of all potential participants by sending a letter of introduction of selection (APPENDIX E). This letter included a description of the study, a request for the participation, and a clause that stated they may not be selected for the study if they did not meet all of the criteria. In the correspondence, I let them know that their agreement did not guarantee selection. I stated that I would attempt to gain a sample of participants that ethnically reflected the school's population including representation from both genders.

After reviewing the qualified candidates who have agreed to participate, I selected a sample of four potential participants. Next, I contacted potential participants verbally (APPENDIX F). From this correspondence, I then acquired a response from the participants via return email or return verbal confirmation. Then, I informed them in writing they had been chosen and requested the "Informed Consent" to be signed (APPENDIX G). I also thanked those via email that were not chosen to participate (APPENDIX H). Upon receiving the signed "informed consent" documents, I sent out an email to each participant informing them of their first observation time. The participants did not know the identity of the other participants. Because part of my responsibilities at the school as a special educator was to observe instruction in a variety of different classrooms and educational settings, my observations did not call attention to any one teacher.



Within the data collection I conducted observations first to protect the validity of the case. I followed the observations with comprehensive interviews and a request to keep a reflective journal for two weeks. Also during that time, I reviewed other available documentation. An open coding process was utilized to analyze the data for themes, concepts, and relationships. The following methods provided a better understanding of the educators' value of self advocacy and the strategies implemented when teaching students with disabilities.

**Observations.** Data were collected from observing each participant individually. I recorded two different types of behaviors as defined by Schreiner (2007). The first behavior was recorded when the participant helped students' recognize their limitations, wants, and needs. This behavior included verbal prompts or gestures. After this recognition, one must set goals and act toward obtaining the resources to meet those goals. The second behavior was recorded when a participant helped students set goals and/or helped students act toward obtaining those goals. As discussed in the literature review, teachers used strategies such as inventory of performance levels, inventory of expectations, organizational strategies, and reminding students to ask questions to promote self advocacy (Hammer, 2004; Schelling, 2010). Some of these strategies included from the literature review were direct instruction, modeling, or verbal suggestions and nonverbal prompts (Karvonen, et al., 2002). Examples of nonverbal prompts included gestures, signals, and graphic organizers. If repetitive behaviors occurred, tally marks were used. A sample of the observation data collection note card can be found in Appendix C.

During arranged time segments, I observed the four educators in the classroom or school settings. Before the observations, the participants received explanation within the consent to participate that explained my observations of their role in helping students obtain resources and voice needs. The letter of consent can be found in Appendix G.

Individual classroom observations were used to collect data from the special education teacher and general education teacher in their natural settings. For these educators, there were (four) separate scheduled observations lasting approximately 55 minutes each. I did not participate in discussion of instruction during these observations. Behaviors were recorded on note cards. The note cards served as record of the educators' practices of helping students identify awareness and independence (APPENDIX C).

For the other two educators' observations, the administrator and counselor's responsibilities did not provide them adequate student contact for this study during a 55 minute block of time during four different educational occasions. Therefore, their observations required more time consecutively to collect data. The behaviors of the administrator and the counselor were recorded during one full school working day each, observing them through their normal duties working with all students. This time allotment began when students arrived on campus and continued through extracurricular activities following the normal school day. Observations were recorded on note cards in a journal to provide a better understanding of the participants' day chronologically. The notecards of observations were compared to the responses in the interviews.

**Interviews.** The second stage of the study included four individual interviews. Since the interview questions were created by me, they were checked for validity by an

expert in the field of qualitative educational research and confirmed to appropriately to answer the research questions.

One interview was conducted for each participant individually. I provided the interview questions in advance. During the interviews, I requested information in a series of open-ended questions. I took notes, audio-recorded the interviews, transcribed the recordings, and uploaded the notes onto a computer. The participants received the same questions in the same order; however, because of their different roles and backgrounds the interview varied in length and discussion. The interview questions can be found in the Appendix D.

The intent of the interviews was to identify educators' experiences in developing student self advocacy. Therefore, through the interviews, the educators described their perception of how self advocacy evolved within a public secondary setting. Also, the interviews served to describe the perceived role of each of these participants in facilitating self advocacy. The goal for the interview was to explore the perceptions of educators who actively work with students with disabilities in order to identify actions and behaviors demonstrated to encourage self advocacy.

The interview questions sought to answer what value was placed on teaching self advocacy, what strategies were used, and what support was available for educators in self advocacy implementation. Questions explored their perceptions of teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities and ascertained how they implemented and allotted time for teaching that skill.

Using a flexible yet semi-structured outline of questioning (Table 1), I encouraged honest communication throughout the interview. Merriam's research (2009) suggested

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Table 1

*Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions*

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*Questions guided towards educating students with disabilities*

1. What is your job title?
2. What is your teaching experience and background?
3. What are the demographics and disabilities of students in your classroom and/or school?
4. How do you define self advocacy?
5. What have you observed students do in order to self advocate?
6. How would you describe a student who is a successful self advocate?
7. How do home supports, cultural backgrounds, and social pressures affect self advocacy skills?
8. How do the level and type of disability impact self advocacy skills?
9. What supports do you typically provide throughout the year to students with disabilities?

*Questions toward self advocacy instruction*

1. What is your perception of students' self advocacy?
  2. What specific strategies have you seen employed by students that successfully self advocate?
  3. What kinds of resources do you provide students with disabilities to help meet their needs?
  4. What time do you invest in planning and preparing materials to help students learn self advocacy skills?
  5. How do you help students with disabilities self advocate so that they can function with the least amount of assistance to have their needs met?
  6. What strategies do you encourage with students who successfully self advocate?
  7. Does the curriculum support development of self advocacy? If so, how? If not, why not?
  8. How do you implement teaching advocacy to students through the curriculum? Give examples.
  9. What self advocacy techniques do you intentionally model and prompt within your interactions with students with disabilities?
  10. What role, if any, do schools have in teaching students how to advocate for their needs and rights?
- 

that the use of interviews communicates the participants' point of view about the phenomenon. He also emphasized that a semi-structured interview helped the researcher

obtain a rich base of information concerning the opinions of the participants (Merriam, 2009).

In order to address each of the research questions within the study, I interviewed, recorded, and transcribed the data from the interviews. Although not in numeric order, the formation of the interview questions addressed each research question. All participants' were asked the same interview questions. Using open-ended questions, Interview Questions 3-7, 15 and 16, I obtained information about Research Question 1 through personal definitions and personal examples of self advocacy from each participant. Likewise, the participants addressed Research Question 2 through Interview Questions 1-4, 7, 9-14, and 16-21 by describing examples of how they saw students self advocate. In order to address Research Question 3, all participants identified their perceived role in educating students with disabilities about self advocacy through Interview Questions 8-13 and 18. Finally, Research Question 4 was addressed by Interview Questions 4, 10, 12, 13 and 17 and the data collected from the observations (Table 2).

The intent of questioning was to provide information about implementation within the classroom and school setting. The administrator and counselor provided additional information about school policy and implementation. The line of questions also gathered information about the participants' educational background, participation with this population, and overall description as to the relationship between the participant and students with disabilities. Time invested in preparation, implementation, and reflection of teaching self advocacy was recorded and compared to each participant (Sebag, 2010).

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Table 2

Connection between Research Questions and Interview Questions

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	Interview Questions
Research Question Number One	Questions 3-7 & 15-16
Research Question Number Two	Questions 1-4, 7, 9-14, & 16-21
Research Question Number Three	Questions 8-13 & 18
Research Question Number Four	Questions 4, 10, 12, 13, & 17

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The data was analyzed and compared to the observations. Then, I summarized the results.

In addition to providing perception of self advocacy, the interview questions provided examples of how the legislative protections affected these participants as they served students with disabilities. The content of these questions connected similarities and differences within reviewed literature about strategies and perceptions of educators (Karvonen, et al., 2002). The interview questions were made available to participants in advance. In addition, I indicated that additional information may be requested to better understand the phenomenon. After I recorded and organized my findings, I allowed the participants to review the information for member checks. At each stage of data collection, an open coding process was used to identify concepts, themes, and relationships. To connect related concepts or themes, I accessed an axial coding system

to code the data. The notes from the note cards were transcribed into electronic word documents.

**Available Documentation.** Finally, the observations and interviews were compared to available documentation. Available documentation differed from each participant as it pertained to his or her job description. Teachers' documentation included a review of teacher-provided lesson plans and curriculum used within the classroom. For example, at the site, teachers implemented Academic Contact Time (ACT) 22 minutes every day. During this time, students received announcements and advisement or participated in study hall or silent reading. Teachers were required to spend one day a week to discuss advisement and character-building. Part of this advisement addressed self advocacy, thus, this study accessed available lesson plans and information provided by the curriculum and school policy that promoted self advocacy.

For the administrator and counselor, available documentation included county and school policies about students with disabilities as it pertained to helping them to become better advocates for their needs. This included curriculum instruction and discipline policies. Finally, all participants kept a reflective journal of a two week experience that allowed each participant to write down any thoughts about self advocacy that may not have been observed or addressed in the observations and interviews. As the only collector of data, I also transcribed, uploaded, and stored the primary documents. A colleague checked and confirmed the information was transcribed accurately.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

**Coding.** This collective case study utilized open coding and axial coding for validity purposes. The first coding method I utilized was the open coding method.

Researchers emphasized the use of open coding to divide the data into manageable sections and to identify concepts that help to determine themes from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding can also organize the data into correspondence of two categories of similarities and differences. I organized the responses from the interviews and observations into similarities and differences of interpretations of teaching students how to self advocate. Notecards served as the means to document raw data. Code names were given to label each concept. The open coding process allowed me to identify patterns and themes within the raw data based upon the number of occurrences. Concept labels were based upon data drawn from observations, interviews, and available documentation. Using this systematic process allowed the participants to express their perception of self advocacy and discuss effective self advocacy strategies, while increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

The next type of coding I used in this study was axial coding. Once I established the categories, I identified occurrences and determined (a) what caused it, (b) the response, and (c) the context (Creswell, 2007). Axial coding was accessed to connect the data back together relating to the concepts and codes. Any concepts or themes related to the defined behaviors that helped students identify understanding of self and behaviors that helped students act toward independence in the educational setting were documented. Using axial coding related the categories of information to the central phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Summaries of the findings were compared to previous studies. New concepts and themes that emerged from this study were noted as perceptions and attitudes about the implementation of self advocacy.



The software used to code and analyze the data was Atlas Ti. This software transcribed and analyzed patterns and themes within raw data. Atlas Ti formed relationships among items and processes in order to display interpretive analysis of significance (Atlas Ti, 2012). Once data had been imported and coded, it was tracked by themes and compared by factors such as occupation, race, gender, or disability. Tools through this software suggested subtle trends and patterns in order to explore the research questions. I then saved, tracked, and compared the literature review to the observations, the interviews, and available documentation. In an effort to transfer data, Atlas Ti imported results from programs including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and HTML. In this research process, I used the software to analyze the data retrieved from the observations, interviews, and available documentation.

**Naturalistic generalizations.** The second method I used to analyze data was naturalistic generalizations. In educational research, this was used to compare single case studies to other single situations rather than a population. Creswell (2007) defined naturalistic generalizations as, “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or for applying it to a population of cases” (p. 154). With the use of a collective case approach to display results, I recognized essential similarities between participants and established the basis for naturalistic generalization. All notes and memos were well documented to provide an audit trail for later recall and reflections. Verbatim quotations were provided for interpretation.

**Data reduction.** I processed the data by focusing, simplifying, and abstracting the themes about self advocacy within the participants’ perceptions. I utilized a second coder from field of education to confirm accuracy. Researchers suggested this step in

order to reinforce and help code key words, phrases, and quotations pertaining to theme representative in the text (Jung Lu & Shulman, 2008). The second coder marked and confirmed all the examples in the text that pertained to the themes in the data. I continued this process until the final thesis and conclusion were completed in order to sharpen the focus drawn.

### **Trustworthiness**

To increase reliability, credibility, and dependability of this study, I employed member checks, audit trail, reflexivity, and triangulation.

**Member checks.** Using educators at the same site with different roles in working with students with disabilities suggested reliability in the way this school facilitated teaching self advocacy. Member checks allowed participants to validate the solicited opinions of self advocacy (Merriam, 2009). The participants had the opportunity to review a summary of their interview transcripts for accuracy and completeness. Reconciling discrepancies required additional data collection. Merriam (2009) emphasized importance when using member checking to ensure the transcripts of the participants' interviews accurately reflected the responses given. Follow up questions were asked when participants checked the confirmed the summary.

**Audit trail.** I implemented the use of an audit trail to accurately collect the audio data from the interviews. In qualitative research, Janesic (2000) suggested using audit trails, audio recording the interviews, to ensure accuracy of transcriptions in order to establish credibility. Data collected from the transcribed teacher interviews were documents, coded, and tracked to ensure, "the process of segmenting and labeling text form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (Creswell, 2007, p. 237). Chapter 4

included verbatim quotations extracted from the data, allowing the reader to make an interpretation. This software was password protected to enhance security and confidentiality. Atlas Ti imported data from Word documents, PDFs, database tables, and spreadsheets. Atlas Ti was used to illustrate connections, ideas, and findings using visualization tools such as charts and graphical organizers (Atlas Ti, 2012).

**Reflexivity.** According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), researchers must be aware of their own bias, experiences, and principles that may influence the study. My assumptions were made explicit to the participants. Participants were aware that I was a co-worker with no professional advance over them. Prior to the observations and interviews, I scheduled data collection times. I protected the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

The research questions drove the participant selection process, data collection, and data analysis. The data collection and analysis techniques were processed technically. The respected theoretical explanations from previous research aided my summaries. Furthermore, this study gained value toward improving instruction.

**Triangulation.** Finally, Calhoun suggested using data triangulation, or the use of several data sources, to provide an analysis of a comprehensive perspective of an issue (Calhoun, 1994). According to Gall, et al. (2010), researchers used this to provide validity of qualitative research findings. Because I accessed three primary sources (observations, interviews, and available documentation), I gained an in-depth understanding of teaching students with disabilities how to self advocate.

These primary sources were compared to each other to suggest credibility within each perception. Using several sources of data also increased the reliability and reduced

the weaknesses of using a single data source (Merriam, 2009). By drawing upon multiple independent sources of data, I limited threats to validity (Merriam, 2009), while strengthening my conclusions about the educators' perceptions.

### **Ethical Issues**

This study also made ethical considerations. First, participants experienced some psychological stress that they would not normally deal with in their typical daily routines. Also, topics and questions may have been considered sensitive. Therefore, participants may have been unwilling to provide accurate information about how their school supported student self advocacy. Finally, there may not have been any individual benefit for the educators; however, this research may benefit the region and educational community as educators prepare students with disabilities to self advocate successfully.

Consequently, to minimize these threats, I protected the participants' privacy by changing their names in the case study. The audio tapes were erased after being transcribed. The transcripts and all computer data were kept in a password-protected file. Any hard copies were kept in a locked file cabinet. A pseudo name code book was kept in a separate locked file cabinet and destroyed after the completion of the research. The participants were told that they may decline to participate in the study at any time. The data of any participant that may have withdrawn his or her consent would have been destroyed immediately upon being notified of the consent withdrawal. There would have been no repercussion for any participant electing to not participate or withdrawing consent. To further protect the reliability and validity of the study, I was the only person collecting the data and no information that could have identified the participants was included within the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES OF DATA**

### **Summary of Methodology Used**

The findings emanated from the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this case study sought to identify how educators from different educational roles in the same setting perceived educating students about self advocacy. This qualitative research explored the perceptions of one administrator, one counselor, one general educator, and one special educator from the same secondary setting for the purpose of understanding their experiences and roles in teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities in a public educational setting. This study explored in-depth descriptions of self advocacy practices within the same school from different educators who work with students with disabilities. The findings represented the perspective of four participants directly involved in a public secondary educational setting with students with disabilities. In addition, this chapter summarized the methodology approach used, including a discussion of the sample, the setting, data collection, analysis procedures, and discoveries in terms of similarities, patterns, and emerging themes. A detailed interpretation of the summary and conclusions is presented in Chapter 5.

The primary research questions examined four issues:

1. What do educators perceive students do in order to self advocate?
2. What are educators' experiences in developing student self advocacy?
3. What roles do educators perceive they have in developing self advocacy of students with disabilities?

4. What actions and behaviors do educators demonstrate to encourage self advocacy amongst students with disabilities?

The criteria for selecting participants (the administrator, the counselor, the general educator, and special educator) were based upon specific guidelines as it pertained to educational role, experience, and exposure to students with disabilities. Thomas, the administrator selected, handled all duties and obligations regarding special educators and students with disabilities. As a young, Caucasian male, his responsibilities also included male dress code violations, discipline, and supervision of extracurricular activities. Lisa, the counselor selected, was an African American female that was responsible for part of the advisement program and foreign exchange program. Jose, the general educator selected, was a Hispanic male World History teacher who took pride in his United States naturalization. Finally, Randall, an experienced Caucasian teacher from California was the special educator selected. All educators shared a responsibility to educate students with disabilities. This collective case study took place in a secondary school in Georgia.

In regard to tracking and organization in qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994) stressed the importance of data management and providing high-quality, clear descriptions of analyses, and retention of data. In this study, I systematically organized the data collection by creating a filing system for storing and retrieving all raw data, including tapes and field notes. All consent forms, observational field notes, transcripts, interview notes, and reflective journals were properly stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic data were stored in password-protected folders. In addition, I used the qualitative software, Atlas Ti 7.0, to store, manage, and retrieve the

coded transcripts. The data were analyzed by open and axial coding, natural generalizations, and data reduction to determine the similarities, patterns, and themes.

## **Findings**

**Observations.** The data collection process began with conducting individual observations of each participant. Each participant was observed in his/her natural educational setting to ensure a true description as to what occurred in the educational environment.

The administrator and counselor each were observed for one full school working day. The teachers were observed on four separate occurrences lasting 55 minutes each. Data were collected for the educators during different times of the day and in different settings to reflect their normal daily duties. Data were collected on the defined behaviors that promoted self advocacy to students with disabilities (Table 3).

After reviewing the data collected from observations of participants, Behavior 1, “helped student(s) recognize their limitations, wants, & needs,” was recorded 279 times. This behavior included verbal prompts or gestures. After this recognition, the second behavior was collected when the participant helped a student set goals and act toward obtaining the resources to meet those goals. The second behavior was recorded 218 times. Within these behaviors, two categories evolved.

Common behaviors towards teaching self advocacy were divided into two categories: those behaviors demonstrated towards an individual and those behaviors

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Table 3

Total Observed Behaviors for each Defined Behavior

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	Total Number
Behavior 1: helped student(s) recognize their limitations, wants, & needs.	279
Behavior 2: helped student(s) set goals or act towards obtaining resources.	218

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demonstrated toward a group (Table 4). The counselor and the administrator met most of the day with individuals. During these conferences, they would discuss the student's level of performance, the student's strengths, weaknesses, and current progress towards the student's goals. Both participants helped the students identify realistic goals and avenues to obtain the correct resources to fulfill their needs and wants.

The counselor had 15 individual conferences on the day of observation. During the conferences, she would help the student identify basic student information such as social security numbers, grades and current progress, and graduation credits and requirements. Although she discussed working with many student groups, few of the targeted behaviors were observed while she worked with a group of students. The administrator met with eight students during the scheduled observation. He helped the individual students identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, school expectations, and the student's current progress. Also during the conference, the student and the administrator developed a behavior and academic management system to help the student succeed.



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Table 4

Sub Categories of Total of Behaviors

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Total Number of Behaviors towards	Behavior 1	Behavior 2
Group	157	122
Individual	92	105

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The teachers both displayed the defined behaviors more evenly between individuals and groups of students. The general educator addressed the students as a group at the beginning and end of instruction to remind the students of their prior knowledge of their performance levels and expectations for success. He, later, followed up with individual students while other students worked independently addressing specific needs and goals.

The special educator displayed both behaviors to individuals and group evenly. Yet, it was noted that he displayed more behaviors when he was in small group instruction because he had more time to work with students on an individual basis. In the collaborative class, he displayed less of the behaviors to individuals and more behaviors towards the entire class. In addition, the total for each behavior for each participant was recorded (Table 5).

The administrator, counselor, and general educator displayed more behaviors that helped students' recognize their limitations, wants, and needs. They displayed fewer

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Table 5

Total Recorded Behaviors for Each Participant

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Total Number	Behavior 1	Behavior 2
Administrator	48	35
Counselor	80	53
General Educator	88	53
Special Educator	63	77

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behaviors that helped students set goals and obtain goals. The special educator displayed fewer behaviors that helped students' recognize their strengths and weaknesses with more time spent setting goals and expectations.

These behaviors included both verbal and nonverbal prompts (Table 6). All participants displayed behaviors through both verbal and nonverbal prompts. The administrator displayed most behaviors verbally. He clearly stated to students their level of performance and then he clearly defined a plan (both verbally and visually) that helped students understand how to obtain their goals. He used phrases such as, "Given the events, we need to create a plan of success" and, "How do you think we can resolve this situation?" to promote self advocacy statements from students. The counselor displayed behaviors verbally and nonverbally. She began discussions with students by stating, "I wanted to make sure you understood how your class schedule affects your graduation

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Table 6

Categories of Prompts towards Teach Advocacy

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	Verbal	Nonverbal
Administrator	68	15
Counselor	56	24
General Educator	114	25
Special Educator	90	35

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requirements.” Nonverbal behaviors included gestures and providing graphic organizers. The graphic organizers included a credit completion plan and graduation requirements so that the students could maintain paperwork about their goals and progress. The graphic organizer provided each student an individualized plan of study that displayed all possible options and outcomes for each student’s academic choices.

The general educator, Jose, and special educator, Randall, displayed three times more verbal responses than their nonverbal responses. Jose used phrases such as, “Have you looked at the timeline,” “are we too loud,” and “does anyone know what is due tomorrow?” to promote the student’s communicating steps towards being successful. Randall, the special educator, discussed advocating in his smaller classes. He used verbal phrases in his curriculum such as, “What would happen if you didn’t advocate?” This allowed for an open discussion about how the students would not be able to obtain what they wanted, if they did not speak up. Randall led the class with questions about self

advocacy. Then, he would offer positive reinforcement and model self advocacy strategies. He later voiced, “You have the right and the responsibility to voice your concerns.”

Common strategies used by all participants included positive reinforcement (both verbal and nonverbal), direct instruction, modeling, and organizational graphic organizers of inventory of performance levels and inventory of expectations. These strategies were coded with the data analysis as significant to teaching students self advocacy. Positive reinforcement was recorded when the participants provided a verbal and nonverbal positive reinforcement to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses or how to speak out for resources. Nonverbal reinforcement was recorded when educators used adult proximity, a tap on the shoulder or facial expression to promote self advocacy. Positive reinforcement was also included when the participants provided praise for a student correctly identified their needs or correctly identified their resources. The administrator complimented students when they advocated for their resources. The general educator also provided positive reinforcement to students who voiced questions about homework.

Direct instruction was recorded when a participant led a guided discussion giving specific direction about obtaining resources for needs. The teachers displayed positive reinforcement and direct instruction during components of a lesson to help the students identify their needs. The administrator and counselor used direct instruction to guide the students to make more appropriate choices.

All participants used modeling to suggest self advocacy. Some examples of modeling included the special educator acting out social stories of appropriate behaviors

in the classroom setting. Other examples included the administrator allowing two students to witness him speaking out for his needs and resources, and general educator question-prompting during the class discussion promoting self advocacy and accountability of expectations.

Finally, the participants also displayed an inventory of performance levels and expectations to suggest self advocacy. The administrator began many discussions with students by assessing their needs, then following the discussion with a plan to progress towards a goal. Likewise, the counselor and the teachers used the structure of their lesson and advisement to present self advocacy. Specifically, the structure of her conversation during student conferences allowed her to prompt the student to inquire about their performances and expectations. A complete Chart of Summary of educators' strategies toward teaching self advocacy is found in Table 7. These strategies were coded with the data analysis as significant to teaching students self advocacy. The observations were then compared to each participant's interview and available documentation to support his or her perceptions and opinions.

**Interviews.** The next source of data included individual interviews of each of the participants. The interview questions were given in advance to participants in order to prepare for the interviews. All participants' were asked the same interview questions. The interviews were semi structured, open, and flexible, allowing me to seek explanations or clarifications when needed. This setup provided a two-way communication format for extensive exploration throughout the interview process. The interviews were audio-recorded, reviewed, transcribed, and stored on a laptop

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Table 7

A Summary of Educators' Strategies Used to Instruct Self Advocacy

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	Administrator	Counselor	General Educator	Special Educator
Positive Reinforcement	24	56	30	17
Direct Instruction	10	52	20	24
Graphic Organizers	5	14	18	35
Modeling	10	10	20	35
Inventory of Performance levels	15	53	20	5
Inventory of Expectations	20	52	18	16

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computer that was password protected.

In this section, a narrative is presented to provide an in-depth and rich description of conversations recorded during the interviews. A brief profile of each educator was presented, followed by the teacher's classroom and jobsite observations summary. A fictional name was assigned to each participant to protect and ensure confidentiality. The interviews encompassed the perceptions and feelings of the participants emanating from

the responses that best represented their present positions, their educational backgrounds, and their personal and professional experiences.

**Randall: Special Educator**

Before starting the actual semi structured interview, I assured Randall that all information would remain anonymous and no records of the interviews or tapes would have his name on them. The interview took place in a quiet room at the secondary school. I sought to establish a demographic profile that included an overview of Randall's educational and teaching background.

Randall explained that because he was a special educator at this school, he had two main tasks. He was a case manager of students with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) and an autism resource teacher. He also taught several classes that included study skills, affective skills, general educational diploma (G.E.D.) test prep, and a collaborative U.S. History class.

His teaching experience included teaching students in California and Georgia fulltime since 1994. During that time, he worked in a variety of settings. He worked with students 18-22 years old with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities. His work consisted mainly of job training, job placement, and job coaching. He also was an assessment counselor and direct job coach for the Department of Rehabilitation. Other teaching experience included working at alternative schools with utilizing the Assisting Developing Adults in Proactive Transition program (ADAPT). ADAPT was an adult transition program for students 18-22 with all manner of ability and disability. During this time, he was actively involved in advocacy groups that promoted awareness of young

adults who needed specific resources. Since 2008, he has worked as an autism resource teacher here at this secondary school.

Within his population of students, the demographics varied. Socioeconomically, the students ranged from lower middle class primarily to some rural and suburban lower class and upper middle class. Ethnically, the students included a general mixture of African American and Caucasian students with a few students of Latin and Asian descent. Randall stated he felt, “Minority groups tended to be overrepresented in special education as opposed to the general high school population here.” Therefore, educators working with students with disabilities must be aware of cultural diversity. His special education caseload handled 17 students and he had approximately ten students in resources classes and 30 students in the collaborative setting. All the students were either designated with learning disabilities (sometimes severe learning disabilities), behavioral disabilities, or ASD challenges (autism spectrum disorder).

Throughout the interview, Randall discussed what he felt students do in order to self advocate. He stated self advocacy is, “the ability to speak up for one self. It is the ability, further, to coherently and intelligently speak up for oneself.” He added, “it’s not just the ability to complain (though it is important to not to be afraid to complain), but to be able to be forcefully persuasive with some intelligence and be appropriate in one’s presentation to negotiate one’s needs.” He continued to discuss his observations; he stated that many students who are emerging in advocacy begin by complaining. “Verbally complaining is a pre-self advocacy skill that many of my students seem to have.” In his discussion about the secondary school level, the more extroverted students were, the more they verbally advocated for themselves, and that included the ability to



negotiate. Randall gave the example that effective self advocates request assignments after absences and can approach adults when there are glitches or scheduling issues or social interactional issues amongst other students.

Randall continued his discussion of how a student uses self advocacy to include speaking up clearly. He reported that students emerging in self advocacy tended to complain about things such as turning in homework, disagreeing with the assignment or having a social or personal conflict with a peer. Describing students who effectively self advocated, he used words such as “extroverted, verbal, unafraid, and not intimidated by adults” to describe students that displayed effective self advocacy practices. These students spoke out clearly toward adult figures especially ones that might be considered intimidating to the students. They were able to simulate adult or mature responses to undesirable situations. They were able to deal with the stress and conflict. These students were “vocal, confident, but patient in understanding the procedural process.” They helped set the example for students who lacked effective self advocacy strategies.

In his discussion of his experiences, he gave several examples. One of his examples included a student, M.G, who had Asperger’s Syndrome. He was social, but sometimes inappropriate when overwhelmed by stress. Expectations from instruction overwhelmed him; therefore, he yelled or acted out. Much of his needs focused on utilizing better stress management and stress indicators before reaching maximum frustration level. Randall taught M.G. to recognize stressful situations, appropriately leave stressful situations, and go to an agreed upon safe destination. If M.G. could not get a safe destination and he displayed an inappropriate behavior in front of his peers, M.G. would later feel embarrassed. Randall worked with this M.G. and other students to

better understand the warning signs and be able to just leave the classroom to get his emotions under control. Conversationally, students similar to M.G. needed a lot of practice and reminders about remembering the cues and coping strategies when dealing with stress.

Randall described teaching students how to read the social cues to overcome stress. During affective instruction, Randall and the student would analyze the situations and talk about possible solutions. Randall helped M.G. create story boards of appropriate phrases to say to M.G.'s teachers and his peers. Randall would have to remind M.G. and the other students about the rules of socialization so that they would better understand people's cues. Randall discussed having many opportunities to review appropriate responses with the students.

Another example provided by Randall of weak self advocacy skills involved a male student with little conversational abilities. He was very sweet and nice; however, he did not advocate for himself. He had a soft quiet voice and allowed his peers to speak up for him. Randall worked with this student to speak out for his needs. Because he appeared to be culturally dependent on allowing others to speak for him, Randall had to practice patience in waiting for the student to respond. At times, Randall described pausing for several minutes before continuing the discussion.

Randall also discussed his experiences in the school environment that involved teaching students how to self advocate. He expressed that he had curriculum to teach his students about appropriate behaviors and social cues. He reported that the county he currently worked in provided curriculum that dealt with anger management, appropriate versus inappropriate relationships and conversations. However, Randall shared that the

curriculum was not appropriate to use in a collaborative setting with the larger amount of students and academic rigor. He reported that there was no curriculum that supported self advocacy in the general curriculum. He felt this was because of the increasing emphasis on academic curriculum. He admitted that he attempted to include self advocacy in examples taught in the collaborative class. For example, in the discussion of the American Revolution, he discussed how these men and women spoke out against something they did not support. He referenced this example to their lives. In his connection between history and current events, he asked the students how they would speak out against injustices and create plans to progress. He concluded that he attempted to personalize this information and use history to learn life lessons.

Randall named specific strategies that he saw employed by students who self advocated well. He included “being able to get into the personal space of an authority figure with politeness.” This included speaking clearly and using appropriate tone to request resources. He provided his reasoning, “Adults are more inclined to listen to students who are able to deal with the stress of negotiation, and to deal with possible conflict. They listen more than complain using quasi-adult voice, tone, and manner.” Students who could self advocate neutralized the situation with their peers and adults and used neutral problem solving in an appropriate fashion. For example, a student who can calmly voice their perspective and listen to the adult’s point of view after being disciplined will receive more respectful feedback allowing the situation to work itself out.

Randall admitted in his experiences at this school, he had supportive and unsupportive parents. Home supports did affect student self advocacy because, in his

opinion, “students model how their own parents problem solve.” He added that because he was a special educator, all the students have individualized educational plans, and as a team member, he attempted to help students voice what they need and help them achieve their goals to meet those needs. Parents can be active in this process. Culturally, in his opinion, he noted that the Latino population tended to be polite; however, they seemed to be more passive when obtaining resources to fulfill their needs. He compared this population to other ethnic groups such as French or people who lived in New York City who he perceived vocalized their concerns better as a group. Randall also felt that social pressures affected student self advocacy. He continued, “I feel students are taught by their peers not to trust authority figures.” This prohibited them from going to authority figures to learn how to negotiate.

In his experiences, Randall felt the disability and intensity of the disability affected how students self advocate. In reference to autism, the disability and intensity affected their communication skills. They may have severe deficits in communication. He stated, “In the resource level of ASD, most of the students have average verbal skills, meaning they use their voice, but don’t stay on the topic when they speak. They also have difficulty with social interaction. Negotiations are tricky with this population because the teacher must listen very closely for their requests.” He later compared the students with ASD to students with learning disabilities who have problems with processing. These students were delayed in processing information and retrieving the correct information. Randall suggested that this could be a hindrance in dealing with authorities. “Some educators tend to speak too fast and some students need a little longer to process all of the information and requests.” Particularly, in a large school setting, he

concluded that it might be hard for students who process slowly and are not extroverted to keep up with conversation and information. Teachers may need to adjust their speed in delivery of information to students with disabilities that struggle to keep up with the information.

Randall later described his perceived role in teaching self advocacy. He did not feel most schools that he had worked in supported teaching self advocacy. However, as a special educator, he “felt the department was doing a better job.” He gave the example of past diploma options that included technical tracks to help students find their path of career opportunities. Due to an emphasis on academics and lack of funding, those diploma tracks were no longer offered. Even elective classes, such as the Affective Class that helped students deal with social situations and appropriate behaviors were extremely limited in student population because students did not have the room in their schedule to take such classes and graduate in the traditional four year period.

Randall specifically saw his role in self advocacy as the liaison between the parent, student, and other teachers. He helped students express their needs by keeping an open line of communication with the students’ parents, teachers, and the students. He did this through emails, face to face discussions, and web pages. At this school, students and parents had the opportunity to view students’ progress on IEP goals, discipline, and attendance via the internet. He also said that he routinely checked on all of his students on his caseload at least once a week in various classes. He elaborated, “with the class size being too large and inappropriate for most students, the general educators may not witness specific needs not being advocated in the classroom; therefore, part of my job is to be that connection.”

Many students Randall instructed had behavioral issues. Randall provided these students the space to lower frustration levels and process situations that overwhelmed them throughout that day. The affective skills curriculum assisted in teaching students appropriate behaviors. Other students had organizational struggles. Instruction included practicing, modeling, and simulating situations so that students understood how to act more appropriately and effectively. Randall stated he attempted to offer his students the least amount of assistance. He tracked their progress through functional behavioral assessments (FBAs). He felt, at times, “teachers have the tendency to tell students what to do and not how to derive the answer on their own.” Therefore, Randall described how he helped students complete homework, review for assessments, and organize time management instead of teaching them to only complete assignments.

In the collaborative class, it was more difficult to teach self advocacy to students mainly because of the class size. He taught self advocacy through modeling and a consistent structure. Part of his perceived role was keeping students organized, helping students advocate for what they need, and communicating regularly with the student and their parents.

Randall admitted that because of his role in special education, his department provided him a designated time during pre-planning to meet with other teachers in the county with this same title to discuss curriculum and strategies that work with this population to better meet their needs. He collaborated with the other faculty members about successful strategies used with particular students in the past. However, as school academic pressures arise, there was little planning of self advocacy strategies.

Randall closed his interview with his goal for self advocacy in schools. He felt responsible for students understanding how to meet their own needs with the least amount of assistance. Many students he worked with were prompt dependent and needed to be told what goals to set. He felt compelled to teach students to think for themselves and how to set goals. He felt that education should guide these students, but eventually the goal should be to pull away the services and supports when they were no longer needed and as quickly as possible. At some point there was a line between dependency and independence.

Randall described his behaviors that promoted self advocacy. He stated that discussing realistic situations helped students identify with lessons of self advocacy. This allowed the students to understand their own humanity and others' struggles, conflicts, weaknesses, and challenges. He offered his own high school experiences, adult experiences, and behavioral experiences, when he did not speak up and did not accomplish his goal. Students were able to relate to his experiences too. He modeled to his students how to self reflect and analyze previous experiences. He closed by stating, "People who analyze and talk out impulses, have good stories to share and strong relationships when they need to seek out help." The interview concluded.

**Jose: General Educator**

At the beginning of the interview, I assured Jose that all information would remain anonymous and he would not be named in the interview. First, I sought to establish a demographic profile that included an overview of Jose's educational and teaching background. Jose was a social studies teacher at the secondary school. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in social studies education. He later completed his

Master's Degree also in social studies education. In his ten years of teaching, he had taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 10<sup>th</sup> grade at all of the levels including: the advanced placement courses, honors courses, and the basic social studies courses. This year, he continued to teach World History to all three levels and students with disabilities were included in each type of class. He was not certain of the demographics of the school, but in his classroom, the students were predominantly Caucasian and African American students including other ethnicities such as Hispanic and Asian students. The students in his classroom being served in special education were students with learning disabilities, other health impairments (mainly attention deficit disorder), and autism spectrum disorder (mainly Asperger's Syndrome).

Throughout the interview, Jose discussed what he felt students do in order to self advocate. He described students who self advocate well as "someone who does a good job at speaking out on behalf of themselves and standing up for themselves in a group setting while understanding what their deficiencies are and how to get help for themselves." He continued his discussion by explaining that these students know they need guidance. Therefore, they asked for assistance. He described these students as confident, educated, aware, curious and inquisitive. He did not exclude or include students with disabilities in his description.

Through his descriptions of his experiences, Jose elaborated on the strategies he used to help students self advocate. He first described his teaching style. His classroom activities encouraged students to ask questions. He admitted that he does not give answers right away. Rather, he asked the students another question that would further their own self discovery. Jose's self advocacy strategy encouraged students to speak for



themselves through modeling independent behavior. He taught appropriate problem solving skills to avoid learned helplessness. He described learned helplessness as previous experiences demonstrating acceptable outcomes while producing very little. In other words, students who demonstrated learned helplessness would first respond with lack of effort and others would produce for them. He felt this guided discovery helped the students answer their own questions while providing them with self-worth and better decision making skills. Then he would say, “See you didn’t need me, all you needed was yourself.”

Jose felt the students in his class struggled most when it involved reading comprehension. His subject area required the students to be proficient in reading. Many of his students, particularly the students receiving special education services, struggled with reading comprehension and staying on task. Many of his students failed to understand the directions of assignments and got frustrated in multi-step assignments; therefore, he demonstrated step by step visual cues such as arrows and highlighted texts to help students who were struggling to keep up for multi-step assignments. In Jose’s conclusions, he felt some students were unmotivated to do well in school for various reasons (lack of home support or social pressures from friends; therefore academics such as World History were lower priorities).

Jose also discussed his experiences with students with disabilities in a co-teaching setting. He explained that this educational setting included two certified teachers (one certified World History teacher and one certified special education teacher) teaching approximately 33 students at a time. He described this class differently than his advanced placement classes. The students in the collaborative setting had a harder time

asking questions. They were shyer in front of their peers and did not want to seek help when they were lost in an assignment. He felt that the students with disabilities had a problem with speaking out or experienced nervousness in a large crowd; therefore, they might not speak out for themselves. He furthered his discussion by explaining that he used “confidence building” to encourage students to ask questions. According to Jose’s class grade report, Jose stated, “Students, who did not show confidence in asking questions, statistically didn’t do well in his class.” Therefore, early within the unit or semester, he used positive reinforcement and encouragement to support these students advocating for their rights and needs within the classroom.

In the collaborative class, because there is more than one teacher, Jose felt that he had more time to work individually with students while they worked on their own. He also stated that he made an extra effort to be available for these students before and after school to provide additional resources to address the material. He encouraged students to seek their case managers and other certified staff that might be able to better assist with the specifics of the students’ disabilities.

Jose admitted that he did not have much time invested in planning or preparing materials to help students self advocate. He felt that the position of his school was that students should have already mastered those skills; therefore, he focused his planning on the World History academic rigor. He stated, “Especially in the social studies department, there is so much focus on how long on the amount of exposure to the information; there is very little room for the differing types of kids in the class.” Jose felt that one of the biggest challenges for students with disabilities in his classes was maintaining focus. He elaborated that many students may understand the material for a

few days, but one absence or one day of lack of motivation can result in frustration for the remainder of the unit.

Later in the discussion, Jose described his perceived role in teaching self advocacy. He felt that he and his school should play a bigger role in teaching students to understand how to ask questions and how to obtain what they need, but due to the other academic requirements, he and his peers struggled with time to address self advocacy issues. He felt that his school provided a large range of special education classes from self-contained to general education to meet the needs of the special education population. He wished he had collaborative teaching in all of his classes to reduce the student/teacher ratio. Jose also discussed the importance of home supports. Students who displayed effective self advocacy skills typically had parents who also advocated well. The more support from home, Jose felt, the more likely the students would succeed; however, he could not determine whether it was because the students were using their self advocacy skills or their parents.

Also, Jose felt that part of his perceived role was to help students from other countries adapt to this public educational system. As a former immigrant and Spanish speaker, Jose described his attitude towards these students as sensitive because of the cultural barrier that prevents them from being successful. He described that when new students entered his class, he attempted to make them feel special by asking them about their last attended high school. He invited the rest of the class to learn about the new student's culture. He felt compelled to help all the students communicate and speak out for their needs. In his explanation, he suggested that everyone in the classroom could learn something new about culture from every new member.

Finally, Jose addressed what he specifically did to help students become successful. He attempted to provide an environment where students felt comfortable asking questions. He built a comfortable rapport to ensure communication between him and the students. He encouraged them to seek help and to seek answers on their own. If they struggled too much, then he provided the answers. The interview concluded.

**Lisa: Counselor**

Before we began recording the interview, I reminded the counselor that all information would remain anonymous and her name would not be identified in the interview. The interview with Lisa began at the end of the school day. First, I sought to establish a demographic profile that included an overview of Lisa's educational and teaching background.

Lisa was a secondary school counselor for grades 9-12 for students with the last name between a portion of the alphabet. In addition to providing counseling and advisement, she also was in charge of the foreign exchange program for all exchange students. She previously taught World History but she has been a counselor for twelve years. Throughout her interview, she described her personal definitions and examples of self advocacy. She first described the demographics of the students she worked with that have disabilities. She confirmed that she advised and counseled students of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Asian descent at her school. Within those populations, some students were receiving special education services due to learning disabilities and emotional behavioral issues such as bi-polar disorder and other types of depression.

In discussing how students self advocate, she defined self advocacy, "as access to resources and equal rights, questioning processes, and questioning unfair treatment."

Lisa added that students channel a variety of ways to advocate for their needs. Some methods were more effective than others. She added that students “will often get their parents involved if it does not seem like they are getting their question answered, but mostly they just come and ask for help first”. Friends would also intervene if a peer needed it. Students reported to her office if they felt a friend was depressed, had conflict, needed mediation, or needed to report bullying.

According to Lisa, “A successful advocator speaks up for his or herself and asks for help.” This student understood that he or she could go to an adult to gain access to resources and information and believed that he or she deserved to be treated fairly. This student had to be fairly knowledgeable about her role as a school counselor. She added that some students needed grade corrections. Other students needed schedule changes. Still, there were times Lisa did not have the authority to make the specific changes; therefore, the student had to advocate to a higher administration. Other students advocate for different resources. Some students requested lunch money and her job was to investigate, enroll, and follow up with the student for free and reduced lunch.

Lisa also described her experiences in developing student self advocacy. She noted that a disability can affect a student understanding what was going on in a school environment. This affected his/her ability to advocate for needs and resources. Students with disabilities received help from parents to navigate through the school system effectively. She continued by stating that if students with disabilities do not have parental support, they may miss out on needed information. Successful strategies from self advocates included speaking out persistently or getting someone such as a counselor or a parent to speak up for concerns. She admitted that with some cases, “It was hard to

teach a student with a disability how to self advocate because they were so use to gaining assistance with their learning on so many levels. Some students have been receiving so much help in this area; it is hard to teach them to change that way of thinking.”

Throughout the interview, Lisa discussed her perceived role in self advocacy. She did not feel that it was her responsibility solely to teach students how to self advocate. She admitted that many groups of people affect students’ understanding of how to self advocate. Along with her role as a counselor, other supports help students with self advocacy. Friends and home support model how to retrieve resources. She encouraged both support systems to work with the students. At times, she facilitated this process. For example, she organized, orchestrated, and supported foreign exchanged students’ opportunities at her school. She communicated with the student’s parents, mentors, and teachers to provide a smooth transition.

Because Lisa felt her job description involved facilitating resources, a part of her perceived role was helping students with disabilities understand their strengths and weaknesses. She noted that any disability affected a student’s understanding of what was in the school environment. Thus, the disability affected the student’s ability to self advocate. Some students with disabilities have received help from parents to navigate through the school system effectively; therefore, those students themselves struggled when parents were removed from the situation to advocate independently.

In working with all students, Lisa felt that she provided individual students information about credit requirements and college information. Her responsibilities included classroom guidance instruction. If needed, she also provided tutoring information for students seeking remedial help. Lisa also discussed if students did not

feel comfortable talking to school counselors, her role was to refer those students to outside help such as another counselor, administrator, or teacher.

Lisa concluded that there was no time currently spent helping students advocate for their needs and resources. She was not aware of any curriculum that directly discussed self advocacy. She did note that advisement lessons during homeroom may have some character building that included self advocacy. Advisement lessons were 20 minute mini lessons that addressed an adolescent issue where teachers could review appropriate behaviors and choices with the students. She also did not feel the school had a main role in teaching students how to self advocate at the secondary level.

Lisa summarized her behaviors and actions that encouraged students with disabilities to self advocate. She discussed meeting with students with disabilities to make sure they were using their accommodations such as extended time, graphic organizers, or books on tape. She also met with them to review their diploma choice and the requirements to receive that diploma. Likewise, she provided students with disabilities information about post-career opportunities. Overall, she felt her model provided students with a plan or direction to obtain information.

**Thomas: Administrator**

The interview with Thomas, the administrator, also took place on the campus of the large secondary school where Thomas supervised the special education department. Within his nine years of experience, he spent five years in teaching: three years in a middle school teaching students with emotional behavioral disorders and teaching interrelated special education and two years at the secondary school teaching interrelated

special education. The other years of experience had been in administration at the secondary school level.

He described his current students receiving special education services as having a wide variety of disabilities. The primary disabilities that were served in the college preparatory environment included students with specific learning disabilities, students with autism, and students with other health impairments (which were usually qualified for attention related issues). He felt that the majority of the students had a specific learning disability or other health impairment. The demographics of this population were fairly diverse. Students of Caucasian descent had a slight majority.

Throughout the interview, Thomas provided discussion about his perception of what students do in order to self advocate. He defined self advocacy instruction “as teaching students how to voice their needs for themselves.” He felt the goal of the educator was “to get students that need something to be comfortable enough to ask for it or to approach you or their teachers in order to obtain what they need.” He discussed two examples of what he had observed in order to self advocate. Behaviorally, students self advocated to adults and teachers when they needed to be removed because they reached a peak frustration level. Academically, students self advocated for their specific accommodations in the classroom or needed additional help in the classroom. He furthered his discussion to suggest specific strategies including confidence and positive attitude. He believed educators should provide praise and leadership opportunities to help teach students self advocacy. He stated, “if someone makes a good decision, by coming to me instead of causing a bigger issue, I always try to reward them, not tangibly, but just by telling them, ‘Good job, I appreciate you doing that.’”



When asked about specific students who successfully self advocate, he gave the example of a student who struggled with impulsivity. This student removed himself when he knew he needed a break. The administrator met with this student several times before he mastered this skill. Thomas wanted to ensure that the student used the strategy effectively and did not abuse his situation. In time, the student obtained his goal of self-control.

In another example, Thomas discussed a student self advocating from an academic standpoint. This student was supposed to have small group testing so that the test can be read to him. This student brought it to his attention to remind his teachers. According to Thomas, students in the past have used phrases such as, “Hey, I normally get pulled for my tests, can you find out if I still get this help?” Thomas reported that because of his relationship with students, they felt comfortable advocating to him because they knew he would speak to the teachers.

Later, in the interview, Thomas described his perceived role in educating students with disabilities in self advocacy. He recognized that home supports and social pressures can help or impede his goal in helping students identify what they need and how to obtain their goals. Parents can overly support their students causing them to not learn self advocacy skills. In his experience, he worked with supportive and less supportive parents in helping students advocate. He reported some parents wanted their children to receive support but still be able to learn how to voice their concerns. Still, other parents impeded their children’s voice by providing too much support or no support at all. Social pressures also affect his perceived role in teaching self advocacy. He added, “Kids don’t want to be seen as people who need help. Academically speaking, kids don’t want to be

seen as people who don't understand the material and because they don't want their friends to know if they don't get it. So that's one reason why social pressure is a reason why they won't ask for assistance and won't advocate for themselves.”

When specifically discussing his perceived role, Thomas noted that he did not have much time to invest in planning and preparing materials to help students learn self advocacy skills. He noted that he has read many leadership articles and texts. Over the summer, he led a student book group that involved leadership and teaching students to be better self advocates.

Thomas's perceived his role was teaching the students the process of earning an education. He added, “The process is just a way they can serve themselves. If they learn, then they don't always have to go to someone. They can stand up for themselves and they can ask a question on their own.” He used his own behavior and troubleshooting strategies to teach students to use their own strategies to meet their needs. Some students would rather sit and fail than to raise awareness as to why they were not doing well academically. Therefore, he modeled identifying his problems of the day and brainstorming solutions that identified with the students. When discussing his strategies, he used the phrase “life coach”, to identify his role. He conveyed that he wanted students to make good decisions and he felt that he connected students with the correct people to obtain resources.

Thomas concluded that he felt the school should model to students how to self advocate. He continued, “Schools should take a primary role. However, schools are more concerned about academics. So, it depends upon individual teachers who choose to

teach their students how to self advocate.” Teachers who provide functional opportunities within lessons provide more opportunities for instructing self advocacy.

Thomas conveyed through his experiences that he attempted to lead by example. He explained that he spent much of his day attending to problematic situations that he had to diffuse. He stated, “I try to model and coach people through stuff. I don’t ever try to ask people to do anything without knowing what it is. And I always give an example.” He ended the interview with an example of a young lady that had a conflict with somebody. Thomas and the girl met many times to work out a plan if she felt that she would cause harm when she was frustrated. He added, “I always try to make sure that kids are thinking through the process and that’s what I try to model to them”. I thanked Thomas for sharing his experiences and the interview concluded.

Thomas and the other participants’ interviews encompassed the perceptions and feelings from the responses that best represented their present positions, their educational experiences, personal and professional experiences. The concepts and themes from the data that emerged were compared to past literature to see if they confirmed what has been found in other settings.

**Available Documentation.** The final source of data included documentation that each participant provided to suggest their opinions and behaviors towards teaching self advocacy. Available documentation was different from each participant as it pertained to his or her job description. Data included a reflective journal from each participant, teacher provided lessons taught through the year that included self advocacy, counseling resources, and school policies that reflect helping students with disabilities become more independent.

Upon completion of the observations, each participant maintained a reflective journal and wrote any additional thoughts that he or she wanted to add to the topic of teaching self advocacy. The participants' responses helped to provide better insight as to how they perceived educating students about self advocacy.

The teachers' responses in their reflective journals shed light on their struggles with teaching self advocacy. The general educator's response in his reflective journal discussed his struggles to help his students when he felt he had little time to instruct the students on all the required academic information. He felt support from his school, but there was little time to collectively work on self advocacy. The special educator reflected on his connection to his students. He believed that the state's emphasis on assessments and lack of educational funding compared to years past contributed to the lack of training of for self advocacy curriculum. He described his most effective strategy towards self advocacy was through the use of his relationship with the students. As a special educator he felt compelled to teach his students and his community to understand how to accomplish goals and tasks. Randall wrote

In US History, the American Revolution clearly connects to the actions of the early revolutionaries with the need for self advocacy. In the class, there are quite a few students that are too passive in their approach to the work load, and rarely stand up for what they might need. For example, there are students that might need to negotiate with the teacher about work to be made up but still allow quite a few let things to slide causing a lower grade.

Unlike Randall and Jose, the counselor and the administrator collected anecdotal data on their conferences over the two week period. Lisa's data summarized how she felt

she affected each student in aiding them to obtain their needs and wants. She reflected, “That students advocate more for themselves when they are in a lower grade level homeroom due to lack of credits.” She felt when students were uncomfortable with their social status, they tended to voice more concerns. The administrator journal provided operational tasks throughout his days that impacted students with disabilities. Some operational tasks included briefly meeting with students about attendance and truancies and assisting teachers in the self contained units of the Special Education department.

Because the administrator’s and the counselor’s role in the school was to assist teachers in educating students with disabilities, rather than directly teaching students with disabilities, their documentation review included a review of policy and counseling resources that included addressing self advocacy. County policy towards students with disabilities stated the school system, “will work collaboratively with students, families, schools, and the community to enable special education students to make valuable contributions to themselves, their families, and their communities.” This included providing aid to make educational decisions. Likewise, their mission statement suggested opportunity to seek aid to become more productive citizens. Lisa shared counseling information provided to the students. In her documentation, she included a graduation requirement graphic organizer, tutoring lists, free and reduced lunch applications, and an organizer chart for studying and homework. Each document provided a better insight to the counseling support toward teaching students how to seek out information.

Teachers’ documentation included teacher-provided lesson plans on self advocacy. The lesson plans were provided from the general educator and the special

educator. Jose provided one lesson used during advisement. The twenty minute allotted lesson plan sought to identify strong advocacy skills using class discussion. Within the body of the lesson, the students were to rate their needs throughout the day. Then, the students were to identify how to meet those needs. In the conclusion of the lesson, the students were to identify specific skills within themselves that sought to aid their advocacy. The special educator provided two lessons. One lesson was provided by the county and the other lesson he created himself to address specific needs within his classroom for his students with disabilities. Both lessons were one half hour and students worked collaboratively to problem solve how to seek help more effectively. The county-provided lesson could be used in a science lab or cooperatively learning instruction where the teacher floats around the room to groups of students. His teacher made lesson addressed helping students seek teacher assistance appropriately in a small class size. The students brainstormed collaboratively appropriate ways to seek assistance. Then they rated each suggestion as a group. The conclusion to the lesson required the students to apply their knowledge about self advocacy and describe a situation that assistance could be needed and how they could seek help appropriately.

All primary documents from the observations, transcripts of interviews, and available documentation were saved in rich text format, uploaded into the Atlas Ti 7.0 qualitative software, and then stored for analysis. Data were grouped into categories based on common responses and themes.

## **Patterns**

Using the qualitative software, Atlas Ti 7.0, I stored, managed, and retrieved the primary documents. After importing my observations, I then used open and axial coding to determine the total behaviors, verbal and nonverbal behaviors, individual and group behaviors, and strategies used during each significant behavior. Natural generalizations were used to compare each of the educational roles with teaching students with disabilities how to self advocate. The data were analyzed by open and axial coding, natural generalizations, and data reduction to determine the similarities, patterns, and themes.

Data analyzed first included the validation of the educators' perception compared to their behaviors within the educational environment. On the initial examination of the transcribed primary documents, 408 observations and 497 quotations or significant statements were identified from participants (Table 8). Quotations and statements were defined as significant when they addressed the educators' perception of teaching students with disabilities about self advocacy. This included statements that supported their behaviors. Data suggested that participants' behaviors confirmed their support for self advocacy.

Observational transcribed notes that recorded the defined behaviors were compared to the recorded perceptions from the interviews and available documentation

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Table 8

Comparison of Quantity of Significant Statements to Observed Behaviors

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	Administrator	Counselor	General Educator	Special Educator
Significant Statements	88	76	134	110
Observed Behaviors	83	133	140	146

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(Table 9). Patterns included modeling, positive reinforcement (both verbal and nonverbal), and accountability. Modeling was documented when the participant walked through the appropriate steps in advocacy. Verbal positive reinforcement included supportive comments such as, “Keep up the good work,” “Nice try,” and “I knew you could do it.” Likewise, the nonverbal positive reinforcement included a smile, a wink, or a pat on the back. In addition, all educators promoted accountability. These appeared in through statements toward students about their expectations of progress. Some statements explained the expectations and other statements questioned the students about expectations. Overall, the educators attempted to hold every student accountable for



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Table 9

A Summary of Educators' Patterns about Self Advocacy

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	Administrator	Counselor	General Educator	Special Educator
Modeling	25	20	6	35
Supportive	20	18	19	23
Positive Reinforcement	32	20	58	22
Accountability	16	18	46	30
Inventory of performance levels	15	18	27	14
Inventory of expectations	10	15	30	18

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their actions and choices. Within the observational notes, transcribed interviews, and available documentation, these patterns led to themes that provided evidence towards the research questions.

**Themes**

Finally, from the initial analysis of the primary documents, three themes emerged about the perceptions of these educators toward teaching self advocacy. The primary documents suggested these educators perceived similar characteristics of successful student self advocates. In addition, the educator's educational role influenced how each

participant instructed self advocacy to students with disabilities. Lastly, students with disabilities need stable supports both within the secondary setting and home setting. The evidence found within the themes confirmed the conclusions within the research questions.

### **The perceived student self advocator**

Through this collective case study, the participants reflected on their description of students who self advocated in their secondary setting. The interview questions revealed significant quotations that elaborated on how students effectively obtain their resources to meet their needs. The administrator defined successful student advocates as students that are, “comfortable enough to ask for assistance or to approach someone in order to obtain what they need.” Through his educational role as an administrator, he witnessed effective student self advocacy with discipline situations. His actions suggested that he wanted students to communicate freely to him so that he could help them fulfill their goals.

The counselor suggested, “Successful advocates access resources, request equal rights, question processes, and question unfair treatment.” She felt that student advocates helped others identify their needs. Her actions reflected support towards student advocacy.

The general educator defined a successful self advocate as someone who does a good job at speaking out on behalf of him or herself and standing up for individual rights. He used adjectives such as, “confident, educated, as far as knowing themselves, and curious and inquisitive” to describe successful advocates in his classroom. Jose’s actions suggested he promoted self advocacy in his classroom.

The special educator described a successful student self advocate as, “often extroverted, verbal, unafraid, and not intimidated by adults.” He also described these students as, “vocal, confident, but patient in understanding the process.” Randall felt students who had emerging self advocacy skills first only complained about their needs. These students may not attempt to brainstorm possible solutions to meet their needs. His actions supported his discussion about students who self advocate. Adjectives found in the text for each participant can be found in Table 10.

### **The influence of educational role toward self advocacy**

During this study, participants reflected on their perceived role in teaching students with disabilities how to identify their needs and wants and obtain resources to meet their requests. Each participant’s perceived role in teaching students how to self advocate reflected their experiences, their educational background, and their educational role with students with disabilities. Data collection within the quotations and significant statements provided evidence that the participant’s educational role influenced how they instructed students with disabilities to use self advocacy.

Overall, the administrator and special educator saw themselves as leaders toward educating students about their rights and accessing resources. The special educator also saw himself as, “a facilitator, organizer, and a problem solver.” Randall’s responsibilities as a case manager suggested his leadership and advocacy with students with disabilities.

Because of his educational role with students, the administrator perceived his role with students with disabilities as, “a mediator, trouble shooter, and mentor.” He felt

Table 10

Themes Emerged about the Perceptions of These Educators about Self Advocacy

	Administrator	Counselor	General Educator	Special Educator
Perception of the Self Advocate	Confident	Knowledgeable	Curious	Verbal
	Articulates	Speaks up	Inquisitive	Unafraid
	Ask questions	Seeks help	Educated	Extroverted
	Aware	Confident		Not intimidated
The Perceived Role of the Educator	Mediator	Resource	Role Model	Facilitator
	Trouble shooter	Communicator	Instructor	Problem Solver
	Leader	Sponsor	Promoter	Organizer
	Mentor	Advisor	A guide	Leader
Need for Supports	Social Pressures	From Home	From Home	In Transition
	Helpful	Early Age	Goal Setting	Parent Support
	Academically		Parent Support	Socially

schools needed to promote self advocacy. Students sought him for advice, guidance and assistance in obtaining resources.

The counselor's and the general educators' perceived role in teaching self advocacy addressed students more regularly. They presented self advocacy to students

with disabilities through instruction more often than the administrator and counselor. The counselor perceived her role as “a resource, communicator, sponsor, and advisor.” The general educator perceived his role as “a guide, role model, instructor and a promoter for learning.” He hoped his teaching style promoted self advocacy. All participants agreed that students needed self advocacy to be successful in secondary school. Due to the different educational roles, the participants varied in how they viewed their role in support for self advocacy.

### **Need for stable supports (school setting and home setting)**

In order to promote self advocacy, the final theme that emerged from the data included the participants’ discussion about stable support for students with disabilities both within the secondary setting and home setting. According to Randall, because students have information delivered from many adults, peers, avenues, and Medias, students may struggle with processing information and determining the next step of progression within a problem. Particularly in secondary settings, students must interact with several different people of authority. Students with disabilities may struggle to determine how adults such as librarians, custodial staff, and administrative assistants could help access resources. Both Randall and Jose pointed out the need for parental support to encourage self advocacy. Jose also noted that consistent expectations and organization help students anticipate the steps toward progress.

The administrator and the counselor both supported the need for parental support in setting the example of self advocacy. The administrators stated, “The school needed the home support and social support to better understand how to obtain resources for their requests. Also, home support can aid the school in how to better understand their

students' needs." The counselor's support for self advocacy differed slightly from the other participants because she described an emphasis on teaching self advocacy at an earlier age. Therefore, she noted that, "because of the academic rigor, high school setting does not show a support in teaching students how to self advocate." She elaborated her support by stating, "I think that has a lot to do with the fact that parents are considered to be the point of contact for us and not the student." Overall all participants displayed support for teaching self advocacy to students.

The teachers both used the word, "valuable" to describe their support for self advocacy. Randall also used the words, "necessary and immeasurable" to describe the importance of mastering the skill of self advocacy. Jose also used the words, "advantageous and important" to emphasize the connection to student success. Both teachers' behaviors reflected their responsibilities as teachers and their role in teaching students how to better meet their needs.

The administrator and the counselor both used the words, "helpful" to describe their perception of self advocacy in public secondary settings. The administrator used the word, "beneficial" to students when they can easily communicate their perceptions of a situation to an adult or peer. The counselor used the word, "useful" to explain the benefit of self advocacy to students. She described her department as a support for self advocacy so that students could use her as a resource.

## **Evidence of Quality**

Like other types of research, qualitative research must suggest validity, trustworthiness, and quality of the study (Merriam, 2009). Several measures were taken to assure accuracy of the data and evidence of quality. Because I was the only one who collected data, I was responsible for removing potential biases to ensure validity. As the primary data collector, I was mindful of my personal biases and assumptions. I sought to separate any personal thoughts and feelings during the process of interviewing and observations.

In order to protect the validity of the study, the observational notes were collected first. Structural corroboration was used in looking for recurring behaviors or actions. Later, consensual validation was implemented by a colleague in education to confirm that the description, interpretation, and evaluation were accurate (Eisner, 1991).

In order to suggest trustworthiness, each of the primary methods of data collection was compared to each other. Likewise, the themes that emerged from the data were also compared to previous literature. Data confirmed the impact of educational role on self advocacy (Martin, et al., 2004). Also, thematic units suggested home support and structure to be beneficial (Deci and Ryan, 2000). By drawing upon multiple independent sources of data, I limited threats towards validity and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). All findings were reported as comprehensive descriptions of the participants' perceptions within the study. Transcriptions were available to the participants for review to confirm the accuracy of their perspectives.

Further, the process, triangulation of three primary sources, was used to enhance credibility and to ensure quality. Data from observations, interviews, and available

documentation were examined, compared, and interpreted. Using multiple independent sources, the conclusions to the research questions were strengthened and the risks of possible misinterpretations were reduced (Merriam, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the current study revealed that these educators displayed behaviors that helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses and helped students seek resources. The behaviors were presented toward groups of people and individuals, both verbally and nonverbally. Likewise, these educators displayed specific strategies that prior research supported in self advocacy such as inventory of performance levels and expectations, positive reinforcement, and role playing (Hammer, 2004; Schelling, 2010; Karvonen, et al., 2002). The findings also included significant statements and quotations that supported perceptions of student self advocates, their experiences, and their perceived role in teaching students with disabilities to self advocate (Table 11). Patterns were examined, compared, and confirmed with past literature. Observational transcribed notes that recorded the defined behaviors were then compared to the recorded perceptions from the interviews and available documentation. Overall, three recurring themes emerged from these participants about teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. These themes included similar perception of student self advocates, the influence of the perceived role of the educators, and the need for stable supports both within the secondary setting and home setting. These themes were the result of open and axial coding of clustering of key phrases and/or quotations. Chapter 5 of the dissertation includes a summary and interpretation of the findings according to the research questions, a discussion of the implications in light of the



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Table 11

Total Significant statements, Quotations, and Recorded behaviors from each Participant

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	Observational Notes	Transcribed Interviews	Available Documentation
Administrator	83	76	63
Counselor	130	50	32
General Educator	141	70	22
Special Educator	130	54	60

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relevant literature and theoretical framework, limitations of the study, the recommendations for future research, and the conclusion of study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS OF IMPLICATIONS, AND DISCUSSION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Conclusions**

This collective case study research explored the perceptions of four educators in different educational roles toward teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. The primary data sources for this case study research were observations, interviews, and available documentation. Data analysis consisted of providing a rich and detailed description of the findings of the context of each case presented in Chapter 4. Within Chapter 5, I discussed a summary of the findings for each research question, a discussion of the implications in light of the relevant literature and theoretical framework, an outline of the limitations and recommendations for future research that would extend the findings, and a conclusion of significance.

The three major themes that emerged from the findings included similar perceived descriptions of student self advocates, the influence of the educators' role toward in self advocacy, and the need for stable supports in school and home settings. These themes were further examined in this chapter and categorically integrated to answer the four research questions of this study. The research questions were addressed using all of the data collected in the study from the primary documents. Following the interpretations and conclusions to the research questions, the recommendations and the conclusions are addressed.

Research Question Number One: What do educators perceive students do in order to self advocate?

Using open-ended Interview Questions 3-7, 15 and 16, observations, and available documentation including the reflective journals, I obtained personal definitions and personal examples of self advocacy from each participant. Educators from the four different roles described students using self advocacy in generally the same terms. Each participant provided specific words that described students who successfully self advocated. Within in their definitions, all participants talked about students' displays of confidence. This was the primary attribute ascribed to self advocacy.

Jose, the general educator, stated effective self advocates were, "confident, educated, as far as knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, and curious and inquisitive." The special educator described students who self advocated as confident, verbal, and not too intimidated to ask questions. He stated, "These students are able to speak up and out, clearly, with adult figures especially ones that might be considered intimidating. They are able to simulate adult or mature responses to undesirable situations." Although the administrator did not use confidence as a description, all of his descriptive words incorporated the definition of confident. The administrator used words such as assertive and articulate when describing students who effectively asked questions to adults. Similarly, Lisa, the counselor, used words such as knowledgeable and aware to describe student self advocators. In her journal, she wrote, "A successful advocator speaks up for his needs and asks for help. I have observed students self advocate by getting their parents involved if they could not get their question answered, but mostly they came and asked for help first."

Participants also provided a contrast to exemplify what was not effective self advocacy. Randall discussed in his reflective journal the fine line between self advocacy

and complaining. Randall wrote, “Of course, there needs to be a balance of simply complaining to be oppositional, as teenagers can sometimes be, and getting what you need and saying what needs to be said.” Randall described part of a student’s difficulty in self advocating was appropriately understanding the teacher’s role within the classroom. Because the teacher is an adult, students may follow rules of teacher authority, but they may be unaware of knowledge, resources, and guidance students could obtain from the teacher’s authority.

Similarly, the administrator addressed how students with disabilities struggled with authority and often struggled with identifying how best to obtain resources quickly within a variety of educational settings they faced in a secondary school. He also stated “some of the students would rather sit and fail than to raise awareness as to why they are not doing very well academically.” He suggested social pressures and the lack of parent involvement contributed to such student attitudes.

To summarize, participants used similar terms to describe successful student self advocates as students who showed confidence in accessing help and resources. Confident students were described, across participants, as understanding their strengths and weakness, willing to approach adults, and active in addressing their needs. In contrast, it was suggested by participants that students who were not successful self advocates struggled with communicating with authority and navigating various peer groups in a variety of school settings within a large secondary school.

Participants’ descriptions equated to the definitions and theoretical framework discussed by various researchers in the literature review. All descriptions by participants in this study were similar to Skinner’s definition, including student understanding of their

disability and legal rights, while demonstrating competence in communicating rights and needs (Skinner, 1998). Students who demonstrated confidence were more likely to communicate for rights and needs (Skinner, 1998). Skinner's operational definition of self advocacy also addressed seeking resources from authority (Skinner, 1998). Although the use of complaining as a strategy can obtain some resources, the special educator's perception of complaining provided a similar discrepancy between self advocacy and complaining as other research discussed (AAID, 2012). The strategy of complaining only voices concerns and often unsuccessfully. Students who progress further toward self advocacy actively seek means to address their needs.

Comparably, Snitker-Magin (2011) noted that students with disabilities must also communicate rights and needs to those in positions of authority and often do not understand the expectations or means to achieve expectations. Further, the learning from experiences and surroundings affirmed the connection between self advocacy and the social learning theory. However, findings by Deci and Ryan (2000b) that experiences outside the instructional setting, specifically confirmed ecological pressures students dealt with during adolescence, provided insight as to why students may struggle with confidence and willingness to reveal their needs to authority figures. Educators working together who define self advocacy similarly can help parents and students better understand expectations and responsibilities of students entering secondary school.

Research Question Number Two: What are educators' experiences in developing student self advocacy?

Using open-ended Interview Questions 3-7, 15 and 16 and available documentation including teacher provide lessons and reflective journals, I obtained evidence of how each participant's experiences impacted his or her influence in the development of student self advocacy. Reported experiences included educational background, strategies they used in developing student self advocacy, and the struggles that they perceived students with disabilities had in dealing with self advocacy. Each participant provided specific examples of experiences of development of student self advocacy.

In general, participants discussed how their educational roles impacted their descriptions of educating students with disabilities about self advocacy. Having a background in special education prior to being an administrator affected Thomas's perception towards educating students about self advocacy. He was aware of how their disabilities impacted students' abilities to speak up and seek help. Strategies Thomas most commonly used to develop self advocacy included positive reinforcement and modeling advocacy in a variety of student situations. In his discussion with students with disabilities, he stated, "I appreciate you coming to talk to an adult" to praise the student for understanding his or her needs. Later, he stated, "Given the events, we need to create a plan of success." He modeled appropriate behaviors in seeking resources. He felt that students that modeled and practiced his strategies participated more in educational planning during the IEP. Although he stressed the importance of understanding where to seek resources, his experiences clearly included many instances in which students did not know how to seek appropriate resources.

However, Thomas provided more examples than non-examples regarding how students self advocated. For example, in his interviews, he provided two examples of self advocacy that he witnessed as an administrator. “Behaviorally, a student who frequently exhibited impulsive, explosive behaviors recognized his frustration level and requested to be removed from the environment. From an academic standpoint, a student advocated for small group testing so that the test could be read to him. This student brought it to my attention and I reminded his teachers.” Thomas’s statements regarding his experiences clearly indicated overt effort and applied strategies to develop student self advocacy.

The counselor’s experiences impacted her counseling philosophy related to working with student self advocacy. Lisa’s previous experience in teaching world history provided her opportunities to see students advocate for their needs within the general education classroom. As a counselor, she utilized a variety of strategies to help students speak out for their resources. In addition to positive reinforcement and supportive comments, Lisa spoke with students individually about their performance levels and expectations. She suggested that positive supports from adults within the school setting, and home setting provided support for students to have confidence to speak up for their needs. When students voiced concerns and did not sit passively, they created more opportunities to self advocate. She perceived that students with disabilities struggled to speak up for their needs. In her words, “It is hard to teach a student with a disability how to self advocate because they are so used to gaining assistance with their learning on so many levels. This group of students have been receiving so much help in this area, it is hard to teach them to change that way of thinking.” This statement alluded to the perception that some educators who work predominantly in the general curriculum have

for some students with disabilities and the perception of learned helplessness (Gill, Martin, Salkind, & Rasmussen, 2008). Because educators in the general curriculum were not be aware of the IEP specifics that include the explanation of a student's struggles, deficits, goals, and accommodations that promote self advocacy for a specific student's progress, the perception of these students displaying learned helplessness was plausible.

The counselor also provided detailed examples of how students developed self advocacy skills. For example, in her reflective journal, she explained, "A student voiced she was hungry and needed lunch money. We checked if this student fell under that free and reduced lunch so that we could assist them in the proper resources. We followed through with the cafeteria." Lisa discussed her educational role as a resource for students to seek information and assistance. Regarding students with disabilities, she noted a desire for them to feel comfortable seeking help so that an adult could attend to their needs.

Jose, the general educator, also discussed in length his experiences in developing self advocacy. His educational role as a instructor impacted many levels of students from advanced placement students to students receiving special education services on a college preparatory diploma. He provided several examples of students who advocate well. These students prompted peers and others to help them achieve resources around them. Students that were more extroverted, talkative, and educated advocated better to meet their needs. Students who did not speak out for their needs might fall behind. He stated, "There is very little room for the differing types of kids in the class. And, it makes it hard to help those kids along that are struggling."



Jose used positive reinforcement, an inventory of expectations, and accountability to help students develop self advocacy. He used phrases, such as “You are a very hard worker,” and “Can you list one more example?” Positive statements provided students with an avenue of critical thinking to master the standard. He also continually requested an inventory of expectations from the students so that they could identify a plan to master the goals of world history.

Jose’s behaviors and statements held the students accountable for their own responsibilities in learning the information. His overall experience with students with disabilities suggested they had weaknesses in focus and questioning. In order to strengthen this weakness, Jose would pause for a class summary of what was just discussed. During that time, he would ask students who had not provided feedback if they had any questions. Jose closed his interview by saying, “Sometimes, I think their disabilities get in the way therefore they just can’t focus long enough. Their disabilities may get in the way where they can’t focus enough through the frustration to understand what they know, what they don’t know, and how to ask for help for the things that they don’t know.” He concluded by adding that teachers should provide many opportunities throughout a lesson for students to self monitor what they just learned and to consider what they need to do next in order to achieve their goals.

The special educator shared similar experiences as the other participants, despite the fact that he spent his entire instructional day with students with disabilities. Randall’s educational background included working with adults and adolescents with disabilities. Some of his responsibilities included helping this population transition, advocate, and succeed as independently as possible. The three main strategies Randall used with his

students included modeling, accountability, and positive reinforcement. Through modeling, he rephrased students' inappropriate statements. One student attempted to move to another seat during instruction time while talking to another student. Randall stated, "Where do you want to sit? If you can use words, then you can move." In his experiences in his reflective journal, he reported "struggling to keep data on teaching advocacy skills." The students in his classes require repetition and intense explanation; therefore emphasis on academics took precedent. Similar to the other participants, the special educator's experiences strongly supported his perception of the need for teaching students with disabilities how to self advocate, along with clear evidence to indicate that he promoted development of students' self advocacy skills.

Overall, all four participants provided examples of experiences to support their perceptions that students needed to develop self advocacy skills. In addition, they provided relevant scenarios to discuss how they attempted to develop student self advocacy skills. Participants regularly noted verbal strategies they used in class and individual conferences. Commonly, those strategies included positive reinforcement when students applied strategies, questioning to focus thinking and modeling of strategies. All participants described overt effort to develop self advocacy skills, but the lack of time, previously learned "helplessness" for high functioning students, and priority of academic work were given as barriers to greater development of student self advocacy skills.

Prior research supported the participants' strategies. Positive reinforcement and modeling suggested by Schelling (2010) was used by the administrator. Test's et al (2005) supported self monitoring performance levels. Taking an inquiry of performance

levels was used by the counselor. The general educator periodically surveyed the students in the classroom who did not display strong self advocacy to provide them more opportunity to practice. Karvonen et al., (2002) also supported this strategy to promote self advocacy. In addition, observations indicated the special educator spent detailed time with individuals explaining their responsibilities and how they were accountable for their choices. Prior research affirmed using such accountability to reinforce self advocacy skills (Test, 2005).

Research Question Number Three: What roles do educators perceive they have in developing self advocacy of students with disabilities?

In order to address Research Question 3, all participants described their perceived role in educating students with disabilities about self advocacy through Interview Questions 8-13 and 18 and available documentation. The participants' descriptions were compared to their defined behaviors towards teaching self advocacy.

Thomas described his perceived role as an administrator as a coach to students and adults. He explained, "I am a behavioral coach and an academic coach. I always integrate academic discussion into realistic situations." He felt that he provided a connection to students, teachers, and parents so that they could access resources to meet their own needs. He also described his role as an educator first. He wanted to help the students better understand the process of obtaining resources. He stated, "If they learn how to seek resources, then they don't always have to go to someone. They can stand up for themselves and they can ask a question on their own."

He concluded that he felt the school had a role in teaching self advocacy to students who did not possess strong advocacy skills. However, he reported that he felt the school's primary role was teaching academics. "Individual teachers may choose to teach their students how to self advocate. But I think the school should have a priority to teach self advocacy strategies." His responses aligned with and were supported by actions witnessed during the full day observation of him and prior research indicated by other educators (Schelling, 2010).

Lisa perceived her role as a counselor to be that of a resource for all students. Although she worked with students with disabilities regularly, she admitted that her other responsibilities did not allow her many opportunities to instruct self advocacy to students with disabilities specifically. She discussed the many resources the counseling department provided students with disabilities. She stated, "Students with disabilities can seek many services such as tutors, peer mediation, financial assistance for breakfast and lunch, referrals for outside counselors, and grade verification by requesting an appointment." For students who do not make appointments, their designated counselor created an appointment for them twice a year and discussed registration. They also gave the students the opportunity to ask question. Because her educational role was within a secondary setting, she felt students should have already mastered self advocacy.

For further assistance both students and parents could make an appointment with their counselor. Packets of information on various topics were made available in the counseling center for parents and students to obtain. Despite the availability of these supports, Lisa agreed that students with disabilities may continue to struggle, but felt that the parents should be helping these students advocate. In her explanation she stated,

“The school does not currently teach students how to advocate for their needs or rights. I think that has a lot to do with the fact that parents are considered to be the point of contact for us and not the student.” The packets of information that the counseling department provided could help students and parents access information; however, because there was a lack in declaration of the parental responsibilities, she noted parents and students still may not be aware of all of the resources available. Lisa’s behaviors aligned with and confirmed her perceived role of resource.

Jose’s perceived role towards teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities was that of a general educator. As an instructor, he felt he needed to provide a safe environment for students to learn about world history and culture. He stated that part of his role was to help students from other countries adapt to this public educational system. As a former immigrant and Spanish speaker, Jose described his attitude towards non-native students as sensitive because of the cultural barrier that prevents them from being successful. He felt compelled to help this particular subgroup of students speak out for their needs. He also perceived his role as a facilitator of information. Because he taught in a secondary setting, he treated the students as young adults that should accept responsibility for their assignments and assessments. Jose explicatively communicated with both parents and students about the expectations for his class.

Overall, Jose struggled with the time allotted to teachers in order to achieve all of the academic standards. He stated, “there is so much focus on how long do we teach information and when do we have to be done; therefore, there is very little room for the differing types of kids in the class. And, it makes it hard to help those kids along that are

struggling.” The general educator’s behaviors aligned with and confirmed his perceived role in teaching students how to develop self advocacy.

Finally, Randall perceived his role as that of a special educator with a responsibility for teaching students how to self advocate. He first explained that because he was a special education teacher at this school, he had two main tasks. He was a case manager of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and also a collaborative teacher assisting students with disabilities in a large U.S. history class. Because he spent part of his day with students with ASD, he also taught study skills, affective skills, and a G.E.D. preparatory class.

Randall believed his role was the most critical for students with disabilities because he had the responsibility of communicating with all of the parents, teachers, certified staff and students about the progress and expectations of the students with disabilities. He stated, “Part of my job as case manager is to interact with the parent almost on a daily basis. I also try to connect with all of the teachers who work with my students.” He elaborated, “Also, part of my job is to support them and their teachers. The supports ranged from behavior resources to organizational supports.” Randall’s actions aligned with and confirmed his perceived role in educating students about self advocacy.

Clearly evident across all participants’ responses was overt effort in encouraging students to ask questions and a push to involve students in plan development to obtain goals. Whether the participants perceived themselves as a coach, a resource, an instructor, or communication coordinator, they all noted the priority of academic performance in the school. They underscored the availability of resources available.

There was a difference, though, in perceptions of those with a specific special education role and those with a broader general education role, in that the administrator and special educator perceived it their duty to develop self advocacy skills of students with disabilities. The counselor and general educator perceived it as their role to support all students, but they did not report a specifically different responsibility to develop self advocacy skills for students with disabilities.

Perceptions of participants in this study aligned with perceptions of comparable participants in the extant literature. Similar to prior research about administrators, the administrator in this study understood he should participate in the educational planning of students with disabilities (Martin, et al., 2004). The counselor perceived role aligned with previous research and observational data indicated comparable contact time for students with disabilities as in Van Dycke, et al.'s study (2006). Although previous research does not specifically address using self advocacy in the context of a general education world history class, researchers have suggested facilitating self advocacy across settings (Wehmeyer, et al, 1998). Overall, participants' perceptions were situated squarely in the existing body of information.

Research Question Number Four: What actions and behaviors do educators demonstrate to encourage self advocacy amongst students with disabilities?

Finally, Research Question Number Four was addressed by Interview Questions 4, 10, 12, 13 and 17, the available documentations, and the data collected from the observations. All participants agreed that students needed self advocacy to be successful in secondary school. In alignment with their perceived roles within the school,

educational background and experiences, and overall perceptions regarding self advocacy, the participants displayed actions and behaviors that encouraged self advocacy amongst students with disabilities.

Like the other participants, the administrator displayed both nonverbal and verbal behaviors to promote student self advocacy. Some of these behaviors included praise, inventory of performance levels, inventory of expectations, supportive comments, and holding students accountable. Overall, during the observation, the administrator displayed behaviors that helped students understand their performance levels in 48 occurrences. He also displayed helping students seek resources in 35 occurrences (Table 5). Thomas felt that teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities was helpful and beneficial to their success in secondary school. His actions demonstrated his willingness to help students meet their needs and request resources.

The counselor also felt self advocacy skills were helpful and useful in obtaining resources within the environment. Behavior 1 was recorded 80 times including when Lisa helped students' identify their performance levels, strengths, and weaknesses. Likewise, Behavior 2 was marked when she helped students seek resources for a total of 53 occurrences. Although she displayed both verbal and nonverbal behaviors in teaching students to self advocate, she primarily used praise and positive reinforcement to encourage self advocacy. Her nonverbal behaviors included helping students correctly fill out credit surveys to identify their graduation requirements. Her behaviors depicted her perception of teaching students with disabilities how to self advocate.

The general educator demonstrated helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses through verbal inventories of performance levels. For Behavior 1, 88



occurrences were recorded. He used direct instruction and modeling to help students seek resources and develop plans for obtaining mastery of goals. Behavior 2 was recorded at 53 occurrences. Jose felt that using self advocacy within instruction provided students an example of achieving their goals. His actions demonstrated his perceived responsibility in helping students with disabilities self advocate.

Finally, the special educator felt that he helped students obtain resources to meet needs. Across observations of him, he demonstrated helping students identify performance levels both within small groups and individually. Behavior 1 was recorded at 65 occurrences. He also helped students obtain resources to achieve goals. These behaviors mainly occurred with individual students. Behavior 2 was recorded 77 times. His behaviors depicted his perception of teaching students with disabilities.

All of the participants in the study employed both verbal and non-verbal behaviors in working with students. Routine strategies included use of praise, identification of performance levels, setting/reviewing goals, and modeling of strategies to obtain resources and self advocate. Specific student activities differed and were embedded in the function of each participant: discussion of graduation requirements with the counselor; discussion of choice making in behavior and academics with the administrator; responding to teacher questions and prompts to consider academic goals in the general education classroom; and work to obtain resources with the special educator. Observed behaviors aligned with participants' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in developing self advocacy.

## **Implications**

The historical overview in the literature review demonstrated that federal and state mandates required educators in secondary settings to help prepare students to become more independent (United States Department of Education, 2007). This collective case study explored the perceptions of four educators in different educational roles toward teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. The participants defined the descriptions of effective student self advocates. They promoted the development of self advocacy skills to help students access resources and meet their needs. Each participant's behaviors aligned with his or her perceived educational role in educating students with disabilities. Finally, each participant employed a variety of verbal and non-verbal strategies to purposely develop student self advocacy skills. Ample data indicated participants' behaviors aligned with and confirmed their perceptions.

The findings in this study have several implications for social change in public education. Positive social change occurs when human conditions and choices create a more productive environment than previously acquired (Swanson, 2008.). This study shed some light on educators' perceptions about teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities and how they demonstrated these perceptions in their behaviors. The findings indicated that, despite their varying roles, the educators in this study shared a sense of responsibility in teaching students with disabilities how to self advocate even though there was no organizational directive as to how to instruct students about self advocacy. Within the interview discussions, all of the participants talked about the need to support student self advocacy through school personnel and home support. Participants reported helping students understand how to manage academic and behavioral needs, handle

authority, and speak out as strategies to promote student self advocacy. Despite the value these educators placed on teaching self advocacy in a secondary setting, their perceptions varied regarding their specific role in teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities, as well as the role they believed the school had in developing self advocacy. The counselor and general educator perceived their role to support all students, where the administrator and special educator perceived it their duty to develop self advocacy skills of students with disabilities. Regardless of the variances in beliefs, however, all participants in the study sought to develop self advocacy skills of students with disabilities through identification of performance levels, work on goals, and modeling or discussion of strategies to obtain resources.

The primary implications of this study are that educators articulated the need for effective student self advocates, employed strategies to develop the skills set within students, and acted according to their own perceptions in teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. As a collective group with no specific organizational expectations or specified appropriations, they sought to provide a productive environment that promoted positive social change. Ultimately, in the absence of formal mandates, the participants acted according to their beliefs about developing self advocacy skills for students with disabilities.

### **Limitations of study**

This phenomenological research involved educators in secondary settings who educated students with identified disabilities on a regular educational diploma track at the same setting. The participants did not include secondary educators working in self-

contained units in which students did not participate in general curriculum requirements of a general education diploma. The participants in this study described different ways in which they conceptualized how self advocacy was addressed in the world around them based on their individual education and experiences.

This research can be used to gain insight into four educators' perspectives working in different educational roles and their behaviors as they work in their natural settings with students with disabilities. Participants were considered and selected based upon experience, credentials, ethnicity, background, and their varied roles in educating students with disabilities. All participants were over the age of 18. The rationale behind the decisions in this study shaped the scope and focus toward how varied educators perceived teaching student self advocacy.

### **Recommendations**

The results of this study appeared to implicate that although educators within the same setting had different experiences and educational roles with students with disabilities, they appeared to share similar perceptions of what an effective self advocate looked like and employed a variety of strategies for teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. The participants' definitions of self advocates were comparable to each other and to the literature review (Skinner, 1998; Test, et al., 2005). Their experiences and perceived roles impacted their behaviors in the educational setting. Despite participants' reports of lack of training in self advocacy instruction, they implemented several instructional strategies for developing student self advocacy discussed in the literature review, including inventory of performance levels, inventory of expectations, role modeling, and direct instruction (Hammer, 2004; Field & Hoffman, 1996; Van-belle,

et al., 2006). Due to the school's focus on academic requirements, three of four participants noted "lack of time" as a barrier to encourage and develop student self advocacy skills. All participants reported that the students with disabilities lacked self advocacy strategies struggled to make progress. Based on these responses, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Educators from all educational roles should practice self advocacy strategies with students with disabilities. Confirmed within the data of the observations, interviews, and available documentation, these educators' perceptions and behaviors demonstrated a desire and willingness to help students identify resources and actively promote confident communication to meet needs. This research provided a better understanding as to how the perceived educational roles contributed to promoting self advocacy practices with students with disabilities within these four educators.
2. Encourage self advocacy practices with all educators by providing training on methods that can be embedded naturally within roles. Educators who must multi-task in order to properly meet the needs of the classroom require practical instruction and application of how to implement self advocacy within specialized instruction. Literature reviewed included increased awareness about self advocacy from staff development and training, yet research did not include self advocacy practices in specific content area such as a language arts class or physics class. With appropriate instruction and training, students observing adult support for self advocacy will encourage student self advocacy behaviors.

3. Provide federal, state and local guidelines regarding responsibilities in educating students about self advocacy to educators, students, and parents. As discussed in the interviews, both the counselor and administrator suggested parents and students may not be aware of how to access resources. Confirmed within the literature, parents and students may not be aware of the expectations and responsibilities. Communication about resources and self advocacy awareness should be promoted in the community.
4. Involve families and make collaborative efforts toward helping students self advocate. Literature supported parents and adults promoting self advocacy in students. Participants added they observed increased achievement in student goals when they were supported in self advocacy by parents and mentors.
5. Develop parent and student support systems to promote self confidence and speaking up for resources. Educators' input about self advocacy can provide parents and students information about how to access resources and information. Developing strong support systems derived as a theme supported by all data methods and within the literature that would increase self advocacy practices.
6. Lobby for appropriations for educating students with disabilities about self advocacy. In order to provide training for educators and support systems to the community that support self advocacy, appropriations must be sought. Legislation protecting students with disabilities can also outline how to help students with disabilities live more independently; noting self advocacy as a priority and a need for training educators and the community.

7. Evaluate the student perceptions of self advocacy. As the evidence of research increases that suggests the importance in promoting self advocacy practices, future research should include a component surveying the students' perceptions of self advocacy. This study included specific examples of how educators perceive self advocacy and the students' responsibilities. Including the student perception would provide more insight as to how to help students act independently.
8. Research cultural differences in how students and parents advocate for themselves. Because of the discrepancy within the educators' perception of how students with disabilities advocate, researching how different cultures encourage advocacy can help communicate school expectations.
9. Continue research of the developmental continuum of self advocacy skills and how development naturally progresses. Participants varied in expectations of student self advocacy practices. Continued research could include specific areas that impede students self advocacy as it pertains to specific disabilities.

As demonstrated in this study, educators' routine strategies for development of student self advocacy included positive reinforcement, modeling self advocacy, direct instruction, inventory of performance levels, and inventory of expectations (Test et al, 2005; Van-belle, et al., 2006; Lancaster & Lancaster, 2003; Hammer, 2004). However, because of the lack of time allotted to teaching self advocacy in the general curriculum, strategies employed by each educator tied directly to the educators' perceptions of their role in teaching self advocacy to students with disabilities. I recommend not only professional training of educators in developing student self advocacy through instructional strategies, but also systematic collaboration amongst educators in the same

location to bring cohesion to development of skills across settings in order maximize student development. Clearly organized local district and school expectations would draw attention to the need and provide structured guidance in how to facilitate student development of skills.

In a similar vein, although providing parental information at the secondary setting encourages self advocacy, providing a structure for parental responsibility could help students and parents better understand the school's expectations. The more awareness about self advocacy generated for students from the home supports, the more opportunities students have to employ self advocacy strategies. Further research could explore a larger population of educators' perceptions of self advocacy and specifically compare educators' perceptions to student perception as it pertained to self advocacy with the goal of identifying practices that most develop confidence and self advocacy practices.

Prior research, along with data from this study, demonstrated that students with disabilities displayed less self advocacy and career planning as compared to students without disabilities (Astramovich, & Harris, 2007; Walker & Test, 2011). Prior research also suggested self advocacy strategies increased post-secondary outcomes (Leake & Boone, 2007). Both educators within this study and those in previous research indicated little time was available to devote to self advocacy instruction (Schelling, 2010). One participant in this study integrated self advocacy instruction into his content area. Therefore, another recommendation from this study is to provide educators with training in development of student self advocacy skills within academic content areas.



Schaefer & Wienke (2011) suggested that while there was more emphasis placed on student performance, many stakeholders and policymakers of school programs continued to research ways for students to be more successful. Perceptions discussed in this study provided rich descriptions of how educators see students self advocate, as well as illuminated the lack of an organized approach to developing the skills of students in this area. Nationally, educators have reported the need to teach self advocacy. Still, there has been little consensus as to how to effectively integrate self advocacy development in the academic curriculum or how to systematically intergrade self advocacy for teachers. As evident in this collective case study, the educators' behaviors toward promoting self advocacy strategies compared to their perceptions despite their little guidance and training from the district and state department of education. Without local emphasis and structure, funding for self advocacy instruction will likely be as varied and uncoordinated as individual educators' practices. Participants described the need for students to display self advocacy behaviors as suggested in the research; still, little funding was reported to help educators promote self advocacy practices.

At the community level of education, further research in two areas would be beneficial for deepening understanding of self advocacy by students with disabilities. First, learning how students and parents from various cultures view proactive self advocacy could generate suggestions for culturally sensitive parent and student training. Exposing educators to various family and ethnical customs provide evidence as to how to communicate using self advocacy practices. Second, provision of a research based developmental continuum of self advocacy skills would provide a working framework to objectively assess students' self advocacy skills across age groups and school settings.

Research in both of these areas would help in systemically approaching support for students and parents.

## **Conclusion**

The primary research question of this study asked what perceptions educators have toward teaching self advocacy. Based on the participants' responses, self advocacy was defined as confidently speaking up about one's needs and seeking appropriate resources. Within these participants experiences, students with disabilities continued to struggle to speak out for their needs. The discovery was made that four educators with the same secondary school, but with different educational roles towards students with disabilities describe effective student self advocates similarly. These participants experiences affected their perception of teaching self advocacy to students. Specifically, the participants in this study perceived themselves as a coach, a resource, an instructor, and communication coordinator. Participants' behaviors supported their perceptions of self advocacy.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



The Graduate School

August 7, 2012

Heather Heap

IRB Approval 1378.080712: A Collective Case Study of the Perceptions and Implementations of Self-Advocacy from Four Educators of Students with Di

Dear Heather,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fernando Garzon".

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**



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## APPENDIX B: TIMELINE AND BUDGET

Step 1: January 2012—Finalize chair & committee together and register for EDUC 989

Step 2: July 2012—Request permission from local administrator to conduct study

Step 3: July 2012—Submit research plan to the Internal Review Board for approval

Step 4: Upon approval, request permission from participants and school to conduct study.

Step 5: (1 day) I will email invitation letters to four different individuals (one highly qualified special education teacher, one general education collaborative teacher, one administrator and one counselor) to determine interest in study. Email; no cost

Step 6: (1 week) A stratified purposeful sampling method will be utilized for this study.

Pool of participants will be identified at the same site. Participants will return consent forms to me in person or via postal system in a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by me. Other participants will have to be found if the original invitees do not agree to take part in the study. In person or postal system.

Step 7 (1-3 days) Individuals will return invitation letter to me in person or via postal system in a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by me. Email; no cost

Step 8: (1-3 days) I will then hand deliver or mail consent forms. In person, postal system.

Step 9: ( 3 weeks) I will provide participants with a letter of consent to conduct observations. I will observe teachers and their presentations of lessons between the hours of 8:00 and 2:00 on school days in their classrooms and other locations on campus.

Teacher observations will be conducted three different times for 55 minutes each in the classroom. The observations will be conducted first to preserve authenticity. After the

observations, I will request that each educator journal about anything that may pertain to self advocacy. During this two week period, I will then conduct interviews with teachers, an administrator, and a counselor to determine their views on educating students about self-advocacy (with IRB approval). Interviews will take approximately one hour each to complete.

Step 10: (1-2 weeks) After reviewing audio-recording of interviews and notes from teacher observations if needed, I will conduct follow up interviews with all participants to gain greater insight, expand, or clarify responses that may be ambiguous.

Step 11: Using open coding and axial coding; I will explore themes of self advocacy these educators practice in their educational setting.

Step 12: (1 week) Participant consent forms along with interview transcripts and observation note cards will be stored and locked in a cabinet in my home.

Step 13: (30 days after final defense) Study results will be disseminated to all stakeholders including the participants and the school system.



## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your job title?
2. What is your teaching experience and background?
3. What are the demographics and disabilities of students in your classroom and/or school?
4. How do you define self advocacy?
5. What have you observed students do in order to self advocate?
6. How would you describe a student who is a successful self advocate?
7. What specific strategies have you seen employed by students that successfully self-advocate?
8. How do home supports, cultural backgrounds, and social pressures affect self advocacy skills?
9. How do the level and type of disability impact self advocacy skills?
10. What supports do you typically provide throughout the year to students with disabilities?
11. What kinds of resources do you provide students with disabilities to help meet their needs?
12. What time do you invest in planning and preparing materials to help students learn self advocacy skills?
13. How do you help students with disabilities self advocate so that they can function with the least amount of assistance to have their needs met?
14. Does the general curriculum support development of self-advocacy? If so, how? If not, why not?
15. What strategies do you encourage with students who successfully self advocate?
16. Think of two or three students you know that successfully self-advocate. What are their specific needs, and how do they self-advocate to have those specific needs met?
17. What self advocacy techniques do you intentionally model and prompt within your interactions with students with disabilities?
18. What role, if any, do schools have in teaching students how to advocate for their needs and rights?
19. Is there a self advocacy curriculum provided by your district or school?
20. How does your school support teaching students how to self-advocate?
21. What problems have you observed or experienced in teaching students with disabilities how to self-advocate?

## APPENDIX E: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO SELECT PARTICIPANTS

This letter is to inform you that you may have the opportunity to participate in a collective case study about how educators instruct students to obtain resources and voice needs. Likewise, this research will address the strategies used with students with disabilities within their local school. Heather Heap, a doctoral student from the education department at Liberty University, will conduct the study as part of a doctoral dissertation.

This letter is to inform you that you are a potential participant. Selection for the study will be based on specific criteria seeking participants from both genders and diverse ethnicity. Additionally, criteria will be based upon your credentials, your position within the school, your contact with students with disabilities, and your willingness to participate. Your perceptions of self advocacy may provide valuable insight and understanding to the field of education. At any time, you may decline from this study.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study and there is no financial reward for participation. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study will help to inform the field of education about the phenomena of self advocacy.

This interview is anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed. Data collection records will be held for five years in secured file. Your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing an interview and an observation, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. The interview will last approximately one hour. Teachers will be observed for three 55-minute sessions each and the administrator and counselor will be observed for one full working day each. Follow up questions may be requested to provide additional feedback. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Heather Heap via email [Hheap@liberty.edu](mailto:Hheap@liberty.edu). If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact Dr. Barbara Jordan-White of the Liberty University-IRB at 813-416-7441 or email [bawhite2@liberty.edu](mailto:bawhite2@liberty.edu).

By signing this form, you are willing to participate. However, you are not guaranteed to be chosen. Participants will be chosen so that they represent the diversity of this setting.

---

Signature

## APPENDIX F: SCRIPT OF VERBAL INVITATION AND FOLLOWUP

### EMAIL

After reviewing the qualified candidates, I will select participants that are willing to participate. Next, I will contact potential participants verbally. The script will state:

"I would like to invite you to participate in a research study on the perceptions of educators that work with students with disabilities. The goal of the study is to provide an in-depth understanding and exploration of how educators help students be more independent and advocate for what they need. At any time, you may redraw your consent to participate in this study without any adverse consequences. The study will include observations (teachers: four 55 minute sessions) (administrator and counselor: one full working day), one face to face interview, and document review such as lesson plans, curriculum, and reflective journal. The interview will seek your perception on issues related to self advocacy. I am asking you to participate based on your experience and involvement with students who have disabilities. The interview should take about an hour and a half of your time. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Please consider this opportunity."

From this correspondence, I will then acquire a response from the participants via return email or return verbal confirmation. I will follow up each verbal confirmation with the following email:

"Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research project. The goal of the study is to provide an in-depth understanding and exploration how educators help students be more independent and advocate for what they need. The study will include

observations, one interview, and a review of available documentation such as lesson plans, curriculum and reflective journals.

The interview will seek your perspectives on issues related to self advocacy. I will provide a copy of the questions prior to the interview. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed into computer-based software for data analysis. After the observations and interviews, I will request a review of any relevant lessons plans and/or instructional documentation. Through the two week period of the interviews, I request you keep a reflective journal as to anything that pertains to self advocacy. I am asking you to participate based on your experience and involvement with students that have disabilities. The interview should take about an hour and a half of your time.

Regarding confidentiality, every attempt will be made to ensure participants' identities remain confidential. No names or other identifying descriptors will be used. The name of the school will not be used. Interviews, observations, and other documents are kept confidential. Please do not identify yourself on this form as all participants are anonymous. A copy of the records and transcripts, inclusive of audio recording of interviews, observations, and reflective journals from the study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my person for the required three years after the end of this study. The audio tapes of the interviews will be erased after being transcribed. After the three years, the computer files will be deleted and all other documents will be shredded and destroyed. The results of the study may be published and presented without naming the participants under the IRB research guidelines of Liberty University. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Heather Heap who is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University".



APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM FOR EDUCATORS TO PARTICIPATE  
*Educators perception of Self Advocacy with Students with Disabilities*

You are being invited to participate in a collective case study about how educators instruct students to obtain resources and voice needs. This research will address the strategies used with students with disabilities within their local school. Heather Heap, a student from the education department at Liberty University, will conduct the study as part of a doctoral dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your credentials, your position within the school, your contact with students with disabilities, and your willingness to participate. Your perceptions of self advocacy may provide valuable insight and understanding to the field of education. At any time, you may redraw your consent to participate in this study without any adverse consequences.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study and there is no financial reward for participation. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study will help to inform the field of education about the phenomena of self advocacy. Your participation in this study is voluntary. At any time, you may redraw your consent to participate in this study without any adverse consequences by informing me in writing. If you choose at any time to be withdrawn from the study, your transcriptions, observational notes, and available documentation (including reflective journals and lesson plans) about you will be shredded immediately. Teachers will be observed for four 55-minute sessions each and the administrator and counselor will be observed for one full working day each. The interview will last approximately one hour. Follow up questions may be requested to provide additional feedback. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason. This interview is anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Should the data be published, no personal information will be disclosed. Data collection records will be held for three years in secured file.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Heather Heap via email [Hheap@liberty.edu](mailto:Hheap@liberty.edu). If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact Dr. Barbara Jordan-White of the Liberty University-IRB at 800-424-9595 or email [bawhite2@liberty.edu](mailto:bawhite2@liberty.edu). By signing this form, you are willing to participate. However, you are not guaranteed to be chosen. Participants will be chosen so that they represent the diversity of this setting.

Statement of Consent:

By signing your name, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. I have read and understand all information as presented in this document. I hereby agree willingly to participate.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H: THANKING POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

I will thank each participant not chosen for the study via email. The email script will be:

I want to personally thank you for considering participating in the study. I know your time is valuable and I would like to thank you for your time and support in helping students identify their needs and facilitating resources in order to make them more independent. At this time, you will not be needed for this study. In the future, if you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

Thank you,

Heather Heap