TEACHERS' VIEWS OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS: THE LIMITATIONS OF AN INDIVIDUALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Focus group interviews were conducted with special education teachers from Oahu, Hawaii and Washington, DC regarding self-determination for youth with emotional/behavioral disorders. Some of the teachers defined their own self-determination in individualistic terms, while highlighting the importance of collectivistic values for many of their students. Other teachers who held more collectivist–based definitions and perceptions still discussed how their own experiences differed from those of their students. Profiles of self-determination views are presented and compared to definitions and current practices in the field of special education with respect to self-determination and transition. The concepts of individualism and collectivism and of social capital are used to enhance understanding of differences in the views of the participating teachers and of the obstacles to self-determination they identify for their students.

It is well known that students with disabilities, as a group, achieve poorer employment, postsecondary education, and community living outcomes as they transition to adulthood compared to their peers without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Roylance, 1998; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Students with disabilities also tend to have fewer opportunities for self-determination than their nondisabled peers – and when they do have opportunities, they often lack the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to be able to respond appropriately (Ward & Kohler, 1996). To address these outcomes, promoting student self-determination has been at the forefront of special education practices for over two decades (Ward, 2006).

In 1988, the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services launched a self-determination initiative. This initiative promoted the participation of persons with disabilities in service provisiondecision-making and funded more than two dozen research and model demonstration projects aimed at enhancing the capacity for self-determination of students with disabilities (Ward, 2006). The self-determination movement also led to the incorporation of self-determination as a guiding value in major disability-related legislation, such as the Americans With Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-336) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (P.L. 105-17) (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). In addition, a number of disability-related agencies and organizations, such as The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition, developed policies and position statements prioritizing the promotion of self-determination (Field et al., 1998).

Countless self-determination curricula and programs have been developed, and some have been shown by research to be effective in enhancing specific self-determination skills (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004; Kohler, 1998). Research also suggests that students with disabilities who improve their skills for self-determination tend to enjoy improved educational, employment, and community living outcomes (Chambers et al., 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). It has therefore been assumed that students' levels of self-determination can serve as a marker of the success of special education services (Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003).

The association between transition outcomes and self-determination is evident for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). Students with EBD experience worse postsecondary

outcomes than students in other disability categories (Wagner 1995; Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003; Wagner et al., 2005) and have lower ratings of self-determination than students with other disabilities (Carter, Lane, Pierson & Glaeser, 2006; SRI International, 2005). By definition, students with EBD have difficulty with self-regulation and self-control, and are likely to lack essential skills for self-determination such as goal-setting, delay of gratification, and accurate self-appraisal (Kauffman, 2005). When these students do establish self-determined goals, they may be hampered in achieving them by difficulties in social relationships related to externalizing or internalizing behaviors (Kauffman, 2005).   In addition to personal capacity, the development of self-determination also requires opportunities to make choices and process the consequences, but such opportunities are often limited for students with EBD by their parents or when they are placed in structured environments (Mithaug, 1996; Ward & Kohler, 1996).

Although self-determination appears to be a particularly important, yet problematic, issue for students with EBD, very little research involving this population has been conducted (Carter et al., 2006). This article is intended to contribute to the research base by describing teacher perspectives on what self-determination means for secondary students with EBD and how it can be enhanced. Teacher views were collected and analyzed through a qualitative research project focused on exploring how cultural factors influence self-determination. Focusing on cultural factors was considered important because the proportion of students who are of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) heritage is growing and expected to reach half the student population in the United States by 2040 (Archer, 2000), and CLD students (especially African-American) tend to be overrepresented in the EBD category (Donovan & Cross, 2002). However, nearly all self-determination curricula and programs are rooted in Western values that prioritize the autonomous actions of individuals. The individualistic orientation is clearly reflected in Field et al.'s (1998) synthesis of common themes found across numerous definitions:

> *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.* (p. 2)

In several previous articles we questioned whether such a perspective can effectively embrace collectivistic values that prioritize family and relationships over individual action and achievement (Black, Mrasek, & Ballinger, 2003; Leake, Black & Roberts, 2004; Leake & Boone, 2007). Moreover, is it realistic to expect students with EBD who have so many agencies and professionals in their lives (teachers, counselors, behavioral health specialists, corrections officers, and others) to make their own decisions?

The need to address the individualism-collectivism contrast is reflected in findings that CLD families with children with disabilities often report feeling that professionals are insensitive to or disregard their values and culture (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997, 1999; Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez & Blacher, 2005). For example, Geenen, Powers, Vasquez and Bersani (2003) found that independent living is viewed in a negative light for many CLD families as it is associated with separation from the family. They also found that many families are wary of institutional supports, and feel that accepting help from *outsiders* would bring shame to the family. Therefore, more appropriate transition planning and goals may involve developing family and community supports (rather than just agency services), promoting self-sufficiency within the family (rather than focusing on independent living), and identifying ways to contribute to the larger group (rather than focusing on individual achievement).

School personnel should understand the individualism-collectivism contrast because, according to Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz, 2001), these

> *two orientations guide rather different developmental scripts for children and for schooling; and conflicts between them are reflected daily in U.S. classrooms. Keener awareness of how they shape goals and behaviors can enable teachers and parents to interpret each other's expectations better and work together more harmoniously on behalf of students.* (p. 6)

Another useful construct for exploring self-determination issues for students with EBD is *capital*, which refers to the various resources that people can accumulate and use to help achieve their self-determined goals. Numerous kinds of capital have been described along with theories about how they interrelate and function in day-to-day life at various levels of society, from individual to nation. In our

discussion of the results of the research reported here, we focus on human, cultural, financial, and social capital at the individual student and family levels. Social capital is particularly relevant for students with EBD because it emerges from social relationships, and students with EBD are typically referred for services based on persistent problems in establishing and maintaining positive relationships (Kauffman, 2005).

Purpose
Groups of teachers from various ethnic backgrounds were interviewed regarding their perceptions and experiences of self-determination for students with EBD. We believed it was important to determine *how* teachers defined self-determination since they are the front-line contacts with students and their families, and their perceptions of self-determination would ultimately influence the type of instruction and opportunities provided these students. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss findings from these focus group interviews with respect to how these teachers (a) viewed/defined self-determination, and (b) described what is necessary in a young person's life in order to experience self-determination. We focused each of these questions particularly on young people with EBD.

Method
A qualitative focus group approach was used to gather the views of teachers of secondary students with EBD and identify common themes about self-determination (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Thorne, 2000). Focus group interviews are especially appropriate when attitudes and feelings about an issue are sought, and when information comes to light from the interactions between people (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The group format enables ideas to come forth that individuals may not have considered on their own. In this particular study, group discussions also encouraged networking among teachers from different schools who worked with similar students.

Participants
A combination stratified purposeful/snowball sampling technique (Patton, 1990) was used to select our participants. Requirements for participation included that the teachers (a) had at least two years full-time experience working with secondary students identified as having EBD, and (b) most of the students they taught were of CLD heritage (i.e., primarily from non-Caucasian backgrounds). The snowball sampling technique involved identifying a few teachers who met the requirements for participation. Once identified, he/she would provide names of others who may also be interested in participating. From this pool of potential participants we selected teachers who met the requirements for participation and came from various cultural backgrounds such as Asian, Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and African-American. Homogeneous groups based on location and the teachers' cultural/ethnic backgrounds were then formed (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) to enhance common threads within groups, and to determine if differences existed between groups.

Four focus groups were formed, three on the Island of Oahu, Hawaii and one in Washington, DC. Each group met three times, for a total of 12 separate interview sessions (see Table 1).

Table 1
Focus Group Participants, by Gender, Ethnicity, and Research Site Location

Focus Group	# Participants	# Sessions Attended	Gender	Ethnicity
Group 1 – Caucasian (Hawaii)	7	7 attended all 3	4 female 3 male	7 Caucasian
Group 2 – Asian (Hawaii)	7	3 attended all 3, 2 attended 2, 2 attended 1 only	5 female 2 male	1 Filipino 4 Japanese 1 Vietnamese 1 Other (Hispanic)
Group 3 – Pacific Islander (Hawaii)	6	2 attended all 3, 2 attended 2, 2 attended 1 only	4 female 2 male	2 Samoan 3 Hawaiian 1 Tongan
Group 4 – African-American (Washington, DC)	8	3 attended all 3, 1 attended 2, 4 attended 1 only	4 female 4 male	1 African 7 African-American

Focus Group Questions
The teachers talked at length about one or two specific topics each session, covering the teachers' definitions of self-determination; the extent to which students are responsible for shaping their own lives; how the participants defined home and how their students might define home; and how the

participants described their own experiences with self-determination. Focus group interviews also covered the teachers' priorities for their students. During the "priorities" session, participants engaged in a rock activity – the largest rocks represented the most important factors that needed to go in the jar first, and then the smaller rocks represented less important factors that could be added later. Teachers then discussed what rocks their students needed that they did not have at the time.

Data Analysis
A three step coding scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to manage the data. In the first step, open-coding, we reviewed all of the transcripts and looked for themes. Identified themes included the influence of family, culture, and peers; how disability and risks/pressures affected EBD youth; and obstacles and protective factors present in the youth's lives. During the second step, axial-coding, we highlighted text according to the themes. Themes were refined and collapsed during this process and are presented in the Results section. During the third step, selective coding, we searched for text that clearly illustrated each theme. We used those quotes to provide evidence for the themes we had generated.

Results
Research Question 1. Teachers' Views/Definitions of Self-determination
Teachers tended to define self-determination as either an individual construct or a family/cultural construct. We called these two views the *self* view and the *others* view to reflect the words used by the participants.   The Caucasian focus group participants, in general, held more *self* views of self-determination, whereas participants from Pacific Island cultures were more likely to hold the *others* view. Rather than defining self-determination, Asian and African-American participants focused more on what students needed to be self-determined (outlined in Research Question 2).

The self *view*. Views of participants who defined self-determination as an individual construct fit the definitions cited in the literature the most closely. However, they did add some elements about self-soothing that may be more particular to students with EBD than to students with disabilities in general. These teachers defined self-determination in terms of knowing one's self, being an autonomous individual, independent living outside of the family home, taking responsibility for one's actions (i.e., not blaming others), and persistence toward goals. Several of the teachers who defined self-determination in this individualistic way talked about having dreams that you can be anything you want to be and finding sources of enjoyment that serve the function of self-soothing. The teachers did mention frequently how their own experiences were very different from their students'. These teachers used many *self* words in describing their views, such as self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-control, self-discipline, self-soothing, self-actualization, self-advocacy, and self-sufficiency.   The following quotes illustrate these themes:

> *Self-determination is getting to know yourself and your strengths, your weaknesses, and being able to explain that to someone else.*

> *[Self-determination is] being true to yourself. A must-have is self-love, self-acceptance.*

> *For self-determination, how I would define it would be, anything that you're doing individually and want to accomplish.*

> *Go out there and be an independent person and get your dream.*

> *I don't think you can have self-determination until you know yourself…learn who they want to be as a person. And then they can learn how to be determined to fulfill that goal.*

With respect to their own experiences, participants stated they did not put off individual goals for their families, and that self-determination involved independent living:

> *In my growing up, self-determination, to me, meant moving out of the house. I wasn't an adult yet until I moved out. And so, working, moving out and I think that's very different from a lot of kids and adults we see. In my personal culture, independence meant living in your own apartment. It was kind of looked at funny if you stayed at home. And that's not the case for everybody.*

> *I think, growing up in [a US Northeastern city], self-determination was leaving to go to college.*

> *Your family in the end will appreciate you being independent and knowing how you feel about things.*

[In my personal experience, self-determination was] differentiating from the family. I was trying to separate and be my own. That's very different, culturally [from the kids we teach]. Growing up meant being separate or independent from my family.

Self-determination was viewed as being responsible for one's actions, not blaming others or making excuses, persistence, and stick-to-it-iveness. On the other hand, self-determination was also viewed as learning to find enjoyment and peace in life:

Maybe teaching self-determination is teaching enjoyment of the now, the carpe diem. What can you enjoy? ...some of those obligations, your only way out is to find some peace, some kind of serenity, something. The kids that we're talking about, that self-soothing, that is a part of what they're going through. Anger, anxiety, the self-soothing, self-management [that's what they need].

The following statement sums up the *self* view held by many of the teachers regarding their own experiences compared to their students:

In my growing up, that whole thing, To thine own self be true, *that was a given. But, it really isn't for a lot of people. It isn't,* To your own self be true. *It's more,* To your own community, *or,* To your family be true. *[Self-determination to me was an expression of] individuality or that individual pursuit. It was also,* Do your own thing *;* What's right for you; *and* Discovering yourself.

The others *view – family/culture*. In contrast, some teachers reported that there is no such thing as *self* determination. These teachers spoke of the importance of group identity and a sense of belonging. In fact, one teacher stated that culture IS identity. Another stated there is no self without the other.

You see this heading is kind of deceiving, self-determination. The self has to include others....your identity of self includes your neighbor.

I'm a firm believer in culture because my culture is my identity.

My culture is so different – it's not going against authority – it's not self-determination, it's not being self-reliant. It's about family, it's about respect. So, it's two different worlds.

I have to agree that culture is a huge part of self-determination....It has a lot to do with your family because your culture is your family.

That's what culture does. It places us in relationship to other people. What is wonderful about culture is that it's all-inclusive. I don't care if these people come from the bottom of the South Pole. There is a place in the culture where they can link in. Once you get to know the individual, the individual includes the group.

The best way to keep our children from going out of control, do the traditional performance art...the power of the culture. You can call upon resources that are not available to you through Department of Education. All those boys will go back to the ceremony. . . . training them in the language, training them in the culture....So, even in the Mainland, they're finding out that the answer to these guys' experiences in a modern setting, is to go back to the basic group self-identity.

The self-determination thing never, to me, in my experience, didn't ever rise because why am I gonna be self-determined...we all share what we have and if we don't have it, then, we just live without it?

The definition of self, identity....The best one, I think is that self includes others.

Research Question 2. What Do Students Need in Order to Be Self-determined?
Although the teachers mentioned many things lacking in their students' lives, the data regarding students' needs were collapsed into three themes. Teachers believed their students needed (a) hard work and motivation to succeed, (b) good relationships with their teachers, and (c) a belief in a higher power.

Hard work/motivation/success. Several of teachers in the Asian focus group used words such as drive,

discipline, hard work and work ethic to describe what students needed. Their discussion expanded beyond self-determination to focus on what was needed to achieve *success*. For example,

> *What is your vision, what is your drive? Who do you want to be? Your goals, your drive. Your drive is what makes you successful.*

> *I found that a lot of people from my Japanese family they're plantation workers. And, so, you want to become...you come to America to better yourself. You make sure that your kids do better than you because you don't want your kids picking pineapples for the rest of their lives....You're here to go and succeed. So, now, their child graduates from college. Huge success. But the same drive is put into you by your culture.*

> *I was trying to think about how come I've been successful to this point. What drives me to be successful. I know that my parents gave me the value of working hard.*

> *There was a driving force in the family that said,* You may not have everything, you can't right now, but you can achieve it if you work hard towards your education, if you can work hard, if you can shut your mouth and listen to someone tell you what to do. *Our kids, that's a simple value that a lot of them don't have.*

> *If you're not disciplined, it's very difficult to succeed at school. And then it transcends to life. You need to learn how to be successful in school to be successful in the real world.*

Relationships. The teachers spoke about the importance of building relationships with the students, helping them overcome their anger, the need for communication and confidence, and the importance of giving students choices as a way to build their decision-making skills:

> *Because if you're afraid of your children, I think that's a big problem....They are afraid to work with them. They are afraid they are going to get hurt. They are afraid of what they can do. A lot of them say I'm in x y and z gang, blah, blah, blah. And they're really just with a big group of boys. They are really trying to intimidate you because they know that this is a safe place. We have to let them come back....We will still be there to love them no matter what they do. Because we have some students who will tell me to my face,* I hate you. *And they will be the first one in the next morning,* I'm sorry Ms. _____. Are you my friend?

> *They are so angry and I just would want them to find a way to realize that they can move beyond whatever it is that has caused them to be so angry at this stage of their life and that they can move beyond it and they can just start their own life. Like whatever made you angry, whether it was your parents or whatever, like now you can start your own life and let all them go and live your life for you. They have somehow let all the anger go and now they are able to be a productive person.*

> *Working with these students on transition, it's so...you cannot decide for these kids. You can't because even when they tell you what they want to do and you put them on task, it's difficult to get them to go and do it. I'm faced with it every day. And I'm sure a large part of it is due to their emotional issues. They are scared to death to go into the real world. . . they are resistant,* You're not going to tell me what I'm going to do.
> *That is so simple. Like even if they have to pick two classes or even one at this point, that's something so key and fundamental that will give them some sort of control and make them feel as though...give them some reason for wanting to come to school.*

Several teachers discussed the need to feel loved and to have parents who care as an essential need for self-determination:

> We all agree that love and a relationship with a guardian is essential.

> The only thing that I see with all my experiences of working with kids from all over the island, from rich to poor, from black to white, would be if you have a good family, it doesn't matter. If you don't have a good family, you have no self-determination. You are the one, two that beat the statistics. There's hundreds more that didn't make it.

> *You know when you say* loved? *Sometimes I read their IEPs and I go,* Can we just
> have [goals] for love? *You just read their files and you know they just need to be loved.*

These teachers spoke of the students' families feeling alienated from schools, the larger society, and often from their own families by not knowing their own heritage. Many of their students were raised by grandmothers or were in foster care. They stressed the importance of needing to feel loved and the word encouragement was mentioned repeatedly. They spoke about the importance of a community approach with youth becoming involved in clubs and organizations. They stated that the students need people who will guide and challenge them and make them feel like *somebody*, and getting them to believe that they can do more.

> *You know giving them the feeling that this is not the last stop, it's just one of the stops along the way. One thing I would wish for my kids is definitely for them to have some sort of direction. And that's something all students have a problem with, especially older students. No one is ever thinking about what's beyond the next day or the next few weeks.*

> *And we always talk about the whole village concept thing, and Black people we used to have the concept of community and having your community be involved in your life and now we don't have that. And so when your teenagers act like crazy people [who] want to pretend and hide and they don't want to reach out to their community to say help.*

Higher power. Several teachers spoke about the importance of church as a supportive social structure, and stated that a belief in a higher power was a protective factor in the lives of their students.

> *[Students] need to have a healthy fear of something greater than [themselves], especially within the Black community where church always played a key role. Where it wasn't just the Word itself but also the support and the guidance that the church community provides for you. Because we have had several meetings, IEP meetings, where the ministers will come along, they call in and check on students. We need to invite that and not try to ignore their existence.*

> *You bring the focus back to God because it's something greater than [you], something greater than whatever the situation is. It's something that a child can always go to. Like say if a child can't talk to me, I would want them to have other options such as prayer that they can go to instead of going to their half-wit friends getting less than half-wit information about some real subjects.*

> *And I still have a healthy fear of my mother. I have a healthy respect of not just my mother, my grandmother, all of my adults. And definitely when you were talking about religion, like having a healthy fear of God or something greater than yourself.*

Obstacles to Self-Determination
Teachers from every ethnic group talked about obstacles to self-determination. They talked about how the lives and experiences of their students were often very different from their own upbringing. The teachers talked about their students being in survival mode, the lack of stable family lives, lack of security and safety, and lack of financial and medical resources. They referenced self-determination in terms of socioeconomic status influencing whether one feels in control:

> *And when your basic needs are taken care of, you're less worried about other things and you can focus more on school. You can dream the big dream about getting out of the housing and getting your own apartment or your own house, any place else but [public housing]. You're not sure if there's gonna be food. You're not sure if there's gonna be electricity because it's been shut off so many times because your parents don't pay the bills.*

> *A lot of the kids in the schools are...they're on welfare. So, they don't get determined because they think they always have welfare. So, it's like a continuing thing where my mom, my grandma on welfare. So, I don't have to worry 'cause I'll have welfare, you know? I'm talking about this because I want people to realize that these are the students that we deal with. Could be even worse, what they're going through....Because I remember lots of neighbors who never graduate. And once the eldest didn't graduate, it usually just follows along with younger siblings.*

> *But I think they feel because they are from a poor family, a poor neighborhood from a racial class that is considered minority that they cannot control what they do in their lives. I really do.*

> *I went to a high school, K through 12, in an affluent, wealthy suburban county. The students*

from that town...because of their background, they would be able to do whatever they wanted....I mean they felt as though they had a lot of control over their lives because they could make things happen that other people couldn't...I knew there was a limit on me as a Black child from a single parent home, but I knew that the world was open as far as the possibilities that we have because of what you're exposed to in certain settings.

Some students they know their weaknesses...they don't realize their strengths because of their experiences from their homes or from whatever setting they do come from. They're not learning-disabled. Their problems come from socioeconomic, family, stuff like that. Many can barely speak English. They got 12 people living in a two-bedroom apartment someplace.

I think one thing that our students are lacking is the sense of control. They actually don't have a sense of control in their lives. They have all these other factors, people parenting them who aren't their parents, whether it's the state or foster parents and so forth, but when you start giving them some sense of control like by starting off with small things like choices....Like different small things that actually allow them to start making some sort of control in their lives.

Throughout the interviews these teachers mentioned their students' need to have options and to see beyond their immediate experiences:

They don't have enough options. The option is go to work or stay home or play with their friends...a lot of 'em. When you don't have options, then it's hard to [be self-determined].

I had a journal assignment. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" One of the basic ones we do basic ones we do early in the year. "I want to be a fire man." "I want to be a police man." A lot of kids put that. But, at _____ School, when I started, a lot of it was, "I want to work at McDonald's like my mom." I was floored. I never expected something like that. But now you can understand why they think like that. Because they don't see very many options coming out of the [public] housing and they haven't been exposed to what's outside of the community. They never get out of the community.
I'd like to take them to these different places and show them that the world is bigger than _____ Valley housing....If you don't know anything else, if you don't know that education is better in a different country or a different island, then you're happy with what you have. Ideally, you would like to expose them and get them to experience as many things as possible.

A lot of them are not gonna have options. Whether it be family support, financially, whatever. It really saddens me that these are really nice kids, they're all nice kids.

When speaking of the differences between their own cultures and the cultures of their students, several teachers spoke of generational culture clashes. They also spoke of respect for elders, respect for teachers, and hierarchical cultural relationships:
For me, I think, it wasn't, maybe, a culture clash. It was more like a generation clash because when we were younger, we respected our parents and we were not allowed to talk back. When I hear students talk to their parents, I am like, "I can't believe you just said that to your parents....Oh, my gosh."

When I was growing up....if you see adults talking, you cannot, absolutely, cannot interrupt. You have to wait there quietly. Finally, I'm grown-up, but, I still can't do it. But, then, I married a reverend and that moves me up in the chain. I can easily jump in. But, [my older sister] cannot jump in. She [has to wait].

This might sound strange, but I wish there was some clashing once in a while. Unfortunately, in our area, as teacher, I can pretty much do whatever I want and a parent will never ask me what I'm doing.

'Cause I've noticed that parenting, I think, is different. Like, my kids' parents are very different from the way my parents brought me up and my...the expectations. Even my friends' parents, the expectations that, you know, you listen to your teacher. "I don't want a phone call from school." "You bring home good grades." Basic stuff. You don't do well on a test,

you study harder the next time.

A lot of the times my special ed kids had parents that, I would tell them, "Your kid needs to do their homework." And they would come back to me. "What do you want me to do?" "Do you make sure that he does his homework?" "How?" "Well, can you please, you know, when they come home, they should sit down and do their homework." "He doesn't come home." Okay. "Can you tell them to come home after school to do their...." "Well, he doesn't get home until 11 or 12 o'clock at night."

Discussion
Differences in cultural values and experiences related to self-determination were clearly evident for teachers who participated in the research. Some teachers spoke of the child's dreams, while others spoke of the family's dreams. Some teachers spoke of the importance of Church, whereas others did not. Some spoke of drive and work ethic, self-control, self-discipline, and self-monitoring. Others talked about family discipline, and being disciplined by others. Some talked about culture as identity, whereas others spoke of culture as family. Some mentioned that many of their students did not have the traditional passing down of who is in your family resulting in a lack of cultural identity. All groups spoke about poverty and family instability contributing to a sense of powerlessness and lack of control over one's life.

An obvious limitation of this qualitative study is that the small sample size of 28 focus group participants cannot be considered representative of the teachers of students with EBD in the two locales where the study was conducted, nor can they be considered representative of their respective ethnic/racial groups. A variety of complex issues were discussed in some depth during the focus group sessions, but it is not possible to ascertain which views that emerged are the most widely shared and significant in the broader population. On the other hand, we believe the results do have value by corroborating the general thrust of the relatively small number of other qualitative studies on cultural influences on self-determination and related transition issues (Frankland, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Blackmountain, 2004; Geenen et al., 2003; Rueda et al., 2005; Trainor, 2005). These other studies also found that cultural values and themes expressed by their participants reflected the broad contrast between the individualism of mainstream American culture and the traditional collectivism of many CLD groups. For example, the profile views of *self* and *family* described above correspond with what research says distinguishes individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Kim, 1995; Triandis, 1995), with the individualistic perspective reflected in frequent use of *self-* words and stress on setting and achieving personal goals, and a collectivistic orientation reflected by a focus on cultural identity and putting family first.

It was clear from the focus group transcripts that the teachers did not perceive their students as being self-determined, if self-determination is defined, for example, as *acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference* (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24). Virtually all of the numerous published definitions of self-determination are congruent with individualism in their focus on the individual actor. From this perspective, acting in a self-determined way requires that individuals have the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to set realistic goals, create plans to reach those goals that are based on an understanding of one's own strengths and challenges, and then implement those plans with an appropriate combination of persistence and flexibility (Field et al., 1998; Martin et al., 2003). This orientation naturally leads to a focus on building the capacities of individuals with disabilities in virtually all self-determination programs and curricula.

However, research results such as those reported here suggest that much more besides trying to build individual capacity may be needed to enhance self-determination for many students with EBD and other disabilities. One lens for examining this issue is that of capital. The standard approach described above, of building personal capacity, basically focuses on just two related kinds of capital. One is human capital, which refers to the attitudes, skills, knowledge, and other attributes that typically accrue through training and life experience. The other is cultural capital, the knowledge and mastery of what is required to function well and be accepted within a culture or a higher socioeconomic class. Bourdieu (1984) highlighted the interplay of cultural, financial, and social capital in differentiating people of different socioeconomic classes, with a particular focus on how people of lower socioeconomic status lack the cultural capital needed to reach a high level of educational attainment and achieve upward social mobility. The issue of lack of cultural capital was clearly referenced in the teacher quotations

provided above about how many of their students had little experience of the world outside their impoverished urban or rural enclaves, and therefore had little idea of the many options available to them in the wider world. Another challenge identified by teachers was that many students seem to lack the cultural capital that comes from knowing and practicing the values and traditions of one's cultural heritage, resulting in these students not having a firm moral foundation from which to act and therefore being more susceptible to various temptations leading to negative outcomes.

Human and cultural capital are similar in that they consist of attitudes, skills and knowledge that can be enhanced through training. Whether particular skills and knowledge should be classified as human or cultural capital is not always obvious. For example, Trainor (2008) described how students need certain kinds of *cultural capital* in order to effectively participate in their own individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, such as knowing *school sanctioned ways of communicating* and being able to use *assertive communication* as a tool. From the perspective of Bourdieu (1984), these capacities are cultural capital because they are not likely to be within the experience of those who come from outside, such as people who live in poverty. From the perspective of mainstream American culture, which downplays class and cultural distinctions, such capacities are more likely to be viewed as human capital that everyone should view as desirable and that everyone can obtain through self-initiative.

Another relevant attribute of most self-determination programs and curricula is that they have been developed almost solely as training approaches. They are typically implemented in schools and other institutions with training missions, which requires that student progress be tracked using formal assessments, which in turn requires that *self-determination* be broken down into teachable and assessable skill and knowledge components (Turnbull et al., 1996). According to Mithaug (1996), one problem with this approach is that *the perceptions, knowledge, and abilities comprising the process of self-determination are not easily deconstructed or task-analyzed, taught separately, and then reconstructed into the functional process of self-determination* (p. 150). Turnbull et al. (1996) criticize this *unidimensional emphasis on individual skills* for its lack of attention to addressing environmental barriers and collectivistic values like interdependence.

One result of the skills training approach appears to be inattention to other kinds of capital – notably social capital and financial capital – that are also often required for self-determination. These kinds of capital are not easily enhanced by training individual students and are not readily assessed with written tests or other standard in-class measures.

The importance of financial capital is reflected in the statements of teachers in our study that many or most of their students with EBD came from families lacking such capital, often leading to youth feeling they are constantly in *survival mode* and buffeted by forces beyond their control. Lack of financial capital obviously limited their range of choices for anything that costs money, from hobbies to further education. Opportunities to enact self-determination were clearly constrained for such students. Of course, schools themselves typically face financial constraints and cannot be expected to deal with the economic hardships of the families they serve.

Social capital has been defined as *any resource that inheres in relationships between individuals that helps them produce or achieve some goal* (Kanazawa & Savage, 2009, p. 873). Leake (i.p.) suggested that self-determination almost always depends on social capital even in highly individualistic cultures, since achieving self-determined goals is likely to require social capital inputs from other people such as introductions to key people, information about opportunities, help with tasks, coordination of efforts, emotional support, and so on. In a similar vein, Sprague and Hayes (2000) argued that, *The reason some of us are self-determined is that we are in interpersonal and social structural relationships that empower us* (p. 681).

The issue of social capital is particularly salient for students with EBD because they tend to have difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships with both peers and adults (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002), as was indeed often reported by our participating teachers regarding their students with EBD. In addition, children typically benefit from the social capital accumulated by their families (Coleman, 1998; Harper, 2001), but some of the students came from families with very little social capital due to the effects of parental substance abuse, mental illness, or imprisonment.

Lack of human, financial, cultural and/or social capital can be obstacles to self-determination for anyone. Inherent in the *self* view of self-determination described above is the idea that individuals can

reach their dreams through sheer determination and hard work. From this perspective, the obvious prescription for people in need is to help them enhance their personal human and cultural capital by training them to gain relevant attitudes, skills, and knowledge. It is expected that they can then seek success by building their own social and financial capital on their own initiative. Such an approach, however, may not be sufficient to produce enhanced self-determination and improved outcomes for many students with EBD because their conditions might well preclude a steady emotional commitment to achieve normative goals and prevent the establishment and maintenance of essential social relationships that yield social capital.

With regard to the social problems so often faced by students with EBD, a commonly recommended solution from the standard skills training perspective is to provide training in social skills. Unfortunately, most meta-analyses of research indicate that such training for students with EBD tends to generate only small gains, if any, in social skills that generalize to real-world settings (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, & Forness, 1999), although a recent meta-analysis found significantly greater improvements for youth receiving training compared to controls (Cook et al., 2008). Social skills training might be critiqued on the same basis as vocational skills training in segregated settings for people with significant disabilities often has been: their progress in mastering skills may be so incremental that they may never be judged ready for competitive employment, so supported employment is a more appropriate intervention (Wehman & Moon, 1988). Similarly, social skills training for many students with EBD may not lead to enhanced social relationships, so approaches that might be termed *supported friendships* might be more effective.

A substantial body of research confirms that people who are strongly socially connected are indeed more likely to achieve their goals and be *housed, healthy, hired and happy* than those who are not (Woolcock, 2001, p. 12), but viewing relationships in terms of the social capital they potentially provide has only recently begun to emerge in the literature. For example, a recent special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* promoted the development of social capital to support people with significant cognitive disabilities to achieve their employment goals, with several of the articles describing how particular organizations have used the social capital construct to revamp their policies and practices (Flaherty, 2008; Parris & Granger, 2008; Zimmerman, 2008). Interventions aimed at building social capital have also been promoted to support the recovery of adults with psychiatric disorders (Cullen & Whiteford, 2001; Whitley & McKenzie, 2005). Special educators and other school personnel should also consider adopting a social capital perspective for students with EBD. The use of such a perspective often leads to an expansion of thinking about service provision, from a focus on changing individuals through interventions in the classroom or clinic to more directly promoting development of positive and enduring social relationships in natural settings (Onken, Craig, Ridgway, Ralph, & Cook, 2007).

Social capital has been variously conceived as a property of individuals, of families, of neighborhoods, of nations, or of a combination, and these levels each require different approaches for building social capital (Aldridge, Halpern, & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Some practices that show promise at the individual student and school levels include mentoring by adults or peers (Aldridge et al., 2002); the *circle of friends* or *circle of support* approach of person-centered planning (Cotton et al., 1992; Mount, 1997); and school-wide interventions promoting mutual respect and acceptance, such as the effective behavioral supports approach (Todd, Horner, Sugai, & Sprague, 1999).

Practices that might be used to support students to gain social capital must, of course, be culturally competent if they are to be as effective as possible for the greatest number of students. The individualistic-collectivistic attributes of a particular sociocultural setting strongly influence how social relationships are typically enacted and the social capital that results (Allik & Realo, 2004). For example, members of collectivistic cultures tend to put more energy than those in individualistic cultures into establishing interdependent relationships maintained through exchanges of food, services, and so on. The most significant of these interdependent relationships are generally with relatives, whereas in individualistic cultures people are more likely to also actively seek and develop close relationships with others from outside their natal families and neighborhoods (Triandis, 1995). A good example of the collectivistic orientation is traditional Latino *familism* – a term chosen because the extended, multi-generational family is central to all aspects of social organization and is also the primary source of supports for its members, who in turn are expected to give priority to mutually supporting each other (Gutierrez, 1995; Zuniga, 1998). For youth who grow up in this kind of sociocultural setting, having good self-oriented skills may be relatively less important than other-

oriented skills that strengthen interpersonal relationships that potentially yield social capital. Examples of such other-oriented skills include being able to work as part of a team, perceiving and responding appropriately to the emotional status of others, understanding one's roles in the group, and jointly developing group goals (Ewalt & Mokuau, 1995; Yamauchi, 1998).

Conclusion
Analysis of focus group transcripts showed that teacher understandings about self-determination tend to cohere into two basic orientations that roughly reflect the contrast between individualism (the *self* view) and collectivism (the *others* view). Teachers of both orientations generally agreed that their students with EBD lacked the self-oriented skills (self-regulation, self-awareness, self-reinforcement, setting realistic goals, etc.) needed for self-determination. In addition to these presumably teachable skills, the teachers also identified obstacles to self-determination that were generally related to the low socioeconomic status of most of their students with EBD. These obstacles can be understood in terms of a lack of various kinds of capital that people typically need to reach their self-determined goals. Our discussion focused primarily on social capital because it is something that schools and individual teachers can reasonably support their students to gain. Such efforts require cultural competence since the social relationships that yield social capital are enacted differently in individualistic and collectivistic contexts.

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