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Walker et al. found that “the degree to which one is socially included affects one’s opportunities to engage in self-determined actions; it also affects the experiences in which one learns about individual preferences, interests, wants, needs, and desires” (2011, p. 15). Walker and colleagues further argued that research clearly shows inclusion in community and school provides greater opportunities to make choices, express preferences, set goals, and become more self-determined when compared with more restrictive settings and experiences. This viewpoint is corroborated by findings of Hughes et al. (2013), who showed that students participating significantly less in inclusive classes and school- and community-based transition instruction reported significantly less frequent use of self-determination skills than did students in more inclusive settings.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of both inclusive school environments and community-based training on postschool outcomes such as employment, postsecondary education, and independent living (e.g., Cimera, 2010; Test et al., 2009). Attending school exclusively in separate special education classrooms and having very limited or no community-based instruction provides students with little opportunity to independently make choices, solve problems, or speak up for themselves. Wehmeyer and Metzler (1995) suggested that educational environments that are highly structured, restrictive, or protective typically do not provide opportunities for independent problem solving or decision making. Students do not have the opportunity to develop the skills to independently respond to the ever-changing, unpredictable events and vicissitudes that comprise everyday life in inclusive school and community settings when daily activities are more predictable.

Inclusive environments may present frequent challenges for the individual that can prompt independent performance and self-determination skills. For example, the bus route that a student takes to a community-based jobsite may unexpectedly change, causing the student to have to problem-solve options to get to work. Or, a student must learn to prompt and reinforce herself to get to class on time when walking in the hall to her inclusive class without a teacher. The students in Hughes et al. (2013) who were already at a disadvantage because of limited access to inclusive school and community instructional environments reported significantly less use of self-determination skills than did their counterparts experiencing more inclusive educational environments, suggesting that segregated settings can hinder self-determination. Hughes and colleagues’ findings suggested that the degree to which students are included in school and community may affect their opportunities to make choices, set personal goals, express preferences, and develop other self-determination skills, as argued by others (e.g., Walker et al., 2011; Wehmeyer, Palmer, et al., 2007). Further investigation of the effects of participation in inclusive settings and activities in relation to self-determination in school and community settings appears warranted at this point.