

THEORY IN SELF-DETERMINATION

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Foundations for Educational Practice

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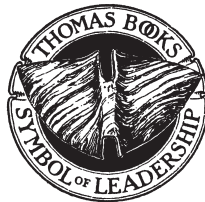
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To Kathy, Geoff, and Graham (MLW)
To Cynthia, Brit, and Tyler (BHA)
To my parents, Madge and Earl (DEM)
To Pat, James and Peter (RJS)

PREFACE

This text provides a comprehensive overview of three theoretical perspectives proposed during the past decade addressing the *self-determination* construct as it applies to the field of special education. From 1990 to 1996, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded 26 model demonstration projects to "promote self-determination for youth with disabilities." Subsequently, OSEP funded five major research projects to develop theoretical frameworks of self-determination and to design assessment processes to measure self-determination. In the intervening years, OSEP and its sister agencies NIDRR (National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research) and RSA (Rehabilitation Services Agency) funded numerous research, outreach and model demonstration projects focusing on self-determination. Most recently, OSEP funded a project to synthesize intervention and research findings in self-determination and self-advocacy. Not surprisingly, promoting self-determination has become a primary focus in the education of students with disabilities, particularly within the context of providing transition services. Moreover, promoting self-determination has become a pillar of disability policy in the United States. Analysts at the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy at George Washington University, for example, conducted a comprehensive review of this disability policy in which they examined all the major disability-related policy initiatives of the last three decades, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Social Security and Fair Housing protections, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. This analysis encapsulates this "emerging disability policy" into *four* guiding principles that cut across all such policy and legislation and which, in turn, guide all efforts impacting people with disabilities in our nation, including education. One of these was that federal policy and practice should empower people with disabilities, promoting *self-determination*, opportunities for meaningful choices, and full participation in and contribution to the community, not paternalization and charity.

Due to the considerable interest in the construct generated by the federal

funding initiatives and legal mandates, there are a growing number of curricular materials and programs focused on enhancing or promoting self-determination, primarily for transition-age students. The professional journals in the field of special education consistently publish papers about self-determination and the conferences of professional associations have workshops and keynote presentations focusing on the topic. Finally, research has shown that self-determination status predicts positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

We note these trends in the field to illustrate the prominent position that the construct “self-determination” has taken in the education of students with disabilities. The federal investment in model demonstration and research projects to make sure that educational services for students with disabilities include a focus on self-determination and the institutionalization of self-determination as a key component of disability services in America ensures that the construct will continue to play an increasingly important role in special education and, more and more, in the education of all students. For example, recent initiatives have focused on the application of self-determination to school reform in urban settings.

The importance and durability of the construct in its application to education places importance on establishing solid theoretical formulations of self-determination that can provide a foundation for the development of treatments and interventions, describe development, examine the impact of environment and social contexts, and predict future behavior. It is fair to say that this is an area in which model and curriculum development has outpaced theoretical and research efforts. However, after the frenzied pace of curriculum and intervention development slowed in the second half of the 1990s (as the national model demonstration projects ended), the need for such theoretical formulations became readily apparent. While these intervention development efforts were generally well intentioned, very few had empirical validation of their efficacy and many simply faded from sight. However, the self-determination initiative had given rise to several theoretical models that were grounded in research in psychology, sociology, and education, and throughout the last half of the 1990s, these models began to emerge as representing the foundational knowledge needed to drive further curriculum and intervention development.

This text overviews three of the models that were developed to provide such theoretical foundations. The three models were selected primarily because they have focused on defining and categorizing self-determination for all students with disabilities, including students with mental retardation and other cognitive disabilities. These models are intended to provide students and practitioners a solid grounding in self-determination theory.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the construct and more detailed information about the structure of the text.

M.L.W.
B.H.A.
D.E.M.
R.J.S.

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THEORY IN SELF-DETERMINATION

SECTION I

An Overview of the Self-Determination Construct

Chapter 1

SELF-DETERMINATION: A REVIEW OF THE CONSTRUCT

MICHAEL L. WEHMEYER

Since 1990 there has been an increased focus in the special education literature on the importance of self-determination in the education of students with disabilities. Due largely to the federal emphasis on and funding for promoting self-determination as a component of transition services for youth with disabilities, numerous resources are now available to support instruction to achieve this outcome. Such resources include curricular materials (Field & Hoffman, 1996a; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998a; Test, Karvonen, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2000; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998), assessment tools (Abery, Stancliffe, Smith, McGrew, & Eggebeen, 1995a; 1995b; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995; Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994), teaching models (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000), model programs (Ward & Kohler, 1996), position papers (Field, et al., 1998b), and student-directed planning programs (Halpern, et al., 1995; Martin & Marshall, 1995; Powers, et al., 1996; Wehmeyer & Sands, 1998). The process of promoting self-determination has been explored across age ranges, from early childhood (Erwin & Brown, 2000; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2000) to secondary education (Field & Hoffman, 1996b; Powers, et al., 1996) and across disability categories, including learning disabilities (Field, 1996), mental retardation and multiple disabilities (Gast et al., 2000; Wehmeyer 1998; 2001), and autism (Fullerton, 1998).

While instructional methods, curricular materials, assessment processes, model programs, and planning procedures are all important components of ensuring that students with disabilities become more self-determined, it is equally important to ensure that such materials, methods and strategies are theoretically based. That is, instructional efforts to promote self-determina-

tion must be based on theory-driven understandings of the construct and its development. This book presents three theoretical perspectives of self-determination that, in turn, provide direction for the design and implementation of treatments and interventions. Subsequent chapters of this book will detail those theoretical perspectives. This chapter begins with a *comprehensive* overview of the construct of self-determination itself, examining its use across multiple disciplines and detailing the meaning of the term.

Before overviewing the self-determination construct, it is worth noting that while each of the theoretical perspectives in this text have been applied to the field of mental retardation, we present them as a means to understand self-determination for all students. These perspectives were selected primarily because they include *all* people, including people with cognitive impairments such as mental retardation. In so doing, we seek to establish a theoretical foundation upon which interventions and treatments to benefit all students can be built.

WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) identified the earliest use of the term *self-determination* as occurring in the year 1683 and defined the term as referring to the “determination of one’s mind or will by itself toward an object” (p. 919). A second meaning of the term identified by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “the action of a people in deciding its own form of government” (p. 919), with the first use of that meaning of the construct occurring in 1911. While both meanings, which we refer to as the personal versus corporate meanings of the construct, are reflected in the use of the term as applied to people with disability, it is the first sense of the term (e.g., the personal sense) that we explore in depth in this text. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition shows, this personal sense of the term pertains, at its fundamental level, to issues of *human action* as a function of mind, will, and/or volition. Other definitions illustrate this basic emphasis. *Webster’s Third New International Unabridged Dictionary* (Gove et al., 1967) defined self-determination as the “determination of one’s acts or states by oneself without external compulsion” (p. 2059). Similarly, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1992) defined self-determination as the “determination of one’s own fate or course of action without compulsion; free will” (p. 814). Self-determination, in essence, refers to *acting* based on *one’s own mind or free will*, without external compulsion.

These definitions provide an indication of the basic intent of the term “self-determination” and reflect the sense of its historical antecedent, the philosophical doctrine of *determinism*. The self-determination construct

emerged from centuries-old debates about free will and determinism, and to understand the intent of the self-determination construct as used today, one must begin with an examination of issues pertaining to determinism.

Determinism is a philosophical doctrine positing that events, in this context human behavior and actions, are effects of preceding causes. There are generally two forms of the doctrine, hard and soft determinism. Hard determinism is the doctrine that *every* event and *every* action is caused in accordance with causal laws that account completely for the event's or action's occurrence. Hard determinists believe that even when human actions are posited to result from mediating determinants or causes, such as wants, wishes, desires, motivations, or feelings, those same wants, wishes, desires, motivations, and feelings are, themselves, caused by specific antecedent conditions that ensure their occurrence. Alternatively, the soft determinism position argues that an act can be both *caused* and *free*. This is because, according to the soft determinist, the hard determinist mistakenly equates "caused" with "forced" or "compelled." The soft determinist believes that every action is caused somehow; but not *every* action is compelled. The indeterminist's or anti-determinist's position differs from both hard and soft deterministic positions by positing that there are *no* causes for events or actions, and that humans act completely from *free will*.

This question of *free will* versus *determinism* is generally identified by philosophers to be one of the most enduring philosophical problems of all time, bound inextricably with religious theologies about the free will of man versus the control and authority (determinism) of God. The Catholic Encyclopedia (Herbermann, Pace, Pallen, Shahan, & Wynne, 1914) stated the dichotomy as such:

On the one hand, does man possess genuine moral freedom, power of real choice, true ability to determine the course of his thoughts and volitions, to decide which motives shall prevail within his mind, to modify and mould his own character? Or, on the other, are man's thoughts and volitions, his character and external actions, all merely the inevitable outcome of his circumstances? Are they all inexorably predetermined in every detail along rigid lines by events of the past, over which he himself has had no sort of control? This is the real import of the free-will problem.

In his important work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, John Locke provided a synopsis of the "free will problem." Trying to illustrate the importance of connections in human thought to understanding, Locke wrote:

this proposition "men can determine themselves" is drawn in or inferred from this, "that they shall be punished in the other world." For here the mind, seeing

the connexion there is between the idea of men's punishment in the other world and the idea of God punishing; between God punishing and the justice of the punishment; between justice of punishment and guilt; between guilt and a power to do otherwise; between a power to do otherwise and freedom; and between freedom and self-determination, sees the connexion between men and self-determination. (Locke, 1690)

Locke is considered a soft determinist, someone who saw both causality and free will at work in human behavior. Elsewhere in the *Essay*, which was intended to establish the foundations for a new science of human understanding and knowledge, Locke hypothesized that all human thought comes from *sensation* and *reflection* and, consequently, all human action comes from human thought. Writing in an "Abstract of the *Essay*" published in 1688, he stated:

In the thoughts I have had concerning the Understanding, I have endeavoured to prove that the mind is at first *rasa tabula*. The mind having been supposed void of all innate characters, comes to receive them by degrees as experience and observation lets them in; and we shall, upon consideration, find they all come from two originals, and are conveyed into the mind by two ways, viz. sensation and reflection. The mind, taking notice of its own operation about these ideas received by sensation, comes to have ideas of those very operations that pass within itself: this is another source of ideas, and this I call reflection; and from hence it is we have the ideas of thinking, willing, reasoning, doubting, purposing. From these two originals it is that we have all the ideas we have; and I think I may confidently say that, besides what our senses convey into the mind, or the ideas of its own operations about those received from sensation, we have no ideas at all. (Locke, 1688)

As illustrated above, Locke adamantly opposes any notion that ideas are innate as had been suggested by other philosophers, most noticeably in Descartes' declaration that we are born with the *idea* of God planted in us *by* God. All human ideas and knowledge, according to Locke, emerge from experience (sensation) and from reflection on that experience or sensation.

Locke classified ideas as simple and complex, with complex ideas derived from relations between simple ideas, generated by reflection. Among these complex ideas were what Locke called "Modes" or complex ideas that combine simpler elements to form a new whole that does not exist except as a part or feature of something else. For example, we understand the "idea" of infinity without ever having to see it exist as an actual object that can be counted. Mixed modes, which combined both sensory and reflective elements, were especially important to Locke since they included the ideas of *human actions*, including the ideas of power, volition and liberty. Locke

defines power as the ability to make (active power) or receive (passive power) change (Kemerling, 2000–2001). According to Locke, the human mind has the *active* power of beginning or ceasing its own operations as activated by a preference. The exercise of that power is volition or will. Freedom or liberty (complex mixed mode idea) is “the power to act on our volition, whatever it may be, without any external compulsion or restraint” (Locke, 1690; Chapter II, XXI). Locke avoids entanglement in the free will problem by noting that the cause of the volition is irrelevant, since it is the agent, not the will, that is free. Human beings act freely just insofar as they are capable of translating their mental preferences to do or not to do into their actual performance of the action in question (Kemerling, 2000–2001). Locke writes:

Every one, I think, finds in himself a power to begin or forbear, continue or put an end to several actions in himself. From the consideration of the extent of this power of the mind over the actions of the man, which everyone finds in himself, arise the ideas of liberty and necessity. All the actions that we have any idea of reducing themselves, as has been said, to these two, viz. thinking and motion; so far as a man has power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a man free. Wherever any performance or forbearance are not equally in a man’s power; wherever doing or not doing will not equally follow upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not free, though perhaps the action may be voluntary. So that the idea of liberty is, the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other: where either of them is not in the power of the agent to be produced by him according to his volition, there he is not at liberty; that agent is under necessity. So that liberty cannot be where there is no thought, no volition, no will; but there may be thought, there may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty. (Locke, 1690; Book II, Chapter XXI)

Freedom (from the Latin *libertas*), a frequent target of hard determinists like B.F. Skinner, is conceptualized as the human capacity to act (or not to act) as we choose or prefer, without any external compulsion or restraint. Freedom in this sense is usually regarded as a presupposition of moral responsibility: that is, the only actions for which I, as an autonomous person, may be praised or blamed, rewarded or punished, are just those which I perform freely (Herbermann et al., 1914). This is the crux of the free will problem in determinism; that an omnipotent being (God) can only hold humans accountable for their behavior and actions if, indeed, those humans had the autonomy and free will to act based on their own volition as opposed to all actions being predetermined by God.

Locke’s proposals about the causes of human action as both caused and volitional are important as the foundation for understanding the modern

sense of the term *self-determination*. It is also important to note Locke's soft deterministic distinction that it is the *agent* (the person him or herself) who is free to act, not the action itself (since it is "caused" by perception or sensation). From Locke and onward determinism was gradually decoupled from the sole form of determinism considered to that point, theological determinism. Today we recognize numerous "determinants" of human behavior, including physiological, structural, environmental, and/or organismic factors. Theories of human behavior recognize the impact on human actions and behavior of biological or genetic determinism (behavior as an effect of biological functions such as genes or neurochemicals), familial or relative determinism (human behavior as an effect of family or parental influence or treatment), environmental determinism (behavior as an effect of the environment), psychological determinism (behavior as an effect of how we perceive or understand situations), economic determinism (action as an effect of economic forces or circumstances) and so forth.

With the turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of psychology as a discipline distinct from philosophy, the philosophical discussion of determinism and self-determination as it pertains to human action and behavior becomes overshadowed by discoveries and theories in biology, psychology and anthropology. Nevertheless, even as the meaning or sense of the construct changes as it is used in other disciplines, it is important to remember that the construct's roots lie in the *free will problem* that was the basis of philosophic discussions for centuries. That is, is human behavior the effect of human thought, free will and volition or are such actions predetermined and indeterminant? As discussed subsequently, the scope of the question altered somewhat during the twentieth century and there is currently less focus on theological determinism and more on biological, environmental or other forms of determinism. Nevertheless, self-determination still refers fundamentally to and its meanings derive directly from the philosophical debates around determinism.

Self-Determination in Psychology. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the rapidly growing discipline of psychology brought its empiricism and experimentalism to bear on questions that had previously been the sole domain of introspective philosophers and, in so doing, changed the question posed by the free will problem slightly, from whether human behavior is the effect of free will or is predetermined to whether human behavior is caused by internal versus external forces. In essence, the antideterminist or indeterminist view espoused in philosophy was never adopted by psychologists, leaving only the hard versus soft determinism perspectives. This is likely a function of several factors. The earliest psychologists were heavily influenced in the early 1900s by the perceived explanatory power of the "new biology" which featured the merger of Darwinian evolutionary theory with the newly