

Becoming Self-Determined:  
Improving Self-Determination Skills in College Students with Disabilities

by

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## ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities are entering higher-education institutions at increasing rates, but they are not being adequately prepared for this transition. Transition plans have been created by Special Education teams in the K-12 system, but often times, the student is not an active participant in the development of these plans for their futures. A huge gap in preparing for the transition to post-secondary education is a student's self-determination skills. Self-determination is a belief that you control your own destiny and are motivated to create your own path in life. This study explores how students with disabilities can improve their self-determination skills through guided practice and small group collaboration. Participants included ( $n=4$ ) freshmen students with disabilities who were actively engaged with their institution's Disability Resource Center at a 4-year public research institution in the West.

A qualitative practical action research study was designed to explore the impact of implementing a self-determination innovation to support college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills. The innovation developed for this study was adapted from Field and Hoffman's *Steps to Self-Determination* curriculum. Findings from this study illustrate the need to support transitioning college students with disabilities in understanding their disabilities and how it can and will impact them in the college environment and beyond. Providing students with a safe space to explore their disabilities and the challenges they have encountered in their lives, allows them to identify the barriers to their growth and build a support system of similarly situated students that provide them with a sense of belonging and camaraderie they have not usually experienced in their lives. This study demonstrates how supporting students in

improving their self-determination skills can help them build their confidence and self-advocacy skills to persist in higher education institutions.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, my parents, and my good friend Geoff. My husband, Dominick, has supported me through all of my graduate schooling and been one of my biggest cheerleaders and supporters. Thank you for the endless foot and back rubs and kicks in the butt to never give up. You have, and will always be, my rock when I am having a hard time and you are always the positivity I need when I am ready to give up. Thank you for never giving up on me and helping me cross this finish line. I love you more than you know and appreciate all of your love and support through this program.

To my Mom and Dad, thank you for giving me the love of education and striving to always trying my best. Thank you for kicking me in the butt when I was messing up in school. You two are my biggest cheerleaders and I am lucky to be your daughter. Thank you for always being there for me, even when I didn't think I needed it. I love you and can't wait to share this with you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

*Josh is entering his first year at his top choice of universities and is excited to start his studies. He enters the classroom for his college algebra class and is immediately overwhelmed by the number of students in the class and the noise level. He tells himself that things will get quieter when the instructor comes. The instructor enters the classroom and tells the class to put all their materials away because they have a syllabus quiz. Josh was not prepared for a quiz because he had not read the syllabus before coming to class. He was not told that he needed to read the syllabus. Josh begins to panic. He does not want to fail his first quiz in college. He starts rocking and clicking his fingers to help calm himself down. The instructor asks Josh, "Please quiet down; you're disrupting the rest of the class." Josh becomes more anxious and starts violently rocking in his chair. The instructor asks Josh to leave the classroom. Josh explodes into a tantrum. He is confused, scared, and anxious. Josh is now sitting in front of the Student Conduct officer because of his outburst in class and is overwhelmed by all of the expectations being put on him during his first week of college.*

The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported that 19.4% of students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs reported having a disability that impacted their academic environment and daily living. The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADA) defines a disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or

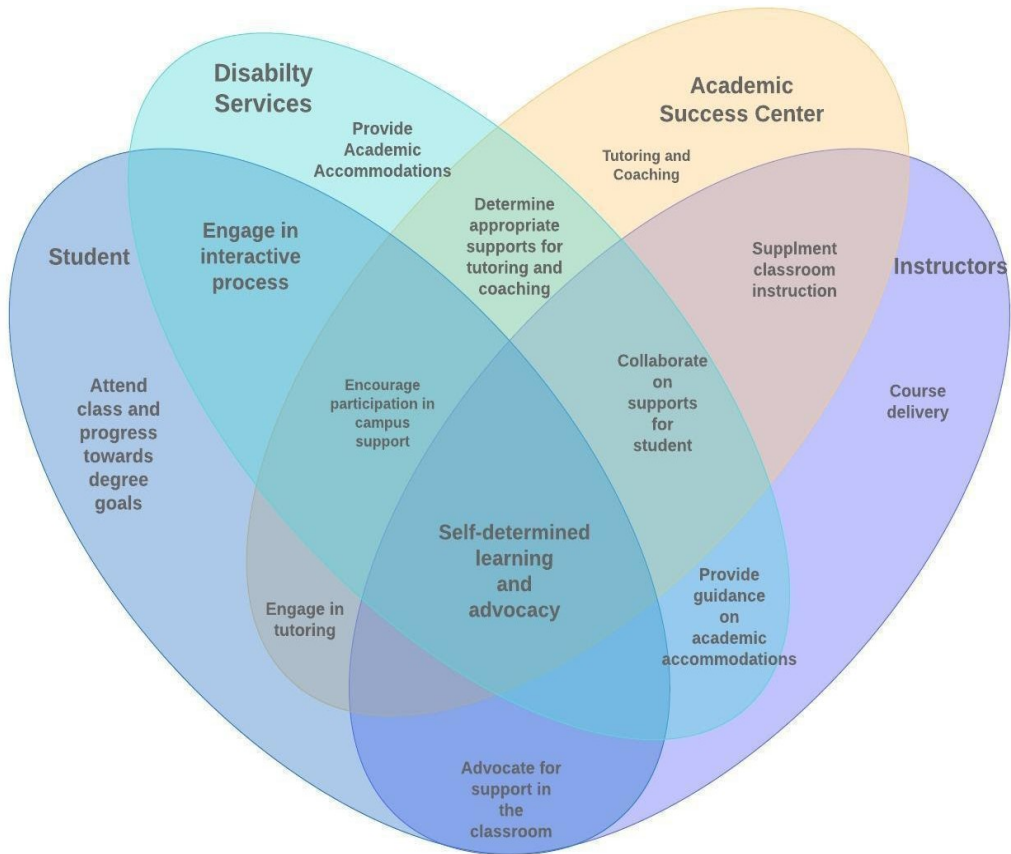
record of impairment, or a person perceived by others as having such an impairment" (ADA, 1990). Under the ADA, post-secondary institutions are responsible for providing reasonable and appropriate academic accommodations when a student discloses their disability. Accommodations provide access to the institution and its curriculum. The accommodation cannot change the fundamental requirements of a course or program at the institution.

### **Larger Context**

Students with disabilities are entering college campuses across the nation in increasing numbers because the ADA expanded the definition of disability and how individuals access accommodations that create equitable opportunities for them in post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Most students with disabilities come to college with little understanding of how support in a higher education setting differs from their K-12 experience. They often enter higher education institutions with significant needs in organization, time management, and advocacy. Most higher education institutions can support these students academically with coaching and tutoring services available across campus but have limited resources outside of this scope. Collaboration with academic success offices, disability centers, and instructors is highly encouraged, but the student must also engage in this collaboration to be effective. Figure 1 shows the collaboration when a student engages with support offices and instructors on campus.

**Figure 1**

*Student Support on Campus*



In this figure, we look at the student as the leading proponent of their academic success; they are expected to attend classes and understand expectations to progress towards earning a degree. Suppose a student identifies as having a disability. In that case, they are expected to interact with their disability services office to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations that will provide them access to the curriculum. Disability services often supports the student in accessing other resources on campus that encourage participation and engagement in supplemental academic resources that are often available on most major college campuses. No office or academic

department works in isolation; they all rely on each other to provide instructional and program support to enhance the students' academic experience. When the student becomes actively involved in this collaborative effort, it can increase their success and overall satisfaction in their overall academic progress.

### **Population of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education**

The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that 17.7% of students enrolled at public 4-year institutions identified as having a disability. Of that 17.7% of students with disabilities, 31% of those students had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD; p. 132). While we continue to see an increase in students with disabilities entering post-secondary institutions, they experience obstacles that lower their 6-year graduation rates (Herbert et al., 2014). The United States Department of Education conducted a 10-year longitudinal study which found that students with disabilities had a 6-year graduation rate of 34% while their non-disabled peers had a 6-year graduation rate of 59% (NCES, 2020; Newman et al., 2011; United States Department of Education, 2011). This gap in graduation rates may be due to the differences in preparing students with disabilities in the K-12 environment. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) examined post-high school outcomes for individuals with disabilities over ten years. Shogren and Plotner (2012) evaluated the NLTS2 findings. They determined that 52% of students with disabilities who participated in the longitudinal study planned to enroll in a college or university, but only 13% of those college-bound students were active participants in their transition planning in high

school (p. 21). The stark contrast between anticipated college enrollment and participation in transition planning is troubling.

### **K-12 and Higher Education Disconnect**

Students with disabilities entering a post-secondary institution no longer have the intensive support afforded in their K-12 special education programs (Goudreau & Knight, 2018). In the K-12 environment, students with disabilities are supported under a success model as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Students entering a college or university no longer have the protections afforded under IDEA and are expected to advocate for themselves, sometimes for the first time in their lives (p. 379). This extreme shift in expectations and responsibilities between the K-12 and college environments can be problematic for a student with disabilities.

### ***Laws Governing K-12 and Higher Education***

The influx of students with diverse needs and challenges is a massive obstacle for colleges and universities that are not typically funded or staffed to provide support beyond the required academic accommodations mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADAAA states that all institutions of higher education that receive federal funding must provide equal access to the educational environment and activities to otherwise qualified individuals with a documented disability (Shaw et al., 2010, p. 142). All federally funded higher education institutions have a designated disability services office that assesses the need for academic accommodations through an interactive process that reviews medical documentation of a disability and determines appropriate accommodations with the

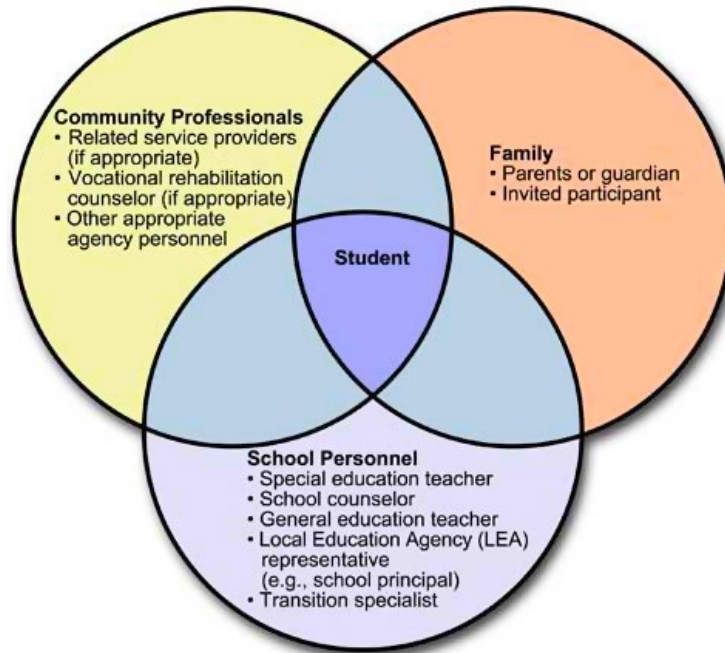
student. Higher education institutions are not obligated to provide free and appropriate education; students must be academically qualified to matriculate and persist in the post-secondary environment. This model differs from the K-12 special education support mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which provides all children with disabilities a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and related services to meet their special educational needs (p. 143).

Under IDEA, schools must begin transition planning activities with special education students at the age of 16. Transition planning activities include developing measurable post-school goals and determining who or what agency will be responsible for supporting the student in achieving these goals (Vanderbilt IRIS Center, n.d.). Figure 2 illustrates the transition planning team mandated as a part of the student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP). In ideal IEP development and implementation meetings, students focus on developing and implementing their IEP and transition goals. In reality, students may be present but are often not active participants in the goal-identification, setting, and implementation. They are often seen as incapable of understanding or expressing their needs to transition to post-secondary education or employment (Goudreau & Knight, 2018, p. 381). The lack of participation in one's transition plan may not be by choice. However, the student is the one who suffers the most when expected to advocate for themselves in the world of higher education after years of dependence on others to make decisions.



**Figure 2**

*IEP Transition Team*



*Note.* IEP Transition Team diagram from Vanderbilt IRIS Center. (Vanderbilt IRIS Center, n.d.).

***Level of Student Involvement***

Incoming freshmen with disabilities are academically capable and qualified to enter degree-seeking programs at the university level just as their non-disabled peers (Goudreau & Knight, 2018; Parker & Boutelle, 2009). While they have honed their academic skills, students depend on others to manage their social encounters. Dependence on others is problematic when expected to navigate their new lives as college students while making academic and social decisions that will ultimately affect their future without the intensive support given a year earlier.

The ability to navigate and flourish in a given environment requires self-determination skills. Self-determination is one's ability to make choices and access resources to guide their life independently (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2013). The significant components of self-determination include decision-making, problem-solving, goal setting, risk-taking, self-advocacy, and self-awareness (p. 44). Being able to manage these self-determination skills is more difficult in individuals with disabilities. Difficulty navigating their new environments and a lack of intensive support in the K-12 environment can cause extreme anxiety. This may impact the student's life to the point where they withdraw from their already limited social interactions and eventual departure from campus due to poor grades (McLeod et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2018).

### ***Level of Support in Higher Education***

Most students with disabilities come to higher education institutions expecting the same supports they accessed in the K-12 environment. There is no guarantee of admission to the college or university, even if students disclose their disability. The student must meet the minimum admission criteria to matriculate at their chosen institution. The student must self-identify and provide documentation of their disability to the appropriate office to receive academic accommodations. While students may receive guidance from their disability office or academic advisor about support services on campus, they are responsible for accessing these services independently. The expectation of students to manage their academic and social lives with little to no support can cause increased anxiety and isolation for a student with disabilities who have come to depend on these supports for the first 18 years of their lives (Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Nationally, students with disabilities face barriers in accessing their education due to non-academic factors such as lack of organizational and time management, self-advocacy, and self-determination skills (DuPaul et al., 2017). Understanding the need to support students with disabilities in improving these skills, to increase their persistence in higher education will guide the development and implementation of research in improving self-determination skills in college students with disabilities at the local level.

### **Situational Context**

The larger context discussed the barriers students with disabilities experience when entering post-secondary institutions on a national level. The situational context will look at barriers students with disabilities experience at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). UNLV is a 4-year public research university located in the urban community of Las Vegas and Clark County, Nevada. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) at UNLV is the only campus office authorized to provide ADA/AA academic accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Within the DRC, Disability Specialists (DS) review disability documentation and determine appropriate academic accommodations under the ADA/AA. The DS initiates an interactive process to determine and adjust academic accommodations to provide access for the student in the academic environment. Going beyond the basic access model of most DRC offices, I have been working with registered students on the Spectrum in improving their self-determination skills.

### **Population of Students with Disabilities**

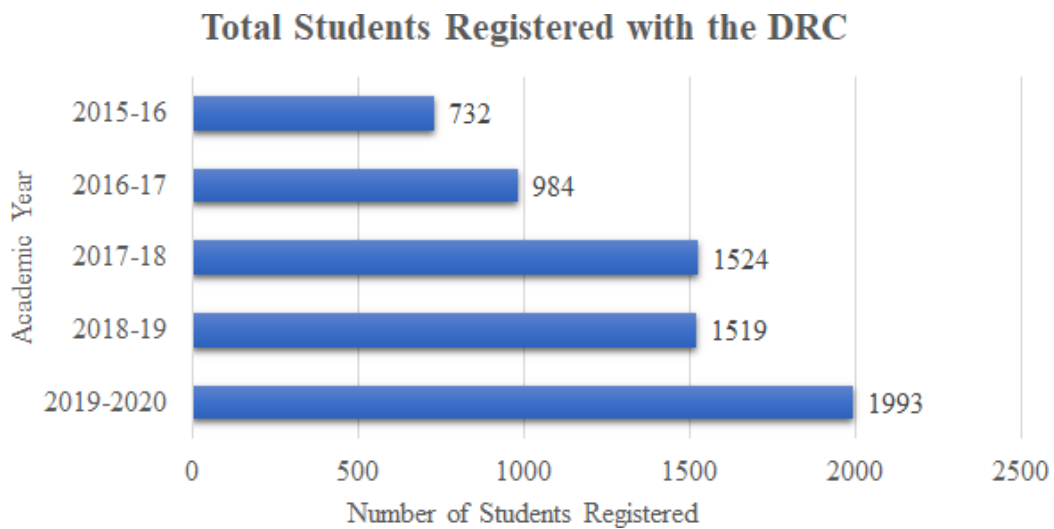
As of Fall 2019, UNLV has 31,171 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs (UNLV Analytics, 2020). Traditional freshmen account for 4,352 of

the student population. As of Fall 2019, The DRC serves 1993 students with documented disabilities; this is approximately 6.4% of the student population at UNLV. Of those 1993 students, 216 students are traditional freshmen. The DRC works with 689 students with diagnoses of ADHD, SLD, and ASD. UNLV students with these disabilities account for approximately 2% of the student population. However, the extensive services they require to persist at the university are at least double what non-disabled students require.

The DRC has seen a 36% increase in students with disabilities accessing accommodations and support services over the last five years. This increase in students registered with the DRC has increased the need for more outreach and education across campus to support this growing population. Figure 3 shows the increase in students registered with the DRC over a five-year period.

**Figure 3**

*Students Registered with the DRC (AY 2015-16 through 2019-2020)*



*Note.* Data retrieved from DRC 2019-2020 End of Year Report. (Leland & Hilbert, 2020).

***Retention and Graduation Rates at UNLV***

UNLV collects data to track first-year retention and six-year graduation rates for all matriculating students. The table below displays the first-year retention rate in college and at UNLV for Fall 2018.

**Table 1**

*First-Year Freshman Retention Rates (Fall 2018 Cohort)*

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	Total Students	Retention at UNLV (#)	Retention at UNLV (%)
Fall 2018 Cohort	3,947	3,132	79.4%

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*Note.* Data retrieved from UNLV Analytics, 2020.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2020), the national average for first-year freshmen retention is 81%. UNLV is slightly below the national average, but with improved student support programs, it is anticipated that this rate will rise for future cohorts.

According to the NCES (2020), 62% of students graduate from a four-year institution within six years of matriculation. UNLV's Fall 2013 cohort was drastically below the national average at 45% (UNLV Analytics, 2020). UNLV's low six-year graduation rate has sparked the growth of student support and advising programs to guide students through their degree programs to completion. The DRC's Fall 2013 cohort saw 430 students graduate within six years, accounting for a 22% graduation rate amongst DRC students, significantly lower than UNLV and national graduation rates (UNLV Disability Resource Center, 2020).

## **K-12 and Higher Education Disconnect at UNLV**

The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) supports UNLV and other NSHE institutions' drive to improve graduation rates by eliminating remedial math and English courses at the 4-year institution level. Students who cannot complete college-level algebra and English courses will have to take them at a community college before being accepted at the university. Leadership hopes that this change in the availability of remedial courses will encourage CCSD and other Nevada school districts to increase student preparedness in math and English to increase success at the colleges and universities.

UNLV has traditionally been a commuter campus that serves Las Vegas and surrounding areas in Clark County, NV. Of the 4,121 freshmen who entered UNLV in Fall 2019, 3,392 of those students are Nevada residents (UNLV Analytics, 2020). With 82% of the freshman class graduating from Nevada high schools, students are entering UNLV not fully prepared for the rigors of college academics. Collaboration with the Clark County School District (CCSD) to prepare students for the rigor of higher education is a top priority at UNLV and other institutions in the Las Vegas valley. However, collaboration and planning tend to be superficial because of the size of CCSD and its teacher shortages. As of SY 2018-2019, CCSD has 321,648 students enrolled in grades K-12, of which 11.8% or 37,954 students receive special education services (Clark County School District, 2019).

The DRC collaborates with CCSD Transition Coordinators to help prepare students with disabilities who are planning to enter higher education institutions locally or nationally. Transition Coordinators are a vital part of the IEP team but do not have as

much interaction or influence as the classroom teacher with the students and their families. UNLV is currently working to strengthen the relationship between the CCSD IEP teams and UNLV DRC to provide more information and guidance on moving from high school to college, which will help students have a more successful transition.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I currently work in the UNLV DRC as a Disability Specialist (DS) primarily supporting students on the Autism Spectrum and Veterans living with traumatic brain injuries, mental health difficulties, and physical disabilities. I carry a caseload of 402 students with varying disabilities. Students with ADHD, SLD, and ASD represent 43% of my caseload but often require the support and guidance of 2-3 students.

### ***Previous Experience***

I grew up in my mother's classroom, helping her set up each summer and preparing centers to help improve her students' skills. When it was time for me to choose a career, becoming a teacher was the most logical option. I started my career in the same school I graduated from four years earlier. I worked for the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) overseas and felt comfortable because I was a product of that system. My biggest struggle as a new educator was being compared to my mother because I worked with teachers who had known me since I was a young child. My mother was a dynamic teacher who supported me with materials and guidance as I started my career. As I continued to grow as an educator, I became the teacher given struggling students not yet identified for Special Education services. I became a pro at implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) techniques to support all learners in my classroom. I learned to identify which students I could support effectively in my

classroom and better served through additional support from our Special Education department. After ten years in the classroom and an unexpected move back to the United States, I found myself at a crossroads in my career. I had recently moved to Nevada and did not have a teaching credential in that state. I began working at a non-profit organization that served adults with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. At times, this work was challenging but also incredibly rewarding. In this position, I connected with the State of Nevada Desert Regional Center, which provided Medicaid funding for the individuals in the non-profit's day program. Less than a year later, I began working at Desert Regional Center as a Service Coordinator. In this position, I was responsible for ensuring that our most impacted individuals were adequately served and cared for by their providers and families. As I provided service coordination to individuals and families, I realized that services for adults with Autism were lacking in the Las Vegas community. As I learned more about the needs of young adults on the Spectrum on my caseload, I was motivated to pursue a Master's degree in Autism and Applied Behavioral Analysis to create more opportunities to support young adults with ASD. This goal led me to leave Desert Regional Center and accept the opportunity to work in the UNLV DRC, supporting college students with disabilities.

### ***UNLV DRC***

I began working in the UNLV DRC in November 2016 with a general caseload of students with a range of disabilities. As I completed my Master's degree in Autism and Applied Behavioral Analysis, I advocated for a more targeted caseload that included working with students with learning differences. I felt that having each DS work within their specialization would improve student progression, retention, and graduation



outcomes. While no disability exists in isolation, supporting the most debilitating aspects of a particular disability can help ease the impacts of other diagnoses in the academic environment. As each DS adjusted their caseloads to fit their specialty, it became evident that many of the students were highly impacted and needed support beyond the typical ADA/AA accommodations due to the transition from a highly structured high school model to a self-structured university campus. Academic accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis. However, typical accommodations in the college environment include extended testing time, a quiet room to take tests, permission to audio record lectures, specific seating to support attention and learning, and technology to access textbooks and other curricular materials. We found that students could access the academic environment with these accommodations. However, they often lacked the organizational, planning, and study skills needed to succeed in a college course. Most students were used to a "lady" who would tell them when and where to be during the school day and what tasks they must accomplish in each environment. There is no "lady" at the university, and these students were not taught how to manage their time or schedule out their day. This led to many students failing classes because they never budgeted time for studying and completing homework outside of class.

### ***Follow-Along Initiative***

Due to the difficulties students were displaying both academically and socially on campus, I initiated a follow-along program to provide students with resources and weekly meetings that could help them improve their quality of life at the university. During these follow-along sessions, I recognized that students were having difficulties with short- and long-term goal planning within their degree paths and future career prospects. They

came to campus with the academic skills to succeed, but many were unsure why they were here. They enrolled in university because that was the next step after high school graduation. Most of these students did not have a clear plan for their futures and struggled in making short -and long-term goals for their college careers. After some surveying and observation, I realized most students had never set their own goals; their parents and teachers typically set them for them. In their Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, a group of adults sat around and made decisions about the student's future. Many students had little to no input on their goals in high school and were told what skills they were going to work on during the school year. Four years later, they come to college and expect a predetermined plan to guide their entire college lives.

**Goal-Setting Skills.** After meeting with a number of these students and discussing their plans for the semester and the year ahead, I realized that they did not have a clear plan for their degree and career plans because planning and setting goals were not part of the K-12 curriculum. Not having a clear long-term goal in college can be troublesome because the students do not have a track to follow as they take classes and decide on a major of study. This lack of direction in a student's course sequence can lead to many unnecessary courses, which can be a financial burden in the future.

While long-term goal-setting skills are essential, identifying, carrying out, and achieving short-term goals are just as important. Short-term goal setting, such as developing a reasonable schedule for the semester, is an essential skill lacking in students with disabilities. Due to this deficit, they cannot plan and execute short-term goals, which increases the individual's anxiety because they are falling behind their peers in class and on campus. Giving students the tools needed to plan and execute short and

long-term goals boosts confidence and improves academic and social outcomes (Wenzel & Brown, 2014, p. 923). The small wins that come with short-term goal achievement can boost confidence and drive a person to work harder towards their longer-term goals (Weick, 1984). Failure at a short-term goal is somewhat less catastrophic because the goal is fluid, and a new trial of the goal can begin relatively quickly. There is not as much at stake in a short-term goal versus a long-term goal. The executive dysfunction of goal setting is not unique to students with disabilities. Other DSs in the DRC have identified students with executive functioning deficits that also struggle with goal-setting skills.

### **Problem of Practice**

Today, students with disabilities are graduating high school, growing up, and entering post-secondary institutions at higher rates than ever (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2016). Students with disabilities have more challenges in the transition from high school to college than their non-disabled peers (DuPaul et al., 2017). Higher education institutions often lack the appropriate resources to assist these students in transitioning to and having success within their college experience. Students with disabilities enter colleges and universities across the country with low self-advocacy skills, low coping skills, and high levels of anxiety related to planning and organizing their daily lives on campus (Goudreau & Knight, 2018; Parker & Boutelle, 2009). This lack of skills and increased anxiety is often manifested during a professor's office hours or at an academic advising appointment, which has led faculty and staff to recognize the need for more and different support services to help these students be successful in their new higher education environments. At which point, the students contact the Disability Resource

Center (DRC) to manage an issue that is out of the scope of services for a typical disability office. The heightened awareness of the needed support for students and faculty has forced many disability resource centers (DRCs) to develop programs that go above and beyond the access threshold put in place by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### **Purpose Statement and Research Question**

Through a brief cycle of research, informal student interactions and observations, and discussions with practitioners in the college community, I concluded that supporting college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills is an essential effort that needs to be researched and developed to better support students entering higher education.

The purpose of this study was to support degree-seeking students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who have registered with the Disability Resource Center and have a documented disability; improve their self-determination skills using a modified *Steps to Self-Determination* curriculum. (Field & Hoffman, 2005).

The research questions guiding the development and implementation of this action research study are:

RQ1: What happens to students' self-determination across the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation?

RQ2: What are students' perceptions of the social benefits and/or drawbacks to intervention participation?

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 1 gave an overview of the larger and situational context of improving self-determination skills in college students with disabilities. It discussed the issues observed when students with disabilities transition from the highly structured K-12 environment to the less structured post-secondary setting. This chapter will define and discuss self-determination and why it is essential for growth and development throughout the lifespan. Self-determination theory and the Zone of Proximal Development frame this research study and help the reader understand the importance of self-determination and its role in growth and development in young adults entering adulthood. The connections between these two theories are discussed using coaching as learning which will guide this study's innovation.

The related literature supports the use of The Model for Self-Determination as a guide to developing and implementing a skills-based program to support college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015). Additional literature will show the connection between student-centered learning and coaching for learning models implemented in this study. Finally, I will present previous cycles of research that examined the need for more intensive supports for students with disabilities and how this research impacts college students with disabilities, and the follow along services that disability professionals in higher education institutions provide for this population.

## **Theoretical Lens**

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development framed this research study. The self-determination theory can frame this study alone, but including the zone of proximal development to help readers better understand the need for scaffolded learning strengthens the framework. This section discusses how these two theories work together to provide a solid basis for implementing a program to help students with disabilities improve their self-determination skills.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan first introduced Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the 1980s to explain human motivation and self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The central premise behind SDT is human motivation and how it shapes one's behavior. External motivation is the first driving force in our development; we depend on people and objects in our environment to shape and mold behavior (p. 69). As we grow and mature, our reliance on outside forces to shape our behavior diminishes, and we rely on intrinsic motivation to guide our behavior. A person's interest in behavior or action based solely on its existence is the basis for intrinsically motivated behavior; no outside factors motivate them to act (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Self-determination develops across a continuum and relates to an individual's regulatory style and processing (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The self-determination continuum provides a visual representation of how one's level of self-determination corresponds with their regulatory style and processing. The lower one's self-determination, the lower their motivation and regulation when interacting

in their environment. As an individual increases their self-determination skills, their motivation, and regulation become more developed and mature.

### ***Basic Psychological Needs of SDT***

Humans are naturally motivated to fulfill their biological and psychological needs to sustain life and equilibrium. SDT identifies three basic psychological needs for maintaining motivation both intrinsically and extrinsically and living a healthy, fulfilled life (Deci et al., 2014). These three basic needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Adams et al., 2017; Deci et al., 2014).

**Competence.** An individual's need for competence is the desire to be a master of their environment and access and interacting within it. If individuals do not feel comfortable or in control of their surroundings, they may experience undue stress and anxiety that causes them to withdraw from such an environment (Deci et al., 2014). Attaining competence pushes individuals to grow and challenge their mastery of the environment to attain higher levels of competency as perceived by themselves (p. 112). The feeling of competence interacting with one's environment creates opportunities for exploration beyond the individual's current level of functioning, creating learning opportunities to build their aptitude and confidence in stepping outside of their learning comfort zones.

**Autonomy.** An individual's need for autonomy stems from the need to make decisions and choices independently and regard themselves as the originator of their choices (Adams et al., 2017; Deci et al., 2014). When individuals feel that they control their choices and actions, they are more likely to engage and explore new experiences not previously available. Autonomy is not equivalent to independence, as the autonomous

person still relies on others for guidance and support to make and evaluate their decisions (Deci et al., 2014). Autonomy does not occur in isolation; the individual still requires trusted individuals in their environment to guide and reaffirm their decisions.

**Relatedness.** An individual's need to belong is crucial to maintaining one's mental and emotional health while navigating the world around them. Deci et al. (2014) identified relatedness as an individual's need to establish and secure bonds with others and feel like valued members of a group or collective (p. 113). This secure attachment to a group of individuals that share your values and interests provides them with a safe space to interact and grow. Individuals with disabilities are excluded from groups that allow for secure attachment outside of their immediate families. Students with disabilities are often provided temporary or superficial membership in a group but are not always valued or included as full members. This lack of relatedness and relationship-building can lead to mental health issues in the future (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### ***Model for Self-Determination***

Field and Hoffman's (1994, 2015) model for self-determination demonstrates a complex concept in a more accessible way for practitioners (p. 160). Field and Hoffman describe self-determination as "the ability to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself" (p. 164). Once individuals can understand and value their unique strengths and weaknesses, they can move forward in developing goals that will help them grow and learn in their current environments and build upon skills that they can transfer to new learning environments. Figure 4 illustrates the Model for Self-Determination and how individuals move through the steps in this model to become more self-determined (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015).



**Figure 4**

*Model for Self-Determination*



*Note.* Model for Self-Determination reprinted with permission (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015).

The first level of the model for self-determination helps individuals explore their strengths and weaknesses and celebrate their uniqueness. When people are aware and can identify their strengths, weaknesses, needs, and wants, they are more likely to act in their self-interest and not depend on others to determine their future (Field & Hoffman, 1994, p. 165). Helping individuals understand that celebrating their strengths and accepting their weaknesses helps them become stronger advocates for themselves and become more self-determined as they develop goals and strategies to improve their weaknesses (p. 166).

The next step in becoming self-determined is planning. Planning, in this context, is defined as one's ability to use skills to seek desired outcomes (p. 166). Developing and planning to implement long and short-term goals that will help a person increase their confidence and help them plan for future goals that may seem out of reach at the time. The act of planning and developing a goal to support one's growth is a skill often overlooked when supporting individuals with disabilities in accessing their environment and having successful outcomes within that realm (Gelbar et al., 2020, p. 165).

The last two components of the model for self-determination are an ongoing exercise in increasing one's level of self-determination through carrying out goals and evaluating the progress of their goals (Field & Hoffman, 1998, p. 167). One's progression through the model for self-determination is not always easy, and risk-taking is a large part of growth and becoming self-determined. Identifying areas of weakness and taking steps to improve upon those weaknesses takes a lot of courage and self-reflection that is not always comfortable. Suppose individuals allow themselves to feel "uncomfortable" and work to overcome barriers they may encounter during this process. In that case, their growth and rewards will be more significant than if they choose to stay in their safe zone and not work to achieve more meaningful, challenging goals (p. 167).

SDT is one of two main theories that guided my research with college students with disabilities, the second being Zone of Proximal Development, which I will discuss next. SDT suggests that students with disabilities transitioning to college are naturally more extrinsically motivated. To be successful, they need to have a good balance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Students learn through interaction with others and with guidance from teachers and mentors. Understanding how individuals interact with

their environment and how that interaction shapes their behavior guided the innovation I developed to help students with disabilities improve their self-determination skills. Meeting an individual's basic psychological needs as identified in SDT can help build their confidence and resiliency when faced with new problems or issues (Adams et al., 2017; Deci et al., 2014). Through a coaching relationship, students are given the tools to understand their strengths and weaknesses, plan and develop goals, act on those goals, and evaluate the outcomes of their goals as an essential skill not always taught in the K-12 setting. My intervention created a space for students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and use that knowledge to build their confidence and self-determination skills. In this study, students with disabilities explored their strengths and weaknesses and created goals that helped them meet the three basic psychological needs of SDT to become more self-determined individuals who can develop plans to be successful in their lives.

### **Zone of Proximal Development**

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a learning theory developed by L. S. Vygotsky explains how one's intellectual capacity develops through the relationship between instruction and development (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211). ZPD relies on three theoretical positions to support the relationship between learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 79). The first position states that development and learning are independent of each other (p. 79). Learning is an external process that does not increase an individual's developmental growth; it uses the learner's current developmental level to impart learning experiences. If a learner is not developmentally ready to participate in a

learning activity, then no instruction or practice will crystallize that learning for the individual (p. 80).

The second position states that “learning *is* development” (p. 80). This idea was drawn from the concept that learning is one's reflexes (i.e., reading, writing, or math), and development is the mastery of those reflexes. The process of learning stimulates a response or reflex when such information is produced in the future. Mastery of this response shows growth in one's development (p. 81). The third position looks at the relationship between learning and development and their ability to account for outlying extremes between the two levels. An individual may be developmentally low, but their capacity for learning a particular subject is high. This third theoretical position to ZPD describes how this gap between developmental level and one's ability to absorb information on a particular subject is possible (p. 81). This concept is observed in individuals with SLD; the student may have a deficit in reading comprehension but can read a text fluently. These are two distinct skills that occur at different developmental levels.

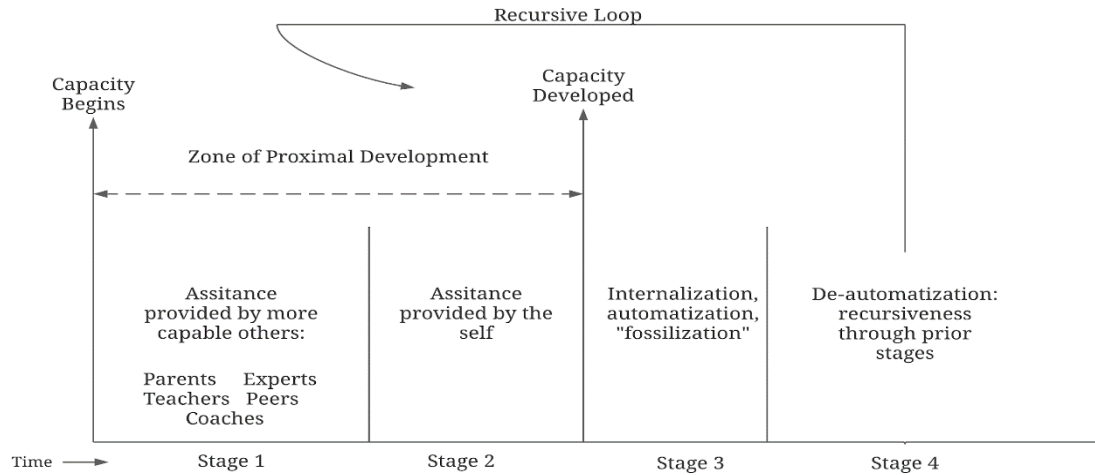
The most critical distinction between ZPD and traditional developmental learning theories is ZPD measures the gap between the knowledge that the individual possesses at a given time and their ability to obtain new knowledge through guided learning opportunities with a more skilled individual or teacher (Hedegaard, 1996). ZPD relies on the interaction between two individuals, with one displaying more competence than the other for learning and development. Through modeling and interaction, the less competent person emulates the skills and behaviors until they become proficient in the task and progress in their learning (Chaiklin, 2003). This learning does not occur in

isolation; the researcher must consider the whole person when preparing for instruction (Saleh & Danish, 2018).

Vygotsky describes ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The ZPD illustrates the functions that have not been internalized in a student's learning and require more time to mature through learning and growth. The process of maturation and crystallization of knowledge occurs in stages that the learner progresses throughout their lives. Learners must be guided through these stages, as they will not move through them independently (p. 86). Other researchers believed that learning could occur through imitation and repetition, but there must be a capacity for learning; it cannot occur independently. This demonstrates why ZPD is vital in developing and implementing new learning systems; individuals cannot learn new tasks or skills without increasing their knowledge (p. 88). Knowledge development is gradual as individuals move through stages that require less assistance from others (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Knowledge acquisition has four distinct stages of learning development, as displayed in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5**

*Four Stages of the Zone of Proximal Development*



*Note.* Gallimore and Tharp's (1990) model of the four stages of ZPD.

Stage 1 describes the learner's dependence on others for knowledge development because the individual has little to no experience with the task (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 184). This does not suggest that the individual cannot learn the concept; they just have not been exposed to it and need guidance to begin the learning process. In stage 2 of this process, the learner starts working independently to learn the new concept, but the learning has not crystallized yet. The individual is still exploring and developing a process to master the concept (p. 185). Stage 3 represents the crystallization of the skill, where it has become reflexive. The learner has mastered the concept and can reproduce this skill reflexively. Stage 4 is the most advanced step in this timeline. The individual can now apply the skills they learned and use them in future learning opportunities that may require that particular skill or develop more complex skills (p. 186).

ZPD addresses the learning process when individuals evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and work on goals to improve their outcomes. Using ZPD and SDT as a foundation for my research allowed me to develop a coaching model that supported students in evaluating themselves honestly and productively, which helped them create goals that supported their growth towards becoming a self-determined individual (Field & Hoffman, 1994). I met with students in small groups and one-on-one settings during this research study. The one-on-one model fostered a trusting, coaching relationship that helped students build confidence in their strengths and weaknesses and grow in their path towards self-determination. The small group setting afforded the students the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange ideas and tips for overcoming obstacles their disabilities had posed in the past. Independently, SDT and ZPD are robust theories, but together they create a powerful framework for this particular study. In the next section, the relationship between SDT and ZPD uses the concept of student-centered learning and how it creates learning opportunities in multiple environments.

### ***Student-Centered Learning***

Ryan and Deci's SDT and Vygotsky's ZPD are the two leading theories I used to frame this study, but their connection to each other created a strong base for this research. Lee and Hannafin (2016) suggest that SDT and ZPD are connected through a student-centered learning (SCL) approach that provides students with opportunities to create learning opportunities and demonstrate knowledge retention in a fluid environment (p. 708). SCL encapsulates the learner's psychological need for autonomy and responsibility for learning and growth (p. 708; Adams et al., 2017; Deci et al., 2014). The connection between SCL and ZPD is its assumption that a learner needs

support in exploring and mastering advanced concepts from a more mature learner or teacher. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning was a socially driven activity requiring students to engage in learning opportunities that interested them. He asserted that engagement allowed them to interact with more knowledgeable peers and teachers who could help guide their learning (p. 79).

While ZPD can be used to frame the learning process within SCL, SDT draws upon the individual's level of motivation to this process. As explained earlier in this chapter, SDT explores an individual's range of motivation and how it impacts their daily living and learning experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT helps us better understand an individual's basic need for autonomy during learning and explains how moving their motivation from a purely extrinsic process to a more intrinsic, autonomous process allows for more active participation in their learning (Lee & Hannafin, 2016, p. 712). As the student gains more confidence in their abilities and is motivated by their internal processes, learning experiences become less cumbersome. Students are more likely to engage in new learning activities than their extrinsically motivated peers (p. 712). SDT's concept of autonomy supports the idea that as a student's sense of autonomy increases, their desire to pursue new learning opportunities will increase and result in more enriching experiences that encourage the student to take more ownership and responsibility in their learning (p. 715). Lee and Hannafin described autonomy as the main supportive factor in SCL, which controls a student's sovereignty and responsibility in learning (p. 715). A student's sovereignty is their ability to control their learning and begin developing their goal-setting processes for future learning endeavors. A student's responsibility develops as they take ownership of their decisions and acknowledge the



consequences of those decisions throughout the learning process (p. 715). Allowing students to take ownership of their learning and build upon their successes and failures during this process makes for more positive outcomes in the future.

Student-centered learning is at the core of this research study and guided my innovation development to improve their self-determination skills. Guiding students through the self-determination learning process allowed them to build their confidence and autonomy. Autonomy gives students the confidence to celebrate their strengths and weaknesses and make plans to improve upon their weaknesses through goal setting and evaluation of such goals. In the next section, I will discuss Coaching as Learning that supported the implementation of my innovation and my role as a coach to help students with disabilities improve their self-determination skills.

### **Combining and Implementing: Coaching as Learning Theory**

Spence and Oades (2011) define coaching as "the enhancement of human functioning, achieved through the improvement of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural self-regulation" (p. 37). Evaluating coaching practice through an SDT lens allows the coach or leader to create a working relationship with the individuals they are coaching to promote growth (p. 41). Coaching allows the leader and participants to develop a connection that can help the student work through outside distractions that could hinder their path to becoming a self-determined individual (p. 42). Coaching as learning supports SDT's three basic psychological needs as described earlier in this section.

### ***Coaching and Autonomy***

Typical coaching models, including the one used in this study, put the individual or student at the center of the learning process to help them develop a sense of self and

pride in their outcomes. This model encourages autonomy by guiding the student through activities that encourage them to take ownership of their learning and the subsequent outcomes that occur because of this learning (Spence & Oades, 2011, p. 44). Taking ownership of one's learning does not happen immediately, but the presence of a coach guiding the student through this growth process makes it more accessible.

### ***Coaching and Competence***

SDT and coaching assume that people are fundamentally capable of learning and growing throughout their lives, but sometimes there are barriers to their learning (Spence & Oades, 2011, p. 44). Coaching believes that individuals are trying their best in life and sometimes need a little help to move forward in their learning and growth. Many students with disabilities have been working off a deficit model of ability and do not have much confidence in their strengths and growth. Coaching allows the individual to determine where they are in their learning and leads to more significant learning opportunities by evaluating their strengths, weaknesses, and goals (p. 44). Providing individuals with tools to explore and recognize their strengths and reach their goals is a powerful experience that helps them feel a sense of ownership of their learning and growth (p. 44).

### ***Coaching and Relatedness***

The inherent nature of coaching allows for a close relationship to develop between the coach and the coachee. Coaches use active listening techniques to make the individual feel heard and validated (Spence & Oades, 2011; Zeus & Skiffington, 2002). My role as a coach in this research study was to engage in active listening and encourage the participants to explore topics that they may not consider on their own. I

developed close, trusting relationships in one-on-one and group sessions to help students develop their self-determination skills and build relationships where they feel empowered. People have a fundamental need to feel heard and understood, which is often not the case for students who have spent most of their academic careers in Special Education services. Giving students a space to express themselves and feel validated in those feelings is a powerful tool for building self-determination and confidence in themselves.

### ***Executive Function Coaching***

Students transitioning from a highly structured high school environment to a less-structured college campus can experience difficulty adapting to their new environment. The external controls in the K-12 classroom are removed, and students are expected to organize their new lives with minimal support (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Students with disabilities entering the college environment experience the most difficulty with this change in structure and often struggle to keep up with the new responsibilities thrust upon them and are more likely to drop out of school (p. 204). Providing students, especially those with disabilities, with academic and coaching support during their first few years of college can help increase their self-determination skills and confidence in their abilities (p. 205). This increase in skills and confidence produces more favorable academic outcomes, which leads to increased retention and graduation rates for students with disabilities who engage in coaching.

Parker and Boutelle's study at Landmark College used Field & Hoffman's (1994, 2015) Model for Self-Determination to develop a coaching model to support students in increasing their self-determination skills for their study (Parker & Boutelle,

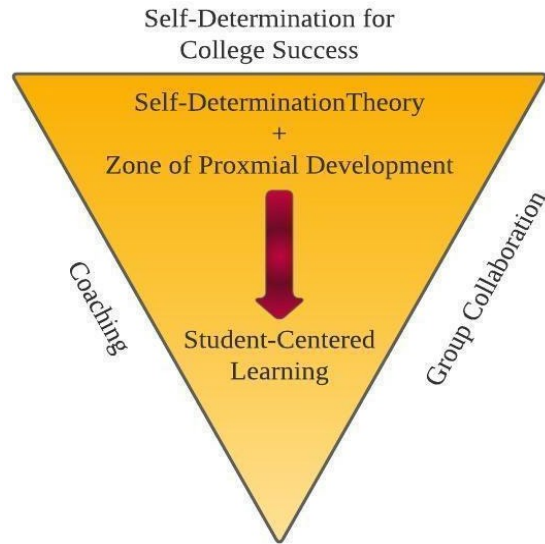
2009). Student participants engaged in a coaching program for a full academic year and were supported by coaches in developing strategies to improve their academic performance through time management, organization, goal setting, and confidence-building activities (p. 206). Researchers found that students who actively participated in the coaching process increased their time management and organizational skills, which led to an increased sense of autonomy (p. 209). Students felt that the coach was a collaborative partner in their growth and development to become more self-determined learners, and they could depend on the coach to guide them to greater success (p. 210). Creating a collaborative relationship with students who are learning to become more self-determined increases the chances of internalizing these skills and carrying them forward even after the coaching relationship has ended (p. 212).

## **Conclusion**

The basic premise of coaching that I used to design this study is grounded in SDT and ZPD. Through one-on-one coaching, I guided students in building their self-determination skills while supporting them in internalizing motivation to grow. I utilized small group sessions to fulfill a student's sense of relatedness to others and build relationships that continued beyond the study. The idea of a coach pushing a learner out of their comfort zone to achieve higher heights in their knowledge is the marriage between ZPD and coaching. Through our one-on-one coaching session, I supported students in realizing their learning potential and reaching new milestones in their self-determination development. Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between the theories presented in this section and my innovation implemented through coaching and group collaboration.

**Figure 6**

*Self-Determination for College Success Structure*



*Note.* This diagram shows the connection between the theories presented and the innovation and its implementation in this study.

The following section will look at how goal setting and coaching were implemented in similarly situated studies to support students in improving their self-determination skills.

### **Related Literature**

This section explores several studies that have used a coaching-as-learning model to support students in improving their goal-setting skills. The studies described guided the design of my intervention, the content students learned, and how I interacted with the students as a coach. While the age range of participants may differ, each research team uses the same model for helping students improve their self-determination skills.

### **Self-Determination and Coaching**

While there are many self-determination curricula available, most are designed to support middle and high school students in improving their skills in a classroom

environment. The nature of the college environment does not allow for the implementation of an innovation in a traditional classroom setting. Field et al. (2003) explored the relationship between levels of self-determination and a successful transition to the higher education environment (p. 340). College students who participated in the study noted that environmental factors, institutional norms, and access to information were the most significant barriers to their growth in self-determination (p. 341). Using coaching to guide students in improving their goal setting and self-determination skills is central to the development of the innovation for this study.

One of the most significant barriers to building one's self-determination was faculty and staff understanding of disability and how it impacts students in the classroom. Students felt that they could not grow as learners if they did not have faculty or staff allies that understood their unique needs and could help advocate. Having a professional who understands their needs and can guide them through the transition to higher education is a powerful relationship that can be developed formally or informally (Field et al., 2003, p. 342). The coaching or mentor relationship that develops can be powerful in helping students with disabilities transition to the college environment and better understand the inner workings of a higher education institution. Once this relationship is cemented, the real work in developing the skills to succeed in college and later in adult life can be done. Initially, students need guidance in understanding their strengths and weaknesses and how it impacts them in the college environment. However, the coaching model allows for students to gain independence through the process (p. 343). This model of coaching guided the implementation of my innovation during this study. Developing a close, trusting relationship with the student participants was the

basis for creating opportunities to build self-determination skills and grow as a learner and adult.

### **Coaching and The Model for Self-Determination**

During the development of the innovation for this research study, many self-determination curricula were evaluated and considered. Most of the curricula evaluated focused on a younger demographic, and the content was inappropriate for a young adult transitioning to the college environment. Parker and Boutelle (2009) evaluated using a self-determination model with students with disabilities at Landmark College (p. 204). While a traditional coaching model is effective in working with students with disabilities, adding the structure of the Model for Self-Determination provided a framework that allowed the researchers and coaches to document the student's progression through the steps in the model (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015). The student participants at Landmark College engaged in a structure that allowed them to grow through an interactive coaching process designed to allow students to develop their strategies and take ownership of their learning and development (Parker & Boutelle, 2009, p. 205).

A total of 54 students with disabilities from Landmark College participated in this study. Students participated in post-innovation interviews to evaluate their experiences during the study and the amount of growth they felt occurred (Parker & Boutelle, 2009, p. 207). Students participated in the coaching intervention for eight weeks, where they worked on developing their self-determination and self-advocacy skills. While eight weeks may be a short period to see progress in one's self-determination skills, the growth

and insight these students experienced during the study provided a framework for future participation in coaching and personal growth opportunities (p. 208).

Students reported feeling less stressed during the coaching sessions because they learned new strategies for taking control of their personal and academic lives (Parker & Boutelle, 2009, p. 209). They felt that they were the leader in their growth and the coach was a partner in this journey. It was not a teacher-student relationship but a partnership where both participants benefited from the experience (p. 210). The biggest takeaway from this study was the students' internalization of the skills they learned in the coaching sessions, which then can be applied across settings.

The researchers identified three main benefits of using the Model for Self-Determination (Field & Hoffman, 2015) to guide the coaching model used in this study. The first benefit was providing a service that allowed students to identify and carry out academic and personal goals (Parker & Boutelle, 2009, p. 211). Supporting students in developing a process for developing goals allows them to internalize the goal-setting process. Self-awareness was the second benefit identified during this study. Students were able to identify barriers to their goal attainment and develop plans to overcome these barriers (p. 211). The ability to identify internal and external barriers to one's goal progress or attainment is a powerful skill that leads to an increase in confidence and self-advocacy. The most significant benefit from this study was the students' feeling that the coaching process helped them develop a better quality of life because they could reduce stress when presented with new challenges (p. 211).

Overall, the development and implementation of a coaching model through the lens of the Model for Self-Determination is influential in providing college students with



disabilities the opportunity to grow and learn in a safe environment. For this study, I developed the innovation using the Model for Self-Determination to establish a coaching relationship with the participants. In the next section, I discuss previous cycles of research used to establish a consensus amongst higher education professionals on the need for additional support, beyond academic accommodations, for students with disabilities in higher education.

### **Previous Cycles of Action Research**

In this section, I present two previous cycles of research and how they guided the development of this study. Cycles of research are essential in an action research study because they inform future iterations of research about an issue (Mertler, 2017). Conducting multiple cycles of research about a specific problem or issue allows the researcher to revise or improve upon past cycles to determine future outcomes (p 38). Cycle 0 was conducted in my first year of this doctoral program through semi-structured interviews with faculty at UNLV. Cycle 1 research was conducted in year two to explore the teaching faculty's knowledge of the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms and strategies they could use to create a more inclusive learning environment. From these previous cycles, I established the need for my dissertation study. I was able to practice and apply data collection and analysis tools to inform the methods discussed in the next chapter.

#### **Cycle 0 Research Guiding Study**

As I embarked on my EdD program, I felt that examining strategies to help students on the Autism Spectrum improve their self-determination skills would be the most appropriate and impactful endeavor for the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and

our students. An initial cycle of research, Cycle 0, was conducted in Spring 2019 to determine the need for such research. Three participants were selected from the faculty and staff I had known and collaborated with throughout my time at UNLV. Participants were selected because of their interest in Autism and their active roles in the medical, social, and academic models of Autism. They were also active researchers in disability and Autism from the scope of their current practice.

The purpose of this cycle of research was to determine if professionals in the field felt that students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who had registered with the DRC and had a documented diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, needed support in improving their self-determination skills. For Cycle 0, I interviewed campus stakeholders to understand their views on Autism in higher education and the support needed to provide adequate services for these students. I developed the interview questions to gather more information about the participants' experience working with students on the Autism Spectrum and their opinions on the importance of improving goal-setting and social skills in this population of students. Three distinct themes developed during the interviews with the three participants for this cycle of research. The three themes were (a) transition to adulthood, (b) increasing social interactions, and (c) need for more adult resources in the Las Vegas community. Preparing for the transition to adulthood for students on the Spectrum and their families was the most powerful theme that arose out of this cycle of research. The transition from high school to college or the workplace is difficult for any young adult. However, there are additional challenges for students on the Spectrum due to their disability and the extensive support they received at home and school during their childhood. Up until graduation, most students on the

Spectrum were accustomed to having parents and educators making decisions and setting goals for them to follow. They did not always practice advocating for themselves and making decisions about their future because those decisions were already decided. The study indicated that young adults on the Spectrum who are transitioning to adulthood need support in understanding their social, academic, and medical needs. Additionally, it demonstrated that training to navigate the responsibilities and expectations of adulthood is crucial to success. According to input gleaned from the three participants, the best way to help build independence and self-advocacy during transitions is to help them recognize students' strengths and weaknesses, support them in capitalizing on their strengths and develop strategies to improve or overcome their weaknesses.

### ***Connections to Current Study***

In this cycle, I determined that faculty felt there was a need to provide additional support to students with disabilities, above and beyond academic accommodations. While my study has evolved to cast a broader net on student experience, moving beyond focusing solely on students with Autism to any freshman receiving services through the DRC, what I learned from this cycle informed my dissertation study in two ways. First, echoing faculty concerns that students are ill-prepared for adult life on campus, nor are they aware of the resources available to them to support student responsibilities through the content of my intervention. In terms of data collection and analysis, this cycle allowed me to practice interviewing, analyzing qualitative data, and coding interviews using tools for collection and analysis used in my study.

## **Cycle 1 Research Guiding Study**

Pivoting from Cycle 0 to further explore, in Fall 2019, I conducted another cycle of research to determine the need for faculty education to support students with disabilities, particularly ASD, in improving their self-determination to improve academic and social outcomes on campus. Faculty and staff are afforded the opportunity to learn how to work with students with disabilities and tend to become frustrated when these students require extra support in their classes. They call the Disability Resource Center for support, but talking someone through a problem and providing the tools to prevent a classroom issue are different.

The purpose of this cycle of study was to support faculty at UNLV; who participated in the Neurodiversity in the Classroom workshop co-hosted by the UNLV Faculty Center in understanding the needs of students with Autism and how to support them in their classrooms. The workshop participants completed a pre and post-workshop survey about their attitudes towards students on the Autism Spectrum in the college environment. The data collected from the surveys showed that attitudes about students with Autism could be changed relatively quickly with some training. The most significant change seen after participating in the workshop was the participants' ability to identify characteristics of Autism and their attitudes towards the academic capability of students with Autism. I had attempted to recruit volunteers to participate in a semi-structured interview to gain more insight into faculty perceptions of students with Autism, but no one volunteered to participate. The lack of volunteers for the interviews helped me realize that faculty value professional development to improve teaching practices. However, they often lack time to participate in longer-term activities to build

their knowledge to support students with disabilities. The time commitment needed for faculty to participate in a full-scale research project is not feasible with their schedules and other responsibilities.

### ***Connections to Current Study***

In this cycle of research, I encouraged faculty to take an active role in supporting students with Autism in the classroom. I understand that this was a big ask for instructors who are already stretched very thin and expected to take on additional responsibilities in their departments. While I hope to continue providing outreach and training opportunities for faculty and staff at UNLV, I used the information gathered in this cycle of research to support the development of my innovation and help students improve their self-determination skills to be more successful in the classroom and across campus.

The cycles of research showed that faculty feel that students with disabilities need additional support on campus and are willing to work with support staff on campus to be more inclusive and accommodating of students with learning differences. While faculty recognized the need for more support, they did not feel equipped to provide that support, which gave me the data I needed to develop my innovation to support students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills. This cycle of research allowed me to practice using quantitative data analysis and determine that future research for this study can be accurately and thoroughly explained through a qualitative lens.

### **Implications for Research**

Previous cycles of research and the studies discussed in previous sections guided the implementation of a modified *Steps to Self-Determination* curriculum, titled Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) for this study. Early cycles of research

focused primarily on the needs of college students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the college environment. As I continued my research, I recognized the need for self-determination skills instruction across multiple disabilities seen in the college environment. After examining the current research demonstrating the influence coaching has on improving self-determination skills in students with disabilities, implications for further action research suggested that implementing a coaching model using the SDCS was the most appropriate innovation for this research study. The successful development and implementation of the SDCS curriculum in the college environment impacted the development of support for true freshmen with or without disabilities as they navigated the transition from the K-12 environment to higher education.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to detail the research methods used in this study. First, I define action research and how it aligns with the theories described in Chapter 2. After redefining the problem of practice in my current workplace as a disability specialist, I outline my research questions that follow a qualitative method of inquiry. Next, I reveal the context and details of my study, including the research setting, the participants, my role as a coach and participant, and an overview of the innovation itself. Then, I discuss the data sources I used to study the innovation and my data analysis methodology. Finally, I discuss the validity and ethical considerations of this study.

#### **Theoretical Alignment and Research Design**

Action research is a combination of theory and practice carried out in an educational setting that informs current and future practices (Ivankova, 2015). It allows practitioners to observe and identify issues in their current practice and develop a research plan to evaluate new practices to help improve outcomes (p. 28). The flexible and cyclical nature of action research allows practitioners to increase their knowledge of the issues in their current practice and create solutions to improve those issues (Mertler, 2017, p. 15). Action research provides educators with an outlet to better understand and improve their educational practices through self-reflection and inquiry, which leads to a better understanding of practices and the environments in which they are carried out (Mertler, 2017; Watkins, 1991).

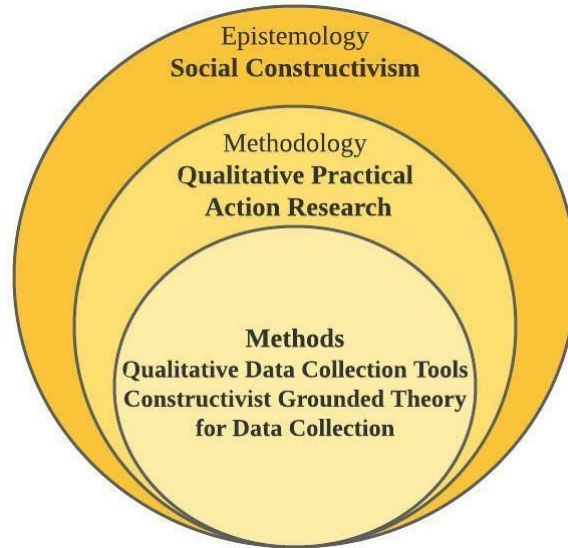
I utilized a qualitative practical action research design informed by constructivist grounded theory for this study. Qualitative research is an interpretive and naturalistic

approach to researching that allows the researcher to interact with participants, understand the environment, and apply meaning to the outcomes of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This approach to research allowed me to interact and observe students while understanding and evaluating their needs within the study. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define practical action research (PAR) as research that focuses on a specific issue within an educational environment; this research is usually conducted independently by an educator who has identified an issue within their context (p. 590). Through the use of PAR, I was able to examine a specific issue related to supporting students with disabilities at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Social Constructivism epistemology guided this qualitative research study and allowed me to develop a socially constructed view of the research and the students' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 689). Figure 7 displays the relationship between my epistemology, methodology, and methods.



**Figure 7**

*Theoretical Alignment and Research Design*



The impetus for this PAR study was a problem of practice in my local context: students with disabilities at UNLV often lack the skills needed to persist in their new college environments. We know from the literature that supporting students in building their goal-setting skills and self-advocacy skills leads to improved levels of self-determination. Self-determination can help students become better students and transition to adulthood easier. To address this problem of practice, I developed an innovation and implemented it in the UNLV Disability Resource Center (DRC).

The purpose of this study was to support degree-seeking students registered with the DRC who have a documented diagnosis of ADHD, SLD, or ASD, in learning about self-determination, and exploring how they might apply self-determination skills in their academic life. I developed two research questions to guide the implementation of the innovation and data collection:

RQ1: What happens to students' self-determination across the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation?

RQ2: What are students' perceptions of the social benefits and/or drawbacks to intervention participation?

### **Setting and Participants**

A qualitative practical action research design (Ivankova, 2015) necessitates researching in a natural, local context. As such, the study participants were students in the DRC. Using a PAR design allowed me to take an active yet flexible role in the study, meaning I, too, was one of the participants in this study.

#### **Setting**

This study took place at the UNLV DRC. UNLV is a 4-year public research university in the Southwestern United States that serves over 31,000 students in over 300 undergraduate and graduate majors. The DRC is the sole office authorized to provide academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities at the university. It serves over 1800 students, from undergraduate freshmen to graduate medical residents. The DRC supports students in accessing the curriculum and campus resources through an interactive process that assesses their disability and its impact on their academics. In addition to providing academic accommodations, the DRC staff identifies registered students at risk for academic difficulty by evaluating their high school GPAs and SAT/ACT scores.

The DRC staff offers at-risk students follow-along services to support students in planning and organizing their semesters and developing time management, self-advocacy, and other skills identified by the student and the disability specialist as a need

to be successful on campus. Through this style of follow-along service opportunities and my position as the Associate Director of the DRC, I conducted this study in this setting. While the DRC is a brick-and-mortar office on campus and typically houses face-to-face meetings and support for students, due to the COVID19 restrictions, the office was only serving students remotely. This study occurred via a digital meeting platform for 13 weeks during the spring 2021 semester.

### **Participants**

Using a convenience sampling method (Ivankova, 2015), I recruited participants by sending out a bulk email to freshmen students registered with the DRC who had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Learning Disability, or Autism Spectrum Disorder. I chose this sampling method because I wanted to recruit actively registered freshmen who were already engaging with the DRC. I chose to recruit active DRC students because they had self-disclosed their disabilities to the university and were aware of the support typically offered to students via the DRC. See Appendix C for the recruitment email.

Four students volunteered to participate in this study. Students did not receive incentives for their participation in the study. All four participants had a primary diagnosis of ADHD. Three were first-year freshmen at UNLV, and one was a second-year freshman due to credit requirements. Of the four participants, three identified as male, and one as female. The students ranged in age from 18 to 20 years old.

Two of the students were local to the Las Vegas area, but only one reported a robust support system in the geographical area. The other two students moved to Las Vegas for college. One of these students had support from extended family in the Las

Vegas area. The other student reported that she lost all family support when she moved to Las Vegas for college and was trying to independently navigate a new school, new city, and new experiences. Three of the students reported being diagnosed with ADHD in elementary school, while the fourth reported receiving a diagnosis their senior year in high school. One student declared an African-American studies major with a Theater minor and was comfortable with his degree plan. Two of the students are still exploring majors, meaning they have yet to declare a major. Both of these students had an idea of what field they wanted to study. One of them was very interested in Biological Sciences, and the other is leaning towards Human Services. The final student was still exploring majors and was not 100% sure what curricular path he wanted to follow, but he did know he wanted to avoid any major that required too much math. The students consistently showed up each week and were active participants in the study. They engaged in the discussion questions and brought their own stories and experiences to the 1:1 and group sessions. Three of the four students participated at the end of the study in semi-structured interviews. In order to protect their identities, during the data collection and analysis procedures, I created labels for each student participant. I used the labels: SP1, SP2, SP3, and SP 4 in the data analysis processes and for reporting purposes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this research study was as a coach and a researcher. My role as a coach was to guide students through the innovation and facilitate discussions in group and individual virtual meetings. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to collect data, analyze it, and share my findings responsibly and ethically.

In Chapter 1, I discussed my professional interest in this study and how it impacts my current work in the DRC. My experience working in the DRC enhanced my role as a researcher and coach. Throughout the study, the students asked questions about university operations, accommodation implementation, and interacting with faculty and staff on campus. I answered their questions as a campus administrator, helping them better understand how the campus operates and access resources more effectively. My five years of experience in the DRC gave me an intimate perspective of the needs of this population above and beyond academic accommodations.

While the students had already self-identified as having a disability, their participation in this allowed them to explore their disabilities in a new space where, at first, they did not know the other participants. I was empathetic to the challenges my participants faced during the study. Being vulnerable about one's disability can be challenging. Getting to know others and new contexts can be challenging. These challenges combined with the challenges students were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. My familiarity with the DRC and its resources, my experience supporting students with disabilities, experiencing the pandemic as a person and campus administrator supported my role as a coach participant and researcher in this study.

### **The Innovation: Self-Determination for College Success**

I designed the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation, a modified version of Steps to Self-Determination (*Steps*), a curriculum used to support middle and high school students in improving their self-determination skills developed from the Model for Self-Determination (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015; Field & Hoffman, 2005). The original *Steps* curriculum consists of 16 workshop sessions led by a teacher in

a classroom or small group setting with middle and high school students. Topics range from understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, setting goals, breaking barriers, effective communication, and conflict resolution (Field & Hoffman, 2005). I met with Dr. Field to discuss the *Steps* curriculum. During those discussions, I determined that some aspects of the curriculum were inappropriate for my target population: post-high school students with disabilities navigating a new college environment. For example, the *Steps* curriculum utilized scenarios that heavily involved the influence of parents on a student's decision-making. I wanted the innovation to help students build independence as they embarked on their transition to adulthood and decided not to include experiences related to parents' influence on students' decision-making.

Using the Model for Self-Determination combined with a focus on my intended participant population, I identified topics within the *Steps* curriculum that I felt were appropriate to use with college students with disabilities (Field & Hoffman, 1995, 2015; Field & Hoffman, 2005). These topics include knowing oneself, understanding one's disability, identifying strengths and weaknesses, long and short-term goal setting, assessing goal progress, adjusting goals to meet one's needs, and plans for the future. I felt that these skills were necessary for college students with disabilities because they helped build confidence and develop tools in college and adulthood.

The SDCS innovation supported college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills through a 13-week cycle of learning facilitated through coaching, group participation, and self-evaluation. Across the innovation, students would reflect on the concepts presented and think about how they could apply them to their own

goals and lives. Table 2 shows the timeline of the innovation and the critical concepts discussed.

**Table 2**

*Timeline of SDCS Innovation Implementation*

Weekly Topic	Zoom Type	Discussion Topic	Connection to Model for Self-Determination
W1: Introduction to Study & SD	GZ	Who Am I? What do I hope to learn?	<b>Define Self-Determination:</b> Students are introduced to the study and learn about self-determination and how it can help them improve their goal-setting skills.
W2: What is SD?	IZ	How do I feel about my SDAi scores? What do I think they mean?	<b>Know Yourself &amp; Your Context:</b> Students understood where they are starting on the SD Scale.
W3: Knowing Myself	GZ	How do I see myself & my disability? What are my strengths & weaknesses?	<b>Know Yourself &amp; Value Yourself:</b> Guided students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how that impacts their lives.
W4: My Dreams	IZ	What are your dreams for the future?	<b>Plan:</b> Why are these your dreams? Students noted extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for dreams
W5: Exploring Long-Term Goals	GZ	What are your top 2 dreams? What do your dreams say about what is important to you? How can you make a plan to carry out these dreams?	<b>Plan:</b> Shared dreams with the group to understand the strengths and weaknesses of others. Brainstorm long-term goals that may be feasible to attack this semester.
W6: Developing Long-Term Goals	IZ	What is important to you? What are your strengths and needs?	<b>Plan:</b> Developed long/short term goals for the semester. The ideal is 2-3 short-term goals that led to the achievement of the long-term goal.

W7: Developing & Choosing Short-Term Goals	GZ	What short-term goals can you put in place to help you achieve your long-term goal?	<b>Plan:</b> Students met to discuss their long-term goals and get suggestions for short-term goals to meet their long-term goal
W8: Finalizing Short Term Goals	IZ	Identify short-term goals and what steps you will take to meet those goals.	<b>Plan/Act:</b> Students set up a plan of action and develop a timeline for measuring and tracking their goals.
W9-11: Working towards Goals	N/A	Write down steps you have taken to work towards your short-term goal this week.	<b>Act:</b> Students tracked what steps they have taken to reach their short-term goals
W12: Short- & Long- Term Goal Check	GZ	What short-term goals are you on track to attain? What is your progress towards your long-term goal?	<b>Act/Experience Outcomes:</b> Students discussed their outcomes with their peers and accepted suggestions for future goal-setting opportunities.
W13: Study Reflection	IZ	What did you learn about yourself in this study? How have you changed since you started learning about SD? What do you want to do to keep growing in SD?	<b>Experience Outcomes &amp; Learn:</b> Students participated in semi-structured interviews to discuss how they had grown during this study.

*Note.* W=Week; GZ=Group Zoom; IZ=One-On-One Zoom; SD=Self-Determination

### ***Group Sessions for Direct Teaching and Student Interaction***

The SDCS innovation presented concepts that were new to the student participants. As noted in Chapter 1, many special education students in the K-12 environment lacked the skills needed to successfully transition to a college environment, including goal setting and self-awareness. Each week, the students engaged in small group instruction, and I asked open-ended questions to encourage group discussions. These discussions created a sense of relatedness and autonomy in their goal-setting skills and competence in carrying out these goals. Group sessions allowed the students to



develop trust in each other and be vulnerable about their disability experiences. Group discussions were held every other week during this study through a secure Zoom meeting room to encourage discussion and build a sense of community amongst the participants.

### ***Individual Coaching Sessions***

I designed the innovation to include one-on-one coaching sessions on subsequent weeks from the group sessions. I understood that students who engage in a coaching relationship with a teacher or mentor reported being less anxious about learning new strategies to become more self-determined learners (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). The intent for these individual sessions was to build a relationship of trust between myself and the students and use the established relationships to coach each student to learn and grow. In contrast to the group sessions, the individual coaching sessions allowed students to share more personal experiences and better understand the obstacles they have overcome and what is ahead.

### ***Self-Determination Notebook***

The Self-Determination Notebook (SD Notebook) was intended to create a space for the students to reflect on their learning during the innovation. The original plan was for students to engage in the notebook by answering a prompt or question that would guide their discussions in the group and one-on-one coaching sessions. I introduced the tool to the students during the first week of the innovation and encouraged them to use the notebook before each weekly discussion. I reminded students through email and at the end of our sessions that it was essential to engage in the SD notebook to guide our discussions for the next week. By the third week, it was evident that the students were not actively engaging in their SD Notebooks, and I decided to discontinue using the

notebooks in the study. While I stopped asking students to write in their notebooks, I used SD notebook prompts in our weekly discussions. I provided the same opportunity for students to engage in the SD notebook discussion topics through the weekly sessions to maintain the concepts initially presented in the SD notebook.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A qualitative practical action research design involves a systematic procedure for collecting and analyzing data to study an educational problem or phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As a participant observer and researcher, I was able to collect and analyze data simultaneously. I observed students' experiences within the innovation in real-time and identified possible patterns during iterative data collection and analysis opportunities. These affordances were possible because I was a researcher and a participant coach in the study (Mertler, 2017).

#### **Data Collection**

Qualitative data collection allows for developing a record of information which brings the human element into the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Data for this qualitative study included artifacts, interviews, and observations. I chose data collection tools that would allow me to answer the two research questions.

#### ***Artifacts***

Artifacts provide information and data from the participants that are not accessible through observation or interviews (Norum, 2012). The artifacts provide additional information about the innovation, the student's experiences, and my observations during the study.

**SDAi.** At the beginning of the study, the student participants completed the Self-Determination Assessment *internet* (SDAi) to determine the participants' levels of self-determination at the beginning of the study (Hoffman et al., 2015). The SDAi focused on variables that support self-determination and are within the student participant's control to change, which gives way for their participation in the innovation (p. 6). The SDAi provided a broad view of the student's strengths and weaknesses through a self-determination lens and allowed them to increase their awareness of their strengths and develop tools to improve upon their weaknesses. The SDAi aligned with Field and Hoffman's (1994, 2014) Model for Self-Determination. Students discussed the results from the SDAi and used the information to guide their journey through the study. A copy of the SDAi is in Appendix E.

**Researcher Journal.** The essence of qualitative inquiry is to develop a close relationship with the participants and the data collected to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). During the innovation, I used my researcher journal to attend to the experiences I observed during the coaching sessions, reflect upon the data collected, and document my own experiences during the coaching sessions. After the study, I used the journal to document my coding processes, record my impressions of the themes emerging from coding, and develop plans for further data analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Journaling allowed me, as the researcher, to synthesize the data collected and critically think about my role in the study while recognizing my assumptions about the data and accepting the extent to which my actions and decisions are shaping my research and what I observed (Saldana, 2016; Tie et al., 2019).

### ***Observations of Virtual Meetings***

Observations are a holistic method for researchers to collect data and provide information that may not be evident in artifacts or interviews (McKechnie, 2012). Collecting data through observations provides the researcher with an opportunity to capture events that occur during a meeting naturally without the constraints of predetermined themes developed by the researcher (p. 574). I collected observations of the group and individual virtual sessions. The virtual sessions were conducted, recorded, and transcribed through Zoom.

**Group Sessions.** For this study, virtual synchronous meetings were held either as a group meeting or individual coaching sessions each week during this study. These recorded meetings allowed me to be an active participant and later review the session recordings. Student participants engaged with the other participants and me online, synchronously, every two weeks. These meetings lasted an average of 30 minutes and engaged students in questions from the SD Notebook. The purpose of the group meetings were to create a sense of community within the student participants and allow them to share ideas and strategies. This sense of community aligns with two of the three basic psychological needs of SDT: relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Having your ideas validated and accepted by others creates a sense of competence that also helps to increase one's self-confidence and pride in their ideas.

**Individual Coaching Sessions.** A one-on-one coaching model was implemented on alternating weeks of the study to introduce concepts and build trust with the students. These meetings were, on average, 30 minutes in length and guided by the prompts developed in the SD Notebook and notes taken by me during the group sessions.

The goals of the one-on-one coaching meetings were to develop a working, trusting relationship between myself and the student participants and then use that relationship to facilitate the development of goals and strategies for students to grow as a learner and adult. These goals align with two of the three basic psychological needs of SDT: competence and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The nature of coaching allows students to grow and learn on their terms, while the coach gently encourages students to explore other ideas that will guide their learning (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Coaching also provides students an opportunity to internalize their learning and apply it in different settings and situations (p. 210).

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

At the end of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which allowed for an open dialog between myself and the student to discuss their experiences. With semi-structured interviews, the interviewer attempts to understand the themes developed in the study through the participant's worldview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The purpose of the interviews was to reflect on the SDCS innovation and how its components supported students with disabilities in improving their goal-setting skills and overall levels of self-determination.

The interviews investigated the following large ideas: (a) an overall impression of the study and what they learned about themselves, (b) impact of the study on the participants' feelings about their levels of SD, and (c) feelings about continuing the use of the strategies learned in this study. The interviews consisted of five standard questions to learn more about the student participants' experiences during the study and their feelings about the growth of their autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The interviews were

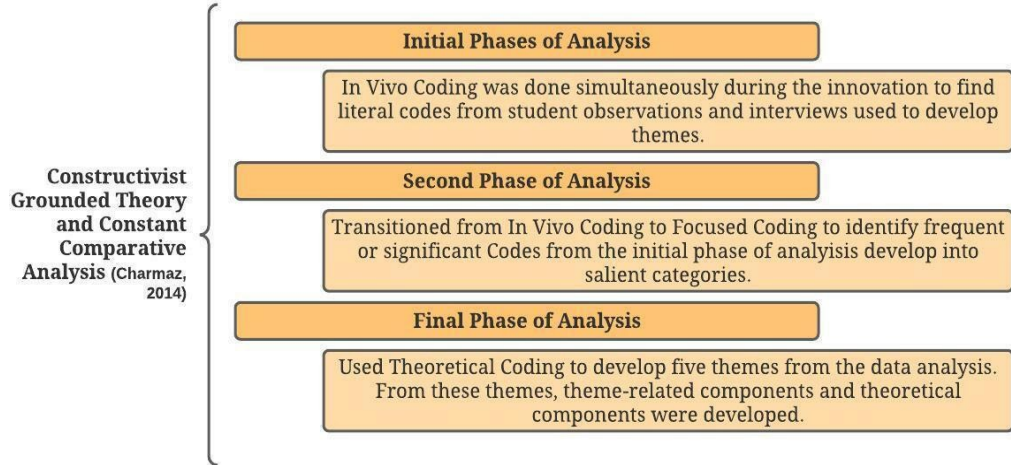
conducted, recorded, and transcribed through Zoom. A complete list of the interview protocol and questions are in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis**

I used constructivist grounded theory to guide my analysis of the data I collected during the study. Constructivist grounded theory is a heuristic device that allowed me, the researcher, to interact with the data and develop meaning through multiple rounds of data coding (Charmaz, 2014). The grounded theory approach supported my aims of collecting and analyzing data simultaneously (p.15). Constructivist grounded theory allowed me, as the researcher, to be an active participant in the study and acknowledged that I am a participant and research simultaneously. I bracketed my positionality and used a process of data analysis that encouraged me to stay true to the data (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist grounded theory allowed me to observe student participants' experiences to construct themes for analysis (Charmaz, 2014). I used constant comparative data analysis to identify significant patterns or themes throughout the study to present critical findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mertler, 2017). Actively coding while collecting data across the study allowed me to see how participants experienced the innovation. The constructivist grounded theory approach I applied to this study is shown in Figure 8 below.

**Figure 8**

*Constructivist Grounded Theory-Constant Comparative Model*



Through these analysis phases, I determined themes in the data and further explored each theme to develop my theoretical propositions. I describe this analysis in Chapter 4.

**Timeline of Collection and Analysis**

Table 3 illustrates the timeline for this study.

**Table 3**

*Timeline and Procedures for the Study and Innovation*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Procedures</b>
Preparation for the Study	December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtained IRB Approval from ASU and UNLV for study</li> <li>Prepared SD Notebook in Google Docs and secured in ASU Google Drive</li> </ul>
	January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presented study to UNLV DRC students with diagnoses of ADHD, LD, and ASD through email and document responses from interested participants.</li> </ul>

	Late January-February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed consent forms and assigned participants to Google Drive for access to SD Notebook.</li> <li>• Set-up participant access to SDAi assessment.</li> <li>• Administered SDAi assessment to students</li> <li>• Determined meeting dates/times for group and one-on-one virtual meetings</li> <li>• Introduced students to Google Docs and SD Notebook</li> </ul>
Implementation, Data Collection, & Preliminary Analysis	February 2021-April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held 30 virtual meetings with students, with students 25 one-on-one virtual meetings and 5 virtual group meetings</li> <li>• Shared feedback with students in one-on-one coaching virtual meetings</li> <li>• Conducted preliminary analysis of data collected during virtual meetings.</li> </ul>
Post-Innovation Data Measures	April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I conducted semi-structured interviews with the students</li> </ul>
Data Analysis	May 2021-August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzed Qualitative Data</li> <li>• Developed theoretical propositions</li> <li>• Prepared findings</li> </ul>

As the table above shows, my timeline had four major phases: preparation, implementation and data collection, post-innovation data measures, and data analysis. The first phase consisted of obtaining permission to implement my study in my local context and coordinating meeting times with the students. The second phase was the implementation, data collection, and ongoing analysis of the SDCS, which occurred over 13 weeks. The third phase included ongoing data analysis and semi-structured interviews in closing out the study. The fourth phase of the study incorporated focused data analysis to answer the study's research questions.



## **Ethical Considerations**

As I discussed in a previous section, I acknowledge my role as the Associate Director and researcher in the UNLV DRC. The inherent nature of action research and its implementation in the local context necessitates that the researcher attends to issues of integrity and trustworthiness of the research conducted. My professional role posed unique challenges as I conducted research that I mitigated by maintaining the highest levels of confidentiality, integrity, and security. I took steps to ensure that my power as the Associate Director did not negatively impact my interactions with the students (Herr & Anderson, 2012).

The findings from this study were intended to improve outcomes in my local context and to inspire conversations beyond the local context about how to support students with disabilities as they transition from K-12 to college environments. All participants signed a consent form detailing the purpose and benefits of the study, participation requirements, and how information is disseminated for future research and improvement within the disability services community. Participants remain anonymous in my dissertation and any subsequent reports or presentations to campus administration or national disability stakeholders.

### **Trustworthiness**

Waterman (1998) suggests that the cyclical nature of action research supports the trustworthiness of findings derived from this research methodology. The cyclical nature of action research "allows for the refinement of ideas and practice that also provides opportunities to deal with the associated issues and difficulties which may emerge as a consequence of the evaluation" (Waterman, 1998, p. 102). Before implementing this

study, I conducted two previous cycles of action research. I evaluated the data collected, which allowed me to establish credibility as a researcher in this field and move forward to develop this study. Throughout this study, I engaged in the prolonged engagement of the data throughout the implementation of the innovation and reflection on the data to increase the study's trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). During the study, I spent a considerable amount of time building trust with the students and getting to know the data intimately to ensure that I understood the ideas expressed. I constantly evaluated the changing context of the data during the life of the innovation and made adjustments when needed.

### **Subjectivity**

Subjectivity is a threat in action research studies because "it is impossible for a researcher to both be in a detached position and at the same time exert positive intervention on the environment and subjects studied" (Kock, 2002). To mitigate this threat, I used constructivist grounded theory to analyze my data and draw conclusions. The constructivist grounded theory allowed me to create conceptual frameworks through inductive data analysis (Tie et al., 2019). The trustworthiness of grounded theory is related to three unique areas: a) the researcher's expertise, b) methodological congruence with the research question, and c) procedural precision in the use of methods (p. 7). In Chapter 1, I discussed my professional role in the UNLV DRC and my role as a researcher and data analyst in this study to demonstrate my expertise in supporting students with disabilities. During the data collection phase, I took steps to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, and that my role in the study did not impact the data collected. I ensured that my methodology aligned with the tools I used to interact with

the student participants, and I kept a researcher journal to lessen this threat. Using a researcher journal to document my own experiences and feelings during the study, I engaged in honest self-reflection of my role and how my actions influenced the study. I explored my reflexivity as a researcher and my own biases and preconceptions of the data I was collecting.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval**

Due to the involvement of human subjects, I analyzed potential risks and ensured that I followed ethical guidelines in the design, implementation, analysis, and reporting of findings for this study. I submitted for review all research protocols and related materials (e.g., informed consent documents, interview protocols, and other data collection instruments) to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Arizona State University and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Both governing IRB bodies approved this study.

### **Informed Consent**

While obtaining consent from the student participants, I clearly described the study, its purpose, design, and any risk or benefits from participating in this study. Because this study lived in the UNLV DRC, I ensured that the student participants understood that their participation was voluntary and had no effect on the services or accommodations they received from the DRC. I did not pressure DRC students to participate in this study. In order to respect student's privacy and confidentiality regarding their disability status during this study, I removed all identifying information for the students.

## Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical alignment supporting the research design. It explained why a qualitative practical action research methodology was an appropriate research design for implementing and studying my SDCS innovation in my local context. I introduced the setting and participants and described my role as the participant observer. I presented the SDCS innovation and framed the concepts explored during the study through the Model for Self-Determination. I offered a study timeline that included my data collection instruments and a brief overview of my data analysis procedures. Finally, I discussed the ethical implications for the study and how I attempted to lessen those threats. Chapter 4 discusses the data collected during the SDCS innovation and presents theoretical propositions that support the evaluation of the research questions in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of my qualitative action research (QAR) study was to support degree-seeking students registered at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Disability Resource Center with a documented disability and improve their self-determination through the SDCS Innovation. Chapter 3 described the methodologies I used to design this study, including data collection tools and a brief overview of my analysis process. This chapter further discusses the qualitative data analysis procedures I used and the findings that emerged from my analysis.

#### **Data Analysis**

In this PAR study, I acted as a participant-observer. A participant-observer is a researcher who actively participates in the study to understand how participants synthesize information being presented, to identify patterns emerging in the study, and to develop a relationship with the participants not otherwise feasible if the researcher was not actively participating (Mertler, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 3, the qualitative data collected consisted of artifacts and transcripts of the virtual meetings and semi-structured interviews. These data created a rich and dynamic representation of the student's growth and experience throughout the innovation and allowed for the use of students' voices to illustrate the findings. Table 4 presents the entirety of the data collected.

**Table 4**

*Description of Qualitative Sources*

Data Source	Word Count
Group Participant Sessions	30,824
Individual Participant Sessions	51,486
Semi-Structured Interviews	12,064
SDAi Survey Results	3,380
Researcher Journal	7,817
Total Word Count	105,571

**Data Analysis Procedures**

For this qualitative study, I used a constant comparative data analysis method to identify significant patterns or themes that developed throughout the study and to present critical findings (Mertler, 2017). Using this method, I analyzed the data in three phases.

***Initial Phase of Analysis***

As a participant-observer in the study, I collected, processed, and conducted an initial analysis of the data simultaneously. As the person leading the innovation and coaching the students, I initially analyzed data while engaging with the innovation experiences. Each week I evaluated the data and as I planned for the following week's discussions. This simultaneous data collection, processing, and analysis was the start of my initial phase of analysis.

I used Zoom to transcribe each individual and group session right after each took place. I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and conducted In Vivo coding as I planned for the next group or individual session. In Vivo Coding is described as literal or

verbatim coding of the data (p. 105). In Vivo Coding was used to understand the student participants' experiences better and develop codes using the terms and phrases they used during the virtual meetings (Saldana, 2016). I started by using the students' actual words and phrases to develop a coding scheme. Each week I would process the transcripts and code them. Weekly reading and coding the transcripts gave me insights into the current happenings in the study, informing my actions as a participant-observer.

After the study, I read the data as a whole, moving away from the 'in the moment' readings. I did two more rounds of In Vivo coding. I started coding the data via participants; this allowed me to review and closely read the individuals in the study and their experiences. Then, I did a final round of coding of all data in chronological order. This final round of coding allowed me to look closely at individual and group experiences across the intervention. After these three rounds of In Vivo coding, I developed 77 codes, which included codes such as stress, confusion, making excuses, getting organized, being a good person, and asking for help.

### ***Second Phase of Analysis***

The start of my second phase of analysis bridged the transition from In Vivo Coding to Focused Coding. To this end, I engaged in a physical code mapping procedure, writing all 77 codes on individual index cards first to get a large-scale view of the In Vivo codes and then consolidated the numerous literal codes that emerged from the data. From this code mapping exercise, I narrowed down the initial codes from 77 to 57. For example, I consolidated you're getting there, you're not alone, and it's a journey into the code encouragement. I consolidated anxiety, stress, and depression into the code

mental health. After three rounds of In Vivo coding and two rounds of Focused coding by hand, I moved my analysis processes into the software program, DeDoose.

In DeDoose, I entered my Focus codes and conducted another coding round to solidify the categories I had identified in my selective coding done by hand. After I finished my rounds of coding, I had a total of 57 codes that became more distinct categories after subsequent rounds of coding. DeDoose allowed me to examine the code groups that developed during the multiple rounds of coding and combine those code groups to identify central codes that best represent the data collected.

As I was evaluating the data, I matched codes that had similar meanings within the data. From the 57 codes, I collapsed similar codes into 30 parent codes that I felt best represented the organized data. Some of the 30 parent codes included: communication, learning, tools, focus, struggle, and disability. I established 12 parent codes used to further organize the data into more manageable codes that would help tell the story of the data. I chose to further collapse the codes into nine main themes that I felt best represented the data analyzed and helped the reader better understand the lived experiences and the student's learning during the study. The nine themes I developed out of these rounds of coding were External Barriers, Internal Barriers, External Motivation, Internal Motivation, Long-Term Goals, Short-Term Goals, Negative Self-Reflection, Positive Self-Reflection, and Struggle. Within the nine categories, I chose several quotes from each category that I felt best represented the students' experiences and reflections from the study that developed into my codebook. Table 5 displays the code book that developed from the themes.



**Table 5***Qualitative Categories*

Category	Definition	Notable Quotes
External Barriers	Outside forces or influences that hinder the student's ability to access resources or overcome barriers to their disability on campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I want to reach out, but I feel like she is going to get mad at me for asking."</li> <li>• "Instructors don't care about students with disabilities."</li> <li>• "My instructors don't understand how my accommodations work."</li> </ul>
Internal Barriers	Internal self-talk that hinders the student's ability to overcome barriers to their disability and be successful on campus and in courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I really don't know how to take notes."</li> <li>• "I don't really try to be friends with others."</li> <li>• "It's hard for me to pay attention and manage my time."</li> <li>• "I am not like normal people, they think I am lazy because of my disability."</li> </ul>
External Motivation	Outside forces or influences that support students in accessing the curriculum and other resources to overcome barriers to their disability on campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I have a good support system for my Math class."</li> <li>• "My teachers recognized when I needed help and helped me."</li> <li>• "We were bonded by our diagnosis, but we came together to support each other."</li> </ul>
Internal Motivation	Internal self-talk that encourages students to overcome barriers to their disability in accessing curriculum and the campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I am a better teammate, I am a better partner, I am a boss!"</li> <li>• "Do the best you can, that's all anyone can expect."</li> <li>• "I am not afraid to ask others for help, especially my instructors."</li> <li>• "I want to get good grades and graduate."</li> <li>• "My disability helps me achieve my daily life struggles."</li> </ul>
Negative Self-Reflection	Internal self-talk that is negative in nature. Students often expressed that they were lacking in their abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't really try to be friends with people."</li> <li>• "I don't know what's going on and no one cares."</li> <li>• "There are no positive impacts in my life."</li> </ul>

Positive Self-Reflection	Internal self-talk that is positive in nature. Students are able to recognize positive influences and aspects of their life that help them grow as adults and learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I know that I can communicate with people with the same disability, but we may have different experiences."</li> <li>• "All of us have ADHD, but we all experience it differently."</li> <li>• "We were cheering each other along and encouraging each other not to give up, keep fighting!"</li> <li>• "Even if I mess up, I will keep pursuing my goals."</li> <li>• "I think I can improve, I have a lot of good things to still do."</li> <li>• "I can better myself."</li> <li>• "Everyone has their flaws, but we can grow from them." "</li> </ul>
Long-Term Goals	Semester-long goals that students created for this study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I want to establish a major."</li> <li>• "I want to earn a 3.0 GPA for the semester."</li> <li>• "I want to improve my time management skills."</li> <li>• " I want to get good grades and be set up for life."</li> </ul>
Short-Term Goals	Weekly goals that students created to reach their long-term semester goals for the study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I will make an appointment with my advisor to talk about majors."</li> <li>• "I will go to office hours to ask questions about my discussion posts."</li> <li>• "I learned how to apply my wants to tangible goals."</li> <li>• "I want to speak up and be heard."</li> <li>• "I met with my mentor to talk about careers."</li> </ul>
Struggle	Barriers to student progress and accessing curriculum and the campus environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't know what I want in life."</li> <li>• "My instructors don't understand my disability and really don't care."</li> <li>• "People see me struggling and won't help."</li> <li>• "I struggle with my disability, it makes it hard for me to pay attention."</li> <li>• "Staying focused, taking notes, and participating is a real struggle in class."</li> </ul>

From the evaluation of the codebook and nine themes that developed during these rounds of coding, I was able to further collapse the themes from nine themes to five: Barriers, Motivation, Goal Setting, Self-Reflection, and Struggle.

### ***Final Phase of Analysis***

I developed a coding scheme to group data that fit into themes identified during the study. After completing Focused coding, I used theoretical coding to further evaluate my five themes. Theoretical coding assisted in theorizing the data and showing a relationship between the codes developed in focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). It allowed precision and clarity to be applied to the data and presented clearly and coherently (pp. 150-151). I reviewed the data for each theme to develop theme-related components that helped define the data associated with each theme. I was able to sit with the theme-related components and reflect on the more significant idea reflected across those components, which led to the development of five theoretical propositions I would use to guide the presentation of the findings. The goal of each theoretical proposition was to develop a statement that showed a causal relationship or phenomenon that developed through the analysis process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 448). The phenomena I present in these findings examine how and why specific experiences occurred during the study and their impact on the findings (Kortsjens & Moser, 2017). The development of findings in qualitative research is arduous and complicated in its very nature. There is no standardized method for presenting qualitative data, making this undertaking more difficult (Miles et al., 2020). Drafting text to illustrate each theoretical proposition was the final step in the analysis process. Many revisions took place to develop and finalize the five theoretical propositions presented below. The first three theoretical propositions

display causal relationships that developed throughout the SDCS innovation. The final two theoretical propositions are phenomena specific to this study and occurred due to the participant's interaction with the innovation, myself, and each other. I strived to stay true to the students' experiences and growth while analyzing the data collected. In an effort to better understand the students' experiences described in the next section, Table 6 illustrates the students' demographic information and preliminary assessment data from SDAi that shows the student's starting self-determination levels. Self-Determination levels are ranked on a scale of one to three with three being the highest. A score of three indicates a high level of the specific self-determination skill measured, conversely a score of one suggests that more attention may be needed in this specific self-determination skill area. Appendix E contains a completed SDAi Profile Report with descriptions for each score.

**Table 6**

*Student Participant Demographic Data and SDAi Results*

SP	Age	SDAi	Know Yourself	Value Yourself	Plan	Act	Experience Outcomes
1	18	57	2	2	2	2	3
2	12	23	1	1	2	3	2
3	10	41	2	1	2	2	2
4	8	64	2	3	2	2	2

*Notes:* SP=Student Number, Age=Age of Diagnosis, SDAi=SDAi Percentile Score

### **Findings**

I developed the first three themes and their theoretical propositions to illustrate how students' competence, relatedness, and autonomy developed throughout the SDCS innovation. To present each theme and its correlating theoretical proposition, I describe components related to the innovation's beginning, middle, and end. The final two themes

and their correlating theoretical propositions do not necessarily represent development over time but instead focus on two phenomena representing the shared experiences of the students and me, as the researcher and coach.

Table 7 highlights the three major themes, the correlating theoretical propositions that emerged through multiple rounds of data analysis. I present a detailed discussion of each theme, the theoretical proposition, and its related components following the table.

**Table 7**

*SDCS Themes, Theme-related Components, and Theoretical Propositions*

<i>Themes* and Theme-related Components</i>	Theoretical Propositions
<p><i>Building Confidence through Competence</i>            B: Students' <b>view of themselves</b> was impacted from high school and how it impacted their confidence.            M: Students began <b>navigating</b> their strengths and weaknesses through the lens of their disability and began to recognize that they are more capable than they realized.            E: Students <b>took ownership</b> of their learning and outcomes and understand that their disability does not have to be a barrier to their success.</p>	<p>The SDCS supported students in building confidence in themselves</p>
<p><i>Empowerment through Self-Advocacy</i>            B: Students did not feel <b>empowered</b> to make their own decisions.            M: Students <b>recognized</b> that they are responsible for guiding their education and accessing support.            E: Students <b>celebrated</b> their voice and that they can use that voice to be strong advocates for themselves.</p>	<p>The SDCS promoted exploration of the students' autonomy through empowerment to become stronger self-advocates.</p>
<p><i>The Value of Struggle</i></p>	<p>The SDCS allowed students to reflect on their struggles and appreciate that they are a vital part of growth and</p>

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B: Students **struggled** with understanding their disability and celebrating their uniqueness in the college community.  
M: Students **identified** difficulties they had experienced in their transition to college and brainstormed ways to overcome those struggles.  
E: Students began to **appreciate** their struggles as learning experiences

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*Note:* B=Beginning of Study, M=Middle of Study, E=End of Study

### **Building Confidence Through Competence**

*Theoretical Proposition 1* ——*The SDCS supported students in building confidence in their skills and accessing campus resources.* While exploring one's disability and its impacts on their lives, students used the safe space. The SDCS allowed students to discuss their struggles navigating different high school and college environments and understand that their disability does not harm their lives. The SDCS allowed students to exchange ideas and experiences to help build their confidence in the college environment.

### ***Improving Self-Image and Building Confidence***

At the beginning of this study, students completed the SDA*i*, an assessment that led them through a series of questions to evaluate their levels of self-determination through the five major components of the Model for Self-Determination: Know yourself and your context, Value yourself, Plan, Act, and Experience outcomes and learn (Field & Hoffman, 1994). The experience of the assessment and its results were the focus of conversations in the early 1:1 and group sessions. As students talked through their results and the experience of taking the SDA*i*, they reported that they were not confident in their academic skills. They reported that they often felt "dumb," and others viewed them as

lazy because of their disability. In further discussing these negative self-images and low levels of confidence, students traced these feelings back to experiences they had in high school. Students carried these earlier experiences in navigating their disability in K-12 through to the university environment. Their high school experiences included being misunderstood by other teachers and students and also misunderstanding themselves.

SP3 illustrated one example of being misunderstood by others. He had been kicked out of school, which led to being labeled a 'troublemaker.' The school viewed him as defiant and expelled him for truancy. SP3 struggled with his classes so much that it would make him physically sick to even think about going to school. While he had a 504 academic plan in place, he was not receiving the support he needed to be successful. SP3 reflected:

I would not go to school because I felt anxious about what I did not know. I remember one time, in public high school, the truancy officer came to my house because I would not go to school. When I was anxious about school, I would get physically sick to my stomach. I had anxiety because I did not know what was going on in my classes, and I was afraid to ask for help (SP3, Individual Session 1, February 17, 2021).

This example represents a common thread across most of the students in the study. When not given the tools they needed to overcome the barriers they experienced due to their disabilities and mental health issues, the people around them often misunderstood their actions. As others negatively viewed them, i.e., thought of them as lazy or dumb, students internalized these views, ultimately carrying these views with them as they transitioned to college.

While most students in the study had been diagnosed with their disabilities early in their childhood, one participant did not receive a diagnosis until their senior year of high school. In this student's experiences, we can see an example of how students' misunderstandings of their diagnosis and their needs led to low levels of confidence in their school abilities; for years, school was a challenge for SP1. Before and even after being diagnosed, he reported having to navigate school on his own. His late diagnosis created a loss of confidence in his abilities and an overall feeling that school was intimidating. All students shared that they had difficulties accessing the classroom environments in high school and felt others did not care if they succeeded or failed. These feelings of being on their own, coupled with their struggles to access content to be successful in the classroom, led students to be intimidated by school and to think of school as a place where they would "not be good enough."

The SDAi results and the subsequent discussions about the results led to many deep conversations that displayed the students varying levels of confidence in their knowledge of their disability and how it impacted them in the college environment. Through the analysis of the one on one and group session data, students reported a paucity of support in high school impacted their confidence in their abilities entering college. This lack of confidence impacted how they engaged with support services, faculty, and classmates on the university campus.

### ***Navigating Strengths and Weaknesses through a Disability Lens***

The SDCS engaged students in discussions about different aspects of self-determination and how it manifested in their own lives. The first few modules helped



students understand their disability and identify their strengths and weaknesses while guiding them through the Model for Self-Determination (Field & Hoffman, 1994). While all four students shared the same diagnosis, they had different experiences navigating the world and their disabilities. These shared yet distinct experiences created rich discussions around their lived experiences and how these experiences have colored their view of themselves.

In our one-on-one meetings, students reported different levels of exposure to their diagnoses. Some were more aware of how their disability impacted their view of themselves as capable college students. Three of the students had very limited or negative experiences navigating support for their disability in the past. They did not grasp their strengths well and focused mainly on the barriers they encountered due to their disability. SP4 had more supportive experiences because "I found out when I was a kid, and my family helped me work through it" (Individual Session 1, February 17, 2021). Despite their differing experiences, the students reported that the levels of support they received at home and in school impacted their attitude towards their disability.

SP3 recognized that his ADHD made it "extremely hard to focus and stay on topic, especially for assignments" (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). The other student participants agreed that it was challenging to pay attention, especially in long, dry lectures. The students expressed higher stress levels in navigating the new expectations placed on them in the college environment. Despite a higher level of comfort with his disability, SP4 felt that sometimes the stress of keeping up would cause him to fall behind and break down because he felt left behind (Group Session 2, February 24,

2021). The students agreed that a stigma followed them to college and impacted their view of themselves amongst a new peer group.

Despite the difficulties they encountered during their academic careers, the students also explored the positive aspects of having a disability. While students shared much information in the individual sessions, the group sessions gave students a safe space to share their experiences and exchange ideas about coping strategies and other supports they have developed. SP1 said, "ADHD has given me superpowers that bring new perspectives to how I experience life" (SP1, Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). The students agreed that living with ADHD gave them a unique perspective on learning and life to expand their thinking in the college environment. SP1's reflection allowed the other students to reflect on their diagnosis journey and the positive aspects of their disabilities. SP4 said that once he understood and appreciated that we all learn differently, he celebrated his differences and the unique perspective of a discussion or class. SP4 reflected:

I am very confident in what I can do and know that I need to try hard things or never get ahead. I know I cannot win at everything, but I can only do my best. I will never know if I do not try (SP4, Individual Session 2, March 3, 2021).

SP4 goes on to say that everybody thinks differently, and that should be celebrated, not discouraged.

SP3 disclosed that while some may feel that being "scatterbrained" is a negative thing, he appreciates that his brain lets him quickly explore different topics until he finds something that piques his interest. SP3 knows that he is not strong in math and has used that realization to help guide his exploration into non-

math-intensive majors. He said, "I make sure I go to the tutoring center if I do not understand something. I am not afraid to ask for help anymore" (SP3, Individual Session 2, March 3, 2021). SP3 disclosed that when he finally acknowledged that he was not strong in a particular area and understood that "that was ok," he became more confident in finding experiences he could manage with minimal support.

The data showed that the students had varying levels of understanding of their disability and how it impacted their lives. Students had a space to explore their strengths and weaknesses while understanding how the disability impacts their lives, allowing for deep conversations and sharing their experiences. The shared experiences of each student during the SDCS helped them understand that they were not alone on their journey to understanding their disability and how it enriched their lives as they transitioned to the college environment.

### ***Ownership of Learning and Outcomes***

Through the SDCS modules, the students explored their strengths and weaknesses related to their transition to college and disability. In the final weeks of the study, the students started reflecting on their growth in understanding and appreciating their disabilities. Giving students the power to explore their own lives and make decisions about how they would move forward was powerful.

The students shared experiences before and while transitioning to college, which helped them be better students and improve their confidence in their abilities. The students reported that there were not high expectations from their families to go to college. While they still experience struggles accessing the environment, several students

reported knowing whom to go when they need help. SP3 reported that he has started to connect with classmates to "fill in the gaps" from lectures. They have created a study group where everyone studies together. He continued, "I do not feel as anxious anymore because I know what I am good at and hard. I enjoy going to class and knowing some people can help me" (SP3 Interview, April 28, 2021).

SP1 built upon the sentiments of the other students and reported:

I cannot learn in a bubble, and I need to depend on others sometimes. It does not mean that I am dumb; I am stronger when I ask for help. I am not as self-sufficient as I thought, and it is ok not to know everything yet (SP1, Interview, April 28, 2021).

Overall the students reported that they need to lead their learning and development; they could not wait for someone to come and help them. They collectively concluded that they do not have to know everything right away. However, the power they gain by seeking out support and taking ownership of their learning makes having a disability a little less scary. SP1 said, "I know how to tackle the daily struggles by asking the right people for help when I need it" (SP1, Interview, April 28, 2021).

The students entered the study with varying confidence levels in their ability to navigate their new environment and its resources due to their experiences in high school. Their confidence levels impacted their interactions in the college environment. Allowing students to share their experiences and learn from each other's encounters created an environment of sharing and collaboration that helped them feel less alone in the transition to college with a disability.

## **Empowerment through Self-Advocacy**

*Theoretical Proposition 2* ——*The SDCS promoted exploration of the students' autonomy through empowerment to become stronger self-advocates.* Throughout the SDCS innovation, students explored their autonomy to make decisions while understanding their rights and responsibilities and accessing support to guide their education. Autonomy is one's ability to make independent choices and regard themselves as the architect of these choices. When people are allowed to make their own choices, they are more likely to explore new opportunities and experiences to build their confidence. As the students progressed through the SDCS innovation, they understood their power to control their outcomes and advocate for their needs.

### ***Student Empowerment***

Traditionally, in the K-12 special education environment, students have played peripheral roles in their education. None of the students who participated in this study could articulate the goals developed on their IEP and 504 plans from high school. Through the individual and group sessions, students reported that because their parents and teachers were the decision-makers in their education and IEP goals, they did not have the opportunity to advocate for themselves. The first few sessions revolved around the SDAi results, which gave the students a snapshot of their levels of self-determination.

SP1, diagnosed in his senior year of high school, did not have the opportunity to participate in the IEP process. SP1 said, "I am still trying to figure out what it means to have a disability" (SP1, Individual Session 1, February 17, 2021). SP1's understanding of his disability was limited and impacted his advocacy on campus and in his life. The other

students had an IEP or 504 plan in place for most of their K-12 careers. They were aware that these plans were in place, but they did not know what was in those plans. While there may have been plans in place, the students expressed that they did not feel supported by the plans, which caused them to experience issues in their learning. SP3 expressed that he had to go it alone in high school, which led to him having mental health issues and moving to an alternative high school because of his behavior. He said that he did not feel that his teachers understood or even cared about his accommodations. The appropriate Special Education plans, by law, were on file and acknowledged. However, these students felt they did not have access to resources to succeed in the classroom environment.

SP4 had a different experience from the other students in the study. He reported that his family was supportive of him in navigating his disability. However, his parents and the IEP team made most of the critical decisions regarding his future. SP4 reflected that he never felt he could speak up. His goals were developed by his IEP team, because they said they knew best (SP4, Individual Session 1, February 17, 2021). Despite a robust support system around him, SP4 still reported a lack of autonomy in his own life choices and goals. While all four students had very different experiences in their K-12 careers, they all reported that they did not feel that they were active participants in the plans developed for them. The SDCS innovation allowed the students to explore their past experiences with their disability and understand that they can make decisions that will guide their lives.

### ***Student Responsibility for Accessing Support***

As the students engaged in the innovation, they started to explore their rights and responsibilities as a college student with a disability. At this point in the SDCS innovation, the group sessions had become a space for the students to openly share their feelings and experiences and give each other advice on overcoming the obstacles they had been experiencing. SP4 expressed frustration with his accommodations in the college environment because they were not as intensive as his high school accommodations. "I do not understand why I only get extra time; I need notes and my book like in high school" (SP4, Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). A discussion about IDEA and ADA, the disability laws that guide support and accommodations, occurred early in the innovation to help answer the students' questions about the difference in support available at the college level and their new responsibilities as a college student with a disability accessing accommodations. I reinforced the student's responsibility "to advocate for your accommodations and support if you do not understand the material. Instructors will assume that you understand the material without letting them know" (Coach, Group Session 2, February 24, 2021).

SP1 and SP3 suggested that the other students become more comfortable with the tutoring services available on campus. SP3 said, "I go to the Tutoring Center at least twice a week, and I make sure to schedule meetings with my instructors during office hours if I do not understand something" (SP3, Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). He expressed that this helped him, and the instructors explained concepts that he did not understand. Both students agreed

that it could be intimidating to reach out to instructors, but most of them are willing and ready to help when asked.

Through the SDCS innovation, the students could explore the rights and responsibilities of a college student with a disability with the coach's support. They used the group sessions to brainstorm ideas and share resources they had used on campus to access their courses and get help in understanding the course work. As the discussions continued, they began to understand that they had similar experiences accessing support and better understand why they experienced difficulties and barriers in their education and advocacy. These group sessions empowered the students to become better advocates for their accommodations and support on campus to ensure that they have access to demonstrate their knowledge in their courses.

### ***Celebrating Their Voices***

Towards the end of the study, students were able to identify supports on-campus that were available to them if they were struggling in a course. At the end of the study, the students participated in semi-structured interviews, which allowed me as the researcher to gain more insight into their experiences and reflect on their self-determination growth. The students reported that they felt more empowered to advocate for themselves because they did not feel alone in their diagnosis. They knew that there were others out there experiencing similar difficulties, and they had fellow students they could reach out to for help and support. SP1 reported that he felt more confident in their ability to ask for help and learned strategies that he would continue to use in the future. SP1 reflected:



I used to be nervous to talk to 'adults' on campus, but now I know they are just here to help me learn and grow. I cannot wait for help to come to me; I have to find it (SP1, Interview, April 28, 2021).

At the end of the study, SP4 reflected on the growth he had experienced during the study and the realization that "I have to let my instructors and other support people know what is going on with me, if I do not they cannot help" (SP4, Interview, April 28, 2021). The students recognized that the abundant resources available on campus are only helpful if they access them and apply the advice and guidance given to their studies and life.

In the final semi-structured interviews, all of the students recognized and appreciated that they were the leaders of their success. While they may have strong support from family and guidance from campus officials, ultimately, the decisions they make are their own and will guide the rest of their lives. SP3 summed it up, "To be successful in college and life, you have to have a game plan. No one can create that plan for you; it is all yours" (Interview, April 28, 2021). While there may be times of doubt and frustration with their disability and the barriers they encounter as a result of that disability, the students concluded, "I am more capable than I give myself credit for, and I have to remember that on the good and bad days" (Interview, April 28, 2021). Students were empowered to take control of their education and lives, a very foreign concept to them at the beginning of this study. I realized that the students had an idea of what they needed to access their education, but they were not confident in their ability to engage and advocate for themselves.

## **The Value of Struggle**

*Theoretical Proposition 3* ——*The SDCS allowed students to reflect on their struggles and appreciate that they are a vital part of growth and development in the transition to adulthood.* The struggle is experiencing difficulty and exerting a great effort to accomplish something (Cambridge Dictionary). The students consistently expressed the struggles they encountered in the academic environment throughout the study. As the study progressed, the students began to appreciate their struggles during their transition to college because they helped them grow as young adults and learners. They recognized that while they all had different struggles, they could learn from each other and build their skills.

### ***Struggling with My Identity***

At the beginning of the study, students reported that they did not understand their disabilities or how they impacted school. These reports elicited individual discussions about the student's results on the SDA*i*. The SDA*i* measured the student's level of self-determination by asking questions about their knowledge of their disability and how it impacts them in the academic environment. The SDCS innovation allowed the students to identify struggles they experienced during their academic careers but never had the tools to overcome those obstacles. SP3 reported, "it is a real struggle to stay focused, take notes, and participate in class" (SP3, Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). SP4 built upon the conversation, "I also struggle with ADHD; it affects me to where it is hard for me to pay attention" (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). SP4 continued, "I tend to struggle even if the teachers take some time to help me, but it does not work because they

do not always understand what is going on in my head" (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021).

The students were consistently reporting that they struggled in academic courses, such as Math and English because they did not fully understand their needs and how to access support on campus. SP4 noted that the COVID pandemic had compounded his disability struggles because he does not have as much access to his instructors and other resources on campus. SP3 added, "it has been tough to stay focused and stay on a schedule" (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). SP1's experience with their disability differed from the rest of the students because of his late diagnosis. SP1 is still trying to understand his new diagnosis, and while there are barriers present, he is reflecting on the difficulties he had when he was younger and, "it all makes sense now" (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021). Individual sessions during the SDCS innovation allowed the students to become more comfortable and began sharing more personal information in the group sessions.

Students also noted that they struggled with the idea of having a disability and the perception that they were weird and dumb by their peers. SP1 noted that he never really made an effort to interact with others because I never felt like I belonged (Individual Session, March 3, 2021). SP2 felt that her disability was a badge of shame; she had not found positive aspects of her disability to help her grow as a learner and adult. The student's lack of understanding and appreciation of their disability caused them to retreat and push others away.

SP4 said, "I was only a part of a friend group because my twin brother was popular in school, and he did not want to leave me out" (Individual Session 1, February

17, 2021). SP4's group membership was contingent on his sibling's status in the group. He expressed that he never felt that their brother's friends were true friends; SP4 always felt like the third wheel. He belonged to the group because of his relationship with his sibling, not because he was a valued group member. The other students reported that they had acquaintances due to mutual classes, but they never felt that a bond or that they could be friendly outside of the school walls. SP3 echoed these sentiments and added:

it was a lot easier to move across the country to go to college because I never felt like I belonged. I did not fit in with the good kids because I did not want to be at school, and I did not click with the wrong kids because I would not do stupid stuff with them (Individual Session 1, February 17, 2017).

All of the students expressed feelings of loneliness and low self-worth because they could not create bonds with others or be valued members of a group where they could feel welcomed and supported. SP3 and SP4 were the only two students who said they had strong bonds with their family but often wished they had a group of friends. SP1 and SP2 both reported strained family relationships that have caused them to move away to start their own lives. It appears that family relationships were an essential factor in how the students interacted in their peer environments. The bonds they had established in their immediate families mirrored their interactions with fellow students in school. They all noted that navigating their new lives in college was difficult with or without family support because they did not have trusted peers they could lean on to learn the ins and outs of the transition to adulthood.

### *Overcoming My Struggles*

As the study progressed, students started to identify support services they have accessed on campus and techniques they have found that help them overcome barriers their disability poses in their everyday lives and their courses. SP1's most significant struggle at the moment was choosing a major. SP1 noted:

I have been networking with the peer mentors on campus to know what is available. They do not care that I have a disability; they have welcomed me as a student who is exploring and wanting to learn (Group Session 3, March 24, 2021).

SP1 connected with a Microbiology graduate student who has helped them explore more aspects of science and find where they feel they belong. He said that his mentor shows him how research works and connects him with other people in the field.

SP4 was also having difficulty trying to find a space where he could be successful despite his disability. SP4 said he explored the campus because "it was all new and different to me" (Group Session 3, March 24, 2021). SP4 was interested in theater, so he went to the theater department and asked questions about the program. SP4 noted:

I met a few of the theater students, and they took me on a tour of the stage and showed me all of the parts of a production, from art to costumes and dressing rooms. I had only seen this in movies. Seeing it in person made me feel more interested in learning more (Group Session 3, March 24, 2021).

During that experience, SP4 said he was just another student, not someone with a disability, and it felt good.

SP3 is still working on developing his support system on campus. However, he did say, "I connected with a history professor who studies empires and religions, and that is interesting to me" (Group Zoom 3, March 24, 2021). SP3 is planning to take more classes with this instructor because he felt that the instructor delivers the material in a way that is accessible to him. SP3 said, "it feels good to feel like I can do well in class, because my whole life I have struggled to keep up" (Individual Session 3, March 31, 2021). SP4 still expressed frustration with instructions, especially in the general education courses, understanding his needs as a student with a disability. He actively compared his experiences in his major courses with general education stating,

My major is African American Studies, and those professors work to connect with me and understand me. They are cool and want to get to know me and help me. Why don't my English and Math teachers want to do that? It is hard and makes me not want to return to school. (Individual Session 3, March 31, 2021)

While feeling connected in some aspects of campus life, the students struggle with advocating for their disability needs with people they have not connected with on a personal level. Overall, the students were able to identify the struggles that had created a barrier to accessing their education and began to brainstorm ideas amongst themselves to break down these barriers.

### ***Appreciating the Struggle***

As the innovation was wrapping up and final interviews conducted, the students reflected on their experiences during the study and viewed the struggles they had experienced. The students began to recognize that the barriers and struggles they had been experiencing were not always of their own doing. Their struggles resulted from

academic constraints and processes put into place that were outside of their control. SP4 recognized that having a disability does not have to be an isolating experience. SP4 noted, "we all have ADHD that makes us different and the same all at the same time" (Final Interview, April 28, 2021). SP4 said that he had learned that everyone struggles differently. However, they can all use similar strategies, adjusted to meet their needs, to overcome their disabilities' barriers in school and life. SP1 reflected:

This study has helped me take a step back and look at a problem before getting upset and giving up. I can take some of the ideas you and the others shared that I will use going forward to have a better semester, year, and life. (Final Interview, April 28, 2021)

SP1 added that he built skills and confidence during the study that makes him feel more comfortable reaching out to his instructors and other support people on campus if he needs help. SP1 also noted that his mentor has helped him explore his new major more profoundly, and he is excited to study more. He does not think he would have had the confidence to open up and advocate for himself with mentors, instructors, and campus support staff. "This study gave me the chance to take a look at what I want and need and how I want that to be in my life" (SP1, Final Interview, April 28.2021).

SP3 reported that while he knows that there will always be barriers in life, especially while navigating a disability, he feels, "I know how to make a game plan to make goals and no matter how small they are, achieving them is a good feeling" (Final Interview, April 28, 2021). He added that having small goals helped him reach the big goal because the small goals made things seem more attainable.

The SDCS innovation allowed the students to identify and explore the struggles they have experienced throughout their lives related to their disabilities. They all had similar struggles when navigating their disability in the academic environment and denied the tools to overcome the barriers placed in their paths. The students could share their experiences and suggestions for removing barriers in their lives to become better advocates and students. Overall the students reported more satisfaction with themselves and their confidence in overcoming struggles and barriers due to their disabilities and the everyday life of transitioning to college and adulthood.

### **Coaching and Community Building**

The first three theoretical propositions evolved from the relationships that developed during the coding and analysis process. They show a causal relationship with the SDCS innovation and reflect the students' experiences directly resulting from this innovation. The following theoretical propositions represent a specific phenomenon developed from the data analysis and the procedures implemented during the innovation. These phenomena are unique because the conditions during this study and its participants allowed them to develop. I do not feel that they could be replicated precisely in the future, even with similar participants. During this study, the phenomena observed and experienced occurred spontaneously and represented all participants, including me as the coach.

#### ***The Role of the Coach in Building a Community***

*Theoretical Proposition 4 —Nurturing a relationship, through open, honest dialog, students were encouraged to overcome barriers they encountered by utilizing strategies they had developed in coaching sessions.* The data supported the idea that the



presence of a coach to guide students through their self-determination journey facilitated a relationship that allowed them to be vulnerable and share experiences that provided insight into the struggles and the journey they would take to improve their outcomes.

My coaching role was impactful and allowed me to grow as a practitioner and researcher. At the beginning of the study, I was unclear in my expectations and reminded myself that I was working with students with challenges they needed support to overcome. This was evident in my first researcher journal entry, “Note to self... do not expect students with LD or ADHD to remember meetings even though a calendar invites. They may not have the calendar set up on their phones” (Researcher Journal, February 3, 2021).

Pretty early on, it was evident who would be more vocal and open to sharing during the study. SP4 often encouraged others to share their experiences. At first, he was very confident, but he opened up more about his struggles once you started getting down to honest discussions. Giving the students a safe space to share and explore their feelings created a sense of trust that I do not feel they had felt outside of their immediate families, and we found later that this was not always the case either. The students eventually felt comfortable enough to have deep, honest conversations about their experiences, which led to some revelations that allowed me to tailor my coaching strategies to meet their needs and learning better.

I facilitated the innovation and developed a space for students to explore aspects of their disability and develop strategies to overcome the barriers. In our one-on-one sessions, I asked open-ended questions related to the SDCS innovation and the information they shared during the sessions. I felt that open-ended questioning allowed

the student to share as little or as much as they wanted and also allowed me, as the coach, to ask follow-up questions to elicit more information. Open-ended questioning facilitated the discussions around the SDAi assessment. In this excerpt, C is me as the coach speaking, and SP3 is the student:

C: The assessment indicated that you have some concrete dreams about your future; what do you want to do in the future?

SP3: I do not know exactly what I want to do, but I know that I want to be successful.

C: What does success mean to you?

SP3: Success means that I can have a steady job, get a promotion, and have a sustainable income to live (Individual Session 1, February 17, 2021).

I worked hard to create a non-judgmental space where they felt comfortable discussing topics they may have never explored before.

While most students opened up in both the individual and group session spaces, SP1 tended to be more open with his personal history and struggles in the individual sessions. The complexity of SP1's history and lack of experience navigating his disability due to the late diagnosis created an opportunity for me to coach him and develop a relationship where he felt comfortable exploring and growing. SP1 reported, "I used to think I was alone, but now I feel I have a community that welcomes me unconditionally and will not judge me when I am unsure" (Final Interview, April 28, 2021).

Overall, the students responded positively to the coaching strategies implemented during this study. My role as the coach was to create an environment where the students felt empowered to explore their situations and guide the learning process during our coaching sessions. This empowerment led to a greater sense of belonging to the group and gave them license to take control of their academics and life in a way they had never experienced in the past.

### ***Community of Supportive Relationships***

*Theoretical Proposition 5* ——*Students strengthened their sense of connectivity to the learning community by interacting with students with similar experiences and disability-related challenges.* When students shared their experiences and struggles, they could relate to others who had similar experiences and created meaningful bonds that increased their sense of belonging and camaraderie. The students organically took control of the group and felt connected through their lived experiences with their disabilities.

The students in this study did not know each other before it began. Two of them were even new to me. We got to know each other during the first three weeks and created a safe space to share information and build trust. It was reasonably easy to establish trust with the students in our sessions because they had already interacted with other DRC staff members or me. They understood that I would not share specific information outside of this study.

As early as the second group session on February 24, 2021, the students started opening up to each other, and my role in the sessions became more of an observer than a discussion leader. The students quickly took control of the conversations and, in doing

so, began to establish a support system for each other. The following conversation illustrates the level of peer support that began to develop. SP2 was talking with the group about her struggles with her courses. She shared that her disability holds her back, and she feels alone in navigating her classes, to which SP4 responded:

We are a group of weirdos that are together and know that you are not alone. We now know each other, and we need to bring positivity and help each other. Know that if you get knocked down, we are going to be there to get you right back up (Group Session 2, February 24, 2021).

Early on and quickly, the students pulled together to support each other. They shared advice about accessing campus resources, such as tutoring and counseling, to help them improve their skills and address their mental health issues. They comforted each other when they were feeling down on themselves and were discouraged from working harder to succeed. The students all had moments of doubt in themselves, but they came to the group open-minded and ready to work through the struggles they had experienced. They encouraged each other to keep working hard to overcome the barriers placed in their lives. They used their own experiences to connect and develop a supportive, compassionate group that championed each other to grow and overcome their struggles, even when they felt vulnerable and alone.

The students encouraged each other to access resources on campus to build their skills and confidence. While there are numerous services on campus, the students reported that they would like to find a student or faculty mentor to learn from and guide their decision of a major. Three of the students were still exploring majors and were not sure of their career paths. While they had accessed the career center in the past, they felt

that they needed a more substantial relationship to explore their major/career options. One student currently had a mentor and expressed the positive aspects that he had experienced in his meetings with his mentor. SP1 helped the students brainstorm strategies for finding a mentor and approaching someone to ask about their major program or job. They expressed interest in finding a mentor, and the discussion led to creating a list of faculty mentors who may be able to connect them with peers in their fields. As a coach, I helped facilitate this discussion and provide suggestions for mentors in their fields of interest.

SP4 emerged as the leader in creating a positive, safe environment for everyone to share. He reflected,

We came together because of our disability, but we developed an honest group by making connections and trusting each other. One day we were all by ourselves, and now we have each other to lean on. You are no longer the one on the outside (Final Interview, April 28, 2021).

SP1 and SP3 both reported being hard on themselves and did not feel they could succeed. Being part of a group of people with similar diagnoses and struggles helped them realize they are not alone in their disability journey through college (Group Session, April 21, 2021). SP4 also noted that even though he learns differently, that does not mean that he is weird; he is a valued group member.

It was nice to be in a group with a mix of people and disabilities. We are all different, but we are also similar. We had a chance to meet one-on-one and in groups helped me build my confidence to share with everyone else (Final Interview, April 28, 2021).

He added that he used to feel uncomfortable talking about himself in front of others, but the group made him feel comfortable and less nervous. The group's sense of belonging and safety was a unique dynamic that the students had said earlier that they had not experienced before in their lives. While my role as the coach was to bring this group together for meaningful discussions about their journey through self-determination, they developed established relationships within the group.

SP1 said, "I was nervous to talk to others because I am new to my disability, but this group made me feel comfortable and helped me understand my disability better" (Final Interview, April 28, 2021). All three students who participated in the final interviews expressed similar sentiments about better understanding their disabilities and feeling more comfortable in advocating for themselves. "We all have ADHD, but it affects us in different ways. I am glad we can learn from each other" (SP4, Final Interview, April 28, 2021). After the study, the students exchanged contact information and requested that I provide more opportunities for DRC students to interact and learn from each other.

As the coach and group facilitator, I watched the relationships develop and grow into meaningful connections that had not been present at the beginning of the study. The students took control of the group sessions. As they progressed, they needed less and less guidance and prompting to engage in meaningful conversations related to their growth and development as a college student. During the last few group sessions, my role was to propose the topic of discussion and then listen and observe the conversation that evolved, often beyond the original topic of discussion and into realms of self-exploration that I could have anticipated.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the qualitative data analysis procedures and phases of analysis that guided the development of the qualitative data findings discussion. The qualitative data findings displayed the students' and my growth, as a coach, during the study. The themes and theoretical propositions that emerged from the data analysis presented. Evidence from the data collected during the innovation supported the propositions illustrated in this section. The following chapter discusses these findings, an analysis of the research questions that guided this study, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I answer the research questions and discuss the data through the lens of the theories and related literature presented in Chapter 2. I present limitations of this action research study and suggest implications for future practice and research. Finally, I discuss lessons learned from this study and how I will use these lessons to improve my own professional practice and future research endeavors.

#### **Findings Related to Research and Theory**

Two research questions guided the development and implementation of the SDCS innovation to support students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills. To answer these research questions, I collected and analyzed qualitative data, the findings of which were presented in Chapter 4. In this section I will draw connections between the findings and the theories and related literature that guided this study. The theories that framed this study and are helpful in understanding the findings: Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1989) and Coaching as Learning (Spence & Oades, 2011).

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What happens to students' self-determination across the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation? (SDT & Coaching)

RQ2: What are students' perceptions of the social benefits and/or drawbacks to intervention participation? (SDT, Coaching & ZPD)



## **Research Question 1**

To answer this research question, I collected and analyzed data to better understand the impact of the SDCS curriculum on students' levels of self-determination throughout the life of the study. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was a leading theory guiding this study, but to answer this research question, I used the three basic psychological principles of SDT; autonomy, relatedness, and competence; to guide the analysis of the data and presentation of my findings. A meticulous analysis of the data showed that as implemented through the coaching as learning model, the SDCS supported students in improving their self-determination skills and allowed students to build confidence and advocacy skills. In the next section, I discuss the findings through the lens of the three basic psychological principles of SDT and Coaching as Learning theory.

## ***Discussion of Findings***

Students entered the study feeling unsure of their place in the campus community and how to advocate for their needs. Through the examination of their strengths and weaknesses and being given license to take control of their lives, they improved their competency and exercised their self-advocacy skills through group discussions where ideas and strategies were freely shared amongst the students. This outcome corresponds with SDT's basic psychological need for competence. Competence is an individual's need to be a master of their interactions with their environment (Deci et al., 2014). Building competence created opportunities for students to explore their environment outside of their natural comfort zones.

Students built upon their self-advocacy skills by better understanding their disabilities and improving confidence in their ability to make decisions guiding their futures, while accessing support resources available to them along the way. Recognizing the power they had to make decisions that would shape their own path through college and life increased confidence in their ability to thrive in their new environments. This outcome is supported by SDT's autonomy. Autonomy is one's need to make decisions and choices independently and feel that they own those decisions (Adams et al., 2017; Deci et al., 2014). Giving students the power to make their own decisions, while accessing supportive resources at their discretion, opened up new opportunities for exploration that were not previously available.

As the coach, I facilitated group and individual sessions that gave students a safe space to explore their disabilities and life experiences. Observing students and active listening allowed me to adjust my own coaching techniques to better meet the needs of the individual student and group discussions. I was afforded the opportunity to watch students make meaningful connections throughout the life of the study. This outcome is supported by Spence and Oades (2011) Coaching as Learning theory which is interconnected with SDT and its basic psychological needs. Coaching facilitates the development of a connection between the coach and students that nurtures one's self-determination growth while building a relationship of trust (p. 42). Students, like all people, have an innate need to be heard and understood and coaching afforded me the opportunity to provide this for them and validate their experiences and feelings.

At the conclusion of the study, students displayed more confidence in their abilities and appreciation for the challenges they had encountered and will encounter

throughout their lives due to their disabilities. Having a disability was no longer seen as a burden, but as a unique aspect of their lives that they could use to build their agency and take control of their lives.

## **Research Question 2**

To answer the second research question, I reviewed the findings through the lens of students' perceptions of the social benefits and drawbacks of participating in the SDCS. The social benefits of their participation can be connected back to SDT and its components and Coaching as Learning theory. While the data collection tools did not specifically ask about the student's personal satisfaction with the innovation, the data collected suggested that the students felt socially validated throughout the innovation. The drawback of the study is supported by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. A thorough analysis of the data revealed that with the support of myself as a coach, the students overcame obstacles by seeking support from others and creating an environment of support and self-exploration. In the next section, I discuss how these concepts connect with the theories presented in Chapter 2.

## ***Discussion of Findings***

Across the SCDS intervention, students created an environment of sharing that allowed them to explore their life experiences while identifying obstacles they had faced in the past and developing strategies to overcome those barriers in the future. They engaged on their own comfort levels and built their confidence to the point where they felt they had license to control their own futures. Students expressed satisfaction with having control of their destinies and were empowered to continue this growth. They were actively displaying SDT's basic psychological need for competence in one's life by

taking control of the group discussing strategies for decision-making that guided the discussions (Deci et al., 2014).

Students recognized that they could lean on others for support and that they were not on this journey alone. They bonded through mutual pain of past experiences due to their disabilities and identified a common thread that allowed them to create trusting relationships that blossomed into a support system that continued beyond the study. The students took control of the group sessions and created their own community that they said made them feel connected and seen. They were actively engaging in building their relatedness, another component of SDT theory. Building one's relatedness allows the person to establish bonds with others and be a valued member of a group (Deci et al., 2014). Through this study, the students improved their relatedness and expressed improved self-perception due to their new bonds.

A drawback of this study was the realization that the students were not ready to engage with the SD notebook on the level I had anticipated. I encouraged students to engage with the prompts in the notebook to facilitate the group and individual discussions. The students expressed their desire to engage in the prompts during the discussions, but were not interested in using the notebook to plan out their thinking ahead of time. The nature of their disabilities supported this desire and I recognized the need to meet the students where they were and guided them appropriately. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) supports this finding by recognizing that if a learner is not developmentally ready to engage in an activity, learning will not occur. Even through guided learning activities I developed, the students, with guidance from me as the coach, were able to engage in oral discussions, but were not

developmentally ready to express themselves through independent writing. I was able to adapt the study to meet the needs of the students, not my own expectations.

### **Limitations**

There are three limitations that I have identified in this study. First, this study was conducted with students who were already engaged with the DRC and showed some levels of autonomy or an innate sense of wanting to improve themselves, which may have contributed to their quick progression through the SDCS innovation. Second, the spring implementation of the study may have been a limitation because students had already had some experience with college life. They had engaged with the DRC and other campus supports and brought those experiences, negative and positive, to the study. The third limitation of this study was its length. I conducted the study over a 15-week semester, but the implementation of the SDCS innovation only occurred over 13 weeks. The short time students had to engage in the SDCS innovation and build their skills might have been more impactful over a longer period of time, for example an academic year. This study was a snapshot of a student's potential for self-determination growth, but more data could be collected to see if the skills have persisted. Because this study was restricted to one semester, a full understanding of the students' growth and follow-up after the innovation were not possible.

Action research is grounded in local phenomena to benefit the people in that context (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As such, as others in similar settings, this is a strength of action research, but may also be seen as a limitation. The specific nature of the work in the DRC and my own implementation of the study with students who had already

engaged with the office may be difficult to transfer to other settings, including other disability offices at similarly-situated institutions.

### **Implications for Practice**

Action research is an exploratory process that improves local educational practices (Mertler, 2014). The inherent nature of action research allows researchers to collaborate with other professionals in their field to improve outcomes systematically (p. 18). The outcomes of this study suggest implications for future practice within my local context and in collaboration with other disability professionals across the country.

During the study, I was promoted to Associate Director of the Disability Resource Center. This new title affords me expanded opportunities to interact with upper-level administrators who have the authority to implement programs across the university. Having access to these decision makers affords me the opportunity to share my research and the ways in which it can support first-year seminar classes and other at-risk student support services. For example, I am currently in discussions with the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education staff on how to improve retention and support students early in their careers at UNLV.

Within my local context at the DRC, I plan to train staff to implement the SDCS innovation in small group settings with students they have identified as at risk or poorly performing in their first or second semesters of school. Training the DRC staff to implement this innovation will bolster our already established follow-along process that was discussed in Chapter 1. I also plan to approach our Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) leadership with the findings from this study and develop a plan to

implement the SDCS in group sessions with students experiencing mental health difficulties through a coaching model.

As an active member of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), a national disability association, I will continue to present my study and its findings to encourage other disability professionals to think about how they might bring this innovation, or aspects of it, to their own campuses for implementation. Improving outcomes for students with disabilities is a recurring topic at our annual national conferences and I feel that this innovation is transferable to other institutions. I am currently participating in a Coaching Community of Practice through AHEAD and plan to share my study and its findings with this group to encourage further exploration and implementation across campuses.

Along with sharing ideas from the study at the AHEAD national conferences and working groups, another way to impact the practices surrounding students with disabilities is to continue to work Dr. Sharon Field, the author of the Model for Self-Determination, SDAi, and the Steps curriculum. During the study design phase, I sought permission to modify and use the Steps curriculum from Dr. Field. Once the study was over, I shared preliminary findings with her. She has invited me to write a blog for her website to share how the Model for Self-Determination and Steps curriculum was implemented with college students with disabilities transitioning to the college environment.

Finally, there are already implications from this study in practice at my university. After hearing about my study, Dr. Emily Shreve, invited me to teach a section of our first year seminar. I am currently teaching a section of UNLV's First Year

Seminar course for students who are exploring majors, COLA 100E. I was given permission to use components of my study to support these freshmen in improving their self-determination skills through exploration of their strengths and weaknesses, building confidence, setting goals, and exploring degree paths that interest them. I plan to present my observations of student growth in the COLA 100E course and my findings from the SDCS innovation to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Academic Success Center Director and to possibly implement in future COLA 100E courses that are required for all incoming freshmen at UNLV. I feel that broader implementation of this program would give incoming students, especially those who are still exploring majors, an opportunity to explore themselves and learn strategies to make decisions and overcome obstacles that they may encounter as a university student.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Future iterations of this research could also look at different data collection tools that look at the social validity of the innovation and ask students specific questions about the tools and how they will be implemented in the future. Through the analysis of the findings and limitations of this study, there are several implications for research using the SDCS innovation. These implications include modifying some of the data collection tools, implementing a year-long implementation, starting in the fall semester, of the SDCS innovation with true freshmen; conducting a spring study with new freshmen who have enrolled off-cycle, survey instructors on their views of student progress, and developing research opportunities with the creators of the original Steps curriculum.

The second research question guiding this study was aimed at better understanding the needs of true freshmen entering the college environment for the first



time. Implementing the SDCS innovation over the course of their freshmen year would allow me to better understand their struggles as they are integrated into a new environment. Implementing the SDCS innovation over an entire academic year would allow me to observe the students' interactions and growth while they are engaging with the campus community. The research questions for this study could be structured around the two semesters of data collection and observations that occur over the course of the academic year.

The SDCS was originally conducted with students who had already engaged with the campus community for at least one semester and had already developed strategies for engagement. Implementing the SDCS innovation with incoming freshmen who enrolled off-cycle would give me the opportunity to understand why this group of students did not enroll at the traditional start of the academic year and how this impacts their level of self-determination and engagement on campus. This study and possible iterations discussed above focus on the student experience in improving their self-determination skills. To better understand the impact of this study across campus, instructors and advisors identified as supports for students participating in the study would be surveyed to understand their view of the student's growth and progress in improving their self-determination skills. I would develop a survey that is easy for the faculty and staff to understand while also conveying the need to understand the self-determination skills being measured. Surveying faculty and staff supporting students participating in the study, would allow for research opportunities to better understand how instruction and support can be improved to better support students, especially freshmen.

Finally, in addition to working with Dr Sharon Field to explore practice opportunities for using the SCDS intervention with X (as discussed above), there are opportunities to research the integration of the original Steps curriculum and SDCS over the course of several years to prepare high school students for the transition to college. This research would allow for longer-term research to be conducted across students and abilities to better understand the needs of students transitioning after high school.

### **Conclusion**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the problem of practice this study aimed to address was the disconnect between Special Education in the K-12 environment and preparing students with disabilities to transition to the college environment. The findings from this study demonstrate the power of action research in evaluating and understanding the needs of college students with disabilities and exploring the SCDS international as a way to improve students self-determination skills. To improve outcomes for students transitioning to higher education institutions, this research needs to be shared with K-12 teachers and university DRC specialists who can work together to impact change in support for students with disabilities. Students who are confident in themselves and their abilities are more likely to have positive experiences as they leave the safety net of K-12 education. My hope is that future iterations of this research are implemented in high schools to improve transition activities for all students.

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APPENDIX A  
SELF-DETERMINATION NOTEBOOK

The Self-Determination Notebook (SD Notebook) will be used to record your experiences and feelings during this study. The SD Notebook will only be seen by you and me. Each week you will be asked to answer 1-3 questions about the material being presented or your experiences, please try to answer to the best of your ability, but know that we will use your answers to facilitate discussion in our group or one-on-one coaching sessions. I will respond to your entries in the notebook to further your understanding and thinking during this study. If you have any questions during the program, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am excited to work with you during this study.

Thank you for participating,  
Patricia Violi  
[patricia.violi@unlv.edu](mailto:patricia.violi@unlv.edu)

### **Week 1: Study Introduction and Self-Determination**

This week, you will be asked to answer the following questions. You will be sharing your answers in our group discussion over Zoom.

1. Who am I?
2. What do I hope to learn about myself during this study?

### **Week 2: What is Self-Determination?**

Last week, you took the SDAi assessment to determine your level of self-determination. This week you will reflect on your results. We will be discussing your results and answers to the following questions in a one-on-one coaching Zoom session.

1. How do I feel about my SDAi scores?
2. What do I think they mean?

### **Week 3: Knowing Myself**

This week we will be exploring your strengths and weaknesses and how it impacts your daily and academic life. We will be discussing your answers to the following questions in a group discussion Zoom session.

1. How do I see myself and my disability?
2. What are 2 of my strengths and 2 of my weaknesses?

### **Week 4: My Dreams**

This week, we will be exploring your dreams for the future and what is your motivation to reach these dreams. We will be discussing your answers to the following question in a one-on-one coaching Zoom session.

1. What are your dreams for the future? They can be personal, academic, or career oriented.

### **Week 5: Exploring Long-Term Goals**

This week we will be expanding upon the dreams you wrote down last week. To prepare for our group zoom this week, please answer the following questions.

1. What are your top 2 dreams?
2. What do your dreams say about what is important to you?
3. How can you make a plan to carry out these dreams?

### **Week 6: Developing Long-Term Goals**

This week, we will start developing long and short term goals for the semester. The goal is to develop 1 long-term and 2-3 short term goals that will lead to the achievement of the long-term goal. We will be discussing answers to the following questions in a one-on-one coaching Zoom session.

1. What is important to you in school?
2. What are your academic strengths and weaknesses?

### **Week 7: Developing & Choosing Short-Term Goals**

This week, we will be developing your short-term academic goals to help achieve your long-term goal. We will be discussing your answers to the following questions in a group discussion Zoom session.

1. What is your long-term academic goal?
2. What short-term goals can you put in place to help you achieve your long-term goal?

### **Week 8: Finalizing Short-Term Goals**

This week, we will be developing a plan of action for your short-term academic goals by developing a timeline for measuring and tracking your goals. We will be discussing your answers to the following questions in a one-on-one coaching Zoom session.

**\*\*Identify your short-term goals and what steps you will take to meet these goals.**

1. Goal 1:
  - a. Steps to achieve goal
2. Goal 2:
  - a. Steps to achieve goal
3. Goal 3:
  - a. Steps to achieve goal

### **Weeks 9-10: Working Towards your Goals**

For the next two weeks, you will be writing down the steps you have taken to work towards your short-term goals. You can structure your steps in a way that best meets your needs. We will not be meeting during these two weeks, but I will be responding to your work through this SD Notebook.

### **Week 11: Short-Term Goals Check**

This week, we will evaluate your progress towards your short term goals. Please answer the following questions as we will be discussing your answers to the following questions in a one-on-one coaching Zoom session.

1. What progress have you made towards your short-term goals?
2. Do you need to make any adjustments to your goals?

### **Week 12: Short & Long-Term Goal Check**

This week, we will discuss your progress towards your long and short term goals. Please answer the following questions about your own goals and be ready to discuss your progress and provide suggestions for the other participant's goals. We will be discussing your answers to the following questions in a group discussion Zoom session.

1. What short-term goals are you on track to achieve?
2. What is your progress towards your long-term goal?

### **Weeks 13-15: Study Reflection**

These next 3 weeks, we will be reflecting on your participation in the study and how you have grown as a learner and young adult. You will be participating in semi-structured interviews with me to discuss your experience in this study. Please take some time to answer the following questions to guide our discussion in the interview.

1. What did you learn about yourself in this study?

2. How have you changed since you started learning about self-determination?
3. What do you want to do to keep improving your self-determination skills?

## APPENDIX B

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

<b>Distribute Materials</b>	Question sheet, consent form
<b>Moderator introduction, thank you and purpose (1 minute)</b>	<p>Hello. My name is Patricia Violi. I'd like to first thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview today. We will take about twenty to thirty minutes. The purpose of this interview is to gather your thoughts, opinions, attitudes of, and experiences with your participation in the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) program.</p> <p>I will be leading the interview today. I am not trying to persuade you in one way or another. My task is to ask you questions and explore the depth of your responses. I will be recording this interview through Zoom which will also transcribe the interview. Are you comfortable with this?</p>
<b>Ground rules (1 minute)</b>	I am going to ask you six questions which I have provided for you. These questions are only a starting point, so please feel free to talk about things that I have not asked you about. Your responses will inform my study which seeks to explore how the SDCS helps students improve their self-determination skills.
<b>Introduction of participant (1 minute)</b>	<p>To begin, please tell me a little about yourself.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is your name?</li> <li>● How long have you been at UNLV?</li> <li>● What is your major?</li> <li>● What interested you in your current major?</li> <li>● Are you considering a change in majors?</li> <li>● Anything else you would like to add?</li> </ul>
<b>Specific questions (20 minutes)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell me about your experience during this study. <i>Construct: Know Yourself &amp; Your Context</i></li> <li>2. What did you learn about yourself during this study? <i>Construct: Know Yourself &amp; Your Context</i></li> <li>3. How do you feel you have grown as a learner during this study? <i>Construct: Know Yourself &amp; Your Context; Experience Outcomes &amp; Learn</i></li> <li>4. Do you think you made progress towards your long- and short-term goals during this study? <i>Construct: Act &amp; Experience Outcomes</i></li> <li>5. Do you think you will apply the skills you learned during this study to your everyday life? <i>Construct: Plan, Act &amp; Experience Outcomes</i></li> </ol>

	<p>6. What steps will you take to continue improving your self-determination skills? <i>Construct: Experience Outcomes &amp; Learn</i></p> <p>7. Do you have anything else you would like to share?</p>
<p><b>Closing (1 minute)</b></p>	<p>Thank you for taking the time to allow me to interview you today and thank you for participating in the SDCS study. Your responses and comments have given me a stronger understanding of the importance of self-determination skills in students with disabilities. Thank you again.</p>



APPENDIX C  
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Amy Markos in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to support college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills and you are invited to participate in this study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in a program designed to help improve your goal-setting and self-determination skills. The program is anticipated to take no more than 1 hour a week for 14 weeks during the Spring 2021 semester. You will be participating in self-reflection, group discussions, one-on-one coaching sessions, and a semi-structured interview through Zoom which will be recorded for data collection at the end of the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. You will be assigned a number when data is being collected and analyzed. All data will be secured in a Google Drive that I will only have access to.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at [patricia.violi@unlv.edu](mailto:patricia.violi@unlv.edu) or 702-895-0653.

Thank you for your participation,

Patricia Violi Disability Specialist, Graduate Student

Dr. Amy Markos Assistant Professor

Arizona State University Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

APPENDIX D  
CONSENT FORM

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Amy Markos in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study that is exploring strategies to support college students with disabilities in improving their self-determination skills. I have created an innovation that provides students with disabilities with instruction on building your goal-setting and self-determination skills through an individual and group coaching model.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve you participating in a 14-week program called the Self-Determination for College Success innovation. This program will cover the definition of self-determination, discovering one's strengths and weaknesses, exploring your goals and dreams, developing long and short-term goals, implementing those goals, and assessing and adjusting your goals. Each week, you will be required to answer a few questions in the SD Notebook and be prepared to discuss your answers in a group discussion or one-on-one coaching session. The group discussions will last approximately 60 minutes every two weeks. The one-on-one coaching sessions will last approximately 30 minutes in subsequent weeks. Each week, you can expect to spend no more than 15-30 minutes on the course which will run from February to May 2021. At the beginning of the study, you will complete a 15-20-minute assessment of your level of self-determination that will be used to start our discussion about your goals during this study. At the conclusion of this study, you will participate in a 30-45-minute semi-structured interview to learn more about your experiences and learning during the study. You have the right not to answer any questions and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, (for example, it will not affect your status with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) or your accommodations). As compensation for your participation, you will receive the Priority Registration accommodation through the DRC.

Participating in this study could benefit you in multiple ways. First, this study aims to support you in developing skills to improve your goal-setting and self-determination skills to help you progress through your degree program. Second, the content in this program can be used outside of the study as you complete your degree and enter the world of work. Finally, you will have an opportunity to meet other college students with disabilities here at UNLV who may have some of the same struggles as you. Building relationships and learning from each other allows you to build a community of support as you progress here at UNLV. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance in this study. Your Disability Specialist and instructors will not have access to this program and the discussions and writing that occurs. The SD Notebook entries will be read by you and me.

Your responses during group discussions will be heard by other participants, but not shared outside of the group. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. I will record the interview and Zoom meetings. If you are not comfortable with this, please let me know. You also can change your mind after the interview and meeting begin.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Dr. Amy Markos (email: ampost@asu.edu; phone: 602-543-6624) or Patricia Violi (email: patricia.violi@unlv.edu; phone: 702-895-0653). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study by signing and returning this form to me.

Thank you for your

consideration! Sincerely,

Patricia Violi Disability Specialist,

Graduate Student Dr. Amy Markos

Assistant Professor

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By signing below, you are agreeing to be a part of

this study. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

APPENDIX E

*SDAI*

<b>Self-Determination Student Scale-Short Form (SDSS-SF) Profile Report</b>	
<b>Patty Violi</b>	<b>University of Nevada, Las Vegas</b>
Administration Date: 10/14/2020	PIN: x8Czv7S
	patricia.violi@unlv.edu
<p>This profile report interprets your responses to the SDSS-SF. The Percentile graph indicates how your score compares with the scores of a large group of students who also took the SDSS-SF. The closer your score is to 100, the more likely it is that you are self-determined. This score is just one indicator of your ability to be self-determined. It is important to consider your score with other information you know about yourself to determine your strengths and weaknesses in each of the areas listed and to make decisions about what you would like to do to further develop your knowledge and skills for self-determination.</p> <p><b>Percentile Score: 74</b></p>  <p>1 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 99</p>	
<b>Components of Self-Determination</b>	
<p>Self-Determination has been defined as "the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing yourself" (Field &amp; Hoffman, 1994, p. 164). A Model for Self-Determination illustrates its five major components: Know Yourself and Your Context, Value Yourself, Plan, Act, and Experience Outcomes and Learn. Your ability to be self-determined is affected by factors in your environment (e.g., opportunities to make choices, available resources and supports) and by your knowledge, skills and beliefs. Your scores for each of the self-determination model components are provided below on a scale of 1-3. A score of 3 indicates an area of strength while a score of 1 indicates that significant attention may be needed in this area.</p>	
<p><b>Know Yourself and Your Context</b></p> <p>Standard Score: 3</p>	<p>You have a good understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, needs and preferences. You also are observant and think about the opportunities, supports and challenges that exist in each environment you are in (e.g., at home, school, with friends, at work.) and how you can get what you want or need in those settings. You allow yourself to dream about your future and you use those dreams to learn about yourself, what is important to you, and what you want for yourself.</p>
<p><b>Value Yourself</b></p> <p>Standard Score: 3</p>	<p>You accept and appreciate who you are and feel entitled to pursue what is important to you. You recognize that you have weaknesses and limitations, but you don't let them hold you back or feel badly about yourself. You understand your rights and the responsibilities that go with those rights. You are highly motivated to care for, or access care for, yourself emotionally, mentally and physically.</p>

<b>Plan</b>  Standard Score: 3	You know how to set goals that give your life direction. You also know how to break those goals down into small, achievable steps. You usually do this before taking action. You typically take time to think through the possible results of your actions before you act. If you think there will be barriers to your intended actions, you review your plans and generate alternative possible actions. You take time to prepare before you act, rehearse your planned actions (even if it's in your imagination) in order to increase your chances of success and imagine yourself being successful.
<b>Act</b>  Standard Score: 3	You are willing to take appropriate risks to achieve your goals. You have the skills you need to work with and communicate with others to get what you want and you know where to find help when you need it. You are able to communicate your needs and wants in an assertive manner and you know how to negotiate with others so that you both find solutions that make you happy. You are able to deal with criticism or conflict in an effective manner. You are persistent in working toward your goals and will try new strategies if your planned actions do not result in the outcomes you want.
<b>Experience Outcomes and Learn</b>  Standard Score: 2	You often reflect on your efforts to achieve your goals and learn from your experiences. If you achieved what you were working toward, you, more often than not, are appropriately proud of yourself and enjoy your success. Whether or not you achieved what you set out to do, you often reflect on your actions and which of your actions were successful and which were not so that you can make adjustments in your goals and your actions in the future. You often think about what you liked and what you did not like about your plan and actions to increase your ability to be more self-determined in the future.
The Self-Determination Assessment <sup>internet</sup> was developed at Wayne State University by Alan Hoffman EdD, Sharon Field EdD, and Shlomo Sawilowsky, PhD.	



APPENDIX F  
IRB APPROVAL



APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

[Amy Markos](#)

[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - West Campus](#) 602/543-6624

[Amy.Markos@asu.edu](mailto:Amy.Markos@asu.edu)

Dear [Amy Markos](#):

On 12/16/2020 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Building Self-Determination Skills in College Students with Disabilities
Investigator:	<a href="#">Amy Markos</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00013072
Category of review:	
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modifications Response Letter, Category: Other;</li> <li>• protocol 15-12-2020.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• recruitment_methods_consent_15-12-2020 (2).pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• recruitment_methods_email_15-12-2020.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• supporting documents modifications 15-12-2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> <li>• UNLV Study Approval, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc);</li> </ul>

The IRB approved the protocol from 12/16/2020 to 12/15/2022 inclusive. Three weeks before 12/15/2022 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 12/15/2022 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator cc: Patricia Violi  
Patricia Violi

APPENDIX G

IRB APPROVAL: MODIFICATION



APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

[Amy Markos](#)  
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - West Campus](#)  
602/543-6624  
Amy.Markos@asu.edu

Dear [Amy Markos](#):

On 1/21/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Building Self-Determination Skills in College Students with Disabilities
Investigator:	<a href="#">Amy Markos</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00013072
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protocol 15-12-2020 modified.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• recruitment_methods_consent_15-12-2020.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• supporting documents modifications 2 15-12-2020.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);</li> </ul>

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator cc: Patricia Violi  
Patricia Violi