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SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A  
HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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# Chapter I

## Introduction of the Study

### *Introduction of the Study*

Self-determination for persons with disabilities, as it is known in the United States, is a complex concept with deep historical roots in the way society views and delivers services to persons with disabilities. The self-determination movement, which is characterized by promoting independence, autonomy, and quality of life for students with disabilities, proved to the field of special education that it is important to nurture self-determination skills during the school years (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The literature shows that in most cases young students with disabilities who develop and exercise their self-determination skills are better prepared for life after school. The goal of nurturing self-determination skills in students with disabilities is to help them become educated adults capable of making informed decisions for themselves and make an impact on the quality of their lives. Also the research shows that developing self-determination skills during the academic years can make a significant difference in making sure that the most successful outcome possible is achieved when planning the transition from school to the community at large, and into the workforce.

To best describe the movement leading to the rise of self-determination, Wehmeyer (1999) recollects four marked passages in history which he believes led to

today's perspectives on disabilities. He first explains how this movement began with a period of benevolence, and compassion towards persons with disabilities. In those times it was common for people with disabilities to be looked at with the mind set of something being wrong with them, as if their disabilities meant they were "broken" and therefore needing to be "fixed." By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this practice had the effect of excluding people with disabilities from the larger society and implied that something was inherently and permanently wrong with them. It provided no room for integration, and perpetuated myths of inequality. This perception of persons with disabilities caused fear to grow among the larger society and lead to treating persons with disabilities as menaces. Then came the Second World War and society began to perceive war veterans with disabilities as fragile, helpless victims in need of total care. Thirdly, in the 1960s there was a significant shift in perspectives and the issue of empowerment became a fundamental goal. All over the United States, advocacy movements were inspired by the introduction of normalization, the rise of the independent living, self-help, self-advocacy movement, and the shift from institutional to community-based services. Finally came the passage of civil rights legislation and protections such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112), the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975, which led to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-476) and its subsequent amendments, and finally the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (PL 101-336). Once all the above changes became part of the disability community in the United States, it also became accepted that education in self-

determination skills was fundamental to assist students with disabilities to develop skills that could assist them in making educated choices for themselves.

The extensive literature and studies on the subject in the United States show that students benefit from instruction and supports leading to the development of their self-determination skills (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1997; Trainor, 2002). They are more likely to be employed and to earn higher wages (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998). They are more likely to live where they want (Wehmeyer & Schwartz), and they are more likely to go on for postsecondary education and to remain in college (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). Ultimately, they report that they are more satisfied in general with their quality of life (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Although the current literature provides ample evidence that self-determination has a significant impact on improving transition outcomes for students with disabilities, there is minimal reference in the literature to what role the concept of self-determination has in the lives of Hispanic students with disabilities when they are transitioning from school to work. The initial research on the role that self-determination plays in the transition from school to work included Hispanic students with disabilities, but did not include large enough sample or did it specifically address self-determination from a uniquely Hispanic cultural perspective. This is needed to determine if the methods and approaches used to teach these skills are culturally appropriate or if the measures of self-determination skills are culturally sensitive for the Hispanic population.

There are growing numbers of Hispanic students in the United States, including increasing numbers of Hispanic students with disabilities. However, there is a lack of literature on the cultural relevance and effectiveness of self-determination for Hispanic students who have disabilities. These children will be in our classrooms and eventually will progress to the transition planning phase, and it could be very important to understand what role self-determination skills would play as they become prepared to transition from school to work. Charged by the federal government to provide an appropriate education to students with disabilities, it could be very significant for special educators and transition specialists to understand the role that the concept of self-determination plays within the Hispanic culture. This will ensure that teaching practices, during their students' transition planning process, are more meaningful, effective, and appropriate.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The specific aim of this research is to understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the transition from school to work of students with disabilities that come from a Hispanic background. This study provides insight into the influences that the Hispanic cultural values, capital, and experiences might have in the role that self-determination plays in the transition planning process of Hispanic students with disabilities. This new insight in the concept of self-determination within the Hispanic culture, in turn, provides a more specific understanding of the cultural context in which this population of students could be more appropriately supported as they plan their transition from school to work.

### *Rationale and Significance of the Study*

As previously stated, the concept of self-determination and its impact on persons with disabilities in the United States is broadly documented in the literature (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, 1998). Furthermore, some of the literature that was found demonstrates that researchers in the field of self-determination are looking to get a better understanding of what role self-determination has in the life of individuals with disabilities from diverse linguistic and cultural heritages (Valenzuela & Martin, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2005; Zhang, Wehmeyer, & Chen, 2005; Frankland, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2004; Haelewyck, Bara, & Lachapelle, 2005; Trainor, 2005). However, these studies do not specifically address self-determination from a Hispanic cultural perspective.

The United States Census Bureau has estimated the Hispanic population of the United States as of July 1, 2005, to be 42.7 million, 14% of the national population. This significant number of people of Hispanic origin or descendants represents the nation's largest ethnic or race minority (United States Census Bureau, 2005). In addition, the Census Bureau projects growth of the Nation's Ethnic/Racial Composition between 2000 and 2100 and shows the Hispanic population jumping from 12% to a 32% growth (and continuing to rise). In fact, sometime around 2050, Hispanics are projected to become the largest "minority-majority" in the United States (United States Census Bureau). Also, the Census Bureau documents that the children age 18 or less currently enroll in schools are 35% Hispanic as compared to 23% White/non Hispanic. According to the 2005 Community Survey, the Hispanic/Latino population estimate for transition-age (16 to 22) students having one or more disabilities is 5.6% of the total Hispanic student population.

As previously shown, the Hispanic population continues to rise in the United States. Therefore, we can assume that more students from a Hispanic background will continue to enroll in schools to grow, develop, and become part of our national and global community and workforce. These students are being educated using practices that were not validated with them. Education must follow research-based/evidence-based practices. The evidence is clear in that self-determination is something that should be taught to students with disabilities in the United States. Hispanic students in the U. S. need to be educated to succeed in the U. S. but in a way that “fits” for them. Hence, there is need for research on what changes are necessary, if any, to the definition/importance/assessment/role of self-determination planning for student with disabilities from a Hispanic background. Understanding the role that self-determination plays in the lives of these students could provide significant knowledge for educators to create practices that are more culturally sensitive and more effective to assist students in their academic and personal development.

These students have the additional burden, aside from their disabilities, of different cultural values that must be overcome in order to function in their new communities. They particularly need to be taught self-determination skills in a culturally sensitive manner so that they can make the best choices for their future while living in the United States. In becoming more capable and effective individuals, they will enhance their quality of life through successful autonomous behaviors.

### *Literature Research Background*

The United Nations' Declaration of Self-Determination defines self-determination as the right for all individuals to make their own choices in life (United Nations Enable, 2008). Self-determination, as described by the United Nations (UN), is not a privilege of a few, but the right of all individuals regardless of a person's ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability. Furthermore, the UN specifically addresses the disabled community to clarify that a person's disability does not strip him or her of his or her right to make choices in life.

Like any other young adult, a student with a disability will reach a time when he or she will transition from school to adult life. As these students enter the world of adulthood, many of them will need to be prepared to make judicious choices that will shape their future in a positive manner. Recognized experts in the field of transition for students with disabilities, like Wehmeyer & Schwartz (1997), have demonstrated in their studies on self-determination that students with disabilities in the United States are able to manifest their thoughts and desires, make rational decisions, and make their own choices when they are provided with appropriate support and training in personal development.

The literature on transition planning for students with disabilities shows that students who show higher levels of self-determination skills are more likely to experience better transition outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field et al., 1998; Grigal et al., 2003; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1997). They are better prepared to become and stay employed and earn higher wages (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998). They are better

prepared to make the choices to live where they want (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997), and they are more confident and focused to pursue post-secondary or college education (Thoma & Getzel, 2006). Overall, students with disabilities who show higher levels of self-determination skills report that they are more satisfied in general with their quality of life (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001).

Another source of information which emerged from the literature review relevant to the role that self-determination plays in transition for student with disabilities refers to the students' family participation in their transition planning process and the impact their families have in how these students experience self-determination. The literature shows that the participation of families in the transition planning process of their sons/daughters can have a significant impact on how these students experience self-determination and on the type of role self-determination plays in these students' transition planning process. Additionally, it emerged that to understand the role that self-determination plays for students in transition, it is important to understand and respect their family's values and culture (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Kim & Turnbull, 2004).

Through an analysis of the literature, some initial research was identified that examined the importance of self-determination for individuals with disabilities from other cultures (Haelewyck et al., 2005; Wehmeyer, 2005; Greene, 1996; Zhang, Wehmeyer, & Chen, 2005). All of these studies show that self-determination is an important concept for other cultures, but that each culture defines it and recognizes its importance in a unique manner within the context of their culture. For instance, Navajo family and disability literature indicates that characteristics of self-determination behavior are relevant and

important to the Navajo culture, but that the ways in which these are expressed in their culture are different from the American perspective of self-determination (Frankland et al., 2004) While people from the Navajo culture value self-regulation and autonomy, they place more emphasis on the importance of interdependence and group cohesion than on independence and autonomy.

Despite the growing population of individuals from Hispanic backgrounds in the United States, information on what role self-determination plays or might play in the lives of Hispanic students with disabilities was not found. The literature addressing self-determination for Hispanic students is not specific to students with disabilities, and the focus is mainly on the political and social justice perspectives relating to education and social integration (Melendez, Melendez, & Molina, 1981).

The concept of self-determination and its impact on persons with disabilities in the United States is in the literature. However, the studies that have been conducted on the transition from school to work at a multicultural level and that have included students from a Hispanic background, do not specifically address self-determination from a uniquely Hispanic cultural perspective.

The wealth of information found in the literature highlights the many aspects of a person's life that can influence the role of self-determination. The researcher of this study was driven to investigate the possible influences that Hispanic students might have in their lives that can contribute to how they experience, learn and develop self-determination skills within the context of their culture. The research shows that cultural competence is a set of compatible behaviors, attitudes, and guidelines that when brought

together enable individuals to work effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that as a family's cultural norms are better understood, then students with disabilities from those families will be more successful in their IEP's and transition planning.

Research shows that Hispanics' attitudes, values, beliefs and cultural capital are significantly marked by their strong family commitment, the strong value they place on education and their determination to succeed (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002). This cultural competences produces characteristics and behaviors such as loyalty, pride, a belief that the youth's behavior reflects not only on themselves but on their family as well, along with a strong sense of duty to care for family members, and a strong family determination to succeed (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002).

The importance of family and community, among the other factors named above, must be recognized as key components that influence the education of Hispanic children. As the fastest growing immigrant population, the educational system as a whole must be thoroughly informed and trained regarding sensitivity to the uniqueness of the Hispanic culture and their values. Despite, or because of, the difficulties encountered by many Hispanic families, the result seems to be that their children acquire cultural competency, producing such strengths as perseverance, focus, motivation, self-discipline, attention to detail, teamwork, and bilingual/bicultural abilities amongst others (Arnett, 2001; Hernandez, 2004).

The searcher found that the literature addressing self-determination for Hispanic students is not specific to students with disabilities. Therefore, it was noted that in the literature there is a lack of specificity regarding self-determination for a student with disabilities within the context of the Hispanic culture. Understanding the role of self-determination for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background could be very relevant to how teachers educate, prepare, and support these students for transition from high school to work.

### *Ecological Theory Literature Review*

There is evidence that certain factors outside of the individual have not been widely studied in reference to the extent that educational experiences impact the development of self-determination (Trainor, 2005). The ecological perspective focuses on contextual factors that influence the dynamics of the development and practice of self-determination. This theory takes into account multiple influences that are acting together in complex ways to impact individual development outcomes (Wachs, 1999). It becomes clear that self-determination can be best understood when taking into consideration both the individual and the various environments in which the individual develops (Abery, 1994; Abery & Stancliffe, 1996; Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, & Stancliffe, 2003).

A literature review was conducted to find an appropriate theory to carry out the analysis of this research. After reading about several theories previously implemented to analyze the concept of self-determination (Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, & Stancliffe, 2003; Bandura, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the Ecological Theory was identified as the most appropriate one for this study because this theory looks at a person's development

within the context of the various relationships (systems) that form a person's environment: family, home, school, parents' work, and the larger cultural context (e.g., relationship with their mother, relationship with the teacher, cultural expectations in their society, the national economy, and the socioeconomic status). Furthermore, this theory will help explain how individuals develop and acquire their knowledge and competencies within a society in terms of the guidance, support, and structure they receive from their environment. Additionally, analyzing this study through the lenses of the Ecological Theory will provide a framework to investigate social changes over time in terms of how the cumulative effect of events through time can affect individual choices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### *Theoretical Rational*

The use of an ecological system approach to analyze the data collected in this study helps to explain how students with disabilities from a Hispanic background understand the concept of self-determination and how they develop those skills while transitioning from high school to work. This study analyzes the relationship between the various social systems that students in this study interact with and how each one of those social systems influence, guide, support, and structure who they are as self-determined individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Four social systems will be analyzed independently and as interrelated systems as identified by the Ecological Theory, which suggests that an individual develops within the context or ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989):

*Microsystem:* the most immediate and earliest influences are in the family, along with local neighborhood or community institutions.

*Mesosystem:* the intermediate level of influences of such social institutions.

*Exosystem:* the exosystem surrounds the mesosystem and refers to social settings that affect the child but do not include the child.

*Macrosystem:* the most removed influences such as international, regional, or global changes.

For this study, the ecological influences of the various systems will be analyzed through, but not limited to, the following lenses:

*Microsystem:* the schools, religious institutions, and peer groups, as well as the specific cultures with which the family identifies.

*Mesosystem:* the interactions between the student's home, school, vocational counselor from the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), possible employer, and other agencies who are part of the student's transition team, etc.

*Exosystem:* the interaction between the student and his/her parents' workplace, school administration/county (policies and procedures), and DRS, etc.

*Macrosystem:* the interaction with the larger cultural context which influences all the other systems. This will include cultural values, political philosophies, economic patterns, and social conditions.

This study was also directed from a theoretical framework founded on a fundamental principle of human rights law whereby an individual has the right to exercise his or her own self-determination, and to make his or her own choices in life

(Parker, 2000). In particular, this study seeks to understand the concept of self-determination as it is known in the United States and also through the eyes and experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background.

### *Research Questions*

The primary research question in this study is:

What role does self-determination play in the transition from school to work for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background?

To help answer the primary research question, sub questions targeting the four ecological influences identified by the Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) have been formulated. The sub questions are as follows:

*Targeting Microsystem Influences*—the school, religious institutions, and peer groups as well as the specific cultures with which the family identifies.

- What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background as they are being prepared to exit the school system to enter the work force?
- Do they see a connection between what happens every day at school with what is important to them?
- How does their everyday interaction with their families and communities influence their preparation for work after high school?
- How involved are they in their transition planning process? (what is the nature of how others respond/read to their voice preferences? Their involvement?)

*Targeting Mesosystem Influences*—the interactions between the student’s home, school, vocational counselor from the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), possible employer, and other agencies who are part of the student’s transition team, etc.

- What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background during the multiagency collaborative transition planning process as they get prepared for employment?
- How do they feel about what their families and these agencies (DRS counselor) are planning for their transition outcomes?
- How pleased are they with the choices and opportunities that are given to them as preparation for employment?
- How does their cultural background (religion, family values, and cultural traditions) impact the interaction between their school, their family, and the multiple agencies involved in the student’s transition planning?

*Targeting Exosystem Influences*—the interaction between the student and their parents’ work place, school administration/county (policies and procedures), and DRS, etc.

- What is the impact of the policies and procedures of the schools, county, and employment related agencies in the transition process of Hispanic students with disabilities?
- How well informed are these students and their families about the policies and procedures that affect/influence their transition?

- How are the schools' and agencies' (DRS) policies supporting these students' personal choices, as well as their strengths and challenges during their preparation for work after high school?
- What is the impact of these students' parents working status in how these students make decisions, plan, and follow-up on the choices they make for their future job/employment?

*Targeting Macrosystem Influences*— the interaction with the larger cultural context which influences all the other systems. This will include cultural values, political philosophies, and social conditions.

- What are the cultural (religion, family values, customs, and traditions) implications for Hispanic students in their transition?
- How does the current status (as minorities) in the U.S. of these students influence their school preparation to enter the workplace?
- How do the religion and or family values of these students influence their transition?
- How (if at all) has the acculturation/assimilation of these students into American culture (social system) influenced how they decide, plan, and follow-up on their career/employment choices for the future?

### *Design and Methods*

A qualitative method with a phenomenological design was used to conduct this investigation. As described by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a qualitative research method involves a systematic approach where the emphasis of collecting data is more on

naturally occurring phenomena and where most of the data collection is in the form of words rather than numbers. The phenomenon that is being analyzed in this study is self-determination. Also, through a qualitative methods approach, significant descriptive data can be gathered from people's own written or spoken words as well as from observable behaviors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The qualitative methods that were used to collect the experiences of the students participating in this study were: (a) documented analysis, (b) interviews, and (c) observation of participants. In order to assure the accuracy of the interpretations of the findings, triangulation methods (Taylor & Boghan, 1998) were used to cross-validate the data collected, time periods, and the theoretical schemes.

### *Instrumentation and Procedures*

Two instruments were used to collect data in this study: (a) the Interview Protocol and (b) the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) (Appendix Q in English and Appendix R in Spanish). The first instrument used was the Interview Protocol designed by the panel of experts and adapted from the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer). The Interview Protocol adapted the content of the Scale to open-ended questions to get more detailed information for each of the four major categories targeted by Wehmeyer: autonomy, psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and self-realization. The Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) is an empirically validated scale normed with 400 young adults. It was designed to measure Self-Determination skills of students with disabilities, particularly for students with learning disabilities (LD) and mild mental retardation (MMR). This scale is the most widely

recognized and recommended tool in the literature to measure the students Self-Determination skills.

A conceptual design for the procedures of this study was created by the researcher to set structure to the study. The conceptual design was sub-divided into four major stages: 1) Data Collection and Management Procedures, 2) Data Collection: Documents Review, 3) Data Collection: Interviews and Observations, and 4) Emergent Data/Data Analysis. Each stage fed into the next one to facilitate an orderly and a logical flow for the information as it was being gathered and simultaneously analyzed. (See Table 4 for a visual representation of the conceptual design). This design was not executed in a strictly linear process. In practice the researcher continuously revisited the different stages in order to clarify questions and/or themes that emerged throughout the process. Each step provided an opportunity to revisit the earlier steps. The purpose of this constant rechecking was to cross-examine the data and the findings to ensure that all the leads had been followed.

### *Sample*

The participants of this study were six young adults with disabilities in transition from school to adult life, who have a Hispanic background. The participants were between the ages of 18 to 23 and were either still attending high school or had exited the school system within recent years. They also were receiving special education services or have received special education services while they attended school. This study targets individuals with learning disabilities (LD) and developmental disabilities, but it did not target a specific social economic status or Hispanic country of origin or heritage.

However, preference was given to those students who spoke the English language to facilitate a better understanding of the purpose and process of the study.

The individuals meeting the criteria for this research were identified by purposeful selection using a snowball sampling process. A purposeful sampling approach was selected because in this type of sampling, the participants are chosen based on the potential relevance and meaningfulness to the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The specific type of purposeful sampling, snowball strategy, was identified as the most appropriate strategy due to the specific nature of the samples needed for this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The purpose of this research is to help understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the transition from school to work of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background. This study provides insight into the influences that the Hispanic cultural values, capital, and experiences might have in the role that self-determination plays in the transition planning process of Hispanic students with disabilities. This new insight in the concept of self-determination within the Hispanic culture, in turn, provides a more specific understanding of the cultural context in which this population of students could be more appropriately supported as they plan their transition from school to work.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### *Introduction*

The focus of this research is to examine the concept of self-determination for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background in transition from school to adult life. While there is a plethora of information about both transition and self-determination, very little has focused specifically on this group of students. For the purpose of this study, the researcher applies the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” to those individuals classified in one of the specific Latino or Hispanic categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire – “Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” or “Cuban.” It also includes people who indicate that they are “other Spanish, Hispanic or Latino.” Origin can be considered as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as “Spanish,” “Hispanic,” or “Latino” may be of any race (United States Census Bureau Population Projection, 2005).

This literature review will concentrate on the literature in four major areas: self-determination, transition, the role of self-determination within the transition process for students with disabilities in the United States, and Hispanic cultural competence. The first

section highlights self-determination in general, followed by an introduction to the normalization movement, and the evolution of self-determination in education. The second main area of literature reviewed relates to transition, including an introduction to federally mandated services for persons with disabilities in transition from school to work (The Rehabilitation Act, 1973). The third section to be reviewed combines the two previous sections, self-determination and transition, and analyzes the literature related to self-determination for students with disabilities in the transition process from school into adulthood within the United States. This section will be subdivided into three categories: (a) self-determination and transition for all students with disabilities, (b) self-determination and transition for students with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds, and (c) self-determination and transition for students from a Hispanic background. The fourth section explores Hispanic cultural competence and capital. This chapter ends with a review of the perspective of the Ecological Theory on the role of self-determination for students with disabilities in transition.

### *Self-Determination Defined*

What is self-determination? This term has been widely used in the field of special education for the past 15 years. Its definition has roots in the fields of human rights, psychology, and even government. It is therefore important to understand these diverse definitions to more completely describe the concept as it has been applied to the field of special education. Those definitions are all interrelated even though they fall under the following separate categories: self-determination as a universal concept for all, self-

determination as it refers to the special education literature, and lastly, self-determination as defined by a person with disabilities.

The first definition was found under the fundamental principle of human rights law of the United Nations' Declaration of Self-Determination. This document defines self-determination as the right for all individuals to make their own choices in life, not as a privilege of a few, but the right of all individuals regardless of a person's ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability (United Nations Enable, 2008).

The second significant definition was found throughout the literature on self-determination as it refers specifically to students with disabilities. Wehmeyer (1992) describes self-determination as the attitudes and abilities required to act as the "primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices regarding one's actions free from undue external influence or interference" (p. 305). In 1998 he summarized the concept with the following statement: "Self determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in society"(Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2).

In recent years, further work and investigation into the meaning of self-determination has expanded on the earlier definitions and provide us with a more in depth understanding about the nature of self-determination in regard to students with disabilities. For example, in Wehmeyer's own words (2007): "Self-determination refers

to people acting volitionally and intentionally to become casual agents of their own lives... there is clear evidence that enabling students with disabilities to become self-determined is linked to more positive functional outcomes” (p. 14). In that regard, throughout several of his studies Wehmeyer correlates a person’s self-determined behavior with his or her dispositional characteristics (2006, 2007). He explains that when individuals have the dispositional characteristics that enable them to engage in self-determined behaviors, then those individuals can be described as self-determined individuals.

Wehmeyer expands on the concept of self-determination as a developmental process that takes place across the lifespan of an individual. This process of development and acquisition of the attitudes and abilities leading towards self-determination is what enables them to shape their own lives. These attitudes and abilities emerge through the development and acquisition of these multiple, interrelated component elements of self-determination behavior. These component elements include the following skills: choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, the skills of independence, risk taking, and safety, the skills of self-observation, evaluation and reinforcement, self-instruction, and, self-advocacy and leadership skills (positive attributes of efficacy and outcomes expectancy; self-awareness; and self-knowledge).

Lastly, possibly the most significant contribution is the definition offered to us by a person with disabilities. This is how R. Williams (1989), a self-advocate, defined self-determination: “We do not have to be told what self-determination means. We already know that it is just a ten dollar word for choice; that it is just another word for freedom, a

word for a life filled with rising expectations, dignity, responsibility, and opportunity. That it is just another word for having the American Dream” (p. 16). This definition is simple yet eloquent. Without using complicated terminology, Williams speaks from the heart and touches us by making self-determination a palpable, meaningful concept.

The three definitions previously described all refer to the same concept, but each one has a different purpose. The United Nations is concerned with justice for all and overseeing global justice (United Nations Enable, 2008). Researchers and professionals in the field of special education and rehabilitation are concerned with educating others about how to help understand and support students/persons with disabilities (Nirje, 1972; Sax & Thoma, 2002; Wehman, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1997, 1999, 2006, 2007). And, lastly, self-advocates are concerned with the basic concepts of freedom, dignity, responsibility, and the opportunity to be just like anyone else regardless of their disability (Williams, 1989).

### *Historical Review*

To understand the concept of self-determination for students with disabilities (self-advocates), it is important to first be acquainted with its history. The literature review reveals four marked passages in history that eventually led to today’s view on disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1999). For decades and through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, people with disabilities were segregated from their societies. In the mid 1800s, the academic community turned their attention to the issue of educating children with disabilities. Segregated special schools and training programs were designed to educate students with disabilities. This approach of segregation for the

education of students with disabilities was founded on the belief that students with disabilities could be taught better if placed in a separate school environment that is, separated from the “normal” student population. Those schools segregated from the local communities became what it is now known as institutions (Kugel & Wolfensberger, 1969).

The Second World War promoted a radical change in society’s perspectives of persons with disabilities. The veterans that returned with physical and mental challenges and limitations had been active members of society as coworkers and family members. They had achieved a functional place in society before the war through successful autonomous behaviors. Society wanted to recognize their courageous conduct and also reintegrate them as useful members into their communities. While it was considered that these veterans with disabilities were fragile, helpless victims, most of them in need of total care, society also realized that at this time they needed to reintegrate them back into the community. It was at this time that federal rehabilitation services began to be provided for persons with disabilities with the primary emphasis on rehabilitating and retraining veterans who were injured in the war so that they could once again become contributing members of society. This trend also gave birth to the Federal-State Vocational Rehabilitation System and the Social Security Supplemental System which later provided benefits to some of those who became unable to work after the war.

Thirdly, in the 1960s, there was a significant shift in perspectives, and the issue of empowerment for persons with disabilities to assert their place in the community like every other person became a fundamental goal. Advocacy movements all over the United

States were inspired by the introduction of the principle of normalization. Nirje (1969) refers to the principle of normalization as “making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norm and patterns of the mainstream of society” (p. 227). The normalization movement facilitated the paradigm shift from institutionalism to community living for persons with disabilities. This movement was the catalyst which exposed the dehumanizing treatment and isolation that persons with disabilities experienced when educated and kept in institutions. Most significantly, the normalization movement ignited the vision to establish the community system approach for persons with disabilities (Pennell, 2001). This system approach supports community integration, independent living, and community support services to assist persons with disabilities to function as integral members of society.

The shift from institutional to community-based services gave rise to the independent living, self-help, self-advocacy movement, and person-centered planning. In the 1980s, advocates began supporting each person based on their individual needs and wants for their lives by helping them create a support system to enable them to live as independently as possible in their communities. The process of providing services for a person with a disability was no longer about what the system wanted for them. The new approach became centered on the person’s life by supporting each individual in the development of their self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy skills encompass the ability of individuals to speak out and to ensure that their voices are heard, as well as the opportunity for individuals to know their rights and responsibilities and make choices about their own lives (Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, 1995). This approach, which evolved as

a result of the social movements of the 1980s involving disability rights and self-advocacy, became what is now referred to as person-centered planning and self-determination movement later in the 1990s (Pennell, 2001). Finally, as a result of the passage of the civil rights legislation and protections such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1990 (PL 101-476) with its subsequent amendments, and finally the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (PL 101-33), these ideas were all merged into the philosophy now known as self-determination (IDEA, 2004).

### *Transition Defined Legally*

Children with disabilities have been protected under the federal law to receive equal access to education in all public schools since the United States Congress in 1975 enacted the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (also known by its acronym EAHCA or EHA). However, it was not until 1990, when the federal government amendment to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed, that transition planning was included. This amendment became effective in 1991 and has since been known as Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. This Act was later amended in 1997 by President Clinton through the IDEA Act amendments, and in 2004 by President Bush through the Americans with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. The purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepares them for further education, employment, and

independent living" (Section 1400[d]). The legal definition of "transition services" in IDEA (2004) is currently defined as:

a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (20 U.S 1401, (3) [b]).

Transition planning is a coordinated effort which involves the students and their families, the school and school personnel, community and adult services representatives, employers, other interested individuals, and professional representatives of related services the student might need ( e.g., speech pathology, occupational therapist, etc.). The purpose of this coordinated effort is to assist the student to identify opportunities and experiences during their school years that can potentially contribute to the positive outcome of their transition from school to life as an adult.

The primary tool that dictates the transition planning process is the individualized Educational Plan (IEP). This plan is designed at school from an early age for a student

with a disability and is primarily focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student. As the student moves further into middle school and high school, the ultimate goal of this plan is to facilitate the student's movement from school to postschool activities (Section 1400[d]). These activities include the preparation for potential postsecondary education, vocational education, and integrated employment, including supported employment (20 U.S 1401, (3) [b]). Each one of these activities is influenced and guided by county, state, and federal policies and regulations which in turn impact the outcomes of each student's transition process.

### *Relevance to the Concept of Self-Determination*

As highlighted by Peter Wright (2004), attorney-at-law in special education, the relevance of self-determination on the mandated guidelines for transition services can be seen in the wording of the law. As shown in the above paragraph in the legal definition of transition, the law mandates to address "...the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests" (20 U.S. 1401,(3)(b) recognizing with this statement the importance of student participation in the planning of their education. Furthermore, in his analysis of mandated transition services, Wright explains how the law reflects the importance of self-determination by requiring schools to ensure that the students participate in their IEP and their transition planning process. He also comments that, again as a reflection of self-determination, even though it is not mandated, the law recommends that students become involved in their transition planning by actively sharing what they want for their future.

This acknowledgement that the law makes to person-centered planning and student participation in their transition planning does not come as a surprise to researchers and professionals in the field of self-determination and transition in the United States. Throughout the review of the literature, a parallel chain of events can be seen between the changes of the law and the results of studies conducted by experts in these fields. In their multiple studies on self-determination in the United States, recognized experts in the field of transition for students with disabilities have demonstrated that self-determination skills can be key elements in prompting students to participate in their transition planning (Wehman, 1996; Test, Karvonen, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2000) and also in the attainment of better results from their transition planning process (Morningstar & Turnbull, 1995; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

### *Role of Self-Determination Within the Transition Process for Students with Disabilities in the United States*

The role of self-determination for students with disabilities who are in the transition process has been the subject of interest of leading researchers and dedicated advocates for persons with disabilities since the mid-90s. The findings from the extensive research conducted in this field ( Wehmeyer, 1995;Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998a; Test et al., 2000; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998) has led to the identification of self-determination as a concept that can have a positive impact in the transition process from school to adulthood for youth with disability. These findings also add to the growing evidence that points to self-

determination as a significant factor to facilitate better transition outcomes in students with disabilities in assisting the student to make choices and to have control over decisions made during their transition planning that would impact their lives (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). This concept led researchers and educators alike to continuously refine productive ways to measure students' self-determination skills and to develop tools and strategies that could help students with disabilities to develop and/or enhance their self-determination skills.

The Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) was identified in the literature as one of the most important assessment tools to measure self-determination skills in adolescents with disabilities. This instrument identifies autonomy, independence, self-regulation, empowerment, and self-realization as the four essential characteristics of self-determination. Within the definitional framework for self-determined behavior, a behavior is autonomous if the person acts (a) according to his or her own preferences, interests, and/or abilities, and (b) independently, free from undue external influence or interference (Wehmeyer, 1995). Psychological empowerment refers to the multiple dimensions of perceived control in abilities and perceptions of success, including its cognitive, personality, and motivational domains (Zimmerman, 1990). Self-realization refers to the development or fulfillment of one's potential measured by individual self-knowledge and self-awareness (Wehmeyer, 1995). And, finally, self-regulated behaviors include self-management strategies (including self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement), goal setting

and attainment behaviors, problem solving behaviors, and observational learning strategies (Wehmeyer, 1995).

Along the same lines, and in alignment with the essential qualities of self-determination identified with the Arc's Self-Determination Scale, Field et al. (1998a) define self-determination as the characteristics (skills, knowledge, and beliefs) that assist an individual to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. The function of self-determination skills is to assist a student to become empowered to assertively embrace and act on their strengths and limitations together with the belief that they are a capable and effective individual. Field et al. (1998b) describe the components of self-determined behavior as (a) awareness of personal preferences, interests, strengths, and limitations; (b) ability to [i] differentiate between wants and needs, [ii] make choices based on preferences, interests, wants, and needs, [iii] consider multiple options and anticipate consequences for decisions, [iv] initiate and take action when needed, [v] evaluate decisions based on the outcomes of the previous decision and revise future decisions accordingly, [vi] set and work toward goals, [vii] regulate behavior, [viii] use communication skills such as negotiation, compromise, and persuasion to reach goals, and [ix] assume responsibility for actions and decisions; (c) skills for problem-solving; (d) a striving for independence while recognizing interdependence with others; (e) self-advocacy and self-evaluation skills; (f) independent performance and adjustment skills; (g) persistence; (h) self-confidence; (i) pride; and (j) creativity.

Further, Wehmeyer (2007) refined the above mentioned self-determination components to the following core components: (a) choice making skills; (b) decision

making skills; (c) problem-solving skills; (d) goal-setting and attainment skills; (e) independence, risk taking, and safety skills; (f) self-observations, evaluation and reinforcement skills; (g) self-instruction skills;(h) self-advocacy and leadership skills [i] positive attributes of efficacy and outcomes expectancy, [ii] self-awareness [iii] self-knowledge. He explains that the interplay of all the above mentioned self-determination components is what can empower students to be able to manifest their desires and thoughts and come to rational decisions and make their own choices (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, Wehmeyer, 2007), which, in turn, assists these students to become masters of their own lives.

As a response to the findings of research that demonstrated that self-determination has a positive impact on the transition planning process of a student with disability, the Department of Education began to provide resources (grants, funding) to expand on research that would help educators find ways to impact students' development or enhancement of self-determination skills within the school curriculum. This federal direction and funding made it possible to conduct research and design resources aiming to facilitate the teaching of self-determination by incorporating it into the school curriculum. As a result of such initiatives, there are currently many resources available to support instruction in self-determination skills as a component of the education of youth with disabilities and a broader range of methods to teach the components of self-determination skills, such as:

- Choice Maker (Martin & Marshall, 1995);
- S. T.E. P. S. (Field & Hoffman, 1996a);

- Who's Future Is It Anyway? (Wehmeyer, & Kelchner, 1995);
- Next S. T. E. P. S. (Halpern, Herr, Doren, & Wolf, 1995, 2000).

Research on the role of self-determination was collected primarily through the implementation of these four methods (mentioned above) (Martin & Marshall, 1995; Field & Hoffman, 1996a, Wehmeyer, & Kelchner, 1995; Halpern, Herr, Doren, & Wolf, 1995, 2000). These methods were implemented primarily within school curriculums. On occasion, these methods were implemented in conjunction with other strategies, like person-centered planning strategies, with the intention of facilitating the development of the student's self-determination skills.

However, in spite of these efforts, educators still found that there were barriers to teaching self-determination in the classroom. This new awareness led to the introduction of the teaching model, The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. This teaching model incorporates the principles of self-determination into the teaching of various academic subjects. The implementation of this model has showed that students who have been taught using this model of instruction have been able to develop or enhance their self-determination skills while at the same time it has helped them attain their educational goal (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000).

The findings from the literature reviewed on the role that self-determination has in the transition process of students with disabilities asserts that when adolescents with disabilities are actively involved in facilitating their transition planning from school to adulthood, there seems to be a higher level of success in that process. The findings also

suggest that enhanced self-determination skills improve the quality of their educational and transition outcomes.

*Understanding the Role Self-Determination Plays for Students with Disabilities in Transition*

The role that self-determination plays in the transition process for student with disabilities is commonly misinterpreted. Self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1998, 2005; Trainor, 2005; Turnbull and Turnbull, 1996, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Kim & Turnbull, 2004) is not exercised nor experienced the same by all individuals. Wehmeyer (1998, 2005) highlights that there are growing misinterpretations of self-determination for students with disabilities that leads to the wrong thinking that people with disabilities cannot be self-determined. In those cases, self-determination is associated with preconceived concepts of what self-determination means for society and not with what this concept means within the context of the individual who is self-determined. The following table (Table 1) presents the eight most common misconceptions found about persons with disabilities and their abilities to be self-determinate (Wehmeyer, 1998, 2005).

Nevertheless, while there are still controversies on these misconceptions, the literature shows a vital link between high levels of self-determination and positive outcomes within the context of the person's strengths and challenges. Empirically, researchers have demonstrated that students who show higher levels of self-determination skills are more likely to obtain a higher level of successful outcomes from their transition to adulthood (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

**Table 1. Misconceptions About Self-Determination**

<b>Misinterpretations of Self-determination</b>	<b>Understanding within context of a person with disabilities</b>
Self-Determination is independent performance	A person can still be self-determined using the right support and accommodations.
Self-Determination is having absolute control over one's life	Most individuals chose to be interdependent in their lives. The critical factor is the choice the person makes of how he/she wants to live
Self-Determination is about successful behaviors	Successful behavior should only be measured by the effort a person makes to try to accomplish a goal or task.
Self-Determination is to be absolutely self-reliant/self-sufficient	No one is absolutely self-reliant/self-sufficient.
Self-Determination is a set of skills a person must have to be independent	Skills alone do not make for self-determination; there is a combination of factors, environment, opportunities and experiences that impact your life.
Self-Determination as something you do or a program you sign up for to do	A student is not self-determined because he/she participates in a SD training program; it is something the student can do regardless of his/her participation in such kind of programs.
Self-Determination has specific outcomes	Outcomes are not a true reflection of how self-determined a person is or not.
Self-Determination is about making choices	Self-determination is not synonymous with making choices only; this is only one component of many.

Both Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) and Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) conducted follow-up studies several years after their initial findings. The studies support the positive impact self-determination skills can have for students in gaining and

retaining employment, earning higher wages, and having an overall better experience in the community. For example, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) conducted a follow-up evidence-based study with 80 students with mild mental retardation or learning disabilities in their final year of high school and then one year after high school to measure their self-determination. The findings of the study showed that students with higher levels of self-determination were more likely to have experienced a greater number of positive adult outcomes. More specifically, the results of the study demonstrated that students who scored a higher level of self-determination were more likely to express a desire to live outside the family home, have a savings or checking account, and find paid employment. Eighty percent of students in the high self-determination group worked for remuneration during the year after graduation, whereas only 43% of students in the low self-determination group did so. Among those students who continued their academic education but had a job through academic and vocational placement, those who were in the high self-determination group earned significantly more per hour ( $M = \$4.26$ ) than their peers in the low self-determination group ( $M = \$1.93$ ).

The second follow-up study by Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) examined the adult status of 94 young people with cognitive disabilities (mental retardation or learning disability) 1 and 3 years after their graduation. They found that the data replicated the results from Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) showing individuals in the high self-determination group fared better than the individuals in the low self-determination group. The adult independent skills areas that were studied were: (a) living independently, (b)

living interindependently, (c) maintaining a bank account, (d) receiving job training, (e) held a job since high school, (f) currently holding a job, (g) working full time, and (h) working part time. The findings demonstrated that 1 year after graduation these individuals with higher self-determination skills performed better in six out of eight adult independent skills areas, and 3 years after graduation, these same individuals performed better in all eight adult living areas. More adults in the high self-determination group paid their phone bills, purchased groceries, and had a bank account 1 year after graduation. The 3 year after-school analysis showed that even more individuals in the high self-determination group paid their rent and utilities. This group also showed that they enjoyed better overall benefits even at 3 years after graduating from school. They also had better specific benefits in vacation, sick leave, and health insurance. Finally, the individuals in the higher level of self-determination group reported that they were more satisfied with their quality of life (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998).

As a construct to the significant role that self-determination can play in transition, the literature supports that students who have higher levels of self-determination are more motivated to go on for postsecondary education ( McMillan & Reed, 1994), and to remain in college (Thoma & Getzel, 2006). As evident from the results obtained from a series of focus groups conducted with 34 postsecondary students with disabilities, Thoma and Getzel commented that these students demonstrate greater confidence and are more focused in their pursuit of postsecondary or college education. Also, they seem to be better prepared to navigate the higher education system. Many of the participants of the study stated that they would have liked to developed self-determination strategies as early

as possible in their lives. They felt that they could gain more from the college experience if they had entered the higher education system better prepared to meet the demands of a college environment (i.e., independence, problem solving, goal setting, and self-management).

Another source of information which emerged from the literature that seems to enhance the understanding researchers have about the role that self-determination plays in transition for student with disabilities refers to the students' family participation in their transition planning process and the impact their families have in how these students experience self-determination. Turnbull and Turnbull (1996, 2001) identify two significant aspects of family participation that can have an impact on the students' self-determination. These two key issues are (1) the students' family values and (2) their families' cultural values. Turnbull and Turnbull describe that, from their perspectives as parents of an individual with significant disabilities and after having conducted studies with families from multiple cultural backgrounds, they inferred that self-determination is a process of making choices in our daily lives in a way that includes respect and honor for our cultural and family values. They further elaborate that their studies reflect the need for the students' family values to be included even when it pertains to parental authority over child choice and collectivism over individualism (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996, 2006, Kim & Turnbull, 2004).

In conclusion, the literature on transition planning for students with disabilities shows a significant correlation between self-determination skills and better transition outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field et al., 1998; Grigal et al., 2003;

Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1997). The research substantially supports that students who exhibit self-determination skills are better prepared to become and stay employed and earn higher wages (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998, Stodden & Dowrick, 2001). They are better prepared to make the choices to live where they want (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998), manage an independent life (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003), and many feel ready to pursue their dreams of continuing their education after high school (Thoma & Getzel, 2005). Overall, students with disabilities who show higher levels of self-determination, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, report that they are more satisfied in general with their quality of life (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, 1998; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1997; Field et al., 1998, Wehmeyer, 2004). Lastly, the literature shows that the participation of families in the transition planning process of their sons/daughters can have a significant impact on how these students experience self-determination and on the type of role self-determination plays in these students' transition planning process. Furthermore, it emerged that to understand the role that self-determination plays for students in transition, it is important to understand and respect their family's values and culture (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Kim & Turnbull, 2004).

### *Self-Determination and Transition for Students with Disabilities from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds*

A smaller literature base demonstrates a growing recognition of the importance of understanding the differences of the concept of self-determination between various

cultures (Frankland et al., 2004; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2005; Zhang et al., 2005, Leake & Black, 2005; Trainor, 2005).

These studies indicate that self-determination is an important concept for individuals with disabilities from other cultures although each defines and recognizes its importance in a unique manner within the context of their culture (Haelewyck et al., 2005; Frankland et al., 2004; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2005; Zhang et al., 2005, Leake & Black, 2005; Trainor, 2005). In reviewing the literature, the researcher found that, in general, cultural values and self-determination were structured in two major categories: individualistic and collectivistic cultural values. The individualistic view of people as independent individuals encompasses self-oriented values and treats the individuals as a separate unit. These values are self-sufficiency, self-determination, self-advocacy, self-competence, self-direction, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-reliance, and self-responsibility (Leake & Black, 2005). The collectivist view sees the individuals as part of a larger group and not as a separate unit. For this group, the individualistic identity of a person is defined by the roles and experiences they have within their relationship with others. The contrasting value between the view of individualists (European-Americans) and collectivists (three fourths of the world's cultures) is that people are either independent or interdependent.

Valenzuela and Martin (2005) also recognize the importance of understanding the difference between cultures as a means to better serve students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. In their studies, they describe reports from current studies on postsecondary education employment and higher

education enrollment which show a significant discrepancy between employment rates and enrollment in postsecondary education between CLD students with disabilities who recently left high school as compared to their peers without disabilities (Greene & Nefsky, 1999; Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003; Wagner, Cadwallader et al., 2003; Warger & Burnette, 2000). Furthermore, they recognize that the above-mentioned discrepancies combined with the projected increases in the CLD student population, stress the importance of bridging the values of diverse cultures in the postsecondary education transition process. Consequently, having acknowledged the importance of understanding the differences between cultures, several researchers have identified the need to approach transition and self-determination instruction in secondary schools from a more culturally and linguistic diverse perspective to better prepare CLD students with disabilities for employment or a self-determined quality of life after high school (Valenzuela and Martin, 2005; Callicott, 2003; Geenan, Powers, & Vasquez-Lopez, 2001; Greene, 1996; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). The findings in some of the literature reflect that the relationships among culture, transition programs, self-determination instruction, and the IEP process influence postschool outcomes for CLD students (Valenzuela and Martin, 2005; Leake, Black, & Roberts, 2004; Trainor, 2002).

The results of the Valenzuela and Martin (2005) review of literature on values of diverse cultures and secondary education suggest that there are four significant areas that need to be addressed. The researchers highlight the importance of conducting discussions to allow an exchange of cultural values during the transition planning process to support self-determination skills. Second, they affirm that even though self-determination is an

essential component of a self-directed IEP (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1996), it is embedded in individualistic values such as self-awareness, decision making, self-advocacy, and independent performance. Therefore, when working with students and families with collectivistic values, it is essential to provide opportunities for the participants to share their particular cultural values. Also, it is important to keep in mind that when self-determination skills are being taught from an individualistic perspective to students with collectivist cultural values, the training should be given in slow increments to allow a process of adaptability when appropriate. Equally, this would allow the students to keep their essential cultural values and not jeopardize their relationship with their families.

Third, in their exploration of the differences between cultures, self-determination, and transition, Valenzuela and Martin (2005) also discuss the need to be sensitive to and respect the concept of a successful transition as valued by individuals from different cultures. For example, undertaking a successful career might not necessarily be reflected by a highly paid job, but rather by finding placement in an appropriate environment for that particular career choice. Or achieving independence might not mean living away from their family, but rather being able to pay their own expenses while continuing to live with their family. Finally, the authors discuss how self-determination practices can provide individualism while allowing the students to maintain their bond with their native cultures when the students are taught self-determination skills incrementally and without disrupting their native cultural values.

Two studies showing examples of collectivistic cultural values were found in the literature. One is a comparison between the self-determination cultural values of students residing in the Republic of China and Chinese students living in the United States (Zhang et al., 2005). The other article explores the cultural values of students from the American Navajo Indian culture (Frankland et al., 2004). The first study was conducted to investigate how parents and teachers in the United States and in China encourage and contribute to the teaching of self-determination skills to students within both countries. This comparison study took place in elementary and secondary schools with the participations of 203 parents and teachers in the United States and 90 students from Taiwan. The results of the study show that teachers from both countries reported similar levels of engagement in fostering self-determination behaviors for their students. However, the parents from the United States reported significantly higher levels of fostering self-determination behaviors in their children than the parents from Taiwan. Also, the study indicated that the level of fostering self-determination behaviors from parents and teachers was higher at the secondary level in both countries (Zhang et al., 2005).

The findings on cultural differences show that nonWestern cultures may encourage values that are different from the essential values associated with self-determination as it is valued in the United States (Frankland et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2005; Trainor, 2005). The researchers suggest that Chinese parents, in comparison to their counterparts in the United States, are often characterized as having an authoritarian and controlling parental style. Within the family circle, the focus is traditionally on

underscoring the respect a child must show towards their parents and their elders and on listening to their words of wisdom (Chen et al., 2002). Consequently, this might not be conducive for children to have the opportunity to develop autonomous behaviors. The findings of this study suggest that in order to respectfully and appropriately teach self-determination skills to students from a Chinese cultural background, one must take into consideration the family goals based on collectivist values to ensure that the students adapt to autonomous behaviors without losing their native cultural values (Zhang et al., 2005).

The second article review of a collectivist culture is a more comprehensive qualitative exploratory study of the role self determination and disability plays in the Dinǫ (Navajo) culture (Frankland et al., 2004). This study is a comparison of the four essential characteristics of self-determination as defined within the values and beliefs of the Navajo people (Wehmeyer, Kelchner, & Richards, 1996). The study explains how the Dinǫ (Navajo) family structure and literature on disability indicate that while the characteristics of self-determination behavior are relevant and important to the Dinǫ culture, they are expressed differently from the American perspective. While people from the Navajo culture value self-regulation and autonomy, they place more emphasis on the importance of interdependence and group cohesion than on independence and autonomy. The structural and cultural makeup of the Navajo family is very unique in that they have their own language, a clan system with a societal approach, and their cultural belief system provides an umbrella under which they all share important beliefs and cultural connections. Therefore, the researchers suggest that to understand and, more so, support

self-determination initiatives in transition for this culture, it is important to analyze the structural factors under the following components: residence patterns, socioeconomic status, acculturation, colonization factors influencing-self-determination, family structure and expectations, child development expectations, and their expectations of a person with disabilities.

The residence pattern of the Dinǫ people is still being maintained in their reservations, and even those who are living in rural areas make strong efforts to stay tied to their land base. Their socioeconomic status shows very high poverty rates. Their annual unemployment rate ranges from 36% to over 50% seasonally, as compared to the national unemployment rate ranging from 4.0% to 6.0% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). Due to the lack of employment, many members of this tribe have left their tribes and have acquired some level of acculturation with the Anglo-European culture. However, even when living away from their reservations, they still maintain strong ties and obligations with the family members who remain in the reservations (Connors & Donnellan, 1998). The colonization factor plays a role in the issues of self-determination because even though the Dinǫ Nation is considered a sovereign nation, the United States still has ultimate power over their tribal economic affairs. Consequently, even after being recognized as an independent Nation, they still have to maintain a dependent relationship with the United States.

According to the reports on this study of students from American Navajo Indian culture, the cultural factors influencing transition and self-determination include: (a) the Dinǫ family structure and expectations, (b) child development and expectations, and

lastly, (c) the expectations they have of persons with disabilities. The family structure of the Dinṭ culture is organized in two ways: first, the immediate family (blood relatives, parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins); and second, their concept of extended family or clans (distant blood relatives and nonblood relatives). The children of the Dinṭ culture are taught to belong to the clan with strong emphasis on the communal spirit. They are raised to believe in the importance of “one for all and all for one” (McWhirter & Ryan, 1991). They are essentially team members and their personal wants and desires are subject to the needs of the group.

The children’s development and their degrees of responsibilities and independence are organized by age brackets. Children from birth to five are encouraged to develop their own uniqueness, and they are taught the importance of self-determination. This is the process by which these children learn all they can about themselves and their environment in preparation to becoming physically and mentally strong individuals. At age 6 to 9, these children are considered to have fully developed and to have become fully capable of assuming adult responsibilities to help their family. It is also at this early age that these young children are left alone in the house without parental supervision. Males and females have different roles, but, nevertheless, they are all held responsible for contributing to the care and growth of the family. At age 10 to 15, their responsibilities as members of the family are increased, and it is at this crucial time that they are allowed to begin making decisions for their lives with little interference from authority. By age 15, they are expected to be self-sufficient, able to care for

themselves, and to contribute to the care and financial support of the family and the community (Connors & Donnellan, 1998).

The authors also comment that in the Din̄ culture, the concept of disability is not applied under the same criterion utilized in the Anglo-American culture. For the Din̄ culture, when making a reference to disabilities, they are generally speaking of a “spiritual imbalance” as opposed to a physical, medical, or emotional issue. This perspective on disabilities is very noticeable in that this culture does not differentiate responsibilities according to abilities. Din̄ people with or without disabilities are expected to develop and contribute to the members of the family to the extent of their capabilities (Connors & Donnellan, 1998).

The comparison of the essential characteristics of self-determination behaviors (self-regulation, psychological empowerment, self-realization, and autonomy) as defined by Wehmeyer et al. (1996) to the traditional values held by the Din̄ culture shows similarities but also different perspectives. For example, in the literature on self-determination, self-regulatory behaviors (Wehmeyer, 1999) are tied in with self-management strategies. These strategies, in turn, promote the ability of a person to make decisions based on their personal preferences. For the Din̄ culture, even though self-regulatory behaviors are expected to be fully developed in their children by age 6 (e.g., learning positive and negative behaviors, learning to regulate appropriate behavior independently from the adults), these children are not expected to make independent decisions because it would interfere with their interdependence and consensual group cultural values.

In the literature on self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1999), psychological empowerment refers to the possession of the skills and opportunities to perform certain behaviors, and that these behaviors will result in positive outcomes in one's life. In an Anglo-European context, this means that the person feels empowered to act on their own behalf to become part of their society. On the other hand, for Din᠔ beliefs, psychological empowerment stems from a holistic/spiritual well-being of becoming one in harmony with the universe and honoring and actively participating in their own clan's system (Connors & Donnellan, 1998).

The literature on self-determination talks about self-realization (Wehmeyer, 1999) as the characteristic of a self-determinate person with full understanding of his or her strengths and limitations. Self-realization is the characteristic that allows a person to act according to his or her strengths thereby empowering him or her to capitalize on these strengths to succeed in life. In Din᠔ family beliefs, although self-knowledge is very important, it ties in with the Din᠔ culture of recognizing and celebrating a person's birth into a certain clan.

The final analysis and cultural comparison of the characteristic of self-determination in this study is autonomy. The authors of the article (Frankland et al., 2004) highlight the importance that the self-determination construct places on behavioral autonomy within the special education and transition process. In this context, autonomy is looked at more as "acting on the basis of their own personal beliefs and values, thoughts and emotions, and likes and dislikes instead of exclusively on social norms or individual group pressure" (Wehmeyer, 1997b, p. 117). Similarly, in the Din᠔ culture,

the values of autonomy are to encourage, support, and assist individual development. However, the development of autonomous behavior is supported for the purpose of enhancing individual potentials so that each individual can later help and contribute to the larger family and clan (Connors & Donnellan, 1998). In conclusion, this comparison study is significantly relevant to the purpose of the proposed research as it exemplifies the possible similarities and differences that various cultures might have of the concept of self-determination. The knowledge shared in this article supports the need to design and implement transition services that can address the specific needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### *Self-Determination and Transition for Students from a Hispanic Background*

The studies that were found addressing cultural values and self-determination in transition generalized two major categories: individualistic and collectivistic. However, a qualitative study (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005) was found that begins to identify differences between the Hispanic cultural values of self-determination in transition services and those held in the United States.

This study was conducted through several focus groups to examine cultural variations in attitudes, beliefs, and the meaning of transition. The participants of the study were 16 Latina mothers (Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador) of young adults with developmental disabilities, all living in low-income and predominantly Latino and Chicano communities of the East Los Angeles area (Rueda et al., 2005). Students' ages ranged from 14 to 31. All of the families were receiving services through a community service agency.

The analysis of the data collected during the focus groups identified five major themes related to transition that were important to the participants: (a) family life skills and social adaptation, (b) importance of family and home rather than individualism and independence, (c) the importance of the mothers' role and their expertise in decision making, (d) access to information, and (e) danger of the outside world. The overarching theme of the mothers' view of transition reflected their preference to a home-centered and shelter adaptation approach rather than an independent and productivity transition model for their children (Rueda et al., 2005).

The trend of the information gathered showed that the participants felt it was their responsibility to speak for their children with disabilities. Even when they took into consideration the opinions of their children, the mothers seemed to take the lead to speak for their sons and daughters. They felt that no one knew their children better than they did and that they would be making the best decisions to ensure the well-being and security of their sons and daughters.

When talking about independent living for their sons and daughters, they commented that it is not customary in their culture for their children to leave the family home when finishing high school, but rather, after marriage. Independent living was not considered to be of relevance for transition planning. The home was considered the best place to care for a person with a disability with the mother as the primary care provider. In her absence, the responsibilities of caring for the person with a disability would fall on other family members. The consensus among the participants was that planning for independent living for their children with disabilities was not considered a viable option.

The mothers expressed their concern with the lack of culturally sensitive material related to transition available to them. Also, they felt they could not relate to the concepts of independence and self-determination as presented to them by the system. The language barrier and the mismatch in understanding of the proposed concepts of transition and self-determination did not fit their cultural life style.

Lastly, the participants voiced their concerns about their sons and daughters working in the community. They felt that while their children were at school, at work, or attending professional development training, they were more supervised. However, they said that their children were not safe in the afterschool vocational services environment due to the lack of appropriate supervision. This reflects the absence of trusting communications with caseworkers, vocational counselors, and other agencies assisting their children.

The results of the examination conducted on the cultural variations in attitudes, beliefs, and the meaning of transition found in this study show marked differences in what might be expected as appropriate transition services for Hispanic families. However, the researchers (Rueda et al., 2005) do point out that the findings gathered in this study cannot be generalized to all Hispanic families since, although they were all from the same socioeconomic status, the participants represented only three countries and only mothers were interviewed.

While collectivist cultures have been shown to experience self-determination in similar ways, studies (Trainor, 2005; Black, Mrasek & Ballinger 2003) show subtle differences between and within these cultures. Hispanics' concerns and views differ from

other collectivist cultures in their strong family attachment and their family values. Also, the majority show a high awareness of opportunities for advancement (MTC Institute, 2005).

### *Cultural Competence and Capital*

Cultural competence is understood to be a set of compatible behaviors, attitudes, and guidelines that when brought together enable individuals to work effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that as a family's cultural norms are better understood, then students with disabilities from those families could be better helped during their transition planning.

Outstanding among Hispanic's cultural attitudes is a strong family commitment, even a sense of obligation, which is expected towards not just the nuclear family, but extends to grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins many times over. This produces characteristics and behaviors such as loyalty, pride, a belief that the youth's behavior reflects not only on themselves but on their family as well, along with a strong sense of duty to care for family members, and a strong family determination to succeed. While this forges strong Hispanic families, it also causes conflict with the emphasis on individualism in the mainstream United States population (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002).

The importance of family and community, among the other factors named above, must be recognized as key components that influence the education of Hispanic children. As the fastest growing immigrant population, the educational system as a whole must be

thoroughly informed and trained regarding sensitivity to the uniqueness of the Hispanic culture and their values. Even though Hispanics place a high value on education, they often defer to schools as the experts and so parents are often seen as disengaged or absent (Job Corps, 2005). Actually, the majority of Hispanic parents feel positive about their youth's school environment. Nearly two thirds of Hispanic parents help students with homework and almost half meet with their children's teachers (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002; Zambrana, 1995).

Despite, or because of, the difficulties encountered by many Hispanic families, the result seems to be that their children acquire cultural competency, producing such strengths as perseverance, focus, motivation, self-discipline, attention to detail, teamwork, and bilingual/bicultural abilities amongst others (Arnett, 2001; Hernandez, 2004).

### *Ecological Perspective on Self-Determination in Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities from a Hispanic Background*

There is evidence that certain factors outside of the individual have not been widely studied in reference to the extent that educational experiences impact the development of self-determination (Trainor, 2005). The ecological perspective focuses on contextual factors that influence the dynamics of the development and practice of self-determination. This theory takes into account multiple influences that are acting together in complex ways to impact individual development outcomes (Wachs, 1999). It becomes clear that self-determination can be best understood when taking into consideration both

the individual and the various environments in which the individual develops (Abery, 1994; Abery & Stancliffe, 1996; Wehmeyer, Abery, Mithaug, & Stancliffe, 2003).

To better understand the concept of self-determination for students with disabilities in transition within a Hispanic culture, this study will be grounded in the Ecological Theory. This theory seeks to explain how the structure provided by society influences and shapes cognitive development and skills competencies in an individual. This theory also helps explain how the interaction of the various social systems where individuals live can influence how they learn to make their choices (Berger, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The social systems identified in the ecological theory are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each system has its independent influence on the individual but they are all interrelated. This interaction is what impacts how individuals experience, learn, and/or exercise various skills in their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1992).

#### *Microsystem influences.*

The environments where the person has the most direct interaction with others are referred to as microsystem (Garbarino, 1992). For students in transition, this environment would include home and their relationship with family members, classrooms and their relationship with teachers and classmates, work environment, and afterschool settings where students might spend a significant amount of time. A number of factors in the interaction of the person within the microsystem environment can impact how the person develops self-determination skills (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). These influences include:

1. Fulfillment of basic elements of quality of life (a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment, privacy, and respect);
2. Opportunities to exercise self-determination;
3. Positive reinforcement for attempts to exercise personal control;
4. Participation and inclusion, availability of role models;
5. Individualized programming and supervision.

*Mesosystem influences.*

Most people function within various environments during their day and the interaction between these various settings is recognized as a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1992, 2001). For a student in transition, these settings or linkages would include the student's home, school, and vocational training sites. The interaction of these settings creates the influences that impact on the development of self-determination skills. These influences include:

1. Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS);
2. Place of employment;
3. Other agencies who are part of the student's transition team;
4. Intra-agency collaboration;
5. Interagency collaboration (Wehmeyer et al., 2003).

*Exosystem influences.*

This is a larger system where a person is not directly involved but is still affected by its events. It is the external context within which the microsystem and the mesosystem

are imbedded (Garbarino, 1992). For students in transition, the system would include their interaction with:

1. Their parents' work place;
2. School administration and school and/or district policies;
3. County policies and procedures;
4. State law;
5. State training and technical assistance supports;
6. School policies for educational planning resource allocations, and teacher training;
7. State licensure requirements;
8. Department policies and procedures supporting transition services.

*Macrosystem influences.*

This is the last ecological system, and it is described as the interaction with the larger cultural context which influences all the other systems (Garbarino, 1992). It is also described as the degree of consistency in the belief systems, attitude, and values held by the members of a given culture (Wehmeyer et al., 2003). For students in transition this would include:

1. National policy;
2. Cultural beliefs that affect the implementation of an approach;
3. Cultural norms such as independence, choice, opportunities;
4. Political philosophies;
5. Economic patterns;

## 6. Social conditions.

The ecological theory gives a map of how the person relates to the world. It breaks it down in four levels going from the more personal to the least personal. Each of these levels and their interactions impact the decisions that individuals make using self-determination skills. Opportunities can be found at these different levels that would help understand how Hispanic students define and develop the construct of self-determination and how they exercise it.

### *Summary*

The literature supporting self-determination in transitions was extensive and demonstrates the significant value this concept has for students in the United States. Most importantly, as relevant to this study, the literature shows an emergent trend towards understanding self-determination for students in transition from other cultures. Given the increase of Hispanic students at schools across the nation, it would be important to understand and assert self-determination for these students without altering or infringing on their native cultural values. Therefore, within that framework, the proposed study will attempt to expand on the knowledge of how to better support students in transition from a Hispanic background to attain successful outcomes.

## *Definition of Terms*

### *Autonomy.*

Within the definitional frame work for self-determined behavior, a behavior is autonomous if the person acts (a) according to his or her own preferences, interests, and/or abilities, and (b) independently, free from undue external influence or interference (Wehmeyer, 1995).

### *Hispanic background.*

People who identify with the terms “Hispanic” or "Latino" are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Latino or Hispanic categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire – "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban." It also includes people who indicate that they are "other Spanish, Hispanic or Latino." Origin can be considered as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as "Spanish," Hispanic” or "Latino" may be of any race (United States Census Bureau Population Projection, 2005).

### *Psychological empowerment.*

Psychological empowerment refers to the multiple dimensions of perceived control in abilities and perceptions of success, including its cognitive, personality and motivational domains (Zimmerman, 1990).

*Self-determination.*

“Self determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in society.” (Wehmeyer, 1998, p. 2)

*Self-realization.*

The development or fulfillment of one's potential measured by individual self-knowledge and self-awareness (Wehmeyer, 1995).

*Self-regulation.*

Self-regulated behaviors include self-management strategies, (including self-monitoring, self-instruction, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement), goal setting and attainment behaviors, problem solving behaviors, and observational learning strategies (Wehmeyer, 1995).

*Normalization.*

Normalization means that the mentally retarded should have the closest access/recourse possible to the paradigms and ordinary practices that are commonplace in society at large.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

To obtain a better understanding of the role self-determination plays in transition for students from a Hispanic background, this investigation utilized a qualitative method approach with a phenomenological design. The information collected per each participant was gathered by conducting: (a) document analysis with the ARC of Self-Determination (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) Scale scores and other documents related to the participants' transition from high school to work; (b) student interview; (c) parents' interview; (d) agency representative interview; (e) observations, and (f) the researcher's journal notes.

This research was initially projected to be conducted using a case study design; however, the majority of the students did not give permission for the researcher to interview their teachers or representatives from other agencies involved in their transition process. This limited access to information presented a significant obstacle to conduct a case study per each of the students. Therefore the researcher was confronted with the need to change the design of this study from a case study to a phenomenological design where the phenomenon being studied is self-determination.

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures used to obtain the result for this investigation. A description of each one of the participating students has also

been included. The purpose is to introduce each participant to the reader by giving a descriptive picture of each student showcased in this study.

### *Rationale for Design*

The rationale to use qualitative research methods was guided by the literature review. Based on what the literature in research methods recommends, an interactive phenomenology design for this study was determined to be the most appropriate approach. The interactive aspect facilitated communication with the participants who were interviewed in a semistructured, relaxed, amicable, and comfortable environment (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This process facilitated the researcher collecting ample data (McMillan & Schumacher) by listening to the students describe in their own words (written or spoken ) stories of their everyday life experiences as they make decisions. These descriptions were a significant part of the data that was analyzed (Van Manen, 1990).

### *Research Questions*

The primary research question in this study is:

What role does self-determination play in the transition from school to work for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background?

To help answer the primary research question, subquestions targeting the four ecological influences identified by the Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) have been formulated. The subquestions are as follows:

*Targeting Microsystem Influences*—The school, religious institutions, peer groups, and the family .

- What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background as they are being prepared to exit the school system to enter the work force?
- Do they see a connection between what happens every day at school with what is important to them?
- How does their everyday interaction with their families and communities influence their preparation for work after high school?
- How involved are they in their transition planning process? (what is the nature of how others respond/read to their voice preferences? Their involvement?)

*Targeting Mesosystem Influences*—the interactions between the student’s home, school, vocational counselor from the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), possible employer, and other agencies who are part of the student’s transition team.

- What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background during the multiagency collaborative transition planning process as they get prepared for employment?
- How do they feel about what their families and these agencies (DRS counselor) are planning for their transition outcomes?
- How pleased are they with the choices and opportunities that are given to them as preparation for employment?

- How does their cultural background (religion, family values, and cultural traditions) impact the interaction between their school, their family, and the multiple agencies involved in the student's transition planning?

*Targeting Exosystem Influences*—The interaction between the student and their parents' work place, school administration/county (policies and procedures), and DRS, etc.

- What is the impact of the policies and procedures of the schools, county, and employment related agencies in the transition process of Hispanic students with disabilities?
- How well informed are these students and their families about the policies and procedures that affect/influence their transition?
- How are the schools' and agencies' (DRS) policies supporting these students' personal choices, as well as their strengths and challenges during their preparation for work after high school?
- What is the impact of these students' parents working status in how these students make decisions, plan, and follow-up on the choices they make for their future job/employment?

*Targeting Macrosystem Influences*—The interaction with the larger cultural context which influences all the other systems. This will include cultural values, political philosophies, and social conditions.

- What are the cultural (religion, family values, customs, and traditions) implications for Hispanic students in their transition?

- How the current status (as minorities) in the U.S. of these students influences their school preparation to work?
- How the religion and or family values of these students influences their transition?
- How (if at all) the acculturation/assimilation of these students into American culture (social system) has influenced how they decide, plan, and follow-up on their career/employment choices for the future?

## *PARTICIPANTS*

A total of 10 participants were identified for this study. Six of them met the criteria for participation and consistently participated throughout the study. Table 2 showcases each participating students' demographics and how they met the criteria for participation in the study.

The individuals who met the criteria for this research were identified by purposeful selection using a snowball sampling process. Individuals with speech and communication challenges were encouraged to use their preferred mode of communication or the assistive technology of their choice to communicate with the researcher.

## Student Profiles

### *Introduction*

The six students who collaborated throughout the entire course of this study are described in this section. The researcher included a profile of each student to capture the

**Table 2. Students' Demographics**

Name	Age	Sex	Disability	Years in U. S.	Job/Work/Education Status	Country of Heritage	Residence in Virginia
Julio	21	M	Dyslexia	21	In College	Cuba	Northern Virginia
Gabriela	23	F	ADHD	23	Graduated from college waiting to enter medical school	Cuba	South East Virginia
Amelia	23	F	Dyslexia	23	Masters Program	P. Rico	South East Virginia
Sebastian	20	M	MR	19	In high school	Mexico	Central Virginia
Mario	20	M	Down Syndrome	19	Recently graduated from high school and not employed	Salvador	Northern Virginia
José	22	M	Autism	20	Attending junior college and employed	Costa Rica	South West Virginia

essence of the information gathered for this study. These profiles showcase the voices of the participants as they shared comments about their lives that added richness to the findings of this study. The profiles are divided into three sections: (a) social and demographic history, (b) educational and transition history and (c) self-determination. In these profiles and throughout this manuscript, the researcher assigned fictitious names to each student to protect their privacy and to protect student researcher confidentiality.

### *Julio*

#### *Social and Demographic History.*

Julio is a very charming 21-year-old young man born in New York City. He is currently living and attending his 2<sup>nd</sup> year of college in Northern Virginia. His Hispanic background comes from his mother's side of the family. His mother was born in Cuba but

moved to the United States when she was a teenager and they all became American citizens. According to Julio's mother, she came to the United States with her parents when they were exiled from their country in pursuit of freedom and opportunities. She stresses that her parents desired to give her the opportunity to grow and have a future in a free country and to give her a good life and an opportunity for a solid education. His father is Irish-American and, according to Julio, his father has embraced the Hispanic culture as if it was his own. The dominant language spoken in his home is English, but everyone, including his father, is biliterate in both English and Spanish. Julio's parents are both highly educated and very prominent members of their community.

Julio works as a bartender at the local college bar to help pay for his expenses. He appears to be very aware of his strengths which he believes he inherited from his maternal grandfather and mother. He is also very aware of the challenges he faces and he feels that his family and extended family are his main sources of support to overcome any and all obstacles. He shared: "I believe that I will excel in life because there are a lot of people in my family supporting me who will always be there for me to help me succeed...we're very close knit and very persistent in helping each other." He explained that in his culture, "you're not alone... it's not even your family, it's your culture...we tend to help each other with school, work, life...you always feel like there is a natural support system built in when you connect with another Hispanic, you have that language and it just feels like an extended member of your family."

Julio is very proud of both his American citizenship as well as of his Hispanic heritage. In his reflection on his Hispanic heritage, he shared: I'm a very, very

determined person, and it's basically from my Latin heritage...my grandfather and my mother.”

*Educational and Transition History.*

Julio was diagnosed with a learning disability (Dyslexia) when he was in elementary school. After attending public school for a few years, out of frustration, his parents moved him to a private school for children with LD. When it was time to enter middle school, he went to a public school, but eventually his parents transferred him back to private school because they felt Julio was not making progress. Julio attended and completed high school at a private school where his transition process started. The documents that were available for review show that Julio's transition plan was centered on developing strategies to teach Julio how to work with his LD. Few or limited opportunities were provided for Julio to explore his career choices. The documents show that Julio and his parents were part of the transition plan, but there is no apparent participation from the Department of Rehabilitation Services or any other outside transition agency. Julio started college guided by his parents and the school counselor. His parents say that they received very little assistance and Julio shared that he did not feel comfortable with the guidance and supports he received from school because it never felt as if the school had his best interests at heart. Now in college, Julio receives accommodations for his disability, but often he shies away from those support services because he still can feel the stigma of “not being the same or as good” as others.

*Self-Determination.*

Julio's final overall score after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked him as having high level self-determination skills. His high level of self-determination was also evident through the rest of the information gathered about him and from him. During the interviews and during the observations, Julio was very assertive. During the interview, he stated that he made his decisions on his own but that he also always consulted with his parents and that he always tried to follow their advice, especially his mother's. He said his mother helped him identify his strengths and made him understand how important it was for him to focus his energy on planning for a future where he could use his strengths.

Julio believed his Spanish background had a strong positive impact on how he makes choices to accomplish what he sets out to achieve. He considered the most important values to include were determination to accomplish goals in life, high expectations for everyone, responsibility for his family and others, and the value of education. He explained how education was a priority for his family and that even with someone like him who is challenged to learn, they maintained the confidence that there will be a way in which he can overcome his challenges. He said: "My family is intense and very determined when it comes to education...we have to have an education—it is not a choice—it is a responsibility."

He also pointed out how the high expectations his family has of him have helped him build his confidence. In his words: "This confidence is a big factor in determining who I am... I'm very determined and it's basically from the Latin heritage side of my

family, without a doubt.” He explained that the fact that his family was assertive and talkative has helped him learn not to be inhibited, to talk to people, to ask for help, or to help them, and that has helped him develop a network of support at school and the community. When discussing how his family tradition of supporting others impacts how he accomplishes his goals, he explained: “...knowing that my own family and my extended family are behind me to support me at all times, in whatever I want or need to do, especially when life gets tough, that’s one of the biggest things that has always helped me get through everything...I know that I’m not alone.”

### *Gabriela*

#### *Social and Demographic History.*

Gabriela is a 23-year-old energetic and eloquent young lady. She was born in Brooklyn, New York. She went to school in Virginia Beach and is currently living there. Her mother is from Cuba and her father is from the United States. The dominant language spoken in her home is English, but everyone, including her father, is bilingual in both English and Spanish. Gabriela shared that she is very proud of her mother because her mother came to the United States without speaking English and without financial resources, and she managed to learn the language and work to pay for her education. Gabriela recently graduated from college with a major in Spanish and currently works at a free clinic. Since she is bilingual, she takes pride in helping Hispanic patients. Gabriela’s career aspiration is to become a medical doctor, like her mother, and help families at risk. She is very proud of her Hispanic heritage and feels she can make a contribution to the Hispanic community through health care because she understands and

has very strong ties to the Hispanic community. Gabriela believes her Hispanic background has had a positive impact in her life. She described how her family values, being bilingual, and having a special connection with other Hispanics, have facilitated many of the opportunities to help achieve some of her school and/or career goals.

*Educational and Transition History.*

Gabriela was diagnosed with a learning disability (ADHA) when she was in middle school. Soon after she received the diagnosis of ADHD, her parents enrolled her in an all girls private school. Gabriela shared that her school taught her a lot of structure and discipline to meet her educational and behavioral goals. According to Gabriela, she was given a lot of opportunities to try new things and to take leadership roles in the community. The documents show that Gabriela and her mother worked with the guidance counselor in planning for transition from school to college and work experience. However, there is no apparent participation from any other outside transition related agency. Gabriela shared that her education and transition had always been mainly influenced by her parents and with very little school guidance. She felt that her family had her best interests at heart and the professional experience to provide her with sound advice as opposed to the school where, though she was pleasant with the support she received, sometimes she felt they did not understand her as well.

*Self-determination.*

Gabriela's final scores after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked her as having high level of self-determination skills. Her high level of self-determination was also evident through the rest of the

information gathered about her through the review of her documents and her answers to the interview questions.

Gabriela shared that she was always self-directed about career or jobs and she described her self-determination as being grounded in her internal competitiveness with herself. She uses her hyperactivity to challenge herself to complete the tasks she needs to complete, but she always made sure to run her ideas by her parents before making her final decisions. She ultimately believes her self-determination skills are directly influenced by her culture. She explained: “everyone in my family is very driven, and are achievers...if the opportunity is there, they get it done.”

Gabriela’s self-determination was summed up by her mother with the following statement: “My daughter is very determined and ambitious...she might get influenced by her peers because she is very competitive, but then she runs it by her family.” Further she explains how “Gabriela bounces her ideas off of her parents; and friends of the family who are also in positions of power, and/or people who have succeeded in their careers. After that she writes her own plans, which she learned from us.”

## *Amelia*

### *Social and Demographic History.*

Amelia is a pleasant and assertive 23-year-old young lady. She was born in New York City but moved with her mother and sisters to Northern Virginia during her last year of middle school. Her Hispanic background is from her father’s side, a native of Puerto Rico. Amelia’s mother, a social worker, shared that even though she is American, she has embraced the Hispanic culture as her own. In spite of the family’s efforts to

maintain a strong tie to the Hispanic culture, the only language spoken at home is English. On the other hand, she believes that their efforts to stay connected to the Hispanic traditions have enabled Amelia to identify herself and grow up both as an American and a Hispanic person. In her words; “I think Amelia has a more rounded education than some other Hispanic youngsters because she grew up exposed to both cultures...she has been able to benefit from the strengths her two cultures have to offer.”

*Educational and Transition History.*

Amelia was diagnosed with a learning disability (Dyslexia) when she was in middle school. She completed her high school in Fairfax County where she received special education services until her sophomore year. Amelia explains that the support helped her overcome most of her academic and behavioral challenges, and, as a result, the support services she received were discontinued and deemed no longer necessary. Amelia’s mother shared that after the school discontinued the support services, Amelia’s grades deteriorated in her last 2 years of high school. Nevertheless, she moved on to college, and after several years of struggling, she finished her Bachelor’s degree. Currently, Amelia is anxiously waiting to start a Masters in Education in the Fall.

Neither Amelia nor her mother remembers receiving a lot of support from her guidance counselor in preparation to exiting high school. However, they recall that Amelia was given the opportunity to teach as a work experience, and she fell in love with ‘teaching.’ She shared that aside from that experience, she received most of the transition support from her mother and extended family. They traveled to several colleges, helped

her in filling out college applications, and helped her to learn how to get around campus. She made the comment that she felt she could have not done it without her family.

Amelia's last comments about her cultural background and the impact on her future career were stated as follows: "I think the majority of Hispanic families like mine are very close. They're very supportive of each other. And that is something that I would like to be able to give to my classroom. I want to build a community where we're all together, where we're one. Growing up I've always felt that I had a solid base; regardless if I'm wrong or if I act like an idiot, I have people that will care for me. And I think that is the part of my upbringing that is the most significant."

*Self-Determination.*

Amelia's final overall score after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked her as having the highest level of self-determination skills among all the students in this study. Her high level of self-determination was also clearly reflected in the other information gathered throughout the study.

She was very direct about stating her career goals: "I know exactly what I want. I know exactly where I want to be, and the career path I want to take." She has been making plans to be a school teacher since she was in middle school. She is planning to work in a positive environment with people that are supportive and who want to work collaboratively to improve the quality of life of underprivileged and at-risk students.

Amelia shared that to make her decisions, she consulted with her family, friends, and teachers. She explained that after listening to their perspectives, she evaluated their

advice and, most of the time, she made the final decisions based on the recommendations they gave her. However, she ended by saying that she made her final decisions based on how their advice aligned with her goals for her future.

She identified her family upbringing as the primary influence in making her career choices and, secondly, the opportunity that she had while in high school to observe a classroom at a Title I school. She explained: “See, I’ve been very fortunate and lucky in my life, and I’d like to be able to give someone that, too, that they don’t have.”

Amelia is determined to work with children who need positive role models and where she can help to build their self-esteem. She explained that she wanted a job where she could care for others through teaching. In her words: “I want to teach in a classroom where my students and I are one big family.”

### *Sebastian*

#### *Social and Demography History.*

Sebastian is a 19-year-old Mexican-American young man who at first seemed very shy and a bit unfriendly, but after the initial introduction, he displayed a very assertive and pleasant disposition. Sab was born in Mexico, but he has lived in the United States since he was 6 months old. He lives in central Virginia with his mother, step father, and five siblings, however, neither Sebastian nor his mother has legal status in the U.S. His mother and stepfather do not speak English; consequently, the dominant language spoken at home is Spanish, although Sab and his siblings are also fluent in English. In the words of Sebastian’s mother “he does everything according to his new culture...he considers himself an American.” The information gathered from the

interview with the family shows that there is very little expectation for what Sebastian will be able to do on his own, and there is no confidence in his capabilities to make good decisions for an independent life. Sebastian shared with the researcher his preference for a future that includes a job and independent living. According to Sebastian, no one listens to him and he often has to yell to be heard but is then ignored anyway.

*Educational and Transition History.*

Sebastian has spina bifida and mild mental retardation. He uses a wheel chair which he independently propels in most situations. His present level of performance described him as a bilingual student with emergent independent skills. His challenges were described as cognitive impairment, information processing deficits, and very low reading and writing skills.

Vocationally he was participating two times per week in a Work Experience Program. His transition goals were to have job sampling experiences at either school or the community or both if possible and to increase his self-help skills. The school and the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) were identified as having been jointly responsible for facilitating the job sampling opportunities. The self-help skills were to be taught and supervised at school by his home room teacher.

His IEP showed that the student and his family had signed a release form waiving their right to participate in the drafting of the student's transition plan. The documents from school that the family shared with the researcher were all in English, and the mother said that she had "no clue" as to what they were all about. These documents show a team of professionals (teacher, DRS, and services related representatives) working with Sab

helping him to achieve transition goals, but without any participation from him or his family. The family seemed to be very acceptant of leaving the leadership of the transition planning process and implementation entirely to the school.

*Self-Determination.*

Sebastian's overall scores after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked him as having the lowest level of self-determination skills among all the students in the study. Sebastian did not recall ever making decisions about his future or discussing plans for the future with his parents. In his words: "I never talk about any of those things with them."

The factors that he took into consideration about possible work or career options were based on what he saw when he went out in the community outings with his teacher. He was influenced only by his experiences at school and by the choices his teachers gave him. **Sab** talked about what he wanted for a job in the future, but he didn't know how to make plans to accomplish his goal. He shared with the researcher his dream of becoming a shoe salesman and helping people buy comfortable shoes. But he never shared his ideas with anybody because he was accustomed to following people's advice.

He commented with displeasure that his family had the tradition of living all together in the same household because it limited the attention he could get from his parents. He further explained that he had seven siblings, and in his house, even if he tries to talk about his plans for the future, his voice was generally ignored. Sebastian declared that he never followed up on anything on his own and he always had someone to remind him at all times, all his life. When asked if in the past he had tried to participate in

following up on his own goals, he made a few comments which can be summarized by the following statement: “No, I never thought I should or could follow up on things by myself.” When asked if he would like to take a more active role leading his school and transition plans his reply was: “sure, but I might not remember what I have to do.”

### *Mario*

#### *Social and Demographic History.*

Mario is 19 years old, a very shy young man with Down syndrome who lives in Northern Virginia with his mother. His father and sisters live in Manassas where he was actually born. Both of Mario’s parents are originally from El Salvador, but they have lived in northern Virginia for over 20 years. The language spoken at home is Spanish, although Mario and his siblings are also fluent in English. Mario’s mother seems very disoriented about his future. She had no idea of where, when, or how Mario will be able to get a job or receive job training and supports. She seems to be very nervous about his future.

Mario’s mother also stated that he has talked about wanting to be independent and get a job in the future, but she does not think that will be a possibility. Mario’s dream for his future is in his words: “I want to work in Manassas, that’s where my dad lives and I can walk to places. I don’t want to have to wait for people to take me out.” He also shared that he feels American because he was born in the USA and that is where he has spent all his life, but that he also identifies strongly with his cultural background. In his words: “I go back and forth between cultures.” However, he feels that his cultural background was a negative influence in his life because people looked at him differently.

*Educational and Transition History.*

Mario has Down Syndrome and he was identified at school as having mild mental retardation. He recently graduated from high school with a special diploma and according to his comments, “he is now taking a break.” He shared that at school he had participated in a few work experiences, but that his favorite work experience was working at McDonald’s. Mario did not release permission to speak to anyone related to his school transition. Mario’s comment was “I don’t like them.” When questioned as to his reasons, he refused to comment.

Mario’s mother has not kept any papers from school because she said “All the papers are in English and I don’t know what they say...my daughters, they speak English but they don’t help me.” Mario shared that his sisters are very supportive of him in the community and advocate for him to his mother to let him go out in the community with them. However, in his words, “they don’t help with school stuff.” The overall family expectation for Mario’s future appears to be very limited. Mario’s mother shared that it was not because she didn’t think he could one day work, but it was because she had no idea of how to go help him get and maintain a job.

*Self-Determination.*

Mario’s overall scores after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked him as having average to low level of self-determination skills. His level of self-determination skills as identified by the scoring from the Scale is also reflected in the other information gathered throughout the study.

When discussing how he made his decisions, Mario shared that he consulted only with his family and that he always followed his mother's decisions. He shared that he hardly ever made any decisions, much less about work. Sometimes when he disagreed with his mother choices, he tried to gain his sister's support to try to pursue his mother to change her mind.

Mario could not identify what factors he took into consideration when making decisions about a career/job or what influenced them because he had not yet made any plans for their future. Mario shared that he had just graduated and was not at all thinking about his future. In his words "I am on a break." He further explained that he really never thought he needed to make plans for his future; therefore, he never talked about it with anyone. He shared "My mom makes the decisions for me." His mother reflected on the subject of factors her son considered when making decisions, but she could not recall Mario ever making any decisions about anything. She insisted that she always made decisions for him. When asked if he ever made comments about school or work she said: "He might express that he does not like going to school, but never explains his reasons."

Mario could not share specific details about how he makes plans, about where he wants to work, or who he wanted to work with, or for whom. He insisted that he was on a break and that he didn't see the need to make plans for the future. As the conversation progressed, he moved on to hypothetically explaining his preference to work at a place close by his house where he could walk to and not have to depend so much on his mother or sisters.

Mario stated that he does not follow up with anything. His mother follows up with everything for him, and that no one has ever expected him to follow up with anything related to school or work. He said: “I mainly wait to see what others are going to tell me to do””

### *José*

#### *Social and Demographic History.*

José is a 22-year-old young man with a very inquisitive and warm personality. He was born in Mexico and moved to the U.S with his parents when he was 2 years old. He currently lives and works in Roanoke, Virginia. His mother is from Costa Rica and his father is from the U.S. José’s mother shared that even though her husband is not from a Hispanic background, he embraced the Hispanic culture as if it were his own including becoming fluent in Spanish. She reported that in their home environment they speak Spanglish (a combination of both English and Spanish) and that both her son and daughter feel very comfortable with both languages. Their family culture is a combination of both cultures because their family values are not necessarily based on either culture or religion. Their family culture does not dwell on deficits but instead on having very high expectations for everyone. In her own words: “in our family, we have high expectations for both of the children... José does not think less of having high expectations for himself.”

*Educational and Transition History.*

José has autism with severe challenges in verbal communication. He has mastered communication, both in English and Spanish, through assistive technology. He was diagnosed when he was attending elementary school in northern Virginia, and since then he received special education services all through high school. José was very active in directing his IEP team, and guided by his desires, he graduated with a regular diploma. His transition documents (and also per his mother's comments) and transition plans were and continue to be guided by his dreams, goals, and objectives as created through a PATH process (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope). José appears to have a very large and cohesive group of support. Among his support team are friends, family, teachers, vocational counselors, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), and university professors. In José's words: "my family values are a great influence in my life. My career choices will be about me first, tradition and culture second."

*Self-Determination.*

José's final overall scores after taking the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) ranked him as having high level of self-determination skills. His high level of self-determination was also evident through the rest of the information gathered about him and from him.

José explained that he knew he needed to consult with his family, friends, and teachers, but that he ultimately made his own decisions. He said that when considering possibilities for work or career, he is always influenced by family and friends.

Furthermore, he explained that even though he is not sure of what he wants to do yet, when he does, it will be something he feels he can do well.

José did not know yet what he wanted to do or where he wanted to work specifically, but he was very sure about how he wanted to work. He shared that whatever he did, he needed to be good at it. And that he was sure he needed to try a lot of options and get lots of support until he could master whichever task he set himself to achieve. His decisions were influenced by his knowledge of his strengths and challenges and the advice and support he gets from his support team. He also shared that he is influenced by his family's expectations of him.

José believed his Spanish background has a positive impact in his life. He highlighted his family values as an asset to help him achieve his school and/or career goals. José identified two of his family values that have an impact in how he accomplishes his goals: (a) unconditional family support, and (b) high expectations for everyone. Unconditional support was explained by him to the researcher by expressing that his family was his main source of support for everything in his life, and that they were always ready to support him on his decisions and accepting of his choices. His family had high expectations for everyone without distinctions between his sister, him, or even his parents themselves.

### *Settings*

The interviews and the observations were conducted at the students' homes, schools, or in the community. The settings varied depending on the preference of the interviewee. In accordance with a qualitative methodology approach, interviews and

observations can be conducted in settings where the participants will feel more comfortable and secure (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The majority of the students selected to be interviewed at their homes where they expressed that they felt more comfortable and supported. Since the majority of the students were working, the researcher was able to observe them at their work place. There were two students who were not working and the researcher was able to observe them at family events (Table #3).

**Table 3. Observations and Interviews Settings**

Students	Observation	Interviews	Parents' interviews	Agencies Representatives interviews
Julio	Work place	Home	Home	
Gabriela	Work place	Home	Home	
Amelia	Work place	Restaurant	Work place	
Sebastian	Family event	Home	Home	School
Mario	Neighborhood party	Home	Home	
José	Work place	Home	Work place	Work place

### *Methods*

The qualitative method that was used to collect the experiences of the students participating in this study was through *document analysis*: (a) scores from the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), and (b) other documents

related to the students transition process; *interviews*: students, parents, and other authorized sources, and *observation* of participants at work place and family events. In order to assure the accuracy of interpretations, cross examination, member checking, and triangulation methods (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) were used to cross validate data collected and the theoretical schemes.

#### *Document Analysis.*

In the tradition of other qualitative research studies, the researcher in this study analyzed several documents. Researchers suggest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) that the information collected through the process of analyzing documents related to the subject can add richness to the information that has already been gathered by other means. Also, reviewing and gathering information from documents is also useful for the purpose of triangulation (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993).

#### *Interviews.*

Following the recommendations of McMillan & Schumacher (2006) and that of other cross-cultural researchers (Blakely, 1982; Rueda et al., 2005), the interview protocol primarily followed a semistructured format. Due to the cultural nature of this study, elements of an innovative interviewing style, most commonly used with Hispanic population, called “la platica” or social conversations, were used as an initial strategy to engage the interviewees in a trusting and culturally sensitive environment (Moll, Rueda, Reza, Herrera, & Vasquez, 1976). In this style of interaction, “the interviewer willingly engages in discussions with the participants about issues not directly related to the research project and proceeds at the pace and response sequence of the respondents”

(Rueda et al., 2005, p. 405). This social conversations approach facilitated the introduction of the semistructured interview protocol.

In this study, a series of open-ended questions were designed in an interview protocol format to elicit in-depth answers for the primary research questions (Appendixes A, C, and E in English; B and D in Spanish). To validate the interview questions, a panel of experts, including a young adult with a disability, and professionals in the field of special education, transition, and Hispanic cultures, was consulted to ensure that all aspects of self-determination and cultural relevance were covered in the interviews.

The panel of experts used a structural process to design the interview protocol. In preparation for the task all panel members studied the goals and objectives of the study. Once they became familiar with researcher questions, they identified the areas where the researcher would need to obtain in-depth information from the participants. Then they studied the Arc's Self-Determination Scale and identified the areas of the Scale (autonomy, psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and self-realization) which could potentially help answer the research questions. During this process, they identified the sections of the Scale that were not conducive to retrieving in-depth information from the participants, and using these sections as a baseline, the panel members created a series of open-ended questions.

Five major questions, plus probing questions, were generated targeting the four major characteristics of Self-Determination. Additionally, due to the cultural nature of this study, the panel of experts also included open-ended questions that would facilitate the interviewee to openly talk about their cultural influences while answering the

interviewer's questions. After the initial draft was created, two tests were conducted. First, the interview protocol was shared with two professional experts in conducting assessments and interviews with young adults with disabilities. After their review, their recommendations to improve the interview protocol were incorporated to document and create a second draft. Lastly, the interview protocol was administered to two adults with disabilities to ensure that the language and procedures were appropriate for the targeted audience.

The questions that were based on the four major categories of the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995): autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization are the following:

1. Tell me how you make your decisions about what career/job you want to be prepared to do as an adult? (*autonomy, psychological empowerment*) Give an example.
  - a. *Possible probes/rephrases*: Do you consult with others, follow advice of others, family members, professionals?
2. Tell me what factors do you take into consideration when making decisions about your career/job, what influences you? (*Psychological empowerment*). Give me an example.
  - a. *Possible probes/rephrases*: Do you take into consideration your family's input, your own beliefs and desires, cultural expectations?

3. Tell me how do you make plans about where you want to work, how you want to work, and/or who you want to work with, what influences you? (*autonomy, psychological empowerment, self-realization*) Give an example.
  - a. *Possible probes/rephrases:* How do you make plans for where you are going, what you are going to do in the weekend, etc?
4. Tell me how do you follow-up on your decisions about work-related training and responsibilities? (*Self-regulation*). Give an example.
  - a. *Possible probes/rephrases:* Do you follow up independently, with help from friends or family members, technology?
5. Tell me how does your Hispanic background (religion, language spoken at home, family values, cultural and family traditions) impact your efforts to accomplish what you set out to achieve? (*Psychological empowerment, self-realization*). Give me an example of how it helps, facilitates, or impedes.
  - a. *Possible probes/rephrases:* Would you be selecting career choices that your family considers a tradition in your family/culture?

Table 4 illustrates the relationship between the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) and the questions asked in the interviews conducted in this study.

The second instrument that was used to gather data is the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) itself (Appendixes Q and R). The Scale was administered to all the young adults participating in this study. The answers to the items on this instrument were scored according to the Scale's procedural guidelines to construct a final score. The results determined each participant's level of self-determination

**Table 4. Relationship between the Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995)**

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What role does self-determination play in the transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background?

Interview Questions	Arc's Self-Determination Scale		
	Section Number	Question ID Number	
1. How do you make your decisions about your future career/job? Give an example.	1	Autonomy	1A and 1D (i.e., consult with others, follow advice of others, family members, professionals)
	3	Psychological empowerment	
2. What factors do you take into consideration when making decisions for your future career/job? Give me an example.	3	Psychological empowerment	4-44, 46, 47, 57 (i.e., family input, their own beliefs and desires, cultural expectations)
3. How do you make plans about where you want to work, how you want to work, and/or who do you want to work with? Give an example.	1	Autonomy	1B and 1C (i.e., on their own, with help from family, help from friends)
	3	Psychological empowerment	
4. How do you follow-up on your decisions about work related training and responsibilities? Give me an example.	2	Self-regulation	2A (i.e., independently, with help from friends or family members, technology)
5. How does your Hispanic background impact your effort to accomplish what you set out to achieve? Give an example of how it helps, facilitates or impedes.	3	Psychological empowerment	4-67, 68, 69 (i.e., cultural and religious beliefs, hierarchy of power within the family structure, and obedience to parental instructions, their role and power or lack thereof in a foreign society)
	4	Self-realization	

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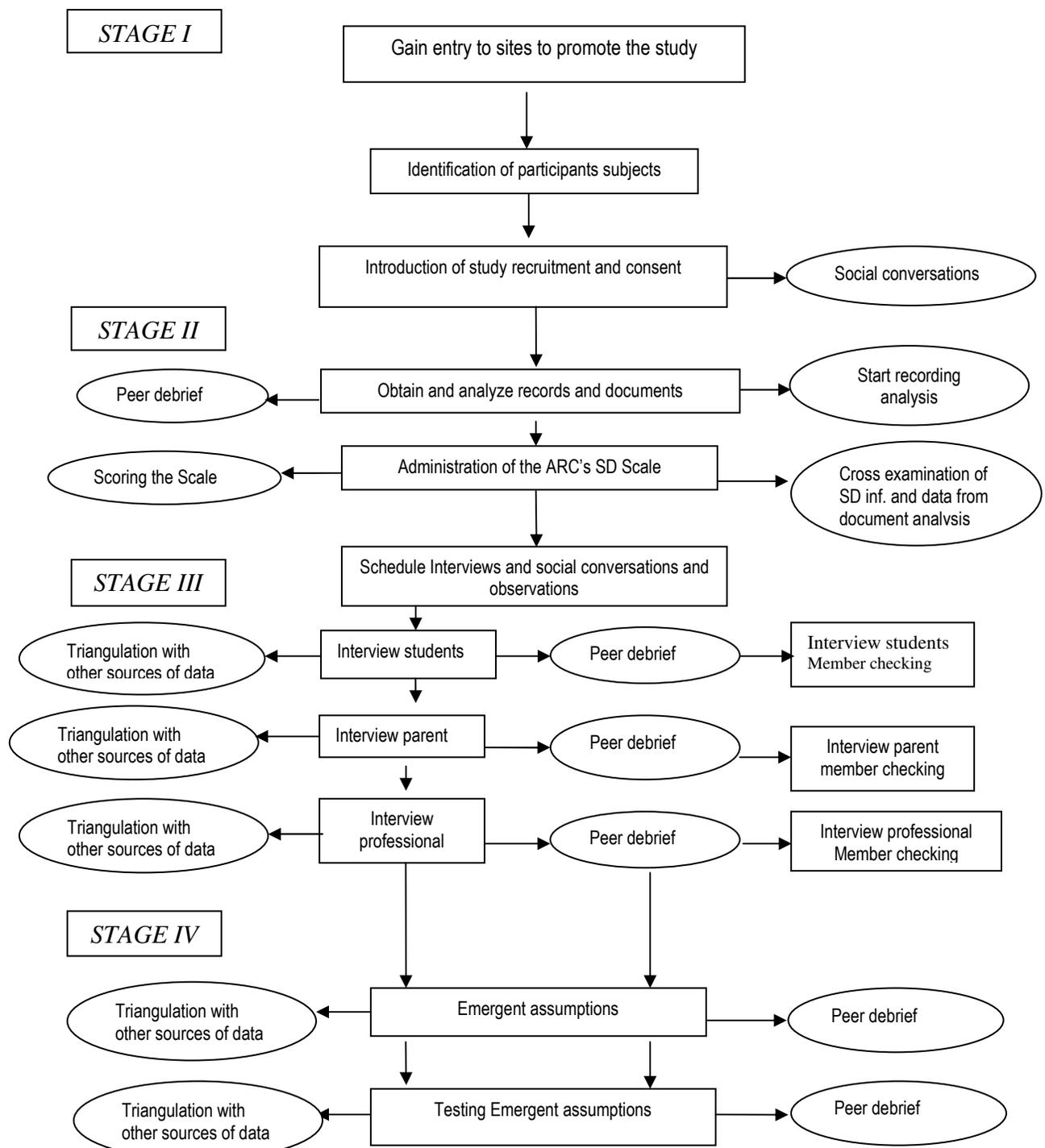
as gauged by the Arc's Self-determination Scale (Wehmeyer). The information gathered per participant from the analyses of these documents provided significant data for triangulation purposes during the data analysis process.

#### *Observations.*

This study included observations of participants as another source of data. This included observing participants and their behavior, interaction with their parents, and professionals they engage in activities with that were part of their transition process; for instance, work related to their transition. Professionals who were interviewed with consent from the participant were the student's vocational counselor from the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the teacher of the student who is still attending school. Data collected through this mode was collected in a systematic and unobtrusive manner (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Details of the social interactions between the researcher, participants, and others in the settings during these observations were also documented for triangulation purposes.

#### *Procedures.*

A conceptual design for the procedures of this study was created by the researcher to set structure to the study. The conceptual design was subdivided into four major stages. Each stage fed into the next one to facilitate an orderly and logical flow for the information as it was being gathered and simultaneously analyzed. (See Table 5 for a visual representation of the conceptual design). This design was not executed in a strictly linear process. In practice the researcher had to continuously revisit the different stages in order to clarify questions and/or themes that emerged throughout the process. Each step

**Table 5. Conceptual Design of the Study**

provided an opportunity to revisit the earlier steps. The purpose of this constant rechecking was to cross-examine the data and the findings to ensure that all the leads had been followed.

## STAGE I - Data Collection and Management Procedures

### *Dissemination of Information and Recruitment*

The dissemination of information and requests for recruitment was conducted as planned in the conceptual design of this study. The process started soon after the Virginia Commonwealth University's Internal Review Board approved the proposal on April 17, 2008. The researcher traveled throughout the state to disseminate information about the Disabilities, Virginia Young Leadership Forum, Partners in Policy Making of Virginia, the Red Cross, Parents' Resource Centers, Chesterfield County Hispanic Outreach Offices, the Governor's Latino Liaison Office, City of Richmond Hispanic Outreach Offices, the National Hispanic College Fund Organization, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services offices. Organizations specifically related to learning disabilities and developmental disabilities were also contacted through the state: the Autism Society of America, the Autism Council of Virginia, Autism Commonwealth Services, Down Syndrome Association, and the Systems Change Leadership. It was estimated that the information and recruitment sessions at these meetings took no longer than 15 to 20 minutes. Lastly, a person to person word-of-mouth dissemination of information was conducted throughout the community at large.

### *Identification of Participants*

After contacting the above mentioned organizations and by word of mouth, a snowball effect generated a list of possible participants. The researcher subsequently engaged in multiple social events with the Hispanic community in Virginia. Through social interactions and unstructured conversations about the study, the researcher gained the trust and respect of several Hispanic families. These families, in turn, became interested in the study and proceeded to help the researcher to find individuals they thought would meet the criteria to participate in the study. After the potential participants have been identified, the researcher contacted those individuals by phone or via email to set up meetings with them. These meetings were set up to further explain in more detail the process and procedures of the project, as well as specific details of their roles and responsibilities if they chose to participate in this research.

The participants for the study were of the age of majority, 18 to 23, consequently it was their prerogative to invite family members (parents, friends, siblings, or a responsible party) to attend the meetings with them. However, the researcher in all cases encouraged all individuals who had shown interest in participating in this study to invite a family member or friend who could assist them to reflect on their decision to be part of this research. Individuals who met the criteria for the study but who have someone else as their legal guardian were required to invite their legal guardian to the meeting and follow their advice to either participate or not in the study.

Approximately 16 students were initially identified who met the criteria for participation in the study. However, only 10 expressed interest in participating. From

these 10 students only 6 remained focused and committed to collaborating with the project.

### *Introduction of the Study to Potential Participants and Recruitment*

The researcher conducted all the recruitment and consent meetings. At all recruitment and consent meetings, the researcher requested that all the potential participants attend the meetings accompanied by someone who was able to serve as a witness and who supported them in making an informed decision to participate or not. At the meetings, the researcher explained in detail the project's process and procedures to the potential participants with the intent of requesting their participation. The initial meetings were conducted separately with each of the identified students and their families. Most of the students were from different parts of the state and they lived very distant from each other. The meeting place for each visit was decided upon based on the agreement reached between the researcher, each student, and/or their family members. All the meetings were conducted at a place where the participant felt comfortable and the environment was conducive to discussing the interview questions openly.

When appropriate, the potential participants were greeted by the researcher in Spanish and were also assured that the meetings could be conducted in Spanish if they felt it would help clarify the objective of the meeting. The researcher made sure to answer any questions about the consent form, the purpose of the study, description of the study, and their involvement in the project. To ensure human subject protection issues of possible risk and discomfort, the researcher also discussed benefits, costs, alternatives to participation, confidentiality, and the statement of voluntary participation and

withdrawal. Lastly, information for further inquiries and contact information were also left with all of the individuals who were interested in participating in the study and with their families or support persons.

As planned, all materials were available in both English and Spanish. At the beginning of each meeting, the researcher gave the students and their family members the option to select their language of choice for their interaction with the researcher. After the initial formalities and detailed explanations on the role the participant would be taking on as part of this study, the researcher allowed time for the families and the students to ask questions. The questions that arose from these sessions were mainly from the parents who did not have a legal status in the United States. Their main concern was confidentiality. The families with legal status were satisfied with the information they received from the researcher.

As a closing to the introduction and recruitment meetings, the researcher summarized the questions and answers discussed at the meetings to ensure that the individuals and their families were provided with a clear and comprehensive explanation of the study and the implications for participation. Three out of the six families requested information and interaction in Spanish versus English. The researcher, who is a native Hispanic and fluent in Spanish, conducted all the procedures in Spanish as well and in English.

### *Consent*

During these sessions, the researcher specifically explained to each participant and their family members that in order to participate, they needed to sign a consent form

(Appendixes G, I, K in English and Appendixes H, J in Spanish). As was done during the initial and recruitment meetings, the researcher gave the participants the option of conducting the meetings in either Spanish or English. Again, 3 participants and their families chose to discuss all details of consent in Spanish. It was explained to them that by signing the consent form, they were agreeing to participate in the study, as well as releasing permission for the researcher to possibly interview one of their parents, professionals they work with, or their siblings, etc. They were also informed that even after signing the consent form, if they wished to withdraw from participating in the study, they could do so at any time.

During these meetings the researcher gave the potential participants the option of signing the consent forms at that time or having the forms left with them and having to return at a later date to finalize their participation. In all cases, the consent forms were signed during the initial meeting and everyone was ready to start with the process. After the consent forms were signed and collected, the researcher gathered from the participants all the documents they could share related to their transition process. Also, the researcher confirmed to the participants and their parents that all the information they shared was to be kept confidential. Finally, during these initial meetings with each student, the researcher scheduled a time and place to administer the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), conduct interviews, and then follow up with the leads to investigate other possible sources of information.

## STAGE II - Data Collection: Documents Review

### *Collecting and Reviewing Documents*

Data collection started with the review of documents. The type of documents that were reviewed varied from student to student. However, in all cases these documents were either documents related to the participants' transition from high school to work and/or scores from the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995).

### *Documents Related to the Participants' Transition From High School to Work*

After the participants released permission to review their documents, all of their available records were collected and reviewed. To maintain structure during the review of these documents, the researcher designed a documents review protocol which targeted the recording of details pertinent to transition and self determination (Appendix N). The documents that were available for review came from various sources and were shared either by the student or the participating family member. The 3 students who were attending college didn't have any documents from their high schools. The documents available for review for these students were correspondence with their college advisors and their personal written plans/tones for their future. Two students had their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and transition documents, and one of them shared a PATH, which according to his mother was their transition guiding document. One student had only transition documents from México. Lastly, only 1 student did not have documents at home that could be reviewed. Coincidentally, this same student did not

grant permission for the researcher to access his high school transition files (See Table 6 for sources of information gathered from each of the students).

**Table 6. Transition Document Reviewed Per Student**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Documents</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Julio	Personal notes and e-mails with guidance counselor Diagnostic evaluation ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	Documents in English Dyslexia Scored high level of SD
Gabriela	Personal notes/goals and objectives Diagnostic evaluation ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	Documents in English ADHD Scored high level of SD
Amelia	Personal notes/goals and objectives Diagnostic evaluation ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	Documents in English Dyslexia Scored high level of SD
Sebastian	IEP  ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	Documents in English Orthopedic Impairment/MR Transition goals and work-prep DRS participation ARC of Self-Determination in both English and Spanish Scored low level of SD
Mario	Medical records with diagnostic evaluation  ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	MMR ARC of Self-Determination in both English and Spanish Scored low level of SD
José	IEP  PATH  ARC of Self-Determination Scale Score	IEP driven by PATH Autism Student lead IEP Transition plan/goal and objective for the future Goals targeted SD skills Active participation of outside agencies (DRS, CILS, University, advocates) Active job sampling Scored high level of SD

*Scores from the ARC of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995)*

Prior to conducting the interviews and observations, the researcher administered the Arc of Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995) to the 6 participating

young adults. The Scale was administered to each student in the language of preference of each student. Four selected English. Three students selected to take the test in Spanish even though they had participated during the meetings in English. One of the students began to take the test in English but often stopped to ask for clarification in Spanish. Five out of the six students felt the test was long and that Section 3, Psychological Empowerment, was very awkward to answer. The tests were initially scored by the researcher. All the scores were also cross-examined by the researcher in collaboration with a professional peer to ensure the reliability of the scores and to protect the validity of the results.

The final scores ranged from 1 student with very high level of SD with a total score of 93; 3 students with high levels of SD with scores between 83-84; 2 students with average-low levels of SD with scores of 59, and 1 student with a very low level of SD with a score of 48 (See Table 7).

**Table 7. Total Self-Determination Scores**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Domain Raw Scores</b>	<b>Norm Sample</b>	<b>Positive Scores %</b>	<b>SD-LEVEL</b>
Julio	124	94	84	High
Gabriela	124	94	84	High
Amelia	138	99	93	High
Sebastian	71	9	48	Low
Mario	87	26	59	Average-Low
José	123	94	83	High

## STAGE III - Data Collection: Interviews and Observations

### *Interviews*

The purpose of conducting in-depth semistructured interviews was a means to gain firsthand knowledge about the participants' experiences during their transition from school to work and the meaning they ascribed to those experiences. The interviews were structured into three rounds: (a) students, (b) parents or family member, and (c) agency representatives. Interviews were requested from all the students. Because all the participating students were of legal age, it was their prerogative to release permission for the researcher to interview a family member and either an agency representative, teacher, or job supervisor.

All the students elected their mothers as the family member to be interviewed, and only 3 of them released permission for the researcher to interview a teacher. None of them approved an interview with a job-related supervisor. The parents who were at the same location with their sons or daughters during the interview process were also interviewed the same day as the students. The parents that were not present during the student's interview were later contacted via telephones to request an appointment to meet to conduct an interview. All the mothers were interviewed. The researcher followed up with the lead to interview the three teachers with phone calls as well. Two of the teachers agreed and were interviewed, however, one of the teachers did not respond after two messages which were left in the process of 3 weeks.

The interviews were scheduled and conducted at the preferred time and place of each of the interviewees and in agreement with researcher. All students were encouraged by the researcher to have someone present during their interviews but only 3 of them followed those recommendations. The rest of the students preferred to speak to the researcher alone, and, all the parents except for one preferred that the researcher interview their sons and daughters alone. One of the students communicated with the researcher through typing. To protect the integrity of the information shared by this student, his facilitator stayed with the researcher and the student during all of their interaction (information sharing, signing consent form, interviews, and talking).

All the interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the interviewees. Six students were bilingual; 1 spoke only English and 1 spoke only Spanish. For the interviews 3 students chose to speak English, 1 spoke only Spanish and 3 spoke both languages, alternating back and forth between the two languages. Four mothers were fluent in both languages, 3 spoke only Spanish and 1 spoke only English. Four mothers were interviewed in English and 3 in Spanish. Each interview lasted an average of 45-60 minutes depending on the personality of the interviewee. All the interviews were audio taped and later transcribed, summarized, and debriefed with the interviewees (See Table 8).

The researcher used social conversations as a preamble to the interviews as a strategy to help the interviewees relax and to help create a trusting and socially comfortable environment between the researcher and the interviewee (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The social conversations led naturally into the semistructured

interviews. The interview protocol was used as a guide. In some cases, the researcher asked clarification questions to ensure the participants had the opportunity to reflect on

**Table 8. Interviews**

Student	Language used during the interview	Parent	Language used during the interview	School	Other
Julio	English	mother	English		
Gabriela	English	mother	English		
Amelia	English	mother	English		
Sebastian	English and Spanish	mother	Spanish	teacher	
Mario	English and Spanish	mother	Spanish		
José	English	mother	English		vocational counselor

the content of the information requested from them. In some cases, the researcher had to paraphrase the original question to help a particular student and/or their family member process their answers. At the beginning of all the interviews, the participants were informed that the conversations were being audio taped for the accuracy of the information. All the interviewees were also assured of confidentiality.

The researcher followed the structure of the interview protocol, but in some cases, other probing questions were asked to clarify the answers or to tap into another possible source of information. Simultaneous data analysis was conducted from the beginning of the data collection process, and triangulation started with data collected from documents. With the accumulation of information from the review documents and the interview data, the researcher was able to identify other areas for further questioning and triangulation. Examples of those questions were: What does self-determination mean to you? What

does your Hispanic heritage mean to you? Also, as a closing to the interviews, the participants were invited to make last minute comments or to direct questions to the researcher.

In all the interviews, but more specifically during the follow up interviews, the researcher used member checking strategies such as paraphrasing the participants' response to ensure that the researcher had captured the true essence of the participants' experiences. This process helped the researcher feel more confident with the integrity of the information that had been gathered. It also helped the researcher guard herself from spinning her own interpretation into the responses but instead ensure she was respecting the integrity of the messages communicated through the interviews.

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a certified bilingual transcriber. Even though the researcher is a native Spanish speaker, the interviews that were recorded either in Spanish or partially in Spanish were also reviewed by a certified Spanish translator/interpreter to protect and ensure the accuracy of the information provided by the interviewees. Transcriptions were conducted when possible immediately after the interviews were conducted. This strategy gave the researcher the opportunity to return to the interviewee quickly after the initial interview: (a) to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, (b) to ask follow-up questions that came up as a result of the reviewing the initial interview, (c) for the researcher to ask any additional probing question to add clarification to the interpretation of the information previously gathered, and, lastly, (d) to give the opportunity for the interviewee to add any last minute comments they liked to contribute. As another strategy for triangulation, the researcher took detailed notes of the

participants' behaviors, mannerisms and expressions during the interviews. The researcher was also able to capture many of the participants' responses in her notes and used these notes to compare them to the transcription of the interviews.

Follow up interviews for member checking purposes were mostly conducted via telephone. Planning and agreeing upon a second meeting time was met with resistance by the majority of the participants. The most common reasons given for not being able to set second meetings were lack of free time and conflicting working schedules.

During the member checking process, all participants were debriefed on the summary of the transcriptions generated from their interview sessions. In a few cases, the participants were made aware of apparent discrepancies during the cross-examination of the data collected from the other sources (observation data, case notes, and the document review notes) with the answers from the interviews. When necessary, participants were asked to clarify some of the information. Lastly, all participants were given the opportunity to add any last minute information they wanted to contribute to the study.

### *Observations*

The purpose of conducting observations was a means to gain knowledge about the participants' experiences as they interacted with others in their environment. The focus of the observations was to document, as observed, the roles of the participants in their own environment as they exercised their self-determination skills or lack thereof. The information gathered from these observations was also documented for triangulation purposes.

Participants' observations were defined for this study as nonparticipatory observations. This strategy allowed for the researcher to fully observe the students' behavior while either at school, work, or community activity without getting distracted by interacting with the student. It also helped the researcher observe the students in their own environment as they interacted with others without being pressured by the presence and interaction of the researcher. The data collected during the observations was systematically collected. The observations were charted in a systematic and unobtrusive manner (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). To accomplish this task, the researcher created a data collection form (See Appendix O) which targeted the observation of 13 self-determination skills categories and simultaneously categorized into the four ecological systems of the Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Behavioral data was also documented by the researcher during the interviews. These were documented as observations correlated with their behavior as they responded to the interview questions and their interaction with the researcher. These observations were documented systematically and kept in a journal throughout this research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Notes and records that were maintained in this journal were detailed accounts of all observations, interview notes, emergent themes, body language, and nonverbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of the data, hunches, and questions that were raised from the interviews, and observations (Thoma, Rogan & Baker, 2001). Also, as recommended by Thoma et al., the researcher logged in personal biases in this journal. All this data was also used for triangulation purposes.

The nonparticipatory observations were conducted at different locations as agreed upon with each student. Each of the observations lasted between 2-3 hours. Four students were observed at their job site. Two students, Julio and Amelia, were observed interacting with customers, co-workers, and supervisors at the restaurants where they work as bartenders. They were also observed interacting with their friends and siblings as they arrived at their work site and also when they left. Gabriela was observed interacting with patients and her supervisor at the clinic where she works as an assistant. And José was observed working and interacting with his vocational counselor and other clerks at the retail store where he is doing job sampling learning to stock merchandise.

The other 2 students were observed during activities in the community. Sebastian was observed during a large family gathering interacting with his parents, six siblings, five cousins, and several friends of the family. Lastly, Mario was observed interacting with his mother, three sisters, and a large group of friends/neighbors outside this apartment building during a Hispanic festivity (Table 9).

**Table 9. Observations**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nonparticipatory Observations</b>
Julio	Job site: Bartending
Gabriela	Job site: Clinic
Amelia	Job site: Bartending
Sebastian	Community: Family gathering
Mario	Community : Neighborhood party
José	Job site: stock room at a store

## STAGE IV- Emergent Data/Data Analysis

### *Identification of Themes, Emergent Assumptions, and Triangulation*

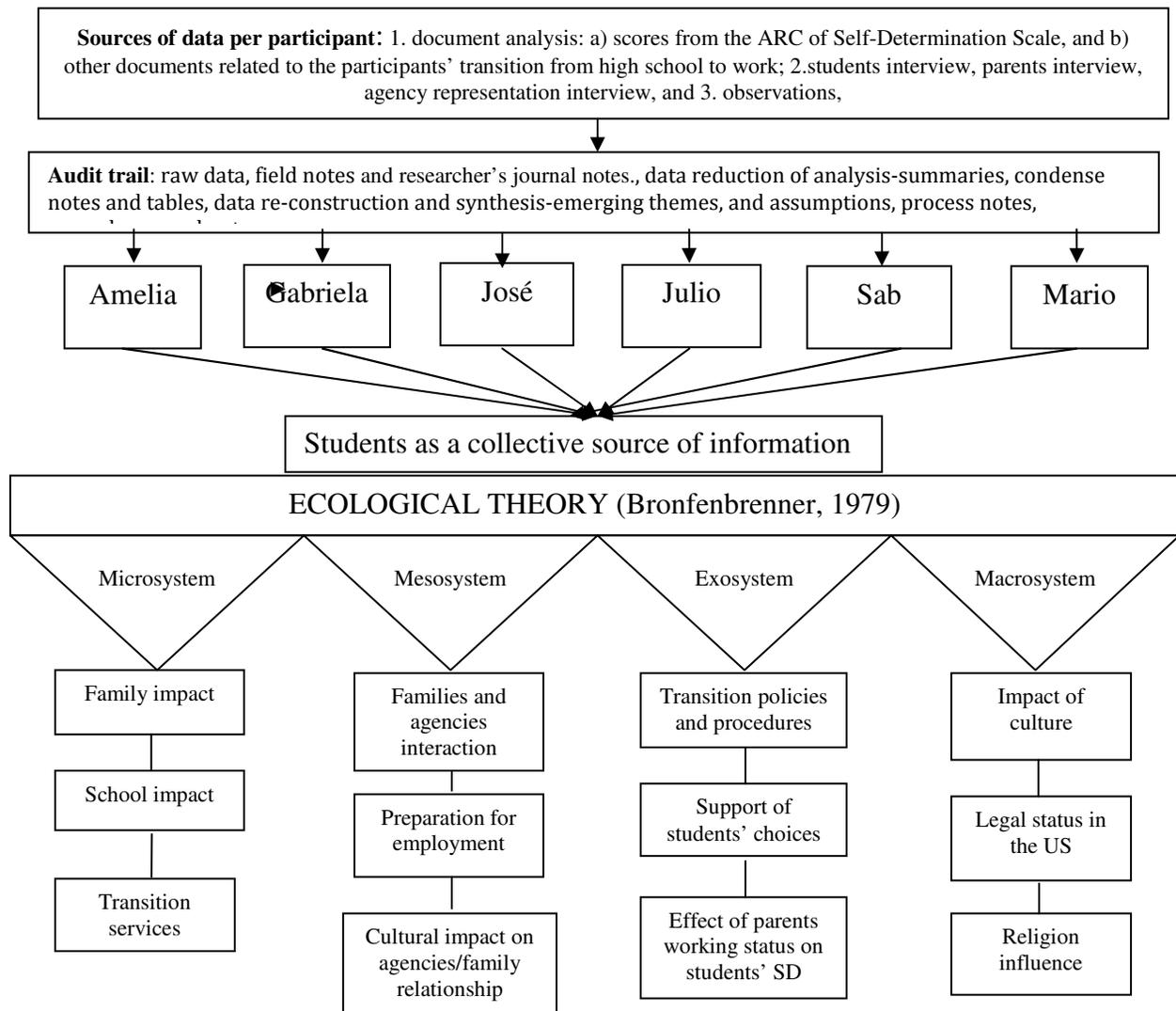
Initially, a computer software program, N-VIVO, was used to organize and manage the data. This computerized system assisted to start identifying emergent themes, categories, and patterns. However, not satisfied with the reliability of this process, the researcher reexamined manually all the data and completed the remaining of the data analysis using an *audit trail* (See Table 10) and following a data analysis organization design ( See Table 11) created by the researcher.

**Table10. Audit Trail**

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<b>Category</b>	<b>Contents</b>
Raw data	Audio recordings, journal notes including observations of participants and interviews notes, transcriptions, coded data, ARC of self-determination tests, and demographic information.
Data reduction of analysis	Summaries, condense notes and tables
Data re-construction and synthesis	Emerging themes and assumptions, data diagrams and tables
Process notes	Interviews, observations, document reviews procedures, peers debriefing, ARC of self-determination tests, reminder notes, and calendar appointments
Personal notes and materials	Research proposal, personal notes

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**Table. 11. Data Analysis Organization Design**

Themes and emergent assumptions were identified by the triangulation of all sources of data and peer debriefing. Because of the voluminous amounts of data accumulated, the researcher created an *audit trail* or “filing system” as an organization strategy to facilitate the cross-examination and triangulation of the data. An *audit trail*

provides a record for examining the research process and its products (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's "filing system" for this study was comprised of six categories:

1. raw data-audio recordings, field notes;
2. data reduction of analysis-summaries, condensed notes, and tables;
3. data reconstruction and synthesis-emerging themes, and assumptions;
4. process notes, procedures; and
5. personal notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher's audit trail assisted her in "backtracking" to review direct quotes, audio-recordings, or to follow the chain of events when cross-examining information, testing emerging assumptions, and during peer debriefing processes (Table 10).

After all the sources of data were categorized, filed, and cross examined, two consecutive steps were taken as preparation for triangulation: the first step entailed the organization and the categorization of all information gathered per participant, and the second step was the organization and the categorization of all information gathered per participant as compared to all other participants (See Table 12).

This process facilitated the triangulation of all the data which in turn highlighted emergent themes. Once this process was completed and a better understanding of the students, both individually and as a group, had been captured, all the themes and emergent assumptions gathered from this review were organized into four categories. The purpose of this substructure was to facilitate the organization of information in order to answer the research question and subquestions.

**Table 12. Sources of Information Gathered Per Each of the Participating Students'**

Name	Transition Documents	ARC Scale	Participant Interview	Parent Interview	Agency Rep. Interview	Observation	Journal Notes
1-Julio	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓
2-Gabriela	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓
3-Amelia	N/A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4-Sebastian	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5-Mario	N/A	✓	✓	✓	N/A	✓	✓
6-José	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

To determine how to best categorize the data to identify themes per categories, the researcher looked for action and interaction that occurred over time and space, changing and sometimes remaining the same in response to a situation or context. The researcher purposefully looked for action/interaction of elements, noting sequences and changes as well as how information evolved into themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To structure this process, the researcher generated a list of questions that added depth to the categories that are shown in Table 13.

This process led to the researcher to design several charts and tables which helped her code and cluster key words and themes in preparation for the next step of the data analysis. Following the theoretical framework of this study and the focus of the four subresearch questions, the researcher organized the themes and assumption into four major categories. The categories were the four ecological systems identified by the Ecological theory: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Macrosystem. Simultaneously, these four categories were subdivided by the focal points of each research subquestion as shown in Table 14.

**Table 13. Process Questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).**

- 
- What is going on here? What are these individuals doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
  - What issues and problems I am seeing or not seeing? How are they connected to other actions?
  - What conditions combine to create the context found? What assumptions are being made?
  - What is been revealed and what is concealed underneath the language? What is underneath the actions and gestures?
  - Why is the action or interaction staying the same?
  - Why and how is the action or the interaction changing?
  - Are action/interaction aligned or misaligned?
  - What conditions connected one sequence of events to another?
  - What condition or activities connected one sequence of events to another?
  - What happened to the form, flow, continuity, and rhythm of actions when conditions change?
  - How do the consequences of a set of actions/interactions play in the next action/interaction or allows them to stay the same?
  - To what more general category do these sequences of events belongs?
- 

*Triangulation.*

Qualitative research acknowledges that in qualitative studies everyone comes with biases. Therefore it is imperative for the researcher to set up a structured triangulation strategy to identify different perspectives and to ensure that the findings are not influenced by the bias of the researcher. This helps to assure that various points of view

**Table 14. Triangulation Strategy**

Researcher Potential bias	Reviewer A	Reviewer B	Reviewer C	Reviewer D	Reviewer E	Reviewer F
Mother of child with disability						
Hispanic			✓	✓		
Transition	✓	✓			✓	
Self- determination	✓	✓				

are included in the study and that all angles are brought out for discussion prior to documenting the concluding findings of a study.

The researcher of this study is of a Hispanic background, working in the field of transition services and self-determination. She is also the mother of a young man with a disability, and an advocate. In light of her personal and professional bias, the researcher solicited the assistance of six professionals from various backgrounds and areas of expertise to assist as peer reviewers.

The selection of the reviewers was strategically structured to ensure minimal biases: (a) none of the peer reviewers were parents of students with disabilities, (b) two were professionals in transition and self-determination, (c) two were from a Hispanic background but professionals in fields other than self-determination and/or transition, and lastly, (d) one reviewer did not have any personal and professional ties to any of the areas

of potential biases for this study. All materials were reviewed by each of the peer reviewers independently, and then discussed with the researcher. Notes on cross examination and emergent themes were then discussed in small groups with two other peers (Table 14).

### *Limitations*

A study based on qualitative research provides an in-depth analysis of the experiences of a small group of people. Given the circumstances it would be difficult to establish if the experiences studied can be generalized to other students with disabilities from a Hispanic background transitioning from school to work. Therefore, the findings from this study might not be generalized to other minorities, or to other groups of Hispanic student with other kinds of disabilities.

Other limitations characteristic of the qualitative research were: sample size and the presence of the researcher while collecting the data. Sample size was purposefully limited to a small number of cases to allow for an in-depth collection of information per students. Though only six cases were studied copious data was collected from over five different sources. Cross examination and triangulation of the data served to protect the validity and reliability of the findings. The presence of the researcher during the collection of the data presents a limitation in this qualitative study if consider the effect that the presence of an outside observer might have had on the behavior of the participants or the information shared.

Since the data for this study was collected close to the end of the school year and during the summer this might have limited the observation of students at work sites or

transition planning meetings. The researcher maximized the potential for observations by traveling across the state of Virginia to visit the students' work and community environment. This allowed for a variety of opportunities where the students were observed displaying social and self-determination skills.

To prevent sample selection bias students were selected based on meeting the criteria for the study (age, disability, academic status, of Hispanic heritage, receiving special education services) and consideration was given to include various disabilities and include demographic diversity. Selection of the participants was based on snowball sampling but limited to what was found. Therefore, some limitations to the generalization of the findings might be affected by the fact that the participants were from different: 1) Hispanic countries, 2) countries of heritage 3) Hispanic generation, 4) SES, and 5) educational level, and 6) family structure (single mother, both parents Hispanic, mother Hispanic father American, father Hispanic and mother American).

The researcher's own personal bias include that the researcher is Hispanic and also has a son with a developmental disability in transition from school to work. To prevent the possible bias of the researcher to influence the findings, both the preliminary findings as well as the emerging themes were reviewed by other professions who: 1) were not in the field of special education, 2) had no family members with disabilities, 3) were not Hispanic or had knowledge of the Hispanic culture, and, finally 4) had no previous knowledge of the nature of this study.

Satisfied with the in-depth testing of the emergent assumptions through triangulation and peer debriefing, the researcher proceeded to document all findings. The

results were organized into descriptions and summaries addressing the principal research question of this study and its four subquestions. Findings and themes are presented in Chapter IV and discussed in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND THEMES

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter the researcher presents the findings and the over-arching themes that emerged from this study. In the first section of the chapter, the overarching themes that emerged across data collection methods, participants, and triangulation are presented. The second section of the chapter then presents the findings as they are related to the research questions and theoretical framework for the study, which is the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The research question for this study is: What role does self-determination play in the transition from school to work for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background?

#### *Themes*

“In the Spanish culture...you know, like in my family, they are always 100% behind you and that’s one of the biggest things that has always helped me get through life. No matter what I decide to do, even if I struggle, I know that I am not alone.”-Julio

This quote from Julio summarizes what was learned from the participants and their families about their self-determination in the transition from school to employment. These individuals described a process for making choices and decisions for their adult lives that included most of the core component skills of self-determination (i.e., choice-making, goal setting and attainment, self-knowledge, etc.). They also engaged in a problem-solving process that included the same sequence of steps: identifying the problem; identifying possible solutions; describing the possible consequences for each solution; choosing the best option; implementing the chosen solution; and finally, evaluating the outcome. What was unique about the self-determination skills and process as the participants and their parents described them was the central role that parents played in the goals they chose, the impact of their cultural values on their choices, the lack of support from the education system, and the employment outcomes achieved.

### *Self-Determination*

It was very apparent that these individuals did not engage in self-determination in isolation, however, they are self-determined. Each of these individuals made choices and decisions for their lives free from undue and unwanted influence. However, they did use their families and particularly their parents as a resource to help them make their own decisions. The majority of the decisions about their lives were based on what their families wanted for them, the existing family dynamics, and the interactions they wanted or expected to have with their families afterwards. Gabriela provides an illustrative example of this interplay between self and family.

Gabriela shared that she always made her own decisions about a career to follow or jobs, but she always made sure to run her ideas by her parents before she made her decisions. She explained that she consulted with them because she felt they had her best interests at heart and the professional experience to provide her with sound advice. Gabriela's mother also talked about the same kind of dynamics expressing that her daughter made her own decisions but that those decisions were influenced by her parents and with very little school guidance. Gabriela's mother stated that "My daughter is very determined and ambitious: she might be influenced by her peers because she is very competitive but then she runs it by her family."

Mario had a lower level of self-determination than Gabriela (as measured by the Arc Self-determination scale). The role of his family and particularly his mother in making decisions for his life was much larger and described as more critical to achieving his transition outcomes. Mario explained that typically his mother made all his decisions for him. He further explained that even though everyone in the family looks to his mother to make all the plans for his future he was not completely happy about the decisions made for his life. Mario stated that he does not follow up with anything, that his mother follows up with everything for him and that no one has ever expected him to follow up with anything related to school or work. When asked directly about how he makes choices and decisions for his life, he said, "I mainly wait for others to tell me what to do."

Not only did students look to their parents as a resource to make their own decisions, students who demonstrated higher self-determination skills had parents who were highly successful in setting goals for their own lives, had higher educational

backgrounds, and achieved successful employment goals in their own lives. For example, Amelia was the student with the highest self-determination skills level both from the Arc Self-determination Scale as well as by the results of the observations. Amelia's mother is a social worker who runs a program for terminally ill patients at a major hospital in northern Virginia. Her mother's professional success came as a result of her own self-determination skills, and these were the same kind of skills that Amelia demonstrated in her pursuit of her college education. Amelia maintained an electronic list of goals that she wanted to complete and attain. That list included the steps she needed to take to achieve each goal, and she would check each off as it was met and then move on to the next step of the process. Amelia's list included the resources to call upon to help her complete her goals, notes to call her mother and sisters, contact professors and other peers. In addition, Amelia also kept a small purse size journal with thoughts and motivational notes.

Mario and Sebastian scored lower on the Arc Self-determination scale and their parents were not as personally successful as the other parents. While both families moved to the United States to achieve a better life, they were uncertain as to how to work within and/or negotiate for the various supports and services that could help. Sebastian's family has not become citizens of the country which they feared would impact his ability to receive employment supports after graduation from high school. Although Sebastian and Mario would qualify for supports that would help them achieve the goals they have for their adult lives, their parents did not know how to access the supports and for some, they did not know they existed.

Mario shared that he had just graduated from high school and was not thinking at all about his future. In fact, during one interview, he said “I am on a break.” He further explained that he really never thought he needed to make plans for his own future and that he never talked to anyone about it. Mario’s mother reinforced his statement when she could not recall an example of Mario’s decision-making. She insisted that she always made decisions for him. Her response to further probing about his opinion about what he might want to do after school, she said: “He might express that he does not like going to school but never explains his reasons.” She went on to talk about the fact she is the person who is responsible and therefore the only one who makes decisions for his life or future. However, she expressed some doubts about what the right resources to help might be, what she would like to see for him, or what he himself might want to achieve for his life. When asked whether this was an expectation she had based on the customs for families in her country, she responded: “I don’t know; does a mother has a choice? No one steps forward to do anything.” She also had questions about what services were available for Mario now that he was out of school and how to begin to find them. Mario’s mother shared her frustration of not knowing where and how to go about getting help to guide her son, and how to plan for his life after high school. He has begun to ask her to help him have a more independent life but ultimately she made the decision for him to stay home because he does not know how or where to find this type of help. She appeared to feel unprepared to answer these questions saying “Mario is far from defining what he wants to do with work”, and she did not know what potential he had for employment and she further stated: “I don’t know what he can do nobody say anything to me... he says he

wants to work in the future but he does not say doing what and I have no idea how to help him.”

Not only did the participants with higher self-determination skills have parents who had achieved loftier goals in their own lives, these students also credited their parents and/or extended family members with being the primary teachers of self-determination skills. While the special education field focuses on the role of special educators in teaching or facilitating self-determination skills, the participants in this study spoke of the role of their parents, grandparents, and extended family members in the development of their self-determination skills. They modeled it their own lives and actively taught their son or daughter many of the core component skills. For example, Julio credited his parents and his grandparents for expecting him to be self-determined and teaching him the skills to achieve his goals for life. Julio shared that most of the strategies he learned relating to self-determination he learned by observing the members of his family that had always being around. He explained, “My Mom is always making lists and reviewing her calendar. She used to do that for me, now she calls me to remind me to do it myself.” Julio also articulated that his grandfather taught him about self-determination. He spoke about the lessons that he learned from him: “the history of my grandfather as an immigrant is just inspirational for everyone; it hits you in the heart. His story is heroic and uplifting...how he was able to come to the U.S. and produce such a family, always taking care of all of them, and making sure they all had an education and a great life...his history is my inspiration.” Julio’s mother also credited Julio’s grandfather with being a powerful influence on how she and her husband raised Julio. She explained

that because of him they instilled in Julio a sense of responsibility for the privilege of having being born in the United States, to be determined, to seek support and to give support even as he reaches for his own goals. She shared that his goals for the future are still very similar to his grandfather's and her goals when they first came to this country as immigrants She explained: "...with faith, hope, and hard work you can reach what you set out to do, which in our case was to reach freedom and the ability to seek opportunities and to grab opportunities that are offered here in the United States."

### *Values*

A second theme that emerged from the data collected for this study was related to their cultural values of family strength and support, the value placed on education, and their understanding of the impact of an individual's disability on transition outcomes.

#### *Family Strength and Support.*

The families of the students in this study can be described as cohesive and closely knit. Through their answers to interview questions as well as their conversations with each other, they described frequent family dinners, celebrations, and phone conversations. Most participants spoke about the need they felt to consult with each other on a regular basis, as well as to share the large and small occurrences in their lives. It was clear that these students didn't make any decisions without consulting family. This consultation was not viewed as unwanted or a barrier to decision making but rather a necessary and valuable part of the process.

The family members consulted and included in this process extended beyond the nuclear family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents and in some cases,

others who were not directly related by blood, but by culture. Julio explained that in his culture “you're not alone... it's not even your family, it's your culture... we tend to help each other with school, work, life... you always feel like there is a natural support system built in when you connect with another Hispanic, you have that language and it just feels like an extended member of your family.” Gabriela also shared that she felt connected to most of the Hispanic families she encounters at work or in the community and that these families did not necessarily have to be Cuban like hers, but were Dominicans, Mexicans, or from anywhere else in Latin America. She explained: “I am able to connect with them at a different level... It's a connection with the spirit of what being Hispanic is. It didn't have to be your own nationality.”

The families of each of these individuals were described as a source of unconditional support, not because of their son's or daughter's disability, but because they provided that to all their children. For the majority of these individuals' families, parents expressed goals for their sons or daughters to succeed in life with the help and love of their extended families. When goals were difficult to achieve, the family was there to help guide or otherwise offer assistance. They offered this support to all of the children in the family, to the students with disabilities but also to their sons and daughters who did not have disabilities. Though there were expectations set by the family those expectations were supported at the capacity level of the individual child. Even when the student was not successful in his attempts to meet a goal, the family was there to help him move forward. Julio depicted this unconditional support when he said, “...knowing that my own family and my extended family are behind me to support me at all times, in

whatever I want or need to do, especially when life gets tough, that's one of the biggest things that has always helped me get through everything...I know that I'm not alone."

Unconditional support was a critical component of family life for students who had more significant support needs and who demonstrated few self-determination skills. Mario's mother said that it was not something that they questioned because this was the mother's job, that is, to care for their children regardless of their ability. Sebastian's family spoke about their plans to remodel a section of the house to provide a separate room for him where he will be able to live with their support into his adult life. Although Sebastian expressed a desire to live on his own, the family believed that they would be better able to provide the support he will need if he lived on his own in a part of their home. It was their way to help him achieve at least a part of his dream for adult life.

#### *Value of Education.*

All of the families of the participants in this study spoke of the value they placed on receiving an education. For instance Julio said: "My family is intense and very determined when it comes to education...we have to have an education—it is not a choice—it is a responsibility." This was true even for those families who viewed the outcome of receiving an education in the United States as something that introduced other values or goals in the lives of their sons or daughters. Sebastian's mother talked about the fact that he has adapted to the American way of life and he has become Americanized. She said, "I don't see much of Mexico in Sebastian." He could now speak both languages and after completing his education he was thinking about a future that was here in America. Despite the conflict between receiving an education and keeping

cultural values intact, none of these families questioned whether receiving an education was important. They saw it as a way to help their son or daughter have a better life.

For some of the participants and their parents, the value of receiving an education extended beyond high school to college. Gabriela and Amelia were completing their bachelor's degree and planning to go on for graduate study because they believed it to be an important step toward achieving their long-range employment goals. The students with higher self-determination skills were more likely to view education as an important aspect of meeting their long-range goals, even individuals with more significant disabilities for whom post-secondary education is not typically seen as an option. For example, José, who possessed a high level of self-determination and also had a severe disability, described a desire to pursue post-secondary education options. He explained that he did not know exactly what he was going to do with his future but that he was going to continue trying to become more educated until he found what he was good at and what would help him reach his goals in life. He said, "I am working on it...ask me in ten years from now." Jose's family also shared that goal for their son, explaining, "We have the same expectations for him that we have for his sister [related to pursuing a college education]."

The parents also emphasized to their children the benefit of acquiring and maintaining both the English and the Spanish language as a means to better advocate for themselves. The students were encouraged by their families and also through the modeling of their parents' actions. An example was José's mother who asserted that becoming fluent in English and culturally competent in the 'American ways' gave her a

better opportunity to help her son more efficiently. She explained that once she mastered the English language, she was also able to become involved in the Advocacy Movement and become well informed about ways to help her son accomplish his dreams. She shared: “in America our children have rights, but you need to be able to speak the language to be able to learn about our rights and our child’s rights...I learned that nothing was going to happen if I waited for somebody to knock on our door to offer us help.”

### *Impact of Disability on Transition Outcomes*

Another cultural value that emerged was in how they viewed the impact of an individual’s disability on the transition outcomes they aspired to achieve. The individuals and their families also viewed disabilities as just one component of that person’s life and did not allow the disability to become the defining factor in the goals that they pursued or the supports that were needed to get there. Instead, they believed that they needed to build upon strengths and use their strengths to overcome the challenges encountered along the way. It is fair to say that families reported that there would be challenges encountered in attempting to reach one’s goals; having a disability was not the only one, nor was it viewed as the defining one. For instance Gabriela’s mother said that she wanted to make sure that her daughter knew that she was a Latina and that she could succeed and achieve the America Dream and that was regardless of whether she had a disability or not.

Students overcame the challenges of their disability in very different ways. Those students who had high self-determination skills looked to these skills to help them overcome the challenges they would confront in their lives. They reported that their

parents were the role models for facing their challenges and trying their best to achieve their goals. For instance, Amelia described how her family, as well as her extended family, supported her unconditionally all through her years in elementary, middle, and high school while she struggled with writing and reading due to her dyslexia. In her words: “It never made any difference to my mother that I had dyslexia; she had the same high expectations of me as she did for my sister.” Gabriela’s mother recognized her daughter’s struggles with writing and she advised her daughter to while continuing to work on her writing skills to focus her goals in areas where she excelled. Recognizing that Gabriela was very good in science, her mother shared that she encouraged Gabriela to focus her energy in exploring the possibilities of a future career in science. Amelia’s mother also reported that her daughter had difficulty in writing and so she encouraged her to find ways to increase her motivation to improve the writing skills that were essential to her future. “I asked my daughter: ‘what it is that you want to do?’ and Amelia said ‘I want to be a teacher.’” This long range goal was used to provide Amelia’s motivation to improve her writing skills.

The support for overcoming challenges for students with lower self-determination skills like Mario and Sebastian was expected to come from their education. For these students, their parents did see their son’s disability as a difficult challenge to overcome. Their parents looked to the schools and the educational professionals to provide the skills necessary for them to overcome their challenges. Mario’s mother talked about the fact that she held firm when Mario did not want to go to school: “...often Mario did not want to go to school, he would not say why but he knew that he still had to go.” Mario shared:

“I tried to get my sisters to help me convince my mother to let me do what I want, like not going to school, but I always end up having to do what Mom says.” Mario’s mom believed that he needed to receive an education to help him in his life as an adult.

Parents and students who had high self-determination skills looked at the impact of the disability differently from the parents who had lower self-determination skills themselves. The latter group of parents tended to view a disability as the defining factor of their son’s or daughter’s transition outcomes. These parents looked at their son’s and daughter’s disability as a limitation to developing self-determination skills and achieving transition goals. For example, Sebastian’s mother said: “Sebastian has a disability therefore he will never be able to do anything on his own or for himself.” She dismissed the possibility of Sebastian having a future which could include choice because she labeled him as not been able to do things or make choices because he has a disability. Though Sebastian dreams of a different future he said “I don’t talk to anyone about my dreams and don’t think I can do anything about it.”

### *Education/Transition Services*

The third major theme that emerged from this study centered on the education and/or transition services received by this group of current and former high school students with disabilities. While each of these students received special education services while in high school for a range of disabilities, it is significant to note that only one participant granted permission for the researcher to speak with his teachers or otherwise gather information from the school. Most families did share the written individual education program (IEP) document, but would not approve of the request to

talk with the teachers about the transition services provided to these individuals. This disconnection between the family and the school was a theme that emerged and re-emerged as these individuals and their families spoke about their experiences with receiving transition and special education services from the high school. In particular, this theme was divided into two components or sub-themes: a lack of collaboration and a view of special education as a barrier.

### *Lack of Collaboration*

While it is difficult to know what attempts the schools made to work collaboratively with families to plan for and provide transition services for these young adults with disabilities, it is clear that the students and families perceived a lack of collaboration between the family and school personnel. For some of these families, the lack of collaboration resulted in an adversarial relationship with families pursuing a due process hearing to help resolve the dispute and/or disagreement. Other families became frustrated and stopped trying.

Amelia's mother was someone who gave up trying to collaborate with the school. She described it as a struggle to coordinate meetings and follow up phone calls and when meetings or during conversations were conducted there was always tension and conflicting of points of views on what was best for Amelia. Julio's mother had a similar experience. She shared that the school failed to return her phone calls and that when they did meet with her, the meeting was not organized to talk through different points of view, but was instead one-sided with the school personnel forcing their opinions and plans on the family. In her last attempt to coordinate their efforts with the transition teams, Julio's

parents requested that the IEP team reconvene. It was very difficult to find a time to meet and when they did there were few goals on which they agreed. Finally, they gave up, deciding instead to focus their time and energy into helping their son plan for his future on their own. The parents of Julio, Gabriela and Amelia took an active role in searching for work experiences for their children through networking with family members, friends, and colleagues who worked in areas related to the career interest of their children.

Jose's family decided to continue finding ways to work collaboratively with their son's transition team. Jose's mother explained how they tried every possible way to engage the school in collaborating with them to develop an education program and transition plan for Jose that reflected their goals for his future. However, they finally chose to exercise their right to due process to assure that their son received the education he needed. Jose's mother said: "My husband and I had to become very savvy advocates and dedicated countless hour with school, administration, mediators and attorneys before José's team understood that transition planning was a team process that included all of us, not only the school."

In all three of these examples, parents felt their efforts to collaborate with the schools was overwhelming and did not help facilitate their children's transition to adult life. This was in contrast to the less educated parents who believed that teachers are all-knowing and that they should not interfere with what was planned and offered for their children's transition. However, these parents also felt uninformed and disconnected with their children's transition plan. The reasons for the absence of collaboration were

different, but the result was the same. The schools and families appeared to be working on very different goals in very different ways.

Mario's mother shared her frustration about not knowing where and how to go about getting help to guide her son on how to plan for his life after high school. She didn't know what his potential for work could be, as she explained: "I don't know what he can do and at school nobody said anything to me...he says he wants to work in the future but he does not say doing what ...and I have no idea how to help him." She further elaborated by saying, "I cannot communicate well enough to talk with the school so I hardly ever know what is going on."

The majority of the students found that the efforts made to get everyone to collaborate had a very negative emotional impact on them and this experience stayed with them after leaving high school. Amelia's mother recalled her daughter's struggles at school when trying to make plans with her transition team: "...she hated school when she was in middle and high school...It was a struggle for me to convince her to talk to her guidance counselor." She had a very similar aversion to asking for supports and/or accommodations at college that could help her with her post-secondary studies. Instead, she relied on her family to identify supports and accommodations she could make on her own, building on her strength in self-determination (goal setting, problem-solving and self-evaluation).

### *View of Special Education*

While families placed a value on receiving an education, they did not all appear to hold the special education services they received in a similar light. Instead, these

individuals and their families felt that special education acted as a barrier to long-term positive outcomes for their adult lives. Some students expressed this view strongly; for others, the message was embedded in their answers to other questions.

Julio was one of the students who did not grant permission to interview his school counselor because he felt his counselor did not understand him. Julio said: "I don't talk much with him...he doesn't get me." He further explained that he felt that school personnel held low expectations for his adult outcomes because of his disability and therefore he believed that there was very little interest in helping him strive for the goals he has set for his future. Amelia also believed that others' views of disability could hold her back from achieving her dreams. For this reason, she chose not to disclose her disability to her employer. She shared: "I am very good at what I do. But if he knows that I have a disability, I'm afraid he is going to look at my performance at work differently."

Mario also did not grant permission to talk with his teachers and when asked to share his reason for that, he looked away. After a long pause, he finally stated, "I do not want to talk about it." Only Sebastian granted permission for the researcher to interview his teacher. Sebastian, the student with a significant disability whose family expressed uncertainty about how to help him meet his needs, felt that the school was a help for him in meeting some of his long range plans. Neither he nor his family felt that special education was a barrier to his long range success.

### *Employment Outcomes*

The fourth and final theme that emerged from these findings comes in the descriptions of their transition to employment outcomes. It was noted that employment

was a critically important part of the experiences that these individuals described when talking about their transition to adult life, as well as their plans for their future. Parents also described some aspect of employment when talking about the adult lives of their son or daughter with a disability. Parents played a critical role in the transition to employment for these young adults with disabilities. However, these experiences and plans were different for students with high self-determination skills when compared to those with lower self-determination skills.

### *Work Experiences*

All individuals who participated in this study had the opportunity to work at some point in his or her transition process. Young adults with high self-determination skills chose jobs that could provide them with learning and growing opportunities until they reached their career goals. Julio explained: “I want to make money to have a good life. And I know that I will need to do something that I am good at so I will look for a career opportunity where I can use my strengths.” He further explained “don’t get me wrong times are difficult to get a job so right now I work on anything as a short-term plan to help my parents pay for my school and to cover for my personal expenditures.”

Students with low self-determination skills viewed their work experiences differently. Instead of work being a means to an end, they enjoyed the work for its own sake. Sebastian expressed gratitude that he was given an opportunity to work while in school. Despite the fact that Sebastian did not have a choice about where he would work, he was happy that he had the opportunity to work. Similarly, Mario, spoke of his job at a fast food restaurant as an opportunity to help others, to make friends, and to do things on

his own. He did not describe it as part of a long-range plan for his adult life or as a step toward independence.

### *Help With Job Development*

In the employment field, job development is the process of helping an individual identify employment goals, find employment options, and identify necessary supports to be successful. Recommendations for successful transition planning and services include job development. However, the majority of these students describe these supports as coming from their families or from their own efforts rather than from the school's transition services. In fact, for the students with the highest level of self-determination, the parents' role in job development was described as being very important in the process. Parents, not school-based transition personnel, were the ones who opened doors for them and taught them how to enter the work force. For example, Julio worked as a bartender at an establishment owned by a family friend. Gabriela worked at a medical clinic administered by a physician who was a close friend of his mother. Both Julio and Gabriela indicated that they were successful in getting those jobs because their parents introduced them to their friends, but only after the parents told them how to first inquire about job openings and then describe their job-related work skills and experiences.

### *Career Goal Setting And Attainment*

While all participants could articulate a work or career goal, those with higher self-determination skills were more likely to have a clearly articulated goal and a plan for attaining it. Both Gabriela and Amelia said: "I know exactly what I want. I know exactly

where I want to be, and the career path I want to take.” Though Julio and José did not know yet exactly what they were going to choose as a career they both had definite plans to continue pursuing an education and work experiences that would help them identify the job where they could use their strengths.

This description of a concrete plan for the future was in contrast to the experiences of Mario and Sebastian who were not able to describe how they would achieve their plans to meet their employment goals. Although they had a goal for the future, they did not share them with their families or their transition team members. They were also not asked about their employment goals by their parents or their teachers. When interviewed as part of this study, Sebastian shared his dream of becoming a shoe salesman and helping people buy comfortable shoes. He spoke about how he chose this goal while at the Mall watching people buying their shoes. He also talked about the fact that he had not told anyone else this plan because he believed that he should follow other people’s advice, particularly in relation to their ideas about what he could accomplish in life.

Mario and Sebastian’s families also waited for school personnel to provide guidance and support for the transition to employment. They spoke about the need to rely on school personnel to take the lead in organizing the transition from school to work for their sons. Sebastian’s mother said that she leaves most of the decisions up to the school because she does not understand English very well and the school is doing a good job handling Sebastian’s plans for the future. Mario’s mother felt that the school did a good job of keeping him busy and happy by giving him the opportunity to have a few work

experiences in the community. Even if she did not always know what to expect from the transition planning and services, she felt that they made the best choices for her son.

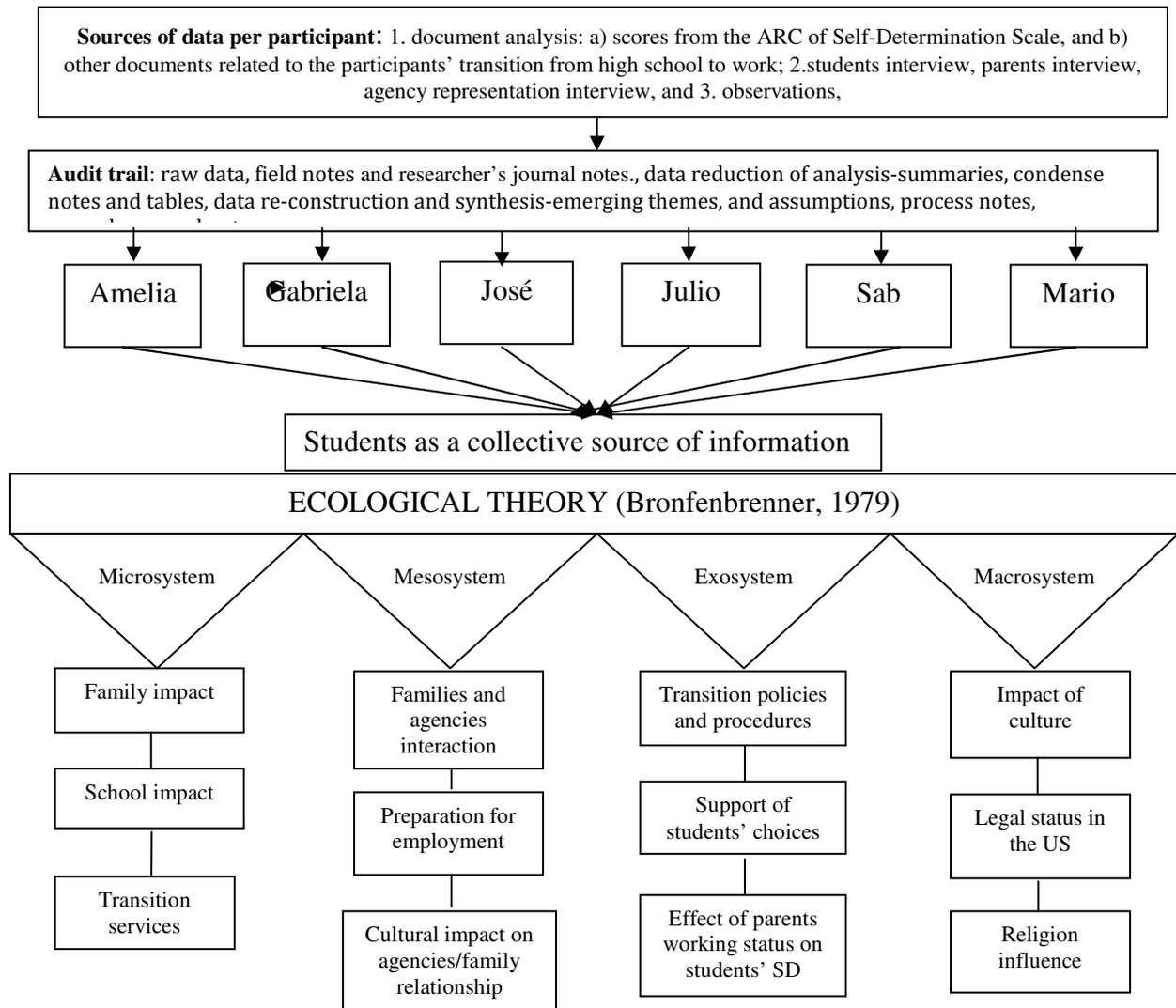
### *Findings by Ecological System Level*

This study sought to understand the role that self-determination plays in the transition from school to work for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background. To accomplish this, the experiences of 6 individuals with disabilities were studied and analyzed. The findings and overarching themes that emerged across the study are again presented in the next section, this time looking at the information through the lenses of the four major social influences identified by the Ecological Theory: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The following section of the data analysis addresses each of the independent subresearch questions (Table 15).

Subsequently, this section of the data analysis addresses the research questions based on the reflection of the key elements which emerged through the analysis of all the data. The findings were addressed and are presented per subquestions under the four ecological systems Microsystem (Table 16), Mesosystem (Table 17), Exosystem (Table 18), and Macrosystem (Table 19).

#### *Microsystem.*

The first independent sub-research question of this study was: What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background as they are being prepared to exit the school system to enter the workforce? In order to address this sub research question three additional question were addressed.

**Table 15. Process of analysis of the data through the Ecological theory**

The findings from this research questions reveals that the majority of these students' experiences during their preparation for transition were primarily influenced by their families and extended families.

**Table 16. Microsystem**

A. How does their every day interaction with their families and communities influence their preparation for work after high school?	
Key elements	Description 1. Family support and 2. The family's expectations.
1. Family support	-Students with no family support who had the school solely responsible for the transition planning showed limited ability, or very limited, to none, to make choices to have autonomy, self regulation, self realization and or psychological empowerment.
2. Family's expectations	-Students whose parents had high expectations for them seemed to be motivated to make their own decisions, plan for their future, and follow up with their plans
B. Do they see a connection with what happens every day at school with what is important to them?	
Key elements	Description: 1. Disconnect between school with students' preferences and 2. The majority of the students felt their voices were not being heard.
1. Choices limited due to disconnect with school counselors	- The majority reported being unsupported by their school transition team
2. Inclusion of students voices	- The majority felt there was a lack of opportunities for them to express their choices or to share their perspectives about what they hope to accomplish for their future.
C. How involved are they in their transition planning process? What is the nature of how others respond to their preferences?	
Key elements	Description 1. Active involvement in school transition 2. No involvement in school transition plan
1. Involvement in transition plan	- In the cases where the students were involved the outcomes were very successful -A minority of students are involved in their transition plan at school
2. No involvement in transition plan	-Students and their family waived their right to participate in the planning. The transition plan was conducted by schools in collaboration with the Department of Rehabilitation Services

**Table 17. Mesosystem**

A. How do they feel about what their families and these agencies (DRS counselor) are planning for their transition outcomes?	
Key elements	Description 1. Interaction between parents and agencies, and 2. and the inclusion, or not, of the students' voices in the interaction between parents and multi-agencies collaboration.
1. Families and agencies interaction	-The majority of students felt there was no collaboration between the school and the family
2. inclusion of the students' voices	- The majority of the students felt their voices were not included in their transition plans.
B. How pleased are they with the choices and opportunities that are given to them as preparation for employment?	
1. Preparation for employment productive	The key elements to emerge were: 1. Some found the experiences productive and 2. Others were not sure what those experiences meant as preparation for their future jobs and careers.  - The majority of the students were presented with opportunities for jobs or career explorations while in high school.
2. Preparation for employment not relevant for their future	-Though pleased with the experiences, they felt unmotivated by the choices but were not sure of how they would use the skills they learned from those experiences after leaving high school.
C. How does their cultural background (religion, family values and cultural traditions tradition) impact the interaction between their school and their family, and the multiple agencies involved in the student's transition planning?	
Cultural impact on agencies/family relationship:	The key elements to emerge were: 1. Language, and 2. Family values.
1. Language	- Parents who master the English language had communication and interaction with the school and the transition team. Families who did not speak English felt incompetent to attend meetings to discuss their children's transition plans.
2. Family values	- The majority of the students' family values which emerged as also having an impact are: high expectations for everyone, responsibility to help the family and others, unconditional family support, and the value of education.

**Table 18. Exosystem**

A. How well informed are these students and their families about the policies and procedures that affect/influence their transition?	
Key elements	Description 1. Informed and 2. No knowledge of the law.
1. Informed	- Majority of students and their families had knowledge of the policies and procedures related to the transition process.
2. No knowledge of the law	- Minority of the students were not aware of policies and guidelines for their transition services.
B. How are the schools and agencies' (DRS) policies supporting these students' personal choices, as well as their strengths and challenges during their preparation for work after high school?	
Key elements	Description 1. Students struggled to have their voices heard
1. No inclusion of the students choice, or consideration of their strengths	- Though the policies and procedures of the schools welcomed the students participation in their transition planning the majority of the students shared that their plans and choices were not taken into consideration
C. What is the impact of parents working status in how these students make decisions, plan and follow-up on the choices they make for their future job/employment?	
Key elements	Description: different impact from parents with: 1. High profile jobs and 2. Low profile and unstable working conditions.
1. Parents who had high profile jobs	- Parents working in high profile jobs were involved with their children's transition. Through their large network they found opportunities for their children to have work experiences, and mentorship.
2. Parents with low profile jobs and unstable working conditions.	- Families with low profile jobs and unstable working conditions had limited to no involvement with schools.

**Table 19. Macrosystem**

How has (if at all) these students' acculturation/assimilation into America culture (social system) influenced how they decide, plan and follow-up on their career/employment choices for the future?	
1. Key element Family acculturation	<p>Description: (1) family influence</p> <p>-The majority of the students were influenced by how their parents adapted to and embraced the American culture.</p> <p>-These students' assimilation of the America culture was a reflection and direct influence of their parents or grandparents' experiences. In turn, these influences shaped how these students made their decisions and followed up with the choices they made.</p>
How did these students' current status (as minorities) in the U.S. influence their school preparation to work?	
1. No perceived influence from legal status in the U. S.	-The current legal status of the majority of the students in this study did not appear to have a direct influence, either positive or negative, in their transition.
How does these students' religion and or family value influences their transition?	
1. No apparent influence from religion	The religion of the students in this study did not emerge as being an influence in their transition from school to work but not their religion.

*Mesosystem.*

The second independent sub-research question of this study was: What are the experiences of students with disabilities from a Hispanic background during the multi-agency collaborative transition planning process as they get prepared for employment? In order to address this sub research question three additional question were addressed.

The findings from this researcher question revealed that the majority of these students felt a lack of collaboration between their families, their school and their interests.

*Exosystem.*

The third independent sub-research question of this study was: What is the impact of the policies and procedures of the schools, county and employment related agencies in the transition process of Hispanic students with disabilities? In order to address this sub research question three additional question were addressed.

The findings from this researcher question revealed that the majority of these students were offered work experiences at their schools. However, the work experiences were limited and in its majority no relevant to the students strengths and choices. Those students whose voices were heard their choices were honored by their families and their extended families.

*Macrosystem.*

The fourth independent subresearch question of this study was: What are the cultural (religion, family values, customs and traditions) implications for Hispanic students in their transition? In order to address this sub research question three additional question were addressed.

The findings from this research question revealed that for the majority of the students their families' values and their culture had significant implications in their transition from school to work.

### *Summary of Findings*

The cross examination of the major themes that emerged from all the data across the four systems inferred the assumption that the role of self determination for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background in the transition from school to work is strongly influenced and shaped by their families' values and their culture. The family's impact was also a factor in the transition team and their involvement, or lack of participation, played a significant role in the outcomes of the transition plan. Equally, the family also plays a vital role in the implementation of the policies and procedures at school. The majority of the families had some knowledge of the opportunities offered by school, county and agencies' policies. The majority of the families made the effort to collaboratively work with the schools to design, implement and follow through with a seamless transition plan as per the guidelines of the school the and counties. However, after several attempts to inquire on the school's accountability to the appropriated transition plan, the process was to demanding for the participants and their families. Therefore, the participant and the parents collectively waived their rights to the make their school accountable for implementing the transition plan as per state and county guidelines. Due to this inability the participants and the parents chose to assist their children outside of the school.

The data from this study inferences that how the students were influenced to make their decisions about life in the United States was determined by the experiences and attitudes of their parents and their extended family. These students highlighted that their cultural family values held education and personal growth through self-determination as

the highest priority. They also highlighted that what influenced them the most to continue to grow and be educated was their families' high expectations, unconditional support and their sense of responsibility for themselves and their family. These family and cultural values appeared to motivate them to make more efforts to plan for their future.

## Chapter V

### Discussion, Implications And Conclusion

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to understand the role that self-determination plays in the transition from school to work for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background. According to previous research, self-determination has been identified as a concept that can have a positive impact on the transition from school to adulthood for youth with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1995; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field et al., 1998a; Test et al., 2000; Wehmeyer et al., 1998). In response to this positive correlation, a range of methods, strategies, and/or approaches have been tested to not only teach self-determination skills, but to facilitate student self-determination during the transition planning and services processes (Trainor, 2005; Wachs, 1999; Abery, 1994; Abery & Stancliffe, 1996; Wehmeyer et al., 2003). While earlier research on self-determination focused on students with various types of disabilities and a wide range of cultural backgrounds, more recently researchers have been focusing on understanding the concept from specific cultural backgrounds and/or for students with specific disabilities. For instance, Wehmeyer (1998, 2005b) explored self-determination for students with significant support needs while other researchers explored self-determination for students from diverse cultures (Frankland et al., 2004; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005; Wehmeyer,

2005; Zhang et al., 2005, Leake & Black, 2005; Trainor, 2005). Since differences were found for students from other cultural backgrounds, this researcher sought to understand self-determination for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background, a group which was missing from any type of in-depth investigation. This qualitative study describes the factors that directly influence and affect how these students experience, shape, and develop their self-determination skills and how these factors influence, guide, support, and structure their transitions from high school to work.

### *Discussion*

The findings from this study provide insight for a better understanding of the role self-determination plays in the lives of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background so that stakeholders can provide meaningful and appropriate transition services and supports within the context of their culture. While this was the intended purpose for conducting this research, the fact is that the majority of these students did not provide consent for the researcher to interview school personnel, employers, adult support staff, and/or other key stakeholders in the transition process outside of the family. Instead, the findings of this study provide insight into the role of self-determination in transition planning from the student and family perspectives and are discussed in relation to the literature, to current practices, and to future research.

*How do these findings relate to the literature?*

This first section will link the findings of this study with the overall research literature on self-determination and transition planning. This is a large body of literature covering almost 20 years of research.

*Role of self-determination in transition planning.*

Results of the study confirm that the role that self-determination plays in the transition process for students with disabilities is frequently misinterpreted (Wehmeyer, 1998, 2005; Trainor, 2005; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Kim & Turnbull, 2004) and it is not exercised or experienced the same by all individuals. That is, students with disabilities from a Hispanic background who score high on the Arc self-determination scale ( Wehmeyer, 1995) have better transition outcomes. They are able to articulate their plans for the future, are able to communicate those plans to others, and are able to set and attain goals. For these students, the goals they had for the future were not only clearly stated in interviews but were also repeated by their parents and/or extended family members. For these individuals, not only were the goals clear, but they had a plan for how they were going to achieve those long-range goals for the future. Many of their steps toward their long range plans were completed independently, but the independence was in the context of an extended family that provided a resource or a support for these students to learn to make wise choices, to develop their self-determination skills, and to set goals that reflected high expectations yet were attainable.

Students with low self-determination skills as measured by the Arc Self-determination scale also demonstrated self-determined behavior. Each of them had a goal

for the future although the parents of these students did not have a clear idea of how they could attain those goals and did not engage in the same kind of behaviors that support further development of self-determination skills. For instance, instead of modeling goal setting and attainment strategies, these parents expressed an uncertainty about the future of their sons and the services that might be available for them. Sebastian expressed a desire to sell shoes, but when asked about whether he had shared that goal with others, he did not see a reason to do so. His mother wanted him to finish high school, but she did not have a clear vision of what he would do after that.

*Misconceptions about self-determination.*

Wehmeyer (1998, 2005b) wrote of misinterpretations or misconceptions about self-determination, particularly for students with significant support needs. One of the misconceptions included the perception that self-determination reflects independent performance. These student participants clearly provide examples that are in contrast to this idea; each of them exhibited self-determination skills but did so with the assistance and support of their extended family. It is important that this common misinterpretation is clarified, especially for those who seek to support student self-determination in transition planning for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background. Clearly, for these individuals, involvement of their nuclear and extended family members is not only wanted but is necessary to support their ability to direct their own lives.

The findings demonstrate that for the students in this study, being self-determined meant using support and accommodations, making their own decisions after consulting and considering their families and extended families' advice, and focusing on their

interests and their families interests as well. Their successful behaviors and accomplishments were measured by the efforts they made to accomplish the goals or tasks they set out to achieve for themselves. It was very evident in the findings that in the Hispanic culture absolute self-reliance/self-sufficiency was not a consideration to measure self-determination. Though they were highly self-determined to accomplish their goals, it was a normal process to seek from their families and extended family the advice, support, and guidance to help them succeed in accomplishing their goals. For this group of students, it was not their “perfect skills” that made them self-determined; it was the combination of factors—environment, opportunities, and experiences—that empowered them to be self-determined and act on their own work or career goals and dreams. The students in this study who were self-determined were so because they had mostly learned self-determination skills directly or indirectly from their families and their culture. Their efforts to act on their goals and succeed were the measure of their self-determination skills. Lastly, the clearest finding of this study was that self-determination was not synonymous with making choices independently. This skill was only a component of many. These students made their own choices but after consulting with their families, their extended families and mentors, and after acknowledging and requesting/ accepting the supports they needed. For the students in this study, being self-determined was the combination of many influences and dynamics in their lives.

Another misconception about self-determination highlighted by Wehmeyer (1998; 2005b) involved the belief that students with significant support needs could not be self-determined because self-determination is often wrongly equated with a level of

independent performance that these students will not be able to achieve. For instance, Sebastian's mother indicated that he would never be able to make decisions on his own, so there was little reason to help him make plans for the future or to even ask him what he wanted to do. Instead, she was happy for what supports the school offered and deferred to them to provide guidance about what his long-term options might be.

*Role of self-determination in successful transition outcomes.*

Results of the study further confirm that self-determination can play a positive impact in the transition process from school to work for youth with disability (Wehmeyer, 1995; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Field et al., 1998a; Test et al., 2000; Wehmeyer et al., 1998), and that there is a significant difference in the outcomes based on the individual student's level of self-determination. The students who demonstrated high levels of self-determination, as reflected by how they exercised the core components of a self-determined individual (Wehmeyer, 2007), had a transition process that included their voices and/or where they were in the process of achieving their career goals. Gabriela and Amelia had fulfilled their plans of completing their bachelor degrees and they were on their way to entering their masters program. Julio and José were eagerly working on their plans.

However, this study found that although these students were becoming masters of their own lives, their plans for their lives included their families' advice and best interests. The transition outcomes of the students who did not demonstrate high levels of self-determination did not include their voices or their strengths or their families' voices. They shared that they were satisfied with their transition outcomes; however, they were

not even considering or thinking about a future. They only spoke about their present situation with acceptance of what was offered to them, not what they would have liked it to be. None of these students had plans for their future; instead, they were waiting for others to let them know what was planned for their future.

*Teaching and supporting self-determination.*

Another significant finding as a result of this study is how the students in this study primarily learn and develop their self-determination skills. Currently there are many resources available to support the instruction of self-determination skills at school to youth with disabilities: Choice Maker (Martin & Marshall, 1995), S. T.E. P. S. (Field & Hoffman, 1996a), Who's Future Is It Anyway? (Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1995), Next S. T. E. P. S. (Halpern et al., 1995, 2000), and The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). However, in spite of all of these strategies and models created to be implemented at school, the findings of this study show that for Hispanic students, self-determination is mostly taught and learned at home as opposed to strategies used at school.

The results from this study show that the participants in this study primarily learned their self-determination skills directly or indirectly from their families, extended families, and /or other role models (either Hispanic role models or closely related friends of the family). Direct teaching was conducted by providing their children with unconditional support and by having expectations for their children to develop and fulfill their potential as contributing members of the family. Indirect teaching took place through role modeling. As families exercised their own self-determined behavior, they

modeled the skills and demonstrated the importance of exercising those skills to their children.

Unconditional support was important for the students with high self-determination skills because it encouraged them to take risks and even try to accomplish new tasks regardless of the level of success. This support also helped these students to focus on their long-term goals and not on their disability. The parents' indirect teaching was done through role modeling. While this research study did not measure parent's self-determination skills directly, their individual accomplishments, description of their approach to life, and discussion of their everyday actions included core component skills thought to be part of self-determined behavior including choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, leadership, and self-evaluation. The students were exposed to this display of responsibility for each other and the larger Hispanic community.

Unconditional support was also a significant component of family life for students who had more significant support needs and who demonstrated fewer self-determination skills. Mario's mother said that it was not something that they questioned because this was the mother's job, that is, to care for their children regardless of their ability. For these parents, unconditional support was an essential component of their culture and home life.

Even students with lower scores on the Arc Self-determination scale reported that they learned self-determination skills directly or indirectly from their families, extended families, and other role models. The parents were very direct in expressing their low

expectations to their children. In Sebastian's presence, his mother said "Sebastian has a severe disability...he will never be able to make any decisions for himself." As a role model, Sebastian's mother showed no initiative and left all the decisions about Sebastian's transition planning to the school.

### *What are The Implications for Current Practices?*

*Collaboration with family and family involvement as a way to support the students' self determination.*

The students in this study relied strongly on their families for guidance and support during their transition process. They saw their families as teachers and role models of self-determination. They solicited their families' advice as a way to make informed decisions that would guide them to make their own decisions about their present plans and their long-term goals.

It was clear in the findings that although these Hispanic students were self-determined, they held their family's opinions, needs, and recommendations in high esteem. Their values of interdependence and responsibility for self and others in their family were very prevalent as they made their plans and decisions. It was clear that for these students, their family values and culture significantly influenced, guided, supported, and structured who they were as self-determined individuals. The knowledge gained from this finding implies that the most significant and strongest influence Hispanic students have as they become self-determined individuals is their family and their cultural values.

These findings have implications for school personnel interested in supporting self-determined transition planning for students with disabilities from Hispanic backgrounds. The focus of useful transition planning should center on the family and involve wherever possible an extended family. The success of a student's family members can be used as role models to help inspire and teach goal setting and attainment skills. Students and parents should be provided with resources in the community and an understanding of how to contact them and for what. Lastly, students and their family should be included in identifying transition planning participants to minimize fear of sharing information about legal status and/or disability.

Efforts to teach self-determination skills to students from Hispanic backgrounds should also be approached differently. As educators continue to strive for better ways to help them become causal agents of their lives, they must recognize the role of the family. While this research did not provide an opportunity to interview the teachers of these students or to observe them in the context of their schools and transition planning process, it is clear that for this population of students, the involvement of family is and will continue to be a critical determinant of their transition outcomes. For the majority of these students, their perception was that successful transition outcomes were attributable to their own hard work as well as the support and guidance of their families.

The importance of family involvement in teaching and fostering self-determination skills for this population of students opens a new way of looking at how we teach self-determination. Teaching Hispanic students how to become self-determined individuals clearly involves looking at the student not as an independent unit but as a

member of a larger group effort that includes their family. It can be inferred from the findings that embracing parents as active members of the transition team, respecting the students' family and their cultural values, and assisting these families in including their children's voices in the transition planning can improve how we currently teach self-determination to Hispanic students. The difference from the approach that we currently practice is that with these students, we need to look at their families not as a third party, separate from the students, but instead as a vital component that directly influences and helps define them as self-determined individuals.

*Thinking of "family" broadly.*

The results of this study also infer that the definition of family for the Hispanic population is not just the nuclear family but the extended family, a network of friends and colleagues, and any member of their culture. It surfaced during the study that for the Hispanic population, their extended families, friends, friend of their friend, and /or other Hispanics within that community do play a vital influence in the development of the students' self-determination. They helped each other finding resources, sharing experiences and resources, and by setting examples for each other as an extensive support system. This broad concept of "family" is a significant finding from this study that can be incorporated and utilized to expand the choices and resources these students can have during their transition planning. This broader sense of family increases the capital and resources available to the students during their transition.

Another significant finding that can have implications on how we currently practice teaching and facilitating self-determination during the transition planning of

these students is recognizing how important it can be for them to find work opportunities that reflect their strengths. For the majority of the students in this study, work and career meant striving for the best way they could honor their families for the efforts and sacrifices they had made for them to be here in the U.S. It was very important to them to find ways to improve their lives regardless of their disabilities. The pride of their heritage and the respect for their ancestor who paved their way into the possibilities of “the American Dream” were significant factors regarding how dedicated and determined they were in pursuing a future for themselves. For these students, it was very important to feel guided toward a career or job opportunities where they could be proud of themselves, and that would reflect the respect they had for the opportunities being given to them.

*Need for information about services (transition, adult services, legal status).*

One last finding that can have significant implications on how we currently practice the teaching of self-determination during transition is the absence of viable information available to parents on transition services, adult services, their legal status, and the impact that this can have on the transition process. The transition process and the teaching of self-determination could be more productive for these students when information and resources are readily available to them and their families in both English and Spanish. Depending on the literacy level of the student and their family, there appears to be a need to conduct individualized information sharing sessions.

### *What are the Implications for Future Research?*

More studies are needed which compare and examine the role that self-determination plays for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background in

transition from school to work. This study was an initial exploratory study which only tapped into the role that self-determination plays in the lives and education of these students. Further studies might examine each of the major themes that emerged from this qualitative study as a way to delineate best practices and guidelines to teach self-determination skills within the context of the Hispanic culture.

The findings of this study leads to the implication that more research is also needed to impact the way transition services are currently being delivered. Because students did not agree to allow the researcher to speak with school personnel, an incomplete picture of the entire transition process was obtained. This research provided a clear understanding of their perceptions of the transition from school to work process and the role of student self-determination, but the true role of school personnel in this process was not observed. It is fair to say that a truly collaborative transition planning process was not achieved. Neither the attempts of school personnel to make that happen, the supports and services they provided, nor the skills of the school personnel to offer culturally sensitive transition services could be adequately ascertained from this study. A similar qualitative study that includes school-based transition stakeholders as well as adult service providers would be a critical next step for future research to understand transition planning for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background.

Since these students with disabilities learned their self-determination skills from their parents, research on ways to support parents in this critically important role should be conducted. In particular, this research should focus on strategies that (a) help parents understand the role of self-determination in the transition process; (b) clarify the common

misconceptions of self-determination; and (c) help parents who do not themselves exhibit self-determination skills or who do not know how to teach them to their son or daughter.

Lastly, while this study was grounded in the Ecological Theory and the data analyzed through the lenses of the ecological systems, this was an incomplete analysis of the multiple systems and their interactions due to the limited access the researcher had to the school, adult service system, and/or policy levels of the transition planning process. It did, however, provide a mechanism to explore in detail components of the microsystem (i.e., student-family interactions) as well as of the exosystem (i.e., culture) levels. This perspective allowed the researcher to capture the most significant values within this population—family values and culture—and the vital role they play in self determination for this population. Future research would benefit by using the Ecological Theory to study in-depth the other ecological system levels of the transition planning process as well when studying issues involving self determination for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background.

### *Conclusion*

This research study provided insight into the role of self-determination in transition from school to work for Hispanic students with disabilities. The findings provided a description of the many dynamics and social influences that can shape, guide, and support the self-determination skills of this particular student population. As mentioned above in the discussion section of this chapter, the role of self-determination for Hispanic students with disabilities in transition from school to work is directly influenced by the experiences and culture of their families. This suggests, therefore, that

these students can be better understood and supported through their transition if the transition agents can gain a better understanding of the students' family values and cultures.

It is with this knowledge that the researcher concludes by stating that as educators and researchers strive to provide quality of services for all students with disabilities in transition from school to work, they must continue to implement evidence based educational practices that are focused on the uniqueness of each student and, in particular, on how each student is influenced by their families and their culture. The researcher would like to leave the educators and researchers who are striving for quality of education in transition services with one last thought: to provide quality of services for students with disabilities from a Hispanic background in transition from school to work, we cannot leave the families of our students behind.

Julio, a student in this study, captured the spirit of the findings of this study when he shared the following statement:

“In the Spanish culture...you know, like in my family, they are always 100% behind you and that's one of the biggest things that has always helped me get through life. No matter what I decide to do, even if I struggle, I know that I am not alone.”

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Student Interview Protocol

Personal Information: Age\_\_\_\_\_ Sex\_\_\_\_ Country of Origin or Heritage\_\_\_\_\_  
Years living in the U.S.\_\_\_\_\_

#### Let's talk about you and your plans for future employment/career:

6. Tell me how you make your decisions about what career/job you want?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give an example, do you consult with others; follow advice of others, family members, professionals?
7. Tell me, what factors do you take into consideration when making decisions about your career/job, what influences you?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example, do you take into consideration your family's input, your own beliefs and desires, cultural expectations?
8. Tell me, how do you make plans about where you want to work, how you want to work, and/or who you want to work with, what influences you?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give an example, how do you make plans for where you are going, what you are going to do in the weekend, etc? Tell me, how do you follow-up on decisions you make about work related training and responsibilities?

- b. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example, do you follow-up independently or with help from friends, family members, or technology?
- 9. Tell me, how does your Hispanic background (religion, language spoken at home, family values, and traditions) impact your efforts to accomplish what you set out to achieve?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example of how it helps, facilitates or impedes. Would you be selecting career choices that your family considers a tradition in your family/culture?

## APPENDIX B =APPENDIX A IN SPANISH

Información Personal: Edad\_\_\_\_ Sexo\_\_\_\_ País de Origen o Descendencia:\_\_\_\_\_  
 Tiempo viviendo en los Estados Unidos\_\_\_\_\_

### Protocolo Para Entrevistar al Estudiante

#### Hablemos de ti y de los planes que tienes para una futura carrera o un futuro

#### empleo:

1. Dime, ¿cómo llegas a tus decisiones con respecto a la carrera o el trabajo que te interesa emprender?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿consultas con otras personas, buscas el consejo de miembros de tu familia o de profesionales?
2. Dime, ¿qué factores tomas en consideración en la toma de decisiones respecto a una carrera o trabajo? ¿Qué influye sobre tus decisiones?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿consultas con otras personas como ser miembros de tu familia o profesionales?
3. Dime, ¿como haces tus planes de dónde quieres trabajar, con quién quieres trabajar, y/o cómo quieres trabajar?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿cómo decides adonde vas cada día o qué vas a hacer el fin de semana?

4. Dime, ¿cómo haces para mantener el curso de tus decisiones acerca de tu entrenamiento y responsabilidades de trabajo?
- a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿haces el seguimiento tú sólo o con la ayuda de amigos o familia o asistencia tecnológica? Dime, ¿cómo influye tu herencia cultural hispana (religión, idioma de preferencia en el hogar, tradiciones y valores de familia) sobre tus esfuerzos en el desarrollo de tus planes?
  - b. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, dime cómo estos elementos ayudan, facilitan o impiden tus esfuerzos. Cuando consideras distintas carreras, ¿basas tus opciones en lo que tu familia piensa que deberías de hacer?

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The undersigned Certified Translator hereby certifies the foregoing to be a true and accurate translation into Spanish of the STUDENTS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.

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Magdalena Velázquez, Certified Spanish Language Interpreter for the Courts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## APPENDIX C

### PARENTS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Let's talk about your son or daughter and how they make their plans for their future employment/career:**

1. Tell me about how does your son/daughter make decisions about their future career/job, what influences them?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example, does he/she consult with others; follow advice of others, family members, professionals?
2. Tell me, what factors does your son/daughter take into consideration when making decisions about her career/job, what influences their decision?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example, does he/she consult with others; follow advice of others, family members, professionals?
3. Tell me, what factors does your son/daughter take into consideration when making decisions about where they want to work, how they want to work and they want to work with, what influences them?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example. Does he/she consider family input, his/her own beliefs and desires, cultural expectations?

- b. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example, do they follow-up independently, with help from friends, family members, or technology?
- 4. Tell me, how does your son/daughter's Hispanic background (religion, language spoken at home, family values, cultural and family traditions) impact his/her efforts to accomplish what he/she set out to achieve?
  - a. **Possible probes/rephrases:** Give me an example of how it helps, facilitates, or impedes. (i.e., cultural and religious beliefs, obedience to parents, role in a foreign society, etc.).

## APPENDIX D = APPENDIX C IN SPANISH

### PROTOCOLO PARA ENTREVISTAR A LOS PADRES

**Vamos a hablar acerca de tu hijo/hija y cómo él/ella hacen sus planes para su futuro trabajo o carrera:**

1. Dime, ¿cómo es que tú hijo/hija llega a la toma de decisiones acerca de su futura carrera o futuro trabajo?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿consulta con otras personas? ¿sigue el consejo de otras personas como miembros de la familia o profesionales?
2. Dime, ¿qué factores toma en consideración tu hijo/hija cuando él/ella toma sus decisiones en relación a una carrera o trabajo? ¿qué influye sobre él/ella?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿consulta con otras personas? ¿sigue el consejo de otras personas como miembros de la familia o profesionales?
3. Dime, ¿qué factores considera tu hijo/hija toma sus decisiones de cómo quiere trabajar en el futuro, con quién, cómo, dónde?
  - a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿toma en consideración los consejos de la familia, sus propias creencias y deseos, las expectativas culturales?
4. Dime, ¿cómo hace tu hijo/hija para mantener el curso de sus decisiones acerca de su entrenamiento y responsabilidades de trabajo?

- a. **En otras palabras:** Por ejemplo, ¿hace el seguimiento independientemente o con la ayuda de sus amigos, de la familia o de herramientas tecnológicas?
5. Dime, ¿cómo son afectados los esfuerzos de su hijo/hija para mantener sus planes vigentes por la herencia cultural hispana ( sea religión, idioma de preferencia en el hogar, tradiciones y valores de familia)?
- a. **En otras palabras:** Dame un ejemplo de cómo esta herencia hispana le ayuda, facilita o impide el desarrollar sus planes (por ejemplo, elementos de cultura, religión, estructura familiar, obediencia a los padres, actuación en una sociedad extranjera, etcétera).

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The undersigned Certified Translator hereby certifies the foregoing to be a true and accurate translation into Spanish of the PARENTS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, APPENDIX C.

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Magdalena Velázquez, Certified Spanish Language Interpreter for the Courts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## APPENDIX E

### PROFESSIONALS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Let's talk about your student/client and how they make their decisions about their future employment/career:

1. Tell me about how does your student/client make decisions about their future career/job, what influences them? Give me an example. Does he/she consult with others; follow advice of others, family members, professionals?
2. Tell me, what factors does your student/client take into consideration when making decisions about where they want to work, how they want to work, and who they want to work with, what influences them? Give me an example. Does she/he consider family input, their own beliefs and desires, cultural expectations?
3. Tell me, how does your student/client make plans for the classes he/she is going to take at school? Give me an example. Does he/she gets help from his/her friend, by themselves, help from a teacher?
4. Tell me, how does your student/client follow-up on the decisions he/she makes about work related training and responsibilities? Give me an example. Does he/she make this decisions independently, with help from friends or family members, technology?

5. Tell me, how does your student/client's Hispanic background impact his/her efforts to accomplish what he/she sets out to achieve? Give me an example of how it helps, facilitates, or impedes. (i.e., cultural and religious beliefs, obedience to parents, role in a foreign society, etc.)

## APPENDIX F

### INTRODUCTION LETTER

Date

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, Director

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Re: SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A  
HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

Dear Sir/Madam:

I wanted to thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the, SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK study. WE are so pleased you are going to be a part of this exciting study.

The purpose of this research study is to understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the life of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background when they are transitioning from school to work. Once that role is better understood, then best practices can be developed to provide these students with meaningful and appropriate transition supports within the context of their culture. This, in turn, should help prepare them to achieve a good quality of life after they leave high school and enter adulthood.

Over the course of the next week, we would like to meet with you and several of your staff, particularly the community outreach coordinator working with individuals and families from a Hispanic background. Please look for correspondence from me to this effect. When we come to your location to meet with you and/or your staff, please feel free to ask any questions you may have about the project or your agency's participation; we welcome your questions and attention. In the meantime, if you have questions, please feel free to contact me at: Elin Doval, [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com) or cell phone (804) 301-01156.

Thank you and we are looking forward to seeing you very soon.

Sincerely,

Elin C. Doval  
Student Investigator

## APPENDIX G

### RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION Participant Consent Form

**TITLE:** SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM  
A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

This form may have some words that you do not know. Please ask someone to explain any words that you do not know. You may take home a copy of this form to think about and talk to your parents about before you decide if you want to be in this study.

#### **What is this study about?**

- We want to understand how self-determination (the ability to make choices for yourself) affects the lives of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background when they are getting prepared for work after they finish high school
- Self-determination simply means your ability to make decisions for yourself.
- We want to know what self-determination means for students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background when they are getting prepared for work after they finish high school.

#### **What will happen to me if I choose to be in this study?**

- You will be asked questions about yourself and your plans for work in the future. We think it will take about 30 to 60 minutes. We also would like to have a second interview to ask you additional questions that will give us more information about your plans for work. This will also probably take another 30 to 60 minutes.
- The researcher will watch you as you work on goals that will help you get ready for a job in the community. We want to know how people are trying to help you and what works to help you get the job you want. We will take

notes of what we see. Examples of places where you will be observed are: working with your vocational counselor or at school interacting with your teacher.

- You will be asked to answer questions from the Arc's Self-Determination Scale to find out how you make decisions for yourself. The Arc's Self-determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) is a measuring tool used by professionals to measure how students make decisions for themselves. It will take about 30 to 60 minutes to answer the questions. We can divide it into several short sessions if you want us to do that.
- You can stop your participation at any time or choose not to answer a question if you are uncomfortable.
- If you want, someone can read the questions for you and record your answers.
- If you prefer to answer your questions in Spanish, we can do that.
- If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to sign this form saying that you agree to answer the questions and talk about your school and work plans and allow us to see what you are doing.
- Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered, and understand what will happen to you.

#### **Do I have to be in this study?**

- You do not have to be in this study.
- If you choose not to be in the study you may stop at any time.

#### **Will you tell anyone what I say?**

- We will not tell anyone the answers you give us.
- We will not share your answers with your teachers, parents, or friends.
- The only time that we would tell someone what you said is if you tell us that someone is hurting you, or that you might hurt yourself or someone else. We have to do this under the law, we have no choice.

- If we talk about this study in speech or in writing, we will never use your name.

### **Would you talk to anyone else about me?**

With your parent (s) or legal guardian's permission we will talk to:

- At least a member of your family to learn more about you.
- Other individuals that might know you well like your teacher or someone in the community who knows you well.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

- We believe there are minimal risks from being in this study.
- These risks could come from taking time to talk with us, from having someone watch what you are doing, and maybe from being asked questions about things you believe are private.

### **BENEFITS**

- There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.
- We hope that what we learn from you will help us help other students achieve their goals for work after high school. We specifically hope it will help us understand what works for students from Hispanic culture. .

### **Questions**

If you have questions about being in this study, you can talk to the following people or you can have your parent or another adult call or email:

Dr. Colleen Thoma  
Associate Professor, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Doctoral Student, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, V A 23298  
Telephone: 804-828-0868

### PERMISSION

- I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study.
- Please check "Yes" or "No" if you give permission or not for the investigators of this study to talk about you with:

Someone from my family.....yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_

My teacher.....yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_

Someone from school who I work with other than my teacher .....  
yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_

Someone from my work.....yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Who? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Name of Participant                      signature of participant                      Date

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Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent                      Date  
Discussion / Witness (Printed)

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Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent                      Date  
Discussion / Witness

---

Investigator signature (if different from above)                      Date

## APPENDIX H = APPENDIX G IN SPANISH

### Información Para El Participante Sobre El Tema De La Investigación

#### Consentimiento Del Participante

##### **TÍTULO:**

LA AUTODETERMINACIÓN PARA ESTUDIANTES CON DISCAPACIDADES DE DESCENDENCIA HISPANA EN EL PROCESO DE TRANSICIÓN DE LA ESCUELA AL TRABAJO.

Este documento puede que contenga palabras que no te sean muy familiares. Si ese es el caso, por favor pídele ayuda a alguien para que te explique esta información claramente. Puedes llevarte una copia de este documento a tu casa para pensarlo y para conversar acerca del tema con tus padres antes de tomar la decisión de participar o no en el estudio.

##### **¿Para que es este estudio?**

- Los investigadores de este estudio están interesados en saber cómo es que los estudiantes con discapacidad de descendencia hispana valorizan el concepto de autodeterminación (o sea la habilidad de tomar decisiones propias) particularmente en el período de transición de estudiante en la secundaria a adulto con trabajo en la comunidad.
- La autodeterminación se refiere simplemente a cómo una persona llega a tomar decisiones propias.
- Nosotros queremos saber qué significa la autodeterminación para un estudiante con discapacidad de descendencia hispana en la medida en que éste se prepara para empezar a trabajar una vez acabados los estudios de la secundaria.

##### **¿A qué me comprometo si decido participar en este estudio?**

- Te preguntaremos acerca de tu vida y de tus planes de empleo en el futuro. Pensamos que la entrevista tomará entre 30 a 60 minutos. Luego queremos realizar una segunda entrevista donde te haremos preguntas más detalladas para

- lograr mayor información sobre tus planes de empleo. Esta segunda entrevista también tomará entre 30 a 60 minutos.
- El investigador observará tu comportamiento durante las actividades que realizas para prepararte para lograr un empleo en la comunidad. Nos interesa observar de qué manera otras personas te están ayudando y qué cosas funcionan para prepararte a conseguir el empleo que deseas. Tomaremos apuntes de lo observado. Algunos ejemplos de las ocasiones en que iremos a observarte son cuando estás trabajando con tu consejero vocacional, o en la escuela cuando estés trabajando con tu maestro o maestra.
- Te pediremos que completes un cuestionario titulado “Escala de Autodeterminación ARC” para medir tu nivel de autodeterminación. La Escala de Autodeterminación ARC (Wehmeyer, 1995) es un instrumento de medición validado empíricamente, comúnmente usado por profesionales para medir el nivel de autodeterminación de los estudiantes. Generalmente se contesta en una sesión de entre 30 a 60 minutos pero si lo deseas lo puedes completar en varias sesiones más cortas.
- Puedes retirarte del estudio en cualquier momento, y si alguna pregunta te incomoda no tienes que contestarla.
- Si lo deseas, otra persona puede leerte las preguntas y anotar tus respuestas.
- Puedes contestar en español si así lo deseas.
- Si decides participar en este estudio deberás firmar este documento el cual especifica que tú estás de acuerdo en contestar las preguntas, hablar sobre tus actividades en la escuela y sobre tus planes de empleo, y nos autorizas a observarte.
- No tienes que firmar este documento hasta que todas tus preguntas con respecto a este estudio hayan sido aclaradas.

**¿Tengo la obligación de participar en este estudio?**

- No estás obligado a participar en este estudio.
- Si aceptas participar en este estudio de cualquier manera siempre puedes retirarte en el momento en que lo desees.

### **¿Ustedes le van a decir a alguien más lo que yo les haya dicho durante el estudio?**

- Nosotros no le revelaremos nada de lo que tú nos digas a nadie.
- Nosotros no compartiremos tus comentarios ni con tus maestros, ni con tus padres ni con tus amistades.
- En el caso en que tú nos cuentes que alguien te esta haciendo daño, o que tú te haces daño a ti mismo, o a otra persona, entonces sí debemos informar a las autoridades correspondientes. Esto es requerido por ley.
- Si llegáramos a hablar o escribir acerca de este estudio nos comprometemos a nunca utilizar tu verdadero nombre.

### **¿Con qué otras personas hablarían acerca de mí?**

Teniendo la autorización de tus padres, o de tu tutor legal, hablaremos con:

- Por lo menos otro miembro de tu familia para aprender más acerca de ti.
- Otras personas que te puedan conocer bien como por ejemplo tu maestro o maestra u otra persona en la comunidad que te conozca bien.

### **RIESGOS E INCOMODIDADES**

- Consideramos que los riesgos de participación en este estudio son mínimos.
- Estos riesgos mínimos incluyen el tiempo que tendrás que tomar para hablar con nosotros, que hayan personas observando sus actividades, y la incomodidad de hablar sobre temas de naturaleza personal.

### **BENEFICIOS**

- El participar en este estudio no te brindará ningún beneficio directo.
- El investigador de este estudio espera adquirir más conocimientos para poder ayudar a otros estudiantes a lograr su objetivo de trabajo luego de terminar los estudios secundarios. En particular, esperamos mejorar nuestra comprensión de cuál es la mejor manera de ayudar a los estudiantes de descendencia hispana.

### **Preguntas**

Si tienes alguna pregunta con respecto a tu participación en este estudio puedes llamar a las siguientes personas, o pedirle a tus padres u otro adulto que llame o envíe un correo electrónico, a:

Dr. Colleen Thoma  
 Associate Professor, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
 Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
 (804) 827-2651, Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
 Doctoral Student, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
 Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
 (804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

Si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de tus derechos como participante en este estudio te puedes comunicar con la siguiente oficina:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
 P.O. Box 980568  
 Richmond, V A 23298  
 Teléfono: 804-828-0868  
 CONSENTIMIENTO

- Se me ha dado la oportunidad de leer esta declaración de consentimiento. Comprendo la información que se me ha dado con respecto a este estudio. Las preguntas que yo tenía fueron contestadas. Mi firma en este documento significa que acepto participar en este estudio.
- Por favor, marque ‘Si’ o ‘No’ si le das permiso o no a los investigadores de este estudio para que hablen con:

Familiar/es ..... “si” \_\_\_ “no” \_\_\_\_\_ Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Mi maestro/a.... “si” \_\_\_ “no” \_\_\_\_\_ Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Otra persona con la que trabajo en el colegio:

“si” \_\_\_ “no” \_\_\_\_\_ Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Un colega del trabajo:

“si” \_\_\_ “no” \_\_\_\_\_ Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre del Participante

Firma del Participante

Fecha

---

Nombre de la Persona Gestionando el Consentimiento/Testigo (impreso)

Fecha



## APPENDIX I

### RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION

#### AND PERMISSION FORM - Parent Consent

**Research participant (student's name) \_\_\_\_\_ has given permission for your participation in this study.**

**TITLE: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK**

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with others before making your decision.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the transition of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background. Once that role is better understood, then best practices can be developed to provide these students with meaningful and appropriate transition supports within the context of their culture. This in turn should help prepare them to achieve a good quality of life after they leave high school and enter adulthood.

Your son or daughter is being asked to participate in this study because [s]he is receiving special education or is otherwise identified as a student with a disability.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT**

If you decide to give permission to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

This research study involves students with disabilities that are in transitioning out of high school in to the community.

Your involvement in the study will be to participate in two interviews where you will be asked questions on the subject of how your son/daughter makes decisions about school, and their future careers and/or jobs. Each interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Your son/daughter will be asked the same questions to be answered from their perspectives. Examples of the questions that your sons/daughters will be asked are:

1. What are your plans for the future?
2. Tell me, how you make your decisions about your career/job, what influences you? Give an example. Do you consult with others, follow advice of others, family members, professionals?

The research will also conduct observations of your son/daughter during meetings related to their transition process. Examples of meetings where they will be observed are: transition planning meetings, working with their vocational counselor or at school interacting with their teacher or transition coordinator. Lastly, your son/daughter will be administered the Arc's Self-Determination Scale to measure their self-determination skills level. The Arc's Self-determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) is an empirically validated measuring tool used by professionals to measure students' level of self-determination.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We believe there are minimal risks associated with involvement in this study. These risks are limited to the discomfort of participating in the interviews and the discomfort in answering questions of a personal nature.

## **BENEFITS**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The research of this study hopes to gain some significant knowledge about self-determination, students with disabilities, transition and cultural values that later can assist school programs in the United States to better understand and support students from a Hispanic background.

## **COSTS**

There are no costs for participating in this study.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your alternative is to choose not to participate.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, once interviews are completed and entered into the computer file, the documents will be destroyed.

We will not tell anyone the answers you have given us. However, if the information reveals that someone might be hurt, the law says that we have to let people in authority know so they can protect you and the members of your family.

All records associated with this project will be kept in a locked file and will be accessible only to the researcher and her authorized assistants. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name or other identifying information will never be used in these presentations or papers.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the interviews. Not participating will not affect you.

## **QUESTIONS**

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, contact:

Colleen Thoma, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
1015 W. Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651  
Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Assist Investigator, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020

Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
 (804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
 P.O. Box 980568  
 Richmond, V A 23298  
 Telephone: 804-828-0868

### **PERMISSION**

I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study.

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Name of Child

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Parent name printed	Parent signature	Date
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---

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness (Printed)	Date
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Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness Date	Date
--	------

---

Investigator signature (if different from above)	Date
--	------

## APPENDIX J = APPENDIX I IN SPANISH

### INFORMACIÓN SOBRE EL TEMA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN Y CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LOS PADRES

**El Participante en este estudio (nombre del estudiante)\_\_\_\_\_ ha  
dado su consentimiento para que usted o ustedes participen en este estudio.**

#### **TÍTULO:**

LA AUTODETERMINACIÓN PARA ESTUDIANTES CON DISCAPACIDADES DE  
DESCENDENCIA HISPANA EN EL PROCESO DE TRANSICIÓN DE LA ESCUELA  
AL TRABAJO.

Este documento informativo puede que contenga palabras que no te sean muy familiares. En ese el caso pídele claras explicaciones a cualquiera de las personas que trabajan con el estudio. En todo caso puede llevarse este documento sin firmar a su casa para pensar acerca del asunto o conversarlo con otras personas antes de tomar una decisión.

#### **OBJETIVO DEL ESTUDIO**

El objetivo de este estudio es de investigar sobre el papel que juega la autodeterminación para estudiantes con discapacidades y de descendencia hispana en la etapa de transición entre el egreso de la secundaria a la búsqueda de empleo en la comunidad. Una vez que logremos entender mejor el papel que juega la autodeterminación entonces podremos trabajar en desarrollar principios de eficacia en el campo de los servicios de apoyo y de esta manera ofrecerle importantes servicios a estos estudiantes y de mayor afinidad con sus valores culturales.

Su hijo o hija ha sido invitado a participar en este estudio debido a que atiende clases de educación especial o fue registrado como un estudiante con discapacidad.

## **DESCRIPCIÓN DEL ESTUDIO Y SU PARTICIPACIÓN**

Si usted tiene interés en participar en este estudio entonces le pediremos que firme este documento de consentimiento luego que todas sus preguntas hayan sido contestadas y se haya informado sobre las actividades en las que tendrá que participar.

Para este estudio trabajaremos con estudiantes con discapacidades que están en la etapa de transición luego de egresar de la secundaria y encaminados a ser miembros de la comunidad.

Usted participará en dos entrevistas donde le haremos distintas preguntas incluyendo preguntas sobre cómo cree usted que su hijo o hija llega a la toma de decisiones respecto a asuntos académicos y respecto a una futura carrera o futuro empleo. A continuación siguen ejemplos del tipo de pregunta que le haremos al estudiante:

1. ¿Cuáles son tus planes para el futuro?
2. Explícame, ¿cómo es que llegas a tomar decisiones con respecto a una carrera o empleo? ¿qué cosas influyen sobre ti cuando vas a tomar decisiones? Dame un ejemplo. ¿Consultas con otras personas? ¿Sigues el consejo de otras personas, de familiares, de profesionales?

Para este estudio también observaremos el comportamiento de su hijo o hija durante las actividades relacionadas al proceso de transición. Por ejemplo durante las reuniones de planificación para la transición, mientras trabaja con el consejero vocacional y durante la actividad escolar mientras trabaja con su maestro o maestra, o con el coordinador del proceso de transición. Finalmente, el estudiante completará un cuestionario denominado la Escala de Autodeterminación de ARC para medir su nivel de autodeterminación. La Escala de Autodeterminación de Arc (Wehmeyer,1995) es un instrumento de medición validado empíricamente, comúnmente usado por profesionales para medir el nivel de autodeterminación de los estudiantes.

## **RIESGOS E INCONVENIENCIAS**

Consideramos que los riesgos de participación en este estudio son mínimos y se limitan a la inconveniencia del tiempo para participar en las entrevistas y la incomodidad de hablar de temas de naturaleza personal.

## **BENEFICIOS**

Su participación en este estudio no le brindará ningún beneficio directo.

El investigador de este estudio espera adquirir mayores conocimientos sobre la relación entre la autodeterminación, los estudiantes con discapacidades, el proceso de transición y los valores culturales para contribuir al desarrollo de programas académicos en los

Estados Unidos que fomenten mayor comprensión y asistencia para los estudiantes de descendencia hispana.

## **COSTO**

Es gratis participar en este estudio.

## **OPCIONES**

Tu participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Puedes optar por no participar.

## **CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Para asegurar su privacidad y la confidencialidad, una vez que las entrevistas se hayan completado y registrado en los archivos computarizados todos los documentos serán destruidos.

Nosotros no divulgaremos ninguna de tus respuestas. No obstante, si la información brindada indica que alguien puede ser herido entonces por ley debemos informar a las autoridades para su propia protección y la de su familia.

Todos los documentos asociados a este proyecto serán mantenidos en un archivo bajo llave y solamente podrán acceder a ellos el investigador y los asistentes debidamente autorizados. Es posible que los resultados de este estudio sean presentados en reuniones de trabajo o publicados en distintas publicaciones, sin embargo nunca revelaremos ni tu nombre ni cualquier otra información por la cual puedas ser identificado.

## **PREGUNTAS**

Por cualquier pregunta que puedas tener ahora o en el futuro acerca de la participación en este estudio, puedes comunicarte con:

Colleen Thoma, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
1015 W. Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651  
Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Assist Investigator, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020

Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
 (804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

Si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de tus derechos como participante de este estudio, puedes comunicarte con:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
 P.O. Box 980568  
 Richmond, V A 23298  
 Telephone: 804-828-0868

### CONSENTIMIENTO

Se me ha dado la oportunidad de leer esta declaración de consentimiento. Comprendo la información que se me ha dado con respecto a este estudio. Las preguntas que yo tenía fueron contestadas. Mi firma en este documento significa que acepto participar en este estudio.

Nombre del estudiante	Firma del estudiante	Fecha
Nombre del padre o madre	Firma de padre o madre	Fecha
Nombre de la Persona Gestionando este Consentimiento		Fecha
Firma del Investigador (si diferente al anterior)		Fecha

The undersigned Certified Translator hereby certifies the foregoing to be a true and accurate translation into Spanish of the RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND PERMISSION FORM – PARENT CONSENT, APPENDIX I, bearing the APPROVED stamp of the Office of Research Subjects Protection dated 4/17/08.-

Magdalena Velázquez, Certified Spanish Language Interpreter for the Courts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## APPENDIX K

### RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION

#### AND PERMISSION FORM – Agency Representative/Professional Consent

**Research Participant (student's name) \_\_\_\_\_ has given permission for your participation in this study.**

**TITLE:** SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with others before making your decision.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the transition of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background. Once that role is better understood, then best practices can be developed to provide these students with meaningful and appropriate transition supports within the context of their culture. This in turn should help prepare them to achieve a good quality of life after they leave high school and enter adulthood.

Your student/client is being asked to participate in this study because [s]he is receiving special education or is otherwise identified as a student with a disability.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT**

If you decide to give permission to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

This research study involves students with disabilities that are in transitioning out of high school in to the community.

Your involvement in the study will be to participate in two interviews where you will be asked questions on the subject of how your student/client makes decisions in their lives. Each interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We believe there are minimal risks associated with involvement in this study. These risks are limited to the discomfort of participating in the interviews.

### **BENEFITS**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The research of this study hopes to gain some significant knowledge about self-determination, students with disabilities, transition and cultural values that later can assist school programs in the United States to better understand and support students from a Hispanic background.

### **COSTS**

There are no costs for participating in this study.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your alternative is to choose not to participate.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, once interviews are completed and entered in the computer files the documents will be destroyed .

We will not tell anyone the answers your have given us. However, if the information reveals that someone might be hurt, the law says that we have to let people in authority know so they can protect you and the members of your family.

All records associated with this project will be kept in a locked file and will be accessible only to the researcher and her authorized assistants. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name or other identifying information will never be used in these presentations or papers.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the interviews. Not participating will not affect you.

## **QUESTIONS**

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, contact:

Colleen Thoma, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
1015 W. Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651  
Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Assist Investigator, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, V A 23298  
Telephone: 804-828-0868

## **PERMISSION**

I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study.

---

Name of student

---

Professional name printed

Professional signature

Date

---

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent

Date

Discussion / Witness (Printed)

---

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent

Date

Discussion / Witness Date

---

Investigator signature (if different from above)

Date

## APPENDIX L

### RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION

#### ASSENT FORM

**TITLE:** SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

This form may have some words that you do not know. Please ask someone to explain any words that you do not know. You may take home a copy of this form to think about and talk to your parents about before you decide if you want to be in this study.

#### **What is this study about?**

- We want to understand how self-determination (the ability to make choices for yourself) affects the lives of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background when they are getting prepared for work after they finish high school
- Self-determination simply means your ability to make decisions for yourself.
- We want to know what self-determination means for students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background when they are getting prepared for work after they finish high school.

#### **What will happen to me if I choose to be in this study?**

- You will be asked questions about yourself and your plans for work in the future. We think it will take about 30 to 60 minutes. We also would like to have a second interview to ask you additional questions that will give us more information about your plans for work. This will also probably take another 30 to 60 minutes.
- The researcher will watch you as you work on goals that will help you get ready for a job in the community. We want to know how people are trying

to help you and what works to help you get the job you want. We will take notes of what we see. Examples of places where you will be observed are: working with your vocational counselor or at school interacting with your teacher.

- You will be asked to answer questions from the Arc's Self-Determination Scale to find out how you make decisions for yourself. The Arc's Self-determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) is a measuring tool used by professionals to measure how students make decisions for themselves. It will take about 30 to 60 minutes to answer the questions. We can divide it into several short sessions if you want us to do that.
- You can stop your participation at any time or choose not to answer a question if you are uncomfortable.
- If you want, someone can read the questions for you and record your answers.
- If you prefer to answer your questions in Spanish we can do that.
- If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to sign this form, saying that you agree to answer the questions and talk about your school and work plans and allows to see what you are doing.
- Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered, and understand what will happen to you.

#### **Do I have to be in this study?**

- You do not have to be in this study.
- If you choose to be in the study you may stop at any time.

#### **Will you tell anyone what I say?**

- We will not tell anyone the answers you give us.
- We will not share your answers with your teachers, parents, or friends.
- The only time that we would tell someone what you said is if you tell us that someone is hurting you, or that you might hurt yourself or someone else. We have to do this under the law, we have no choice.

- If we talk about this study in speeches or in writing, we will never use your name.

**Would you talk to anyone else about me?**

With your parent (s) or legal guardian's permission we will talk to:

- At least a member of your family to learn more about you.
- Other individuals that might know you well like your teacher or someone in the community who knows you well.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

- We believe there are minimal risks from being in this study.
- These risks could come from taking time to talk with us, from having someone watch what you are doing and maybe from being asked questions about things you believe are private.

**BENEFITS**

- There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.
- We hope that what we learn from you will help us help other students achieve their goals for work after high school. We specifically hope it will help us understand what works for students from Hispanic culture. .

**Questions**

If you have questions about being in this study, you can talk to the following people or you can have your parent or another adult call or email:

Dr. Colleen Thoma  
Associate Professor, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
 Doctoral Student, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
 Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
 (804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
 P.O. Box 980568  
 Richmond, V A 23298  
 Telephone: 804-828-0868

### **PERMISSION**

I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study.

Name of Participant	signature of participant	Date
Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness (Printed)		Date
Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness		Date
Investigator signature (if different from above)		Date

## APPENDIX M = APPENDIX L IN SPANISH

### INFORMACIÓN SOBRE EL TEMA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

#### FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INDIVIDUAL

##### **TITULO:**

EL PAPEL DE LA AUTODETERMINACIÓN PARA ESTUDIANTES CON DISCAPACIDADES DE DESCENDENCIA HISPANA EN EL PROCESO DE TRANSICIÓN DE LA ESCUELA AL TRABAJO

Este documento informativo puede que contenga palabras que no te sean muy familiares. En ese caso, por favor pídele ayuda a cualquier miembro del equipo de investigación para que te explique esta información claramente. Este documento no tiene que ser firmado en este momento. Puedes llevarte este documento para pensarlo o incluso consultar con tus padres antes de decidir si quieres participar en este estudio.

##### **¿Para qué es este estudio?**

- Los investigadores de este estudio quieren comprender qué papel juega la autodeterminación (la capacidad de tomar decisiones por uno mismo) en la vida de estudiantes con discapacidades de descendencia hispana en la etapa en que se preparan para ingresar al mundo laboral luego de finalizar la secundaria.
- La autodeterminación se refiere simplemente a cómo una persona llega a tomar decisiones propias.
- Esta investigación apunta a establecer el significado de la autodeterminación para estudiantes con discapacidades de descendencia hispana en el proceso de preparación a ingresar al mundo del empleo.

##### **¿A qué me comprometo si decido participar en este estudio?**

- Haremos una entrevista donde te preguntaremos sobre tu vida y tus planes de trabajo en el futuro. Pensamos que esta entrevista llevará entre 30 y 60 minutos. Luego haríamos una segunda entrevista para

ampliar la información sobre tus planes de trabajo. Esta segunda entrevista llevará otros 30 a 60 minutos.

- También haremos observaciones de tu comportamiento durante reuniones relacionadas al proceso de preparación al mercado laboral. Nos interesa saber qué formas de asistencia se te han brindado y cuáles de estas medidas puedan ser efectivas para ayudarte a conseguir el trabajo que te interesa. Las observaciones se harán por ejemplo mientras trabajas con tu consejero vocacional o cuando trabajas con tu profesor.
- Completarás un cuestionario titulado Escala de Autodeterminación ARC para medir tu nivel de autodeterminación. La Escala de Autodeterminación ARC (Wehmeyer, 1995) es un instrumento de medición validado empíricamente y comúnmente usado por profesionales para medir el nivel de autodeterminación de los estudiantes. Generalmente lleva entre 30 a 60 minutos completar este cuestionario pero si lo deseas se puede contestar en sesiones más cortas.
- Puedes dejar de participar en cualquier momento en que lo desees, y no tienes que contestar ninguna pregunta que no quieras.
- Si lo deseas, otra persona puede leerte las preguntas y anotar tu respuesta.
- Puedes contestar en español si así lo prefieres.
- Si decides participar en este estudio, debes firmar este documento, el cual especifica que tú estás de acuerdo en contestar preguntas y a hablar en detalle acerca de tus planes académicos y de trabajo, y que nos das permiso para observarte en tus actividades.
- Tú no tienes que firmar este documento hasta que todas tus preguntas al respecto de este estudio han sido aclaradas.

### **¿Tengo que participar?**

- No tienes obligación de participar en esta investigación.
- Si decides participar, de cualquier manera puedes retirarte en cualquier momento.

### **¿Ustedes le van a revelar a alguien lo que yo les diga?**

- Nosotros no le diremos a nadie lo que tú nos has comentado.
- Nosotros no revelaremos tus comentarios ni a tus profesores, ni a tus padres ni a tus amistades.
- Únicamente revelaremos tus comentarios en el caso en que tú nos cuentes que alguien te esta haciendo daño, o que tú te haces daño a ti mismo o a otra persona. En esos casos la ley nos obliga a informar a las autoridades.
- Si en el futuro nosotros hablamos o escribimos sobre esta investigación, nunca usaremos tu verdadero nombre.

### **¿Con quién más hablarán de mí?**

- Hablaremos con por lo menos un miembro más de tu familia para poder conocerte mejor.
- Hablaremos con algunos otros integrantes de tu comunidad que te conozcan bien como ser tu profesor u otro integrante de tu comunidad.

### **RIESGOS E INCOMODIDADES**

- Consideramos que los riesgos de participar en esta investigación son mínimos.
- Los riesgos a considerar son el tiempo que llevarán las encuestas, el que alguien te esté observando y la incomodidad de hablar sobre temas de naturaleza personal.

### **BENEFICIOS**

- Su participación en este estudio no le da ningún beneficio directo.
- Esperamos que los resultados de esta investigación contribuyan a ayudar a otros estudiantes a lograr sus planes de trabajo luego de completar la secundaria. En especial, esperamos comprobar qué prácticas son las más eficientes para estudiantes de descendencia hispana.

## Preguntas

Si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de tu participación en este estudio puedes llamar a las siguientes personas o pedirle a tus padres u otro adulto que llame o envíe un correo electrónico a:

Dr. Colleen Thoma  
Associate Professor, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Doctoral Student, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

Si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de tus derechos con participante en este estudio comunícate con las siguiente oficina:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, V A 23298  
Teléfono: 804-828-0868

## PERMISO

Se me ha dado la oportunidad de leer esta declaración de consentimiento. Comprendo la información que se me ha dado con respecto a este estudio. Las preguntas que yo tenía fueron contestadas. Mi firma en este documento significa que acepto participar en este estudio.

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Nombre del Participante	Firma del Participante	Fecha
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Nombre de la Persona Gestionando este Consentimiento/Testigo	Fecha
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Nombre de la Persona Gestionando este Consentimiento/Testigo                      Fecha

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Firma del Investigador (si diferente al anterior)                                      Fecha

---

The undersigned Certified Translator hereby certifies the foregoing to be a true and accurate translation into Spanish of the RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION, ASSENT FORM, APPENDIX L, bearing the APPROVED stamp of the Office of Research Subjects Protection dated 4/17/08.-

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Magdalena Velázquez, Certified Spanish Language Interpreter for the Courts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## APPENDIX N

### Document Review Protocol

IEP \_\_\_\_\_ Transition Plan \_\_\_\_\_ Other Document(s) \_\_\_\_\_

<b>1- Participants:</b> Student _____ Parents _____ Teacher _____ DRS _____ Other _____		
<b>2- Transition Related Goals :</b>	<b>Where it will take place:</b>	<b>Who is responsible:</b>
<b>3- Self-Determination Related Goals:</b>	<b>Where it will take place:</b>	<b>Who is responsible:</b>
<b>4- Students Present level of Performance</b>	<b>Transition</b>	<b>Self-Determination</b>

## APPENDIX O

### Observation Protocol

Job site____ Community based assessment____ Classroom experience related to transition____				
<b>Self-Determination Skills</b>	<b>Microsystem</b>	<b>Mesosystem</b>	<b>Exosystem</b>	<b>Macrosystem</b>
Sets and works toward goals				
Decision making				
Problem solving				
Awareness of personal preferences, interests, strengths, limitations				
Ability to differentiate between wants and needs				
Makes choices based on preferences, interests, wants, and needs				
Considers multiple options and anticipates consequences for decisions				
Initiate and take action when needed				
Evaluates decisions based on the outcomes of the previous decision and revise future decisions accordingly				
Regulates behavior				
Uses communication skills: (a) negotiation, (b) compromise, (c) persuasion to reach goals Assumes responsibility for actions and decisions: (c) skills for problem-solving (d) a striving for independence while recognizing interdependence with others (e) self-advocacy and self-evaluation skills, (f) independent performance and adjustment skills, (g) persistence, (h) self-confidence, (i) pride (j) creativity				

## APPENDIX P

### RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION

#### AND PERMISSION FORM – Legal Guardian Consent

**TITLE:** UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM A HISPANIC BACKGROUND IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with others before making your decision.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to understand what role the concept of self-determination plays in the transition from school to work of students with disabilities who come from a Hispanic background. Once that role is better understood, then best practices can be developed to provide these students with meaningful and appropriate transition supports within the context of their culture. This in turn should help prepare them to achieve a good quality of life after they leave high school and enter adulthood.

Your son or daughter is being asked to participate in this study because [s]he is receiving special education or is otherwise identified as a student with a disability.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to give permission for your son/daughter/ward to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

This research study involves students with disabilities that are in transitioning out of high school in to the community.

Your son/daughter involvement in the study will be to participate in two interviews where [s ]he will be asked questions on the subject of how they makes decisions about school, and their future careers and/or jobs. Each interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Examples of the questions that your sons/daughters will be asked are:

1. What are your plans for their future job or career?
2. Tell me, how you make your decisions about your career/job, what influences you? Give an example. Do you consult with others, follow advice of others, family members, professionals?

The research will also conduct observations of your son/daughter/ward during meetings related to their transition process. Examples of meetings where they will be observed are: transition planning meetings, working with their vocational counselor or at school interacting with their teacher or transition coordinator.

Lastly, your son/daughter/ward will be administered the Arc's Self-Determination Scale to measure their self-determination skills level. The Arc's Self-determination Scale (Wehmeyer, 1995) is an empirically validated measuring tool used by professionals to measure students' level of self-determination. It will take your son/daughter/ward approximately 30 to 60 minutes to answer this questioner.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We believe there are minimal risks associated with involvement in this study. These risks are limited to the discomfort of participating in the interviews, and the discomfort in answering questions of a personal nature.

## **BENEFITS**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. The research of this study hopes to gain some significant knowledge about self-determination, students with disabilities, transition and cultural values that later can assist school programs in the United States to better understand and support students from a Hispanic background.

## **COSTS**

There are no costs for participating in this study.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

Your son/daughter/ward's participation in this study is voluntary. Your alternative is to choose not have him/her participate.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, once interviews are completed and entered into the computer file, the documents will be destroyed

We will not tell anyone the answers your son/daughter/ward has given us. However, if the information reveals that someone might be hurt, the law says that we have to let people in authority know so they can protect him/her and the members of their family.

All records associated with this project will be kept in a locked file and will be accessible only to the researcher and her authorized assistants. What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name or other identifying information will never be used in these presentations or papers.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You do not have to grant permission for your son/daughter/ward to participate in this study. If you choose to do so, you may change your mind at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the interviews. Not participating will not affect you.

## **QUESTIONS**

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, contact:

Colleen Thoma, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
1015 W. Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651  
Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Assist Investigator, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
 Virginia Commonwealth University  
 800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
 P.O. Box 980568  
 Richmond, V A 23298  
 Telephone: 804-828-0868

## PERMISSION

- We would like to have your permission to talk with you or at least a member of your son/daughter/ward's family to learn more about him/her.
- We would like to talk to other individuals that might provide information about your son/daughter/ward's transition to work (for instance, a teacher, job coach or vocational rehabilitation counselor).
- We would like your permission to access and review personal documents related to your son/daughter/ward's preparation and training from school to work. The purpose of reviewing these documents is to gain information about: (a) their transition goals, (b) self-determination related goals, and (c) information about their present level of performance in reference to their training and readiness for work after they leave school. For example: Where the training will take or took place? Who is or was responsible for the training or assessment? What are your strengths and challenges? What supports have been put in place?

I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to let my son/daughter/ward participate in this study.

---

Name of Child

---

Legal Guardian name printed	Legal Guardian signature	Date
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Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion / Witness (Printed)	Date
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---

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent	Date
---	------

Discussion / Witness Date

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Investigator signature (if different from above)

Date

## APPENDIX Q – APPENDIX P IN SPANISH

### INFORMACIÓN SOBRE EL TEMA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN Y CONSENTIMIENTO DEL TUTOR LEGAL

#### **TÍTULO:**

LA AUTODETERMINACIÓN PARA ESTUDIANTES CON DISCAPACIDADES DE DESCENDENCIA HISPANA EN EL PROCESO DE TRANSICIÓN DE LA ESCUELA AL TRABAJO.

Este documento informativo puede que contenga palabras que no te sean muy familiares. En ese el caso pídele claras explicaciones a cualquiera de las personas que trabajan con el estudio. En todo caso puede llevarse este documento sin firmar a su casa para pensar acerca del asunto o conversarlo con otras personas antes de tomar una decisión.

#### **OBJETIVO DEL ESTUDIO**

El objetivo de este estudio es de investigar sobre el papel que juega el concepto de autodeterminación para estudiantes con discapacidades y de descendencia hispana en la etapa de transición del egreso del colegio a la búsqueda de empleo. Una vez que logremos entender mejor el papel de la autodeterminación entonces podremos trabajar en desarrollar principios de eficacia en el campo de los servicios de apoyo y de esta manera ofrecerle servicios significativos y apropiados a estos estudiantes de acuerdo a los principios de su cultura. A su vez esperamos que este logro ayude a esto estudiantes, que han completado la secundaria, a acceder a una buena calidad de vida en su edad adulta.

Su hijo/hija/pupilo ha sido invitado a participar en este estudio debido a que atiende clases de educación especial o fue registrado como un estudiante con discapacidad.

#### **DESCRIPCIÓN DEL ESTUDIO Y LA PARTICIPACIÓN DEL ESTUDIANTE**

Si usted decide dar su consentimiento para que su hijo/hija/pupilo participe en esta investigación deberá firmar este consentimiento una vez que todas sus preguntas hayan sido contestadas y se haya informado sobre las actividades en las que tendrá que participar.

Para este estudio trabajaremos con estudiantes con discapacidades que están en una etapa de transición porque han terminado la secundaria y se integran a la comunidad.

El estudiante asistirá a dos entrevistas donde le preguntaremos acerca de cómo llega a la toma de decisiones sobre asuntos académicos y sobre su futura carrera o empleo. Cada entrevista llevará aproximadamente entre 30 y 60 minutos. A continuación siguen ejemplos del tipo de pregunta que le haremos al estudiante:

3. ¿Qué planes tiene con respecto a un futuro trabajo o carrera?
4. Cuéntanos cómo es que llegas a una decisión respecto a una posible carrera o empleo, ¿qué cosas influyen sobre tu decisión? Dame un ejemplo. ¿Consultas con otras personas, sigues el consejo de otras personas incluyendo miembros de la familia o profesionales?

Para este estudio también observaremos al comportamiento de su hijo/hija/pupilo durante las actividades relacionadas a asuntos del proceso de transición. Por ejemplo durante las reuniones de planificación para la transición, mientras trabaja con el consejero vocacional y durante la actividad escolar mientras trabaja con su maestro o maestra, o con el coordinador del proceso de transición.

Por última, el estudiante completará un cuestionario denominado la Escala de Autodeterminación de ARC para medir su nivel de autodeterminación. La Escala de Autodeterminación de Arc (Wehmeyer, 1995) es un instrumento de medición validado empíricamente, comúnmente usado por profesionales para medir el nivel de autodeterminación de los estudiantes. Se necesita aproximadamente entre 30 a 60 minutos para completar este cuestionario.

## **RIESGOS E INCOMODIDADES**

Consideramos que los riesgos de participación en este estudio son mínimos y se limitan a la incomodidad de participar en las entrevistas y en hablar de temas de naturaleza personal

## **BENEFICIOS**

Su participación en este estudio no le brindará ningún beneficio directo.

El investigador de este estudio espera adquirir mayores conocimientos sobre la relación entre la autodeterminación, los estudiantes con discapacidades, el proceso de transición y los valores culturales para contribuir al desarrollo de programas académicos en los Estados Unidos donde haya mayor comprensión y asistencia para los estudiantes de descendencia hispana.

**COSTO**

Es gratis participar en este estudio.

**OPCIONES**

La participación de su hijo/hija/pupilo en este estudio es voluntaria. Pueden optar por no participar.

**CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Para asegurar su privacidad y la confidencialidad, una vez que las entrevistas se hayan completado y registrado en los archivos computarizados todos los documentos serán destruidos.

Nosotros no divulgaremos ninguna de las respuestas dadas por su hijo/hija/pupilo. No obstante, si la información brindada indica que alguien puede ser herido entonces por ley debemos informar a las autoridades para su propia protección y la de su familia.

Todos los documentos asociados a este proyecto serán mantenidos en un archivo bajo llave y solamente podrán acceder a ellos el investigador y los asistentes debidamente autorizados. Es posible que los resultados de este estudio sean presentados en reuniones de trabajo o publicados en distintas publicaciones, sin embargo nunca revelaremos ni el nombre ni cualquier otra información de los participantes por lo cual puedan ser identificados.

**LA PARTICIPACION Y LA RETIRADA**

No es necesario que usted otorgue su permiso para que su hijo/hija/pupilo participe en esta investigación. Si usted decide participar igualmente se puede retirar en cualquier momento sin penalización alguna. Asimismo, usted puede optar por no contestar alguna pregunta que le hagamos durante las entrevista. Si usted decide no participar, no habrá ninguna consecuencia.

**PREGUNTAS**

Por cualquier pregunta que puedas tener ahora o en el futuro acerca de la participación en este estudio, puedes comunicarte con:

Colleen Thoma, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
1015 W. Main Street, Box 842020

Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651  
Email: [cathoma@vcu.edu](mailto:cathoma@vcu.edu)

Elin C. Doval  
Assist Investigator, Dept. of Special Education and Disability Policy  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
1015 West Main Street, Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284-2020  
(804) 827-2651, E-mail: [elind11@aol.com](mailto:elind11@aol.com)

Si tienes alguna pregunta acerca de tus derechos como participante de este estudio, puedes comunicarte con:

Office for Research Subjects Protection  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 111  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, V A 23298  
Telephone: 804-828-0868

### **CONSENTIMIENTO**

- Por la presente le pedimos su consentimiento para conversar con usted o con por lo menos un miembro de la familia de su hijo/hija/pupilo para poder conocer mejor al participante.
- Le pedimos permiso para hablar con otras personas que nos puedan aportar información sobre el proceso de transición de su hijo/hija/pupilo hacia un empleo (por ejemplo, un profesor, un encargado de entrenamiento laboral o un consejero vocacional).
- Le pedimos su consentimiento para acceder a y revisar documentos personales sobre los preparativos y el entrenamiento de su hijo/hija/pupilo para egresar de la secundaria e ingresar al mercado laboral. El objetivo de la revisión de estos documentos es juntar información sobre a) sus metas durante la transición, b) sus metas en relación a la autodeterminación, y c) datos sobre su actual nivel de preparación y disposición para trabajar después de egresar de la secundaria. Por ejemplo: ¿Dónde se llevó a cabo el entrenamiento? ¿Quién es o fue el encargado de la preparación y la valoración? ¿Qué fortalezas y debilidades fueron encontradas? ¿Qué medidas de apoyo fueron puestas en práctica?

Se me ha dado la oportunidad de leer esta declaración de consentimiento. Comprendo la información que se me ha dado con respecto a este estudio. Las preguntas que yo tenía fueron

contestadas. Mi firma en este documento significa que doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo/hija/pupilo participe en este estudio.

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Nombre del estudiante

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Nombre del Tutor Legal	Firma del Tutor Legal	Fecha
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Nombre de la Persona Gestionando este Consentimiento/Testigo	Fecha
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Firma del Investigador (si diferente al anterior)	Fecha
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The undersigned Certified Translator hereby certifies the foregoing to be a true and accurate translation into Spanish of the RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND PERMISSION FORM-LEGAL GUARDIAN CONSENT, APPENDIX Q, bearing the APPROVED stamp of the Office of Research Subjects Protection dated 4/17/08. –

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Magdalena Velázquez, Certified Spanish Language Interpreter for the Courts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## VITA

Elin Cortijo-Doval received her Masters of Education in 1999 and her Ph.D. degree of Special Education and Disability Policy in 2008 from the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. She also holds a mediation certification from the Center for Mediation Key Bridge Foundation, Washington, D.C., and she is a graduate from the Leadership Metro Richmond and Partners in Policy program of Virginia. She is a national and international consultant in the areas of education, behavior intervention, transition, leadership, empowerment, and advocacy for people with disabilities and their families. She has presented at state, national, and international conferences on Self-Determination, Transition, Universal Design, Person-Centered Practices and Autism, and has thirteen peer reviewed presentations. Dr. Cortijo-Doval has coauthored chapters in two text books: “The Good Behavior Game” in the book “Offentlichen Schulen Anwendungsmöglichkeiten und Chancen” (Hillenbrand, C. & Pütz, K. Hrsg.2008) and the chapter “ Applications for youth with autism spectrum disorders” in the book “Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities”, (P. Wehman,Ed., 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006). Dr. Cortijo-Doval currently serves on the board of the Virginia Higher Education Network and is a member of the Virginia Autism Council.