STUDENT-LED IEP IMPLEMENTATION: A SELF-STUDY

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Abstract

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document detailing a student's designation, expected learning outcomes, support services required to achieve learning outcomes, and adaptations in materials, instruction, or assessment to support their learning. Student-led IEPs put the emphasis of responsibility and ownership in the hands of the student in the development of their IEP. This self-study research investigated a change in my practice as I implemented and observed student-led IEPs. Data was collected through a reflexive journal and field notes, then analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The research found that student-led IEPs provided the opportunity for framing IEP development as a formative process focused on student learning. The researcher experienced growth as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) through facilitation of student leadership in the IEP process, including developing strategies and resources to support student engagement. Implementing student-led IEPs also significantly impacted the use of time as a resource. Discussion considered that student-led IEPs may be a catalyst for change by shifting how educators think about and engage with the development of IEPs from the perspective of empowering and supporting students in the process. This research may offer insights to educators considering implementing student-led IEPs in their contexts.

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Chapter One

In its inception, public education in Canada and the United States was not meant for children with disabilities, chronic health challenges, or any other developmental or neurological difference. Instead, from the 19th century through the first half of the 20th century, children who demonstrated differences that would impact their ability to learn in a typical education environment were often sent away from their homes to reside in institutions (Andrews et al., 1993; Hossain, 2020; Sokal & Katz, 2020). Therefore, the mainstream kindergarten to grade 12 classroom population did not match the diversity that actually existed in society (Hossain, 2012) which meant that provisions for diversity in learning needs and styles were similarly absent. It would take decades in the first half of the 20th century, a significant shift in society's perspective on disability, and strong advocacy on the part of parents and educational professionals before students with disabilities would even be permitted to enroll in most public schools, never mind participate in learning with their peers in both Canada and the United States (Hossain, 2012; Sokal & Katz, 2020)

Today, kindergarten to grade 12 public education in Canada is under provincial jurisdiction and welcomes all students as a matter of philosophy and legal obligation (McBride, 2013; Sokal & Katz, 2020) meaning that school and professionals must find ways to accommodate students with a vast array of learning needs. In an education system that was not built for difference, educators and policy makers have had to work hard to make changes and develop accommodations to support students with disabilities (Andrews et al., 1993; Brussino, 2020; Loreman, 2014). In British Columbia, Canada, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) was introduced to recognize and accommodate students with disabilities, developmental or neurological differences, and chronic health challenges in the education system (British

Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). Implementing IEPs resulted in a pivotal change in the way that students with diverse learning needs are supported in schools (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Tremblay & Belley, 2017).

The term 'disability' is in common use currently, including in government documents that articulate special education policy in the province of British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2024). Language and terminology are constantly evolving, especially in the field of education. I chose to use the term 'disability' or 'student with a disability' in this work because the term 'disability' is commonly accepted language and conveys a shared meaning to professionals in the field of education as well as the public more generally. Andrews et al. (1993) argued that an inclusive school system "considers student diversity as a reflection of our society" (p. 5), and I observe and celebrate student diversity in my teaching practice. In this work, the terms 'disability' or 'student with a disability' are not used to define the student, but to give the student, myself, and readers a place to start with regard to understanding the IEP process and working to address the student's learning needs.

In the following chapter sections, I will describe my school-context. I will address how the IEP process is implemented in the province of British Columbia (BC), how the IEP process is implemented in my BC School District, and how I engage with the IEP process as part of my job as a teaching professional. The theoretical framework that I bring to this study will be outlined and I will elaborate on the problem of implementing a new approach to the IEP process, which I investigated in my research.

Researcher Context

I will explain my own context as the researcher in this section in order to establish a connection between my practice, my worldview, and my research question. Working as a teacher

for nine years, first as a humanities teacher and later in special education, has given me the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of students who have different learning styles, strengths, challenges, and goals for their education. More specifically, my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) over the past six years enables me to work closely with students with disabilities to support their learning. As an LST, the IEP process is an important part of my practice and thus an area that I saw as warranting further investigation through my research.

I am practical minded in how I approach my work as a teacher and as an LST, and I approached my research from a pragmatic world view which "holds that the world, as conceived by science, is found within the wider and richer world that is experienced" (Mead, 1934, p. xviii). Therefore, I recognized that my interpretations of my work were shaped and shifted in response to my experiences and background as a Learning Services Teacher in BC, meaning that my research was also affected by these factors. Mead (1934) explained that measurable phenomena of the scientific world is interpreted by the observers of that world, who rely on a social experience to make sense of what they observe. As such, I acknowledge that my research did not take place in a vacuum but instead I intended for it to become an integrated part of my teaching practice; I approached my research in a way that sought to gain a deeper understanding of the world in which the research took place and how the research findings applied back to my lived experience as an LST.

The worlds and lives of the students I work with are varied and have many different trajectories, influenced in part by their experiences in school. My pragmatic worldview allows me to acknowledge that what success looks like for one student is not the same for the next, and neither are their paths to achieving success; hence the leadership of the learner in the individualization aspect of an IEP is important and an area that could benefit from closer

consideration. I strongly believe that every student has in common the ability to learn and the potential to achieve success in a way that makes sense for them and their goals. Consequently, investigating IEPs through my practice responded to the needs and strengths of my teaching context, as well as aligned with my worldview.

In focusing on my practice specifically, I oriented my research towards exploration and observation of possibilities within my own teaching context. Therefore, I approached the investigation of a change in my practice with methods that involved engagement with that change. This approach matched the pragmatic notion that methods of research should be determined based on whether or not they can achieve the desired outcome (Mayan, 2023; Creswell, 2022). Despite the fact that my research focused on my own practice, it is important that I kept in mind that "goals, theories, and methods often closely align with and are responsive to participants' and/or communities' needs" (Mayan, 2023, p. 24) through the pragmatic paradigm. The context of my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in BC and in the Sea to Sky School District affects how I do my job and how I approached my research.

Framing the Problem

IEPs in British Columbia

In this section, I will define Individual Education Plan (IEP) and explain the requirements involved in developing an IEP in the province of British Columbia (BC). I will also articulate the level of student involvement that the province encourages in the IEP development process which is connected to my research question. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) describes an IEP as "[a]n individual education plan designed for a student" with special needs (p. 2). According to the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) an IEP must have a number of components that come together to guide the learning plan for the student, including the

student's learning or education goals, adaptations or modifications that will support the student in school, the services to be provided by the school, and measures the school will use for tracking achievement. In order to have an IEP, a student must first meet criteria designating them as a student with special needs within one or more of the BC Ministry of Education special needs categories.

Beyond a plan for student learning, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) identifies an IEP as "a tool for collaborative planning" (p. 16). A number of relevant parties may be involved in the development of an IEP including school staff, parents, the student, School District personnel, and other Ministries or community agencies such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). However, it is primarily the Learning Services Teacher who is responsible for the development, implementation, and evaluation of each individual IEP as well as the documentation of the above. Students can sometimes be excluded from the IEP process if they are unwilling or unable to engage or if their parent does not wish for them to be involved. However, when students are left out of the development of their own IEP they do not have the opportunity to provide an important perspective on challenges they are facing and accommodations that might support them in the classroom.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) emphasizes the importance of consulting parents and, "where appropriate" (p. 11), the student in the IEP process and encouraging student contributions. The mandate of the IEP process, as articulated in the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) Special Education Policy Manual, is the same for all students from kindergarten to grade 12. Factors that might affect the participation of students in the IEP process include "age, level of maturity, and capacity for sustained, considered

deliberation based on awareness of possibilities and consequences" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 15). Any of the above factors may change the way in which a student is able to engage meaningfully in the development of their IEP. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2016) acknowledges that "[m]any students with special needs can contribute to the process of assessment and planning for their own educational programs, and provide an evaluation of the services available to them" (p. 11) which demonstrates some orientation towards student participation in the process. Beyond the acknowledgement that student contribution is a possibility, however, not a lot of attention is devoted to the depth to which students could or should be involved in the development of their IEP. Of note throughout the Ministry document is wording like 'consult' and that the IEP is being created 'for' the student, language which suggests that the student does not necessarily take an active role in the IEP process. The Ministry of Education does not explain how much ownership students themselves should take for their IEP. Apart from the requirement that a student and their family be consulted, the guidelines do not articulate the depth to which a student and their family should understand the IEP or be involved in the monitoring of the plan.

It is an oversight to omit an expectation of active engagement and responsibility on the part of the student when it comes to the development of IEPs. In order to prioritize student learning in the student's own IEP, it is important that they have the opportunity to be actively involved in the IEP process. While I can understand that freedom is afforded to school districts and staff to be flexible in engaging stakeholders in the IEP process, it also allocates the responsibility to those same parties and potentially leaves the student out of a process that is supposedly centered around their learning needs. I found this to be problematic, so my research

investigated an avenue for deeper attention and commitment to the IEP process on the part of students that is crucial to my work and relevant to others in similar roles in BC School Districts.

IEPs in the Sea to Sky School District

In this section, I describe how the Sea to Sky School District approaches Individual Education Plans (IEP) and describe this in relation to student involvement in an IEP process. The Sea to Sky School District (2023) policy regarding IEPs builds on the BC Ministry of Education (2016) expectation that students and parents "take an active role in the design of the IEP to the maximum extent possible" (p. 15) by positioning the IEP as a collaborative tool to engage all relevant parties. Emphasis is put on meaningful consultation (Sea to Sky School District, 2023), which the District aims to achieve, in part, through a student introduction sheet. The Sea to Sky School District (2023) offers the student introduction sheet to give students the opportunity to answer some basic questions around their strengths, challenges, and desired supports. However, there can be a gap between students filling out a sheet and truly taking an active role in the IEP process as the School District advocates for. In my experience, student collaboration in IEP development requires a more concerted effort towards direct integration of students in the IEP process.

The Sea to Sky School District (2023) follows the BC Ministry of Education (2016) policy for developing and implementing IEPs which means that Learning Services Teachers hold responsibility for the process and are mandated to consult with families in doing so. The Sea to Sky School District (2023) goes one step further to articulate that the "pedagogical foundation of the IEP is a strength-based student-centered approach" (para. 4). Student-centered means that the IEP is designed around a student's unique strengths learning needs (Sea to Sky School District, 2023), making it akin to positioning the student as the main character in the story of the IEP.

Even so, a student-centered approach does not inherently mean that students are actively involved in the IEP process and leaving a student out of the IEP process may mean that the student has little knowledge or in-put regarding the IEP that is developed for their benefit, even if it is student-centered. In moving forward with a student-centered approach to IEPs, Sea to Sky School District (2023) explains that the aim is to nurture a sense of community and strive to have "each student working in the classroom at her or his own level, acquiring self-confidence and independence" (para. 4). Yet, self-confidence and independence would be better achieved by allowing students to build those attributes through the IEP process itself, rather than expecting them to appear as a result of a process that was conducted without full engagement and ownership on the part of the student. My research worked towards putting the emphasis of responsibility and ownership in the hands of the student in the development of their IEP.

IEPs in My Practice

In this section, I will describe how I engaged with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process as a Learning Services Teacher in BC and articulate the connections between the work that I did with student IEPs and possibilities to reimagine this process. As a Learning Services Teacher one of my roles is to be a case manager, which means that I have a certain number of students on my caseload each year who are designated by the BC Ministry of Education as students with special needs. Each student has an IEP that needs to be updated annually. In my school, there are currently four Learning Services Teachers who manage IEP cases for students between grades 10-12. We are all mandated to follow the BC Ministry of Education (2016) framework for IEPs as well as the Sea to Sky School District (2023) policy for implementing the IEP process and documenting student IEPs, as described in previous sections. However, each

case manager approaches the IEP process distinctly as there is some autonomy in the work we do as case managers and I have some flexibility in how I approach the IEP process.

Each fall semester it is my responsibility to ensure that the students on my caseload and their families have an opportunity to meet with me and work through the IEP process. Typically, the meeting takes place between me, the parents or guardians, and the student. Various other people can be invited including school counsellors, and any community members or professionals who are closely involved in supporting the student. Before going through the development or revision of an IEP, I will have read through the student's education file and their previous IEPs, if there are any. I then begin the IEP meeting by asking the student how their school year is going so far. Each new school year is an opportunity for a fresh start in my mind, so I want to give the student the chance to set the tone and orient them as the priority in the meeting. Throughout the meeting, I will consistently consult the student to ask what goals they would like to work on for the year, what accommodations have been helpful for them in the past and what supports or tools they need in order to learn. I am leading the meeting, but my aim is to hear the student's voice more than my own if possible. In my observation, parents often take a leading role in the meeting, especially if the student is reluctant to engage. I endeavor to re-orient our focus to the student's role in developing their IEP. However, this can have varying degrees of success depending on the willingness of the student to speak up or the cooperation of the parent in allowing their child to lead.

In the years I have been working as a Learning Services Teacher, I had not yet observed students being invited to take a primary leadership role in the IEP process and I found this problematic. I would have liked to see this change and have students taking on the responsibility for, and engagement with, the development of their own IEPs. My aim matched with the Sea to

Sky School District (2023) policy that IEPs should be student-centered; if students are the ones taking the lead in their own IEP process, both their IEP and the process itself could be designed around a student's unique strengths and learning needs. My desire to position students as leaders in their IEP process also fit within the overarching aim of the BC Ministry of Education (2016) to encourage student contributions to the IEP process, but went a step further to establish the student as essential to the process rather than merely consulted.

In my endeavors to facilitate a more student-oriented practice with regard to IEP development and revision, I learned about student-led IEPs. The idea of having a student lead their own IEP meeting and the development of their own IEP was something that I thought would work well with my practice; I believed that encouraging a student to engage with the plan that guided their journey in the education system was important because it placed the responsibility and ownership of the IEP in the student's hands. Student-led IEPs were not a current practice in my School District but I could not think of a more student-centered approach than to have the students themselves direct the process of developing or revising their own IEP.

Theoretical Framework

A constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview informed my approach to this research. Constructivism allows the researcher to approach their work from a perspective that seeks to understand the world in which they live. Jaramillo (1996) explains how Vygotsky's work contributed immensely to the development of constructivism while Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) further describe how Vygotsky's emphasis on the "social nature of knowledge production and learning" (p. 3) paved the way for constructivism to frame knowledge production as emerging from a researcher's experiences and interactions with the world. Thus,

constructivism frames an inextricable relationship between the researcher and the subject they are studying.

According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), reality seen through a constructivist lens is relative since it is constructed based on the understanding of the individual. Constructivism supports a complexity of views, acknowledging that there is no single truth to reality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Jaramillo, 1996) but that the researcher may represent one of many possibilities to exist. Researchers who adhere to the constructivist epistemology recognize that their own lived experiences, social interactions, and how they interact with the research all have an influence on the knowledge generated by the research itself (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) which supported my aim to explore my IEP practice. Similarly, my pragmatic worldview allowed for interpretation of phenomena by the observer, who is influenced by their social experiences to make sense of what they observe (Mead, 1934). The elements of constructivism and pragmatism made sense for my research since my background and relationship to the inquiry would influence how I approached the investigation into how to implement student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my own practice as well as how I engaged in meaning making throughout the process. Through my constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview, I acknowledge that my research was shaped by my context and experiences.

Krahenbuhl (2016) pointed out that constructivism is currently a dominant force in pedagogical theory, which means that my practice as a teacher entering the profession in the last ten years was likely impacted by constructivist concepts and therefore was an influence in my decision to approach my own research through this lens. Considering Vygotsky's influence on constructivism and the fact that he was a teacher and based much of his research in education

(Jaramillo, 1996), there are a number of important connections to be made between constructivism as my theoretical framework and student-led IEPs as my subject of inquiry. Constructivism works well as a theoretical framework for student-led IEPs because it allows for students to be centered in their learning. Vygotsky, and in turn constructivism, advocate for learning through experience (Krahenbuhl, 2016; Jaramillo, 1996); similarly, student-led IEPs center students in the experience of leading their own IEP process. Moreover, both Krahenbuhl (2016) and Jaramillo (1996) asserted that, through constructivism, learners need to be actively involved in a process in order to internalize concepts through their own interactions. Thus, engaging with student-led IEPs which puts the responsibility and ownership of learning back into the hands of students fits well within a constructivist framework.

I see the value in student engagement and responsibility regarding their education and see this value reflected in the language that the BC Ministry of Education (2016) and Sea to Sky School District (2023) employ to encourage student participation in the IEP process. Another way student engagement and responsibility might be achieved in the IEP process is through student-led IEPs. However, student-led IEPs are not a common practice, which is why I was interested in learning more about a student-led IEP process. My constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview supported not only my approach to research but also student-led IEPs.

Statement of the Problem

The introduction of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) signified a major shift in the way that students with disabilities are supported in the education system in Canada and the United States (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). However, there is possibility in today's education system for the IEP process to evolve further in order to support student needs. If an IEP is meant to guide, among other things, the support that a student receives for their

learning needs (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016), then students themselves should have significant input into this process. Supporting students in taking ownership of their learning at the planning level when it comes to their IEP made sense for my practice and is supported by the BC Ministry of Education (2016) framework for IEPs as well as the Sea to Sky School District (2023) policy for IEPs. Yet, a process for students to take an active role in the development of their IEP is not yet fully in place. My work to implement student-led IEPs was a change to the IEP process that facilitated student ownership of their learning plan. Student-led IEPs integrated well with my desire to develop my own practice in a way that supports students to articulate their learning needs and take ownership of their learning. Therefore, my research focused on a change in my practice through the implementation and observation of student-led IEPs.

Research Question

What has been my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in British Columbia, Canada?

Sub-questions

- How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?

- What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs?

- What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs?

- How have student-led IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher?

- How have student-led IEPs affected student success?

Key Terms

- Adaptation – strategies in instruction or assessment to support a student in meeting the learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum. May include alternative format of

materials, instructional strategies, or assessment procedures without modifying provincial learning outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

- Designation – a Ministry category assigned to a student who is identified as having special education needs based on formal assessment outcomes (e.g., Learning Disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder)

- Differentiation - adjusting materials to meet the needs of the student (Hossain, 2012)

- Formative – a process that is focused on providing the opportunity and support for students' learning (Lau, 2016)

- Individual Education Plan (IEP) – document detailing a student's designation, expected learning outcomes, support services required to achieve learning outcomes, and adaptations in materials, instruction, or assessment to support their learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

- Learning Assistance Teacher – teacher who plans, organizes, and supports the implementation of strategies to support the learning of students with special education needs in the classroom. Learning Assistance teachers play an active role in development, implementation, and evaluation of IEPs (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

- Learning Services Teacher – see "Learning Assistance teacher"

- Modification – changes in learning outcomes that are significantly different from the provincial curriculum and are chosen to meet a student's learning needs (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

- Self-advocacy – standing up for oneself or taking action on one's own behalf (Royer, 2017)

- Self-determination skills – skills that help one to determine their own path (Royer, 2017)

- Special education needs – characteristics making it necessary for a student to be provided with resources that are different from those needed by most students. Special education needs are determined through assessment and are the basis for determining an education program suitable for the student (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

- Special needs – see "special education needs"

- Student-led IEP – student-centered and student-directed practice that empowers students and allows them to engage with their IEP meeting as contributors and leaders (Davis & Cumming, 2019). An IEP is considered to be student-led when the student actively engages in every stage of the IEP process (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Martin et al., 2006; Royer, 2017).

- Summative – a process that is focused on evaluation or assessment of a student and their learning (Lau, 2016)

- Supports – see "Adaptations"

Chapter Summary

This chapter has given an overview of public education in Canada and the United States, articulating where students with disabilities fit within the system and how those learners are supported by Individual Education Plans (IEPs). I framed the story by illustrating how the IEP process happens in British Columbia, in the Sea to Sky School District where I work, and in my own practice as a Learning Services Teacher. The contradiction between Ministry and District assertions that students should be at the center of the IEP process, and my observation that students are not invited to take a leadership role in the development of their IEP was problematized. In doing so, I demonstrated that a gap exists between policy and practice which could potentially be bridged; I argued that students should have a more active role in the IEP

process and proposed student-led IEPs as a path forward for my practice and my research. My research question required me to explore my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in BC and respond to the five research sub-questions related to that process.

In Chapter Two, I will introduce a review of the literature around how IEPs were established and explore the potential benefits, challenges, and recommendations for student-led IEPs articulated in previous research. The information in Chapter Two will help to build my case for the evolution of the IEP to becoming student-led and the implementation of student-led IEPs in my own practice.

Chapter Two

This chapter covers a review of the literature around how the Individual

Education Plan (IEP) was established and illustrates potential benefits, challenges, and

suggestions for student-led IEP implementation. IEPs are a common component of

special education services provided to support students with disabilities to engage in

education. IEPs have become pervasive around the globe; where a country has special

education policies, it is common that the IEP will be a key element to those policies

(Mitchell et al., 2010). Most nations throughout Europe have IEPs or an equivalent, as do

Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Thailand, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and many more (Brussino

2020; Mitchell et al., 2010). However, the origins of the IEP lie in the United States, with

Canada quick to follow (Andrews et al., 1993; Loreman, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2010;

Tremblay & Belley, 2017). In tracing the history of education that led to the development

of IEPs, reviewing the legislation that made IEPs a legal reality, and following the

progression of special education to present, it is possible to see how the IEP that is known

today came to be. What is more, the evolving nature of education means that further

shifts in beliefs and practices may influence IEPs to progress to another iteration which

can include supporting students to lead the development of their own IEPs.

A Timeline of Special Education, IEPs, and the Law

Special education in Canada has been heavily influenced by social movements

and legislation in the United States (Andrews et al., 1993; Loreman, 2014; Sokal & Katz,

2020). As such, it makes sense to present the timeline of special education in Canada and

the United States simultaneously in order to recognize the relationship between the two.

Unlike the United States, Canada does not directly govern education at the federal level.

Instead, changes to legislation with regard to education reside with Canadian provinces and territories (McBride, 2013; Loreman, 2014; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). In both Canada and the United States, education policy and approaches to support students with disabilities took the better part of a century to slowly shift from exclusion through institutionalization to normalizing placement in mainstream classrooms (Brussino, 2020). For the first half of the 20th century, "students with moderate to severe disabilities were often denied the opportunity to receive equal treatment in the classrooms with their peers" (Hossain, 2012, p. 2). It was through the activism of educators, parents and others that students with disabilities were eventually included in the mainstream classroom and measures such as IEPs were implemented to support their participation in education.

The 1800s largely saw the institutionalization of children with disabilities where their care and what education they were able to receive "was provided in residential institutions, which served a large geographical area and which resulted in the removal of many children from their homes and communities" (Andrews et al., 1993, p. 32). Although gradual change would occur, Andrews et al. (1993) illustrated that institutions for children with disabilities continued as late as the 1970s. When the public education system was established in Canada in the early 1900s, special education schools and classrooms were created for students with disabilities and residential schools for students with severe disabilities were expanded (Andrews et al., 1993). It is possible to see that the public education system treated students with disabilities largely as a group, rather than individuals in need of individual goals and plans. Moreover, up until the later part of the century, students with disabilities were often denied the opportunity to enroll in local schools (Sokal & Katz, 2020). In the first half of the 20th century, if a school district claimed that it was not able to support a student with a disability, that student could be turned away with

no legal repercussions (Hossain, 2012). As a result, prior to 1975, 90% of children with developmental disabilities were educated in institutions rather than neighborhood schools (Hossain, 2012; Sokal & Katz, 2020).

By mid-century, there was a shift to categorization of students based on their disability. Children with disabilities were being treated less like a homogenous group but, even as the 1950s and 1960s saw further categorization of these students, use of residential schools for educating students with disabilities continued (Andrews et al., 1993). During these decades, parents and professionals began to lobby governments to improve educational provisions for students with disabilities and to bring those students into public education (Andrews et al., 1993). In 1958, the Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act was passed in the United States, which centered around training education professionals to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities (Sokal & Katz, 2020); for the first time, educating students with disabilities began to be considered a responsibility of the public schools and society.

Advocacy for children with disabilities increased in the 1960s and 1970s when a major push was made for special education by education professionals and parents who "came to believe that traditional education was not meeting the needs of their children, and therefore not achieving their desired goals" (Andrews et al., 1993, p. 6). Inherent in the movement was the call for integration, meaning that students with disabilities should be integrated into neighborhood public schools rather than sent to be cared for and educated in institutions. Special education began to emerge, involving "different or supplementary approaches to teaching and learning that facilitate success in students with exceptionalities" (Sokal & Katz, 2020, p. 2). Students with disabilities began to be seen

more and more as humans and citizens with rights who required programing that was specific to them, modifications in instruction, and teachers specifically trained in special education in order to effectively facilitate their education (Andrews et al., 1993).

From the push to educate students with disabilities in public schools arose policies around how that might be accomplished. Deinstitutionalization began to sweep Canada and the United States in the 1970s (Andrews et al., 1993; Sokal & Katz, 2020) but integration of students with disabilities in regular schools meant that they were "expected to work to meet the demands of that setting, possibly with some adjustments made on the part of the school" (Loreman, 2014, p. 37). The shift in expectations were a major change for educators, and a significant challenge; where schools had previously turned away students with disabilities, they now had to find ways to accommodate the learning needs of some students with disabilities in the classroom. The education system had to adapt, and soon encountered legislation to this effect through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, passed in the United States (Andrews et al., 1993; Hossain, 2012; Loreman, 2014; Sokal & Katz, 2020), making education of students with disabilities the legal responsibility of each state. In this piece of legislation, the term Individual Education Plan (IEP) was coined (Mitchell et al., 2010; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). Through legislation of IEPs, it was formally recognized that students with disabilities would need to be treated as individuals, including in their programing for education, in order to meet learning outcomes.

Andrews et al. (1993) and Loreman (2014) emphasized that Canadian legislation and administration regarding students with special education needs was directly impacted by the legislation in the United States around this issue. In the same decade, Canadian provinces began developing policies and guidelines around the use of IEPs (McBride, 2013). Advances in special

education in North America were also felt in Europe as the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, also known as the Warnock Report, came out in 1978 in the United Kingdom (Brussino, 2020). The report aimed, in part, to "transform the nature of education provision for students with disabilities and impairments" (Brussino, 2020, p. 11). Thus, the shift towards support for students with disabilities to participate in education with their peers began to take shape, not only in Canada and the United States, but around the world. The international spread of special education was important because it demonstrated that other nations saw Canada and the United States as leaders in this area, but it also pushed innovation forward as teachers grappled with making decisions and plans around student support.

It was not until the 1980s that IEPs became commonplace and a means of "providing curriculum that attempted to meet the needs of children who it was felt would not benefit from the regular curriculum" (Loreman, 2014, p. 37). The 1980s and 90s saw a push towards including students with special needs not only in neighborhood schools, but in the general education classroom with accommodations to support their learning (Andrews et al., 1993). Labeled mainstreaming, placing students with special needs in regular classrooms gained popularity among education advocates. Mainstreaming focused on "serving the needs of exceptional students in the least restrictive environment" (Andrews et al., 1993, p. 13). Student placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) meant that students with disabilities should spend as much time as possible with similar-age peers in the regular classroom. It was around the same time in 1985 that Canada became the first country to make equal education for people with

physical or mental disabilities a right by law (Sokal & Katz, 2020). A student's new legal right to education would be supported, in part, through the development of their IEP.

In the 1990s, special education took another leap forward from mainstreaming to inclusion. Sokal and Katz (2020) described how the inclusion movement evolved around the idea of both social and academic inclusion with emphasis on educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom alongside their peers without disabilities. Building on the idea of least restrictive environment and the ability to differentiate learning with the guidance of IEPs, the emerging belief was that all teachers should be responsible for addressing the learning needs of all students in their classrooms. During this period there existed "increasing numbers of children in need of individualized programming [alongside] expanding knowledge and skill of teachers with respect to student diversity" (Andrews et al., 1993, p. 8). Thus, inclusion was increasingly adopted in Canada during the 1990s, albeit to varying degrees in different parts of the nation since some provinces operated on a model of full inclusion with every student in the classroom whereas other provinces accepted an approach that involved students being included in some classes but not all (Loreman, 2014). Worldwide, IEPs were spreading as a tool to support special education. The United Kingdom introduced the use of IEPs in 1994 and Scotland did so in 1999 (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Today, special education and IEPs, though they may vary in legal implication, implementation, and description, are used across the globe. McBride (2013) emphasized that, in Canada, all provinces support students with disabilities by using individualized planning accomplished through an IEP. The evolution of special education and the history of IEPs demonstrates that the special education field is constantly shifting and responding to perceptions of students, advocacy of parents, and implementation of legislation. My research engaged with

IEPs in a time when emphasis on inclusion and a student-centered approach can pave the way for students to take more of a leadership role in the development of their own IEPs.

IEPs and the Law

Although each province in Canada has its own laws and policy regarding education, they are all beholden to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms first and foremost (McBride, 2013). Policy that may be "devised at the school district level and the school level…must not contradict policy at any of the levels above" (Loreman, 2014, p 45), meaning that all education policy must uphold the rights of students that are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There was also a larger legal caveat to the major changes for educating students with disabilities that the United States did not contend with; before the reparation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982, there was no constitutional basis upon which to argue for the right to appropriate education for children with special needs in Canada (McBride, 2013). While the lack of a constitutional right did not stop legislation from the United States and social movements from influencing how students with disabilities were educated in Canada, there was a certain reassurance offered when equal rights were guaranteed under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, specifically equal rights for those with mental or physical disabilities (McBride, 2013). Since then, students with disabilities have had the legal right to be educated in regular schools in Canada and IEPs have helped to facilitate this.

Legislation in the United States has had an important influence on the legal rights of students with disabilities in Canada. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, renewed in 1997, and then renewed again in 2004. These pieces of legislation in the United States have

become perhaps the most cited pieces of legislation when it comes to the history of IEPs and had a significant impact on special education in Canada. EAHCA made special education mandatory and was the first time that legal protection had been put in place against discrimination in public education for students with disabilities in the United States (Hossain, 2012; Sokal & Katz, 2020). Another key aspect of EAHCA and its future iterations was the requirement that an IEP be developed for every student who received special education services (Andrews et al., 1993; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). The requirements for IEPs were outlined, and included information about the student's current level of academic performance as well as instructional goals and objectives (Andrews et al., 1993). Overall, an important step was taken through EAHCA and IDEA in holding states accountable to providing education for students with disabilities (Sokal & Katz, 2020). In each renewal of IDEA, changes were made to align the legislation with the evolving understanding of disability and behavioral needs, parent and professional advocacy, and the development of special education at the time.

When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in the United States in 2001, it also had implications for IDEA. With NCLB came increased efforts to hold schools accountable to educating students with special education needs in the least restrictive environment with commitments to providing supports that would allow said students to be successful in that environment (Hossain, 2012). IEPs helped to increase accountability and commitment to the least restrictive environment mandate by outlining the supports needed by the student in order to meet the demands of the regular classroom and curriculum. Performance goals were incorporated into the IEP document and it became mandatory to illustrate indicators by which those goals could be measured (Hossain, 2012) as a means of solidifying expected outcomes. Thus, the goal

of the IEP in the context of NCLB became enabling a student with a disability "to be involved in and make sufficient progress in the general education curriculum" (Hossain, 2012, p. 11).

Internationally, the story of children's rights was closely tied to the shift in public perspective that changed special education in Canada and the United States. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child brought the world's nations together regarding the rights of children in 1989. The United Nations (UN) agreement connected with the trajectory of IEP development as it called attention specifically to children with disabilities. Nations who signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) agreed to respect the rights of all children regardless of their race, the color of their skin, sex, religious or political affiliations, origins, property ownership, birth, or any other status (UN General Assembly, 1989). In particular, the idea that a child should not be discriminated against for having a disability would have ramifications for education. The document further asked that nations make the effort to provide children with mental and physical disabilities the opportunity to have "a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community" (UN General Assembly, 1989, p. 7). Connections can be made back to the provisions necessary to support a student with disabilities to succeed in the regular classroom, many of which were being made through IEPs. Finally, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) asserted that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (p. 4). Ramifications of this statement

echoed from the growing advocacy for students to have a voice in education and, eventually, in their own IEPs. It is possible to see the ideas articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as acknowledging the social movement and resulting evolution in education that had already begun in the United States and Canada when the IEP was developed over a decade previously.

Legislation that created a legal framework for support of students with disabilities in the classroom was key to the establishment of IEPs. Having students progressively prioritized in legislation regarding education and advocacy for legal rights for students with disabilities has influenced the ways in which students are able to participate in education today. My research focusing on implementing student-led IEPs in my practice was a step further along this path, from students with disabilities participating in education to taking a leadership role in their education.

The Inclusion Movement

Inclusion "involves schools and teachers modifying the ways in which they work so as to cater to the needs of a wide variety of learners" (Loreman, 2014, p. 38) in the classroom. The inclusion movement emerged out of the broader social movement through which special education and placement of students with disabilities in regular schools had been accomplished. The inclusion movement took advocacy for students with disabilities a step further, as parents and other advocates of individuals with disabilities gained a stronger voice in society. The central concept of the movement was that students with disabilities should not simply be added to regular classrooms, only to be sidelined with content and activities mismatched with their abilities. Instead, students should be meaningfully included in the learning taking place in their classrooms (Andrews et al., 1993). The movement towards full inclusion continues today and it

is clear that IEPs play a key role by providing a plan for how students' needs will be met in order for them to meaningfully participate in classroom learning.

UNESCO (2017) articulated the argument for inclusion with the statement that "every learner matters and matters equally" (p. 12). When the understanding and conceptualization of disability and difference shifts in society, policies and practices in schools are influenced to change as well (Brussino, 2020). Legislation is tasked with articulating the principles and rights that are needed for building the framework to support inclusion of all learners (UNESCO, 2017). As of 2020, "most countries allow for curriculum adaptations and modifications to meet the individual learning needs of students with [special education needs] and foster their inclusion" (Brussino, 2020, p. 28). These adaptations and modifications are usually documented through the student's IEP. Although not every country includes learners with diverse needs to the same extent that Western nations are aiming to, there is pressure from the international community to do so; pressure that is demonstrated through the documents and advocacy coming out of the United Nations and UNESCO around education policy and guides for working towards inclusion in education. In the end, "[w]hile all learners have needs…, they also have the right to participate fully in a common social institution" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 31), a belief that can only come to fruition through the implementation of special education and IEPs.

Thus far, IEPs have been employed as a tool to help make inclusive education possible. As the inclusion movement continues to influence the evolution of special education, student-led IEPs can be seen as an inclusive practice in and of themselves. This connected back to my research question since supporting students to lead their own

IEP development has the potential to not only facilitate inclusion for students with disabilities in the classroom, but gives them a voice in planning for their own meaningful participation in learning.

IEP Purposes and Expectations

An IEP serves a multitude of purposes from planning tool for developing an educational program, to roadmap of services and interventions in order to facilitate said program, to written document assuring accountability for those services and interventions (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Hossain, 2012; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). It is both a plan of action and a legal document. Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) further described the IEP as "the primary tool for enabling schools to provide [the] required level of support to students with disabilities" (p. 1). More than paper, IEPs are considered foundational for planning special education services as well as positive student outcomes (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). It is easy to see why Tremblay and Belley (2017) asserted that no document is more important than the IEP in the context of special education.

Two avenues exist through which a student is determined to qualify for an IEP in Canadian provinces; medical diagnosis or screening and assessment (Tremblay & Belley, 2017). Having met the criteria for a Ministry of Education provincial designation, categories of which will vary by province, the student becomes eligible for an IEP. Common elements of an IEP include: a summary of the student's strengths and challenges, school or specialist assessments, anticipated objectives of the plan, resources to be provided to the student, methods and strategies for reaching goals, roles of staff and other adults supporting the student, review and evaluation of the plan (Tremblay & Belley, 2017). Changes to educational programing will fall into one of two types: 1) adaptations are "measures that do not alter the initial objectives associated with the

corresponding education program for a given grade" while 2) modifications "amend these objectives" (Tremblay & Belley, 2017, p. 3021). Therefore, adaptation supports the student to meet the curricular outcomes outlined by the province whereas modification means supporting the student without the expectation that they will meet the curricular outcomes outlined by the province.

Expectations for the IEP process, and the IEP itself, have grown and evolved over the decades. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) stated that assistance extended to a child with a disability should be designed to facilitate effective access to education and services "in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development" (p. 7). The expectations outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) are closely linked to the purpose of IEPs as articulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In some instances, however, IEPs are tasked with going beyond supporting students with disabilities to fit into the education system as it exists today. Instead, Mitchell et al. (2010) suggested that they should "also lead to those systems being reformed so as to better accommodate diversity" (p. 64) and ultimately lead to a higher standard of education for students with diverse learning needs.

Shifting the IEP process to become student-led, as I aimed to do in order to answer my research question, is an opportunity to bring about the kind of change that Mitchell et al. (2010) advocated for. Students taking the lead in developing their own IEP can accommodate diversity by having those who need the accommodations articulate their needs and shape their own interaction with the education system. In a scenario

where students lead the IEP process, the purpose of the IEP can evolve to include giving students more ownership of their education.

Critiques and Challenges of IEPs

Critiques and challenges emerge when an IEP does not meet the expectations that stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers have for the document or when the IEP process strays from its purpose. While teachers approach an IEP with the goal of procuring information on the student's learning needs and suggestions for meeting those needs, parents can often face challenges around understanding and engaging with the same IEP document. In gathering parent voices on the subject of IEPs, Zeitlin and Curcic (2014) found that a primary desire from parents was for the IEP process to be "more personal and more meaningful" (p. 384); in other words, parents wanted to understand and be able to contribute to the IEP process in a way that was taken seriously. In order to make the IEP process meaningful, collaboration is needed so that parents, education professionals, and students can all feel like they are on a team in which their voices are heard and the purpose of the IEP, to support student learning, is central to the process.

IEPs were developed in the spirit of collaboration and, in fact, some policies around the IEP process make collaboration a legal requirement (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). However, according to several studies, true collaboration between all parties involved in the IEP process often does not occur (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2010; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Entrenched roles and certain dynamics of IEP meetings have an impact on who participates and how much. For example, Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) found that teachers may be in the habit of taking full control of IEP meetings, but when this occurs "families and students were not meaningful, active participants in the process" (p. 9). Mitchell et al. (2010) also noted that

cultural differences between the school and student's family may impact parental engagement with IEPs since the IEP process often privileges the norms of the dominant culture and these norms may run counter to traditions and sensibilities of the student's family. Parents want to be able to understand what is being said about their child and the supports that are available but understanding becomes difficult when parents are not recognized as "equal and knowledgeable partners in the decision-making process during the IEP meetings" (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014, p. 384). Student-led IEPs are an opportunity to bring both students and parents into the IEP process since making the IEP accessible in a way that the student can comprehend and engage with it means that the parent has the chance to do the same.

The purpose of the IEP can become distorted when more focus is put on the legal or administrative roles of the document rather than emphasizing the support of students (Mitchell et al., 2010). In some cases, parents struggle to even understand what is being said about their child and the supports that are available (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014) between the use of jargon and the focus on meeting legal requirements. When the IEP is viewed as another paper to be filed or a legal box to be checked, a crucial opportunity is missed to develop and facilitate meaningful educational experiences for a student. Blackwell & Rossetti (2014) raised concerns over the fact that some studies have shown IEPs are not sufficiently individualized to the student; in other words, accommodations to support student learning may have been outlined in the IEP, but they may not have met the specific needs of the student in question. In these circumstances, IEPs have lost the plot as it were and are no longer fulfilling their purpose; or their multiple purposes of supporting the student, facilitating collaboration, and meeting legal requirements have

spread the IEP so thin as to make it meaningless. In the end, "[e]nsuring that IEPs serve all their other roles without distorting the primacy of acting as an education planning document is a challenge facing educational policy makers. It may well be that IEPs should not be expected to serve so many diverse purposes" (Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 15).

Student-led IEPs may be an answer to some of the critiques and challenges that face the IEP. Through implementing student-led IEPs to answer my research question, I wanted to put students back at the center of the process and the purpose of IEP development. What is more, when a student can understand and engage with their IEP, parents can as well and students even have the opportunity to explain the IEP to their parents. Ultimately, having a student lead the development of their IEP forces stakeholders to recognize the student first and foremost within the process and the document.

Students as Active Participants in the IEP Process

Students can be active participants in the IEP process without directly leading it. The evolution of special education has made it possible to foresee a future in which students have agency in their own IEP development. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) asked that the world's nations give children the right to express their own views on matters that affect them in as much as they are able. The idea of student involvement and agency is important because an IEP process conducted in this way allows a child to express their own views on a document that impacts their education. Mitchell et al. (2010) asserted that "students can and should be able to participate in their own IEPs" (p. 64). In some instances, opportunity is being made for this possibility as policy makers include provisions for student participation in their legislation around IEPs. In various countries, "students are expected to be involved in the

development and implementation of their plans" (Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 36), including

in Canada (McBride, 2013).

Nevertheless, to make student involvement in the IEP process a reality, concrete

action needs to be taken in schools. Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) found that direct

instruction, meaning teaching students about their IEP and explaining the IEP process,

was key to moving from lip service to the actual implementation of student participation

in IEP development. What is more, Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) found that students

demonstrated improved self-advocacy in response to intervention strategies focused on

explicit instruction guiding student participation in IEP meetings. The researchers

advised policy makers to find ways to encourage the implementation of said instructional

strategies (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014).

Through the growth and progress demonstrated in the history of special education

and IEPs to present day, it is possible to see that students with disabilities and other

learning needs have steadily gained agency in their education. With continued social

change and research, normalizing and legitimizing students leading their own IEPs may

be the next step in this evolution. Investigating the implementation of student-led IEPs in

my practice to answer my research question will give students the opportunity to be

active participants in the IEP process but take the concept a step further by supporting

them to lead the process.

Student-Led IEPs

An IEP is considered to be student-led when the student actively engages in every stage

of the IEP process (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Martin et al., 2006; Royer, 2017). Relevant to my

research is a consideration of the benefits of student-led IEPs, components of a student-led IEP

process, perceived barriers to student-led IEPs, and what teachers need to facilitate student-led IEPs.

Benefits of Student-Led IEPs

A breadth of benefits for students associated with student-led IEPs have been articulated in the literature. In leading their own IEP meetings, findings reported that students have opportunities to practice self-determination skills (Danneker & Bottge, 2009; Davis & Cumming, 2019; Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983) with an authentic purpose and learn to self-advocate (Cavdenish et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2006; Mason et al., 2002; Royer, 2017). The IEP process has been found to give students chances to practice the above skills in a safe and supportive environment before employing them post-graduation. Student-led IEPs also increase meaningful participation in the process among both students (Hawbaker, 2007; Martin et al., 2006; Mason et al., 2002; Royer, 2017; Sanderson & Goldman, 2020) and parents (Hawbaker, 2007; Royer, 2017) making for a more collaborative and interactive process.

In order to participate meaningfully, of course, students must first gain an understanding of what an IEP is, what their own IEP looks like, and how to situate themselves in the document (Hawbaker, 2007; Mason et al., 2002; Royer, 2017), much of which is accomplished through review of the IEP prior to the meeting. Overall, through student-led IEPs, students can be supported to gain a sense of responsibility for their learning (Hawbaker, 2007; Mason et al., 2002) and "take ownership for their own education" (Davis & Cumming, 2019, p. 92). Understanding the benefits that have been linked with student-led IEPs gave me a framework for making my own observations regarding the benefits of student-led IEPs in my practice and answering one of my research sub-questions.

Components of a Student-Led IEP Process

While each teacher may approach the student-led IEP process slightly differently, some common components emerged from the literature. In various cases, the student-led IEP process started with exploration of the student's IEP (Cavdenish et al., 2017; Davis & Cumming, 2019; Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983; Howard et al., 2021; Konrad, 2008) to gain familiarity of the document and previous supports that have been in place for the student. Teachers then supported students in reflecting on their strengths, needs, interests and goals (Cavdenish et al., 2017; Davis & Cumming, 2019; Hawbaker, 2007; Howard et al., 2021; Konrad, 2008) which guided the drafting of the upcoming IEP. Starting the IEP process with an introduction to the document and reflection gave students the opportunity to understand what the IEP document looked like and begin charting a path for what it might become, placing the student's specific strengths and challenges at the forefront of the process.

There is some consensus in the literature that students need explicit instruction in the preparation for their student-led IEP meeting (Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983; Howard et al., 2021; Konrad, 2008) especially since it is often the first time they may have been actively involved in the development of their own IEP. There were a number of strategies to support students in expressing themselves and preparing to lead their IEP meeting including graphic organizers (Royer, 2017), checklists (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Diegelmann & Test, 2018; Gillespie & Turnbull, 1983), digital slideshows (Hawbaker, 2007; Howard et al., 2021), and scripts (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Hawbaker, 2007; Howard et al., 2021). In some cases, students were encouraged to think about who they want on their IEP team and craft an invitation to send out to those members (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Howard et al., 2021) signaling the student's responsibility and leadership role in the lead-up to the meeting. Students were also given the

opportunity to rehearse their IEP meeting (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Howard et al., 2021) in order to be fully prepared.

In the lead-up to the meeting, students were asked to solicit feedback from their parents (Cavdenish et al., 2017; Konrad, 2008) and teachers (Davis & Cumming, 2019) to gain a more well-rounded perspective on their strengths, challenges, and goals. Soliciting feedback helped to get buy-in from relevant parties who would be supporting the student in their education journey. Following the meeting, students were sometimes invited to draft their new IEP (Davis & Cumming, 2019; Hawbaker, 2007; Howard et al., 2021) thereby coming full circle in their IEP process. While there were many similarities between the components of student-led IEP processes articulated in different studies, there were also subtle differences between each process. Having gathered evidence of some consensus for components of a student-led IEP process, I was able to respond to my research question by implementing my own process for student-led IEPs.

Perceived Barriers to Student-Led IEPs

Rather than a single, insurmountable barrier preventing practitioners from engaging with a student-led IEP process, several small barriers were often perceived (Scheef et al., 2024). Student inability to engage with their IEP process or lack of motivation to do so were regularly brought up as barriers (Danneker & Bottge, 2009; Hawbaker, 2007; Scheef et al., 2024) that would prevent students from participating in the development of their IEP, much less leading it. However, Hawbaker (2007) argued that using a lack of interest or motivation on the part of the student as a reason to forgo student-led IEPs was a self-fulfilling prophesy; students did not have the opportunity to develop the skills and motivation to lead the development of their IEP if they were never directly involved in the process. Danneker and Bottge (2009) described the

expectation among the adults that students would be observers in the IEP process rather than active participants and the adults' further surprise that students had meaningful contributions to make when given the opportunity to do so.

The perception that the special education teacher should be in charge of the IEP and in control of the meeting rather than the student was described as another barrier (Danneker & Bottge, 2009; Hawbaker, 2007; Scheef et al., 2024). In pre-IEP interviews, Danneker and Bottge (2009) found that all of the adults interviewed saw the special education teacher as the expert on issues related to the IEP and as having the main responsibility for the IEP process. This perception resulted in students taking a backseat in their own IEP development until student-led IEPs were implemented. Similarly, a dearth of training for teachers as well as a potential for longer meetings made practitioners hesitate at the threshold of student-led IEPs (Danneker & Bottge, 2009; Hawbaker, 2007; Scheef et al., 2024). According to Scheef et al. (2024), teachers who had never experienced a student-led IEP process before lacked confidence in incorporating student-led IEPs into their own practice.

Overall, obstacles reported around the implementation of student-led IEPs largely stemmed from inexperience around a new practice (Hawbaker, 2007). The fact of the matter is that strategies can be developed to remove barriers around student-led IEPs (Scheef et al., 2024) and the benefits of doing so, articulated earlier in this chapter, are worth the effort. Understanding barriers that other teachers faced regarding student-led IEPs allowed me to consider obstacles and barriers that impacted the implementation of student-led IEPs in my own practice as I worked towards answering my research question.

What Teachers Need in Order to Facilitate Student-Led IEPs

Out of the perceived barriers to student-led IEPs arise the real needs of teachers in this process. This section reports on what research has learned about teacher needs as they relate to implementing student-led IEPs. First and foremost, educators should be encouraged to start small (Eisenman et al., 2005; Hawbaker, 2007; Martin et al., 2006; Scheef et al., 2024), especially as they ease into something new. Scheef et al. (2024) clarified that starting small meant defining a manageable size and scope around initial steps in implementing student-led IEPs and might involve something as simple as supporting students to identify and share their strengths and challenges in an IEP meeting.

Teachers needed to shift expectations and keep an open mind in order to incorporate student-led IEPs (Hawbaker, 2007; Martin et al., 2006) as they put more trust in students and let go of some control. Hawbaker (2007) explained that teachers should allow IEP meetings to flow differently when they are student-led and emphasized that the result might be a longer meeting but it would be worthwhile. Further to this point, teachers needed to consciously change their behavior in order for IEPs to be truly student-led (Martin et al., 2006). For example, Martin et al. (2006) described how teachers who had low expectations for student success in leading the IEP meeting exhibited behaviors like stepping in when the student hesitated or seemed uncertain. In order for students to be successful in leading their IEP, however, the teachers needed to believe it was possible and refrain from stepping in.

A certain level of risk-taking was involved in implementing student-led IEPs (Eisenman et al., 2005; Hawbaker, 2007), as teachers found their footing in a new practice. Eisenman et al. (2005) explained that trying a new practice was risky and Hawbaker (2007) found that teachers perceived releasing control over the IEP meeting to be a risk, but both researchers emphasized

that the risks were worth the reward to see students rise to the occasion of leading their IEP process. Hawbaker (2007) articulated that it was necessary to make creative adaptations to facilitate student participation in student-led IEPs, but that was needed to support students with disabilities to be involved in education more generally anyways. There are free resources available to teachers willing to learn about student-led IEPs and ideally one can also "seek guidance from those who have found success" (Scheef et al., 2024, p. 10). Sometimes, however, a practitioner has to be the first to try something new in order to see widespread change (Eisenman et al., 2005; Hawbaker, 2007).

While there are various ways in which teachers might support students to lead the development of their own IEP, there are equally a number of needs that teachers must accommodate for themselves to make the implementation of student-led IEPs successful. Teachers are stakeholders in the student-led IEP process too and a change requires not only a shift in practice but also in understanding what they hope to accomplish. Taking into account teacher needs for implementing student-led IEPs helped to guide the implementation of student-led IEPs in my own practice in order to answer my research question.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has given an overview of the history of special education and how the IEP was established as a tool to support students with disabilities to engage with learning in a general school environment. I framed the story by establishing the legal and social basis for establishing IEPs and I described how changing laws and international agreements that articulated rights for students were closely tied to shifting public perspectives. The IEP is established as a critical component for supporting inclusion, but I also described how it is important for students to remain at the center of the IEP process to avoid straying from the purpose of the document. I

argued that student-led IEPs can be counted as a means of continuing to center students in their IEP. Perceived barriers to student-led IEP implementation were articulated, then countered with an inventory of what teachers need in order to facilitate student-led IEPs. Where Chapter One detailed my context and the context of my practice, Chapter Two frames the broader context of my research within the history of special education. Understanding the history of IEPs leading up to today and exploring student-led IEPs as the next iteration of learning plans for students with disabilities outlines the knowledge base upon which I built a path forward for my practice and my research. My research question required me to explore my own process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in BC.

In Chapter Three, I will explain my research process and how I approached the various elements of that process. My methodology, methods, and data analysis approach will be outlined, describing how I moved forward in investigating my research question. I will establish validity, and outline ethical considerations for my research. Chapter Three will illustrate how the elements of my research approach and findings from the scholarly literature on IEP and disability coalesced with my research question and plotted a path towards answering that question.

Chapter Three

This chapter articulates the choices I made for my research approach and describes how these choices came together as I worked towards answering my research question. I will begin by explaining qualitative inquiry and why it made sense as the approach for my research. I will articulate the attributes of self-study as a methodology and explain how self-study allowed me to respond to my research question. The methods I chose and data analysis approaches that were used in my research will be outlined, alongside how each engaged with data relevant to responding to my research question. At the end of the chapter, I will describe how validity and ethical considerations were approached in my research.

Qualitative Inquiry

Teaching is a highly social process, making the study of pedagogical practice an excellent match with the aim of qualitative inquiry "to illuminate the breadth and depth of human experience and capture and communicate the stark realities of social life" (Mayan, 2023, p. 10). Qualitative inquiry also seeks to answer the "how" and "why" questions (Mayan, 2023) which is precisely where my own research question falls. Mayan (2023) described how "qualitative researchers attempt to interpret and make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences" (p. 3). Thus, asking how I implemented student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my practice also encompassed my interactions with educators and students in doing this work in order to understand the challenges, benefits, and feasibility of changing how I approached the IEP process within a particular context.

Self-Study Methodology

Self-study is a research methodology that centers one's own practice as the problem for investigation (LaBoskey 2004). I selected self-study as the methodological framework for my

study as a means of grounding the research in my lived context while at the same time challenging my held beliefs around how to facilitate growth around my IEP process and putting my beliefs about student agency into action. Research grounded in context fit with my pragmatic worldview because I sought to answer my research question by using my own practice to conduct my investigation. Self-study methodology gave me the opportunity to closely connect my worldview and research question since making a change in my own practice was a pragmatic approach to investigating my research question.

Grounded in Context

LaBoskey (2004) argued that research on teacher knowledge and learning must be grounded in context in order to paint an accurate picture of what is known and convey this through detailed observation methods. What works in one place for one professional may not have the same effect in a different context, which is why it is important to understand how a practice operates within a particular environment. Asking how I implemented student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my practice necessitated understanding my own context to examine the integration of student-led IEPs from different angles of my own setting. Furthermore, LaBoskey (2004) described how motivation for research often stems from recognizing areas of practice in need of improvement. As I have an interest in the area of IEPs, there was value in diving deeply into my own practice through self-study to find answers.

Self-Focused

Teacher knowledge develops in part through improved understanding of one's own personal experience which is another component of context. To continue learning into their years of practice, LaBoskey (1993) argued that teachers need to reflect on their practice by bringing together their own knowledge, pedagogical theory, and alternative interpretations to understand

an experience. Therefore, being able to reflect on my own practice through self-study meant actively thinking through decisions I made while investigating my research question. It is vital that teachers carefully consider the methods they use to engage young learners and doing so through reflection helps teachers to be "thoughtful, passionate, and principled decision-makers" (LaBoskey, 1993, p. 12). If it is true that educators "teach who we are" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 843) then self-analysis is necessary to understand and improve teaching. Self-study gave me the opportunity to get personal with the research and closely examine my own work as a Learning Services Teacher while introducing a new process into my practice. By observing my own implementation of student-led IEPs, I addressed my research question through self-study and kept the focus on myself while simultaneously broadening my approach to the IEP process and carefully considering the implications of this change.

Interactive

LaBoskey (2004) writes that, while self-study focuses on an individual's practice, self-study is also interactive in order to bring a broader perspective to the subject being studied and avoid limitations of individual interpretation. Changes in my perception stemming from self-study require perspectives of others to be included in the process in order to challenge my held beliefs. For example, evaluating previously established IEP protocols and how those protocols might support me to implement student-led IEPs in my own practice allowed me to interact with other perspectives and aligned closely with both my pragmatic worldview and self-study. Self-study subscribes to a theory of learning that positions knowledge as socially constructed, with interactions between theory and personal perspectives coming to bear on the learning that is done (Lyons, 2010). Therefore, a rigorous process of noting others' perspectives on student-led IEPs through investigation of established student-led IEP protocols and resources allowed my research

conducted through the self-study methodology to be informed by a breadth of knowledge available beyond my perspective as the individual conducting the investigation and addressed my research questions.

Responsive

Continual monitoring and adaptation are hallmarks of research conducted by educators engaged in self-study (Lyons, 2010), since self-study researchers are both taking part in the action of the research and observing the research. Continual monitoring means paying attention to what is happening in the context of the research; in my case attending to the school environment and interactions I had with students as I implemented student-led IEPs. Adaptation stemmed from continual monitoring because it required being responsive to changes I observed in my school environment and in my interactions with students in order to change what I was doing as needed. LaBoskey (2004) described how engaging in a practice while simultaneously investigating that practice means that the researcher has the unique ability to generate knowledge and improve their own practice by applying what they have learned right away. Using a research methodology that examined my own practice allowed me to articulate my pedagogical choices in implementing student-led IEPs based on experiences as much as conceptual grounds. While my review of the literature in Chapter Two revealed that there are benefits to student-led IEPs I had the opportunity to reflect on what I observed as benefits to student-led IEPs myself when I experienced implementing them in my own practice and answered my research question. My pragmatic worldview is evident here since my interpretations were shaped by my experiences. Furthermore, self-study allowed me to be responsive in both my practice and investigation of the research questions throughout the research process where being responsive could look like overcoming certain challenges to implementing student-led IEPs or building on areas of success.

Self-study is concerned with integrity or "walking our talk" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 831); following through on what one believes is the best practice. LaBoskey (2004) situated professionals as best positioned and qualified to investigate their practice, and self-study allowed me to bring intentionality to an examination of my practice in my context in the Sea to Sky School District. The self-study methodology offers the practitioner an opportunity to put their beliefs into action and my belief that student-led IEPs could be a positive change for students oriented my research questions towards action on implementing a student-led IEP process in my practice. Gaining practical knowledge through examination of my own practice and implementing student-led IEPs fit well within the self-study methodology (LaBoskey, 2004) and made the results of the research directly and immediately useful to my practice while aligning with my pragmatic worldview.

Improvement-Aimed

The ultimate aim of self-study is less about improved thought and more about improved practice; it is a practical approach to gain practical benefits (Lyons, 2010). My pragmatic approach to understanding the world similarly values making improvements in response to different needs in my practice. The critical connection between research design and pedagogical practice emulated through self-study exists because, as LaBoskey (2004) noted, "we cannot teach something we do not know, nor advocate for a practice we do not embrace" (p. 839). Self-study supports hands-on experience and reflection, which I engaged in as I worked to address my research question through the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice. LaBoskey (2004) argued that the researcher ultimately will be able to support others to learn from the researcher's experience by showing others the path that the researcher took. Through my

research, I was able to illustrate my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in BC.

Self-Study Summary

Employing self-study as my methodological framework facilitated grounding the research in my own context as a Learning Services Teacher in BC while asking questions of my practice and the implementation of student-led IEPs within that practice. Evaluating previously established student-led IEP protocols broadened the perspective of my research and maintained the interactive aspect of self-study. Through self-study, I responded to what I was learning in the research while the research was happening, leaning into areas of strength and seeking to address areas of challenge I encountered while implementing student-led IEPs in my practice. Overall, the improvement-aimed objectives of self-study meant that I was making progress in my practice by innovating and implementing change in a way that closely aligned with my pragmatic worldview which prioritizes pursuing solutions to real problems.

Methods

For the researcher to also be the source of data through a self-study methodology, it is necessary to employ methods of data collection that fit within the researcher's practice and allow the researcher to gather evidence as the research is carried out (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). I used two methods in my self-study research to accomplish the above aims and respond to my research question: 1) reflexive journaling and 2) field notes.

1) Reflexive journaling: the purpose of a reflexive journal in research is to make connections between thoughts, feelings, and actions, allowing the researcher to deepen their self-awareness, follow ideas as they emerge, and develop insight beyond their initial observations including challenging previously held assumptions (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008). Reflexivity

"depicts the ability to direct one's thoughts back onto oneself; to examine one's theories, beliefs, knowledge, and actions in relation to…practice" (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008, p. 56). In other words, my interpretation of events as I implemented student-led IEPs in my practice and further insight into how I developed those interpretations made my thought process reflexive rather than simply reflective. Furthermore, a reflexive thought process matched the mandate of self-study being grounded in context. Using reflexive journaling as a method connected to my research questions in that it allowed me to: a) articulate my process for implementing student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs), b) observe the benefits and challenges of student-led IEPs, and c) note how student-led IEPs affect student success and my work as a Learning Services Teacher in BC.

Barry and O'Callaghan (2008) outline a four-step process for reflexive journaling which I followed: (1) Descriptive journal writing in which thoughts are freely written down and can include descriptions of practice, observations, intentions, significant moments, outcomes, questions, and personal reflections. (2) Extending self-critique and understanding by noting any questions that came up, further understandings, or critical examinations of practice. (3) Integration of new insights into practice. (4) Reflexive evaluation, which consists of reactions to integration of new insights into practice and outcomes resulting from changes in practice.

Barry and O'Callaghan (2008) argued that "[t]he process of reflexive journal writing will differ depending on the author's purpose and preference" (p. 62), which is why I integrated prompts to connect back to my research sub-questions throughout the reflexive journaling steps. At step two, I responded to the question: *how have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?* At step three, I responded to the question: *what have I observed as benefits and challenges of student-led IEPs?* At step four, I responded to the question: *how have student-led*

IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher? How have student-led IEPs affected student success?

Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) recommended limiting the amount of time spent journaling and stated that, while some details may be missed, the amount of data collected can ultimately be just as full because the researcher is more likely to follow through on their commitment to journal. Therefore, I aimed to journal for no more than thirty minutes at the conclusion of each session of student-led IEP implementation. Using a reflexive journal as a method in my research allowed me to not only observe my practice in implementing student-led IEPs but to think through ways that I might make changes in the implementation process to suit my practice and my context, all of which was closely connected to the objectives of self-study.

2) Field notes: Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) explained that the purpose in taking field notes is to provide a rich illustration of a study's context for analysis by making notes on an event or interaction as it happens to capture the most immediate information that will help to build an accurate and detailed narrative of the context and practice. Emerson et al. (2011) elaborated that jottings, taken in very brief form for the purpose of jogging the memory after the event, are written first and then followed by full written notes, which are often transcribed in fuller description by the researcher following an event. Using field notes as a method connected to my research questions in that it allowed me to: observe processes for implementing student-led IEPs, indicate differences between student-led IEPs and current IEP practices, and note how student-led IEPs affected student success and my work as a Learning Services Teacher in BC.

Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) created an outline for qualitative field notes that was built with interviews in the medical field in mind, but also serves as a general template for field note collection. The protocols ask the researcher to take note of: (1) Location, including

geographic location, laws and policies, and demographics. (2) Societal pressures, including how local news is delivered, racial/ethnic/religious/cultural tensions, socio-economic tensions, and marginalized groups (3) Cost of items and cost of living. (4) Influences on health including availability of services, acceptability of services, accessibility of services, and alternative health modalities.

I adapted the field notes protocol created by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) to more directly address my practice, research context, and research question. My field notes process included four sections: (1) Context, in which information was collected on the geographic location and demographics of the curriculum creator or presenter of the content or resource I observed. (2) Influences on implementation of student-led IEPs, in which notes were taken on the availability of the resource, acceptability within my context, and time needed for implementation. (3) Significance, in which I noted areas that were important to focus on and considered the costs and benefits of student-led IEP implementation. (4) Summary, in which I noted particular areas of learning and applications for my practice.

Each step aligned with an opportunity to answer my research sub-questions. Therefore, at step two, I responded to the question: *how have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?* At step three, I responded to the question: *what have I observed as benefits and challenges of student-led IEPs?* At step four, I responded to the question: *how have student-led IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher? How have student-led IEPs affected student success?*

Emerson et al. (2011) argued that field notes provide an immediate rendering of events, which balanced well with the more retrospective data gathering employed by reflexive journaling as my other research method. I generated field notes throughout the duration of a learning

experience, as recommended by Emerson et al. (2011), which included reviewing established student-led IEP protocols. Having progressive steps to follow while using field notes as a research method guided my learning while engaging with the professional development opportunity or student-led IEP protocols. At the same time, answering the prompts I incorporated at each step served to hone my focus to student-led IEPs in my own context as I sought to answer my research question. Using field notes as a method allowed me to interact with other professionals and ideas regarding student-led IEPs, which aligned with the self-study objective and my pragmatic worldview that meaning making is to be informed by a breadth of knowledge beyond the individual.

Data Analysis

Self-study methodology and reflexive thematic analysis both center the researcher in investigating their own practice and producing knowledge in response to the research question. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is an approach to qualitative data analysis that is theoretically flexible, interpretive, and "facilitates identification and analysis of patterns or themes in a given data set" (Byrne, 2022, p. 1392). Braun and Clarke (2021) argued that reflexive thematic analysis demands an active role in knowledge production on the part of the researcher, focusing on "reflexive and thoughtful engagement" (p. 594) with the data in the analytical process and positioning researcher subjectivity as an analytical resource (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Congruency existed, therefore, between investigating the implementation of student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my own practice through self-study as my methodology, my active role in collecting and reflecting on data through a reflexive journal and field notes as methods, and the way that reflexive thematic analysis centers the researcher in data analysis. At each stage of my research, I had the opportunity to reflect on

my interpretations regarding the process of implementing student-led IEPs and examine how I developed those interpretations, which led me to answer my research question.

Braun and Clarke (2021) asserted that "meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual" (p. 334) to the point where the avoidance of bias in demonstrating coding reliability is considered "illogical, incoherent, and ultimately meaningless" in reflexive thematic analysis (p. 334). Both my pragmatic worldview and the self-study methodology worked well with the ways in which reflexive thematic analysis values the subjective experience of the researcher and provides a rigorous and systemic approach to data analysis while also allowing for flexibility and context. Therefore, I put the data generated by my research through the rigorous analysis outlined by reflexive thematic analysis without losing the subjective aspect of the experience that made it my own and situated the data within my context as a Learning Services Teacher in BC.

With the flexibility afforded by Braun and Clarke's approach to data analysis comes the requirement to interact reflexively and transparently with reflexive thematic analysis and to articulate assumptions that inform one's use of the approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Interacting transparently with reflexive thematic analysis meant acknowledging how my theoretical framework influenced my use of this approach to data analysis and articulating assumptions meant laying out the manner in which I expected this approach to data analysis to proceed. To this end, I engaged with data analysis through a constructivist epistemology in which meaning and experience are considered to be socially produced (Creswell, 2022); that is to say, my observations of implementing student-led IEPs and the meaning I attributed to those observations happened within the context of my practice and were affected by that context. Moreover, in my use of reflexive thematic analysis, meaningfulness was prioritized over recurrence in the coding

process (Byrne, 2022), which indicated that I chose codes to form themes based on how important I perceived the code to be in telling the story of the data rather than based strictly on how often the code occurred.

Being both the researcher and the source of data for this study meant that combining an experiential and critical orientation to data analysis makes sense. An experiential orientation meant prioritizing the experiences of the participant and investigating "the meaning ascribed to the phenomenon by the respondent" (Byrne, 2022, p. 1396), which makes sense for my research since I trusted my own interpretation of the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice. However, I also needed to take a critical orientation which prioritized the construction of meaning around participants' experiences and offered "interpretations of meaning further to those explicitly communicated by participants" (Byrne, 2022, p. 1396) as I applied a further level of interpretation to my data through the data analysis process. With regard to coding, my process was predominantly inductive so that codes reflected the content of the data and provided a rich illustration of the overall dataset (Byrne, 2022). Lastly, latent coding suited my study as I engaged in an interpretive analysis of the data and played an active role in developing codes and identifying themes (Byrne, 2022).

Braun and Clark (2006, 2021) articulated a six-phase process for reflexive thematic analysis:

1) Familiarization with the data: Reviewing the full dataset to consider the full breadth and depth of the data and identifying information that is pertinent to the research question.

2) Generating initial codes: Beginning to generate labels for important and relevant features of the data that relate to the research questions.

3) Generating themes: Organizing the codes into meaningful categories and combining them based on shared meaning. Here, the researcher takes an active role in demonstrating the relationship between the codes and thus in building the themes.

4) Reviewing potential themes: Checking that each theme makes a logical argument and provides an accurate interpretation in relation to the research question. During this phase, codes or themes may need to be revised or discarded if they do not contribute to the overall narrative of the data.

5) Defining and naming themes: Ensuring that each theme is internally consistent and distinct, giving an account of the data that cannot be told through the other themes.

6) Producing the report: Constructing an analytical narrative that tells the reader a coherent story about the data.

I followed Braun and Clarke's approach closely for analysis of the data generated through my reflexive journal and field notes methods. The adaptation that I made is to apply reflexive thematic analysis to the data produced through each method separately for the first two steps and then bring the data all together. Therefore, in step one when I familiarized myself with the data, I reviewed the data set that I collected through field notes. Then I reviewed the data set that I collected through reflexive journaling. In step two, when I generated initial codes, I began to generate labels for important and relevant features of the data that I collected from field notes. Then I generated labels for important and relevant features of the data that I collected from reflexive journaling. In step three when I generated themes, I brought together the data and labels that I collected from both field notes and reflexive journaling. I reviewed the aggregated data at this point, generated themes that applied across the dataset I collected through both methods.

Step three through step six of reflexive thematic analysis were followed as I have described above in accordance with the approach established by Braun and Clark (2006, 2021).

Field notes was the method applied in my research to review established student-led IEP protocols whereas reflexive journaling was the method applied to the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice and, while the two methods worked towards answering the same research question, they each gave me different insights through data analysis. Analyzing the two methods separately in the first two steps of data analysis gave me the opportunity to recognize that the codes generated for data collected using each method were complementary. Using reflexive thematic analysis gave me the flexibility to make adaptations to my data analysis process that worked for my research and allowed me to be responsive in a way that matched the self-study methodology.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The positivist paradigm uses reliability and validity to verify claims to truth of one's research. However, in the qualitative self-study modality, trustworthiness is relied on to establish validity in the accounts of one's practice (Craig, 2019). Ultimately, validity in self-study relies on whether practitioners in the profession connected to the research evaluate the findings as trustworthy (Craig, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004; Lyons, 2010). To gain the trust of the relevant community, research is judged by functional criteria (LaBoskey 2004); in other words, could my process for implementing student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in BC and the answers to my research sub-questions inform the work of other professionals in the teaching community? Connecting trustworthiness to validity allows for self-study to continue in the flow and development of practice rather than being assessed outside of the real world, which is an important consideration for my pragmatic worldview.

Although my self-study research attended to the specific problem of student-led IEPs in my own context, the research can still be used to guide other teachers in responding to related issues (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2019), such as implementing other kinds of student-led supports or implementing student-led IEPs in contexts different than mine.

To gain an assessment of validity through trustworthiness requires that sufficient information be presented about what was done in the study and why (LaBoskey 2004). It is important to make visible the data, methods for using data to support findings, and links between the data, findings, and resulting interpretations. To meet the criteria for trustworthiness, I shared that I used the self-study methodology and how this methodology connected with my worldview and theoretical framework. Furthermore, I established protocols that I followed based on self-study practices of researchers. I explained that I used reflexive journaling and fieldnotes as my methods for data collection and I outlined the steps I took for each method. I was clear about how I used reflexive thematic analysis as my data analysis approach and the steps I took during this process.

Transparency is crucial in qualitative research, especially around the role of the researcher and what can be described as a naturalistic setting (Cuenca, 2020). In prioritizing transparency, I highlighted how the goals of the study were achieved or not within my specific context. Without this candor, the understanding developed through the work is incomplete and lacks nuance (Craig, 2019), which is why there is a particular ethical obligation in self-study to show the complexity of interactions between my pragmatic worldview, my context, and my process to answer my research question through the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice.

Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations related specifically to self-study as a methodology. Pursuing self-study as a teacher means committing not just to ethical research but to enacting ethics within the dynamic environment inherent in teaching practice (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2019). In other words, I had to be ethical both in implementing student-led IEPs to answer my research question and in my work as a Learning Services Teacher which required me to constantly consider how I approached my practice and interactions with students in an ethical way. Further to this point, self-study is often concerned with transformation in practice. Taking a critical eye to the impact of certain actions, changes, and developments as they unfold is necessary (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2019) and demands ongoing engagement on the part of the researcher to maintain ethical practices on shifting ground (Craig, 2019; Cuenca, 2020; McDonough & Brandenburg, 2019). Because self-study was a mirror held up to my impressions as I took action and reflected on the process of implementing student-led Individual Education Plans (IEPs), what was revealed through my research emerged as a part of the larger context of my practice. Ethics in self-study is emergent and comes to light as the research proceeds (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2019). Thus, my commitment was to examine my reflections and actions only as they related to my own practice by adhering to the framework I set out to follow in my field notes and reflexive journaling.

Another ethical consideration emerged around the fact that self-study, despite what the label may suggest, still demands interactions with others throughout the research process. Teachers as researchers inhabit an inherently social world (Cuenca, 2020) and these interactions are vital to the study in that they support the researcher to grow and learn (McDonough & Brandenburg, 2019). It is equally important, therefore, that the self-study researcher protects the

privacy of those they may have interacted with over the course of the study in order to be ethical in their research (Craig, 2019). Since the study of one's own practice is very specific, it may be difficult to conceal the identities of those the researcher interacts with over the course of the study (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2019).

The commitment I made to reflect on my own practice came into play here once more. Ultimately, in conducting self-study research "[o]ur intention is to listen to our stories and those of others in our practice and yet bring only our own interpretation to it" (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2019, pp. 124); the utmost effort is made to be transparent about this and ethical in the protection of other's identities. It is possible to see a focus on ethics and transparency in how I planned my research. The frameworks I adhered to for field notes and reflexive journaling were used to bring the focus of data back to my research question and sub-questions. Scoped prompts served as a reminder of the focus on self in generating data. I made a concerted effort to be transparent about how I conducted self-study in an ethical way to protect the identities of those I interacted with over the course of the research and really focused on my impressions and practice.

In juxtaposition to an ethical consideration of others is the ethical consideration of the self in self-study. Since the research is grounded in one's own growth and development, researchers themselves are a vulnerable party in self-study research (Cuenca, 2020; McDonough & Brandenburg, 2019). The transparency that is central to self-study also supports an ethical approach to research with this methodology since the ethical considerations at play such as identity of the self, interpersonal interactions, power dynamics and public vulnerability are all on display and reported out in order to support trustworthiness (Cuenca, 2020). However, the effort to report on one's practice in such a

way that others can learn (Pinnegar & Murphy, 2019) simultaneously opens one up to scrutiny. When I implemented student-led IEPs in my practice for the first time, there was bound to be some mistakes and adjustments I had to make. My hope was that other teachers, in exploring my research, would be able to learn from my mistakes to avoid making the same. However, there is always the possibility of criticism towards my approach to a new practice, which is a risk I took in sharing my research. Thus, as a researcher, I arrived at a vulnerable position between fidelity to my research and protection of the self; I had to consider how much I shared and whether that sharing would put me at undue risk in front of a critical audience who may not comprehend my context or my choices in implementing student-led IEPs.

In order to be ethical in self-study, therefore, I needed to strike a balance between transparency and the vulnerability that comes with it against the need for self-protection and boundaries. Although self-study researchers "position themselves in their inquiries" (Craig, 2019, p. 31), there is a certain amount of choice and selection when it comes to disclosure about self and circumstances. I was as transparent as I could be through my reflexive journal and field notes but remained cognizant of the potential risks outlined above. Just like the self-study methodology itself is responsive through continual monitoring and adaptation, my boundaries in disclosure needed to be similarly responsive as I moved through the research process and monitored my physical, emotional, and professional wellbeing.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of how I approached my research process. I established self-study as the methodological framework for my research and illustrated the various ways in which this methodology responded to my worldview and worked for my investigation into how I implemented student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services

Teacher in BC. Reflexive journaling and fieldnotes were introduced as my methods and

connected back to self-study methodology. I provided a detailed explanation of the steps I took

in using each method, complete with scoped prompts to maintain focus on my research

question and sub-questions throughout the data collection process. Reflexive thematic

analysis was used as the data analysis approach for my research, with a focus on the

rigorous yet flexible aspects of this approach highlighted as a good fit for self-study

methodology and my teaching context. In order to establish trustworthiness and validity

for my study, the need for transparency was emphasized. However, I explained that

transparency had to be balanced with ethical considerations that took into account

reflecting only on my own practice to protect the identities of people I interacted with in

this study and the vulnerable position I put myself in as the researcher using self-study

methodology. Overall, I demonstrated that congruence existed between my methodology,

methods, data analysis approach and my practice as a Learning Services Teacher.

Therefore, I moved forward with a cohesive design for my research as I sought to

respond to my research question.

Chapter Four

In this chapter I will outline the details of my study and explain how I collected data for my data sets. I will describe my coding process and the steps I took as I analyzed the data from my field notes and reflexive journal. I will provide detailed analysis of each of the themes that I developed through the data analysis process. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that embedding data extracts within the narrative of analysis allows the researcher to tell a story about the data that makes an argument in relation to the research question. Therefore, I will weave analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with data extracts to tell the story of each of my themes. Lastly, limitations of my research will be acknowledged and described.

Details about the study

To answer my research question, I began by reviewing student-led IEP protocols that had been established by other educators. I used field notes as my method of data collection at this stage. Over the course of the month of August 2024, I reviewed three student-led IEP protocols and kept field notes about what I learned regarding student-led IEP protocols so that I could establish my own student-led IEP protocol to meet the needs of my teaching practice and my students. After reviewing three different student-led IEP protocols, I used the information I had gathered to develop my own student-led IEP protocol.

Because this was my first time implementing student-led IEPs, I decided to start with a small group of students so that I could record detailed observations and make shifts or changes as needed. Self-study as my research methodology meant engaging with a change to my practice while simultaneously investigating that change (LaBoskey, 2004), which gave me the opportunity to improve my practice by applying what I learned right away. McGahee et al. (2001) emphasized starting student-led IEPs with students who were likely to be successful with

the process. Therefore, I considered which of the students on my caseload would embrace a student-led IEP process. Ultimately, I chose five students to engage with student-led IEPs.

In the previous school year (2023-24), I had consulted with the administration at my school and at the school district level to introduce the concept of student-led IEPs and my interest in implementing student-led IEPs. In early September 2024, I checked in with the administration again and was given approval to move forward with student-led IEPs in my practice. I designed a poster as a communication tool to illustrate the differences between student-led IEPs and other IEPs. I used the poster to communicate with parents and gain their permission to implement a student-led IEP process with their child. I began by communicating with the parents of the students to gain their consent and then confirmed with the student that they were interested in engaging with a student-led IEP process. Of the five students, one family declined engagement with a student-led IEP process out of concern that the student would be nervous about presenting their IEP.

In mid-September, I began implementing student-led IEPs with the four students who had agreed to be part of the process. My student-led IEP protocol called for the student-led IEP process to be spread out over three sessions: (1) understanding and developing the IEP, (2) preparing for the IEP meeting, (3) the student-led IEP meeting. Each session took approximately one hour, which meant that the student-led IEP process for one student took three hours in total. This was two more hours than other IEPs, which usually took one hour. By the end of October, I had completed four student-led IEPs and was ready to begin data analysis.

Data sets

My two methods of data collection in this study were field notes and a reflexive journal. I used field notes first to collect data on established student-led IEP protocols. I continued to use

field notes throughout the process leading up to and including the implementation of student-led

IEPs to collect data. Field notes allowed me to capture details in the process that were not cued

by the reflexive journal prompts or were recalled before or after reflexive journal writing. I used

the reflexive journal to collect data on implementing student-led IEPs. At the end of each

student-led IEP session, I journaled to capture my reactions to the process, what I had learned,

and what I thought might be important to adjust or change about the process. I followed journal

prompts, outlined in Chapter Three, to focus my writing and prompt the exploration of various

aspects of implementing student-led IEPs so that I could capture a depth and breadth of data for

analysis. My data was collected over the course of three months between August and October

2024.

Coding Process

      I began the data analysis stage of my research by engaging in the first step outlined by

Braun and Clarke (2006) in their reflexive thematic analysis approach to data analysis;

familiarization. In Chapter Three, I explained that I would apply reflexive thematic analysis to

the data produced through my field notes and reflexive journal separately for the first two steps

and then bring the data all together so that I could recognize differences and similarities in the

data collected through the two methods. Therefore, at the familiarization stage, I read through the

data collected in my reflexive journal first and then read through my field notes, making notes to

highlight any interesting observations. I started to notice some repeated observations and I kept

notes on my coding and data analysis process. The first step of data analysis provided me with an

important opportunity to accustom myself with the data I had collected across all data sources.

      According to Braun and Clarke (2006), my second step in data analysis was to generate

initial codes. For this step, I used NVivo (Lumivero, 2023), a qualitative data analysis software

intended to help organize and analyze qualitative data. I used NVivo to highlight and code throughout my datasets, to keep track of all my codes, to make notes on the meaning of codes, and eventually to create a codebook. First, I coded the data collected through my reflexive journal. After coding my reflexive journal, I went back to my familiarization notes and added the notes as annotations in NVivo. Next, I coded the data collected through my field notes. Then I returned to my familiarization notes and added the notes as annotations in NVivo. Adding the familiarization notes as annotations in NVivo allowed me to keep each level of analysis that I engaged with collected in one place. Reviewing the notes from the familiarization step caused me to reconsider the word choice of some codes and I made some adjustments. For example, I noticed that items coded as "Student understanding of IEP" included observations of students understanding their learning needs as well as their IEP document. Therefore, I changed the code "Student understanding of IEP" to "Student understanding of learning needs and IEP". Once the entire dataset was coded, my codebook, containing 20 different codes, was created. The second step of data analysis provided me with the opportunity to assign codes to the data I had collected through my field notes and reflexive journal and to begin to observe patterns of meaning throughout my data.

The third step of data analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) that I followed was generating themes. At this point in the data analysis process, I grouped codes together into categories based on shared meaning. I noticed that the codes "Scaffolding", "Differentiation and adaptation", "Context" and "Developing rapport and trust" all shared a common thread in terms of the work I was doing to support students to engage with student-led IEPs, so I placed these codes together in one theme. I placed the codes "Habit of teacher as authority", "Student understanding of learning needs and IEP", "Understanding of student", "Autonomy", and "Shift in perspective"

together in a second theme because I recognized that they all spoke to an important shift that was happening in the IEP process through the implementation of student-led IEPs. I chose to let the code "Preparation for student-led IEPs" stand as its own third theme to represent my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) in preparing to implement student-led IEPs. I connected the codes "Development of practice" and "Letting go" in a fourth theme that centered around my development as an LST resulting from implementing student-led IEPs in my practice. The codes "Time as resource" and "Efficiency" shared the common thread of time, so I place them together as a fifth theme. I saw that the codes "Student building skills", "Self-expression", "Self-advocacy" and "Self-determination" all shared student skill development in common so I placed them together in my sixth and final theme. The third step of data analysis provided me with the opportunity to evaluate shared meaning between the codes I had generated and to group these codes into six themes.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the fourth step of data analysis was to review the potential themes. I started my review of each theme by collating the data for the codes grouped within each theme. Although Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested gathering the collated data as part of step five, I wanted to do it at stage four to get a sense of whether or not my codes fit the themes I had developed for them by reviewing the collated data. I checked that there was internal consistency between the theme and the data grouped within that theme. In reviewing the collated data, I recognized that the codes "Time", "Efficiency", and "Preparation for student-led IEPs" were connected through the resources that I had to consider or create in preparing to implement student-led IEPs. Therefore, I merged them together in one theme, which reduced the total number of themes in my analysis to five. At the conclusion of step four, I was satisfied that each theme contributed to the overall narrative of the data, like Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested.

The fourth step of data analysis gave me the opportunity to review the themes I had developed and ensure that there was internal consistency within each theme. Following the approach to data analysis established by Braun and Clarke (2006) and reviewing the themes at step four gave me a better sense of the message my data was conveying about student-led IEPs in response to my research question.

The fifth step of data analysis involved defining and naming the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized that each theme should be distinct, meaning that each theme should give an account of the data that is unique from the other themes. Therefore, I was thoughtful in generating a name for each theme to indicate the individual story that each told about the data. Ensuring that each theme was distinct allowed me to take note of, and emphasize, the complexity of my data in its response to my research question. I noticed that my data revealed a range of experiences regarding the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice and how student-led IEPs affected my practice as an LST as well as the students, which was reflected in the theme names. At this point in the data analysis process, I developed five themes: "Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative", "Learning Services Teacher growth through student-led IEP implementation", "Resource impacts of student-led IEPs", "Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs", and "Skill development through student-led IEPs", aligning codes into five unique stories about student-led IEPs.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the sixth step of data analysis was to produce the report. Engaging with step six of reflexive thematic analysis, I reviewed the collated data for the codes within each theme again. Then, I created a summary for each theme that captured the essence of what I had learned through the analysis of the data for that theme. In step six, I also pulled together data extracts from each code to help illustrate the argument being made by each

theme for the interpretation of the data. The sixth step of data analysis gave me the opportunity to bring together my analysis with extracts of the data to produce a report of the data that was collected in response to my research question.

Working as an LST for the past six years and developing IEPs as a regular part of my job means that I had an intimate understanding of IEPs going into my research process. LaBoskey (2004), in discussing the importance of self-study, stated that "[b]elieving that teacher knowledge develops through a better understanding of personal experience…we assume that critical reflection on our personal experience as teacher educators will produce knowledge of teaching" (p. 843). Therefore, through analyzing my data, I was able to recognize the changes that implementing student-led IEPs brought to my practice. I established themes based on my experience as a professional developing IEPs, and in light of my data, following the steps of data analysis established by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Braun and Clarke (2021) asserted that it is the role of the researcher to develop themes through reflexive thematic analysis rather than to view themes as emerging from the data. As the researcher, I have actively interpreted and established meaning from the data I collected in response to my research question. I was centered in my work as a researcher through both reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and self-study (LaBoskey, 2004), with both emphasizing the critical role the researcher has to play in shaping the execution and understanding of the research. LaBoskey (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2019) asserted that the researcher plays an active role in knowledge production, which is how I have approached data analysis and generating themes to provide my own interpretation of the data.

In this section, I have described my coding process and the steps I took as I analyzed the data from my reflexive journal and field notes. I detailed how I followed the steps of reflexive

thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to code my data, to develop themes, to review and name themes, and to produce the report on my research. In the next section, I will provide a detailed account of each of the five themes that I developed and include data extracts to illustrate the themes.

Themes

Through my analysis of the data and the five themes I shared below, I have come to understand that student-led IEPs can be approached as a catalyst for change in how Learning Services Teachers (LSTs) frame and execute the IEP process. In analyzing my data and developing themes from that data, I recognized the changes that implementing student-led IEPs brought to my practice as an LST. Student-led IEPs provided me with an opportunity to deeply consider the purpose and person being centered in the development of an IEP. For me, each of the themes represents a change in how I am approaching the IEP process as a result of this investigation, and my realizations may be helpful to other educators in how they might approach and IEP process, student-led or otherwise, in their contexts.

Table 1

Themes and associated codes

Theme	Abbreviated Theme	Associated Codes
(A) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative	Summative to formative	Shift in perspective Habit of teacher as authority Student understanding of learning needs and IEP Understanding of student Autonomy
(B) Learning Services Teacher growth through student-led IEP implementation	Learning Services Teacher growth	Development of practice Letting go
(C) Resource impacts of student-led IEPs	Resource impacts	Preparation for student-led IEPs Time as resource Efficiency
(D) Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs	Supporting students	Scaffolding Differentiation and adaptation Context Developing rapport and trust
(E) Skill development through student-led IEPs	Skill development	Student building skills Self-expression Self-advocacy Self-determination

Theme A: Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative

For me, student-led IEPs shifted the IEP process from a summative process that produced an evaluation *of* a student to a formative process that was *for* the student and their learning. Summative and formative were terms typically associated with assessment practices in education, but I saw the representation of these terms applied to the IEP process as well; summative can be seen as an "evaluation" or "assessment" (Lau, 2016, p. 511-512) of the student while formative can be seen as "aimed at helping students' learning" (Lau, 2016, p. 512). In the context of IEPs, I considered summative to mean focusing on assessing the student and their learning whereas I considered formative to mean focusing on the process and how a student was learning. The shift from summative to formative was noteworthy because it meant that I was

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rethinking not just the process but the purpose of IEPs. My data showed that transforming the purpose of an IEP process required a significant shift in perspective for myself as well as parents, and students. The shift in perspective was important because stakeholders in the IEP process had to shift their understanding of what purpose an IEP served in order to engage with student-led IEPs as a learning process. My observation in reviewing student-led IEP protocols before developing my own protocol was that the student-led IEP process "is centered around student learning and expression to a high degree, as opposed to other IEPs which can be focused on meeting a legal requirement or on communication with parents rather than with the student" (Fieldnotes, August, 2024).

I started the shift in perspective from my point of view as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) but I noted that I had to reconsider my prior approach to IEPs and begin to "see the information in an IEP from the student's perspective" (Reflexive Journal, October 3, 2024) knowing that "the ways in which teachers and parents might speak about a student when they are not present…must shift when a student takes a leadership role in the development of their own IEP" (Reflexive Journal, September 26, 2024). In reviewing my data, I understood that I had some work to do to make IEPs and the IEP development process more accessible to students and shift the perspective of IEPs to focus on student learning. In doing so, I noticed that developing the IEP became a formative process for the student rather than a summative process in which parents and LSTs talk about the student. To me, the shift in perspective on IEPs through student-led IEPs meant that I began to center student learning in the IEP process and orient my efforts in planning for and engaging with the IEP process to meet the goal of student learning rather than an evaluation of the student.

Once I started implementing a student-led IEP process, I had to encourage parents to move away from the habit of looking to me, the LST, as the IEP authority and to shift that role of the leader of the IEP process to the student. This was important because treating the student as the leader in student-led IEPs continued the shift in the IEP process from summative to formative by centering the student in the student-led IEP process and giving the student an authentic leadership opportunity. In my case, I worked towards positioning the student as the leader in student-led IEPs by "establishing meeting norms with the parent ahead of time [which] was helpful in keeping attention directed towards the student during the meeting" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024) and gave the student space to step into a leadership role. The result I observed was that, in a student-led IEP meeting, "the student has a lot more power to direct the flow of the meeting and they are spoken to rather than spoken about" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024), showing how a formative IEP process offered benefit to the student. I did note that it was "difficult to fully transfer leadership perception to the student" (Reflexive Journal, October 30, 2024) since parents had a long-standing habit of seeing me, the LST, as the authority in the room. Moving away from that habit took conscious effort but I found it was necessary to make space for a formative process centering student learning to develop.

In student-led IEP processes, I noticed that the student had the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their own learning needs and their IEP. I considered in my reflexive journal that "[t]his may even be the first time that someone has spoken to the student about their disability so explicitly" (October 1, 2024), as illustrative of how the formative nature of student-led IEPs offered a unique and important learning opportunity to the individual. I described how implementing student-led IEPs meant that a student "had the opportunity to be deeply and actively involved in every aspect of the IEP, which meant that not only did she have the

opportunity to express her learning needs, but she also understood every part of what she was asking for and gained a deeper understanding of her IEP overall" (Reflexive Journal, October 4, 2024). I saw this as noteworthy because witnessing students demonstrate understanding of their IEP showed me that implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice was having an important impact. Students developing knowledge of their IEP and making connections to their learning needs became an important part of the student-led IEP process and student leadership was integral in shifting IEPs from summative to formative.

Having gained deeper understanding of their IEP, students who engaged in the student-led IEP process with me were asked to "participate in the development of their IEP, the leading of their IEP meeting, and the ongoing monitoring of their IEP goals [which gave them] the opportunity to take much more ownership in their IEP and their education" (Field Notes, August, 2024). I noticed that student ownership in the IEP process was important because it supported the development of autonomy. In the context of my research, I considered autonomy to mean making choices for oneself or exercising a measure of control in a situation. Throughout the process, students exercised autonomy through student-led IEPs in tangible ways. I observed students describing their learning needs in the IEP outline, highlighting their speaking points to create a memory prompt for the IEP meeting, and ultimately leading their own IEP meeting as expressions of autonomy. On October 24, 2024, I noted that "the student can make important choices while developing their IEP such as what information to include about themselves, what supports to ask for, and how to present the IEP to their parents" (Reflexive Journal, October 24, 2024).

I saw many aspects of the student-led IEP process that could support students to exercise autonomy. Various opportunities for student autonomy represented an important difference

between student-led IEPs and other IEPs to me, connecting back to my research question. I further noted on October 18, 2024, that "if students make mistakes in their decision-making, they have the opportunity to do so in a safe environment where they can correct course later if need be" (Reflexive Journal, October 18, 2024) which signaled to me that the autonomy offered by student-led IEPs made space for students to engage in meaningful learning through the IEP development process. I saw autonomy as a key component in shifting the IEP process from a summative one to a formative one.

Observing student autonomy and learning through the student-led IEP process appeared to set the stage for the LST and parents to understand the student, their progress, and their learning needs better. Understanding the student meant connecting the individual's strengths, areas of difficulty, learning needs, and goals to who they are as a student. Understanding the student seemed to allow me, as the LST, and parents to have realistic expectations for the student and their learning plan. On October 18, 2024, I observed that engaging with a student-led IEP process was a "good opportunity for a student to demonstrate the progression of their skills…in an authentic environment that allows the parent to understand the level at which their child is currently performing" (Reflexive Journal, October 18, 2024). I noted an important contrast between student-led IEPs and other IEPs, in connection with my research question, insofar as student-led IEPs enacted student skills rather than just talking about them. I perceived that seeing a student engage with their IEP in a way that gave them autonomy and space to learn facilitated a "better understanding of what the student knows about their own learning and learning needs" (Reflexive Journal, October 30, 2024), which in turn might allow for adjustments to be made to support the student's learning and development in areas of need. The shift towards a formative

process through student-led IEPs facilitated learning taking place for and about students, which included the opportunity for the parent and I to gain a better understanding of the student.

Articulating the theme *Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative* was an exciting development for me in my data analysis process. The theme was interesting to me because it pointed to a very clear distinction between student-led IEPs and other IEPs; centering the student in the process. Before I implemented student-led IEPs in my practice, I anticipated some shift in perspective on the IEP process. However, in analyzing my data and bringing together the codes, framing student-led IEPs as a formative process crystalized for me. To me, this theme demonstrated that implementing student-led IEPs had given me the opportunity to make an important shift in how I approach the IEP process in general in my practice. My data addressed my research question regarding what my process has been for implementing student-led IEPs by highlighting the shift in my framing of student-led IEPs as formative, which in turn made a difference in how I proceeded with student-led IEPs in my practice.

Theme B: Learning Services Teacher growth through student-led IEP implementation

For me, student-led IEPs presented an opportunity for growth as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). Implementing student-led IEPs encouraged me to think about the ways I can develop my practice to better match my pragmatic worldview and the value I hold towards supporting students to achieve success in ways that makes sense for them. As I began my research, I realized that "I need to be even more thoughtful and purposeful in my preparation for IEP development and student engagement with their IEP in order to facilitate a student-led process" (Field Notes, August, 2024); student-led IEPs had led me to center students in the IEP process and I needed to develop my practice further in order to do so effectively. LaBoskey (2004) asserted that self-study research is often motivated by recognizing areas of practice in

need of improvement, and this was true for me. My reflection on preparing to implement student-led IEPs was important because I saw that my research gave me the opportunity to grow in my practice and build on my learning with each of the student-led IEPs I implemented. On October 24, 2024, I noted in my reflexive journal that "[s]tudent-led IEPs continue to challenge my beliefs about student abilities and how they will react in certain situations" (Reflexive Journal, October 24, 2024). Student-led IEPs challenging my beliefs indicated to me that implementing student-led IEPs was having an ongoing impact on how I saw my students and my practice. As self-study means engaging with a practice while simultaneously investigating that practice (LaBoksey, 2004), my research gave me the opportunity to immediately apply what I was learning and develop my practice while engaging with the research.

As I reflected on the research, I was considering how my actions and words affected the IEP development process and how I might make a conscious shift in my words and actions to facilitate, rather than lead, the IEP process. I grouped the codes in my data indicating this shift as "letting go". I noted in my reflexive journal that "I had to very consciously take a step back from my usual leadership role" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024), writing on September 26, 2024 to "remind myself to ask questions rather than make suggestions" (Reflexive Journal, September 26, 2024), an indication of my growth as I strove to foster student autonomy. I reminded myself of the importance to "follow through with the choices that the student makes, even when they are not what the LST might have suggested" (Reflexive Journal, October 18, 2024) demonstrating the conscious effort I was making to let go of my own expectations and desires in the student-led IEP process. These examples from my reflexive journal are illustrative of my growth as an LST. Making a change in my practice through implementing student-led IEPs required me to be

intentional throughout the IEP planning and implementation process, thus stimulating my own growth as an LST.

In articulating the theme *Learning Services Teacher growth through student-led IEP implementation*, I paused to consider how my research was having an immediate impact on my practice as an LST. I recognized how my self-study methodology was giving me the opportunity to monitor and adapt my practice (Lyons, 2010) through my research. Moreover, data collection through my reflexive journal was aiding in my development of practice by allowing me to deepen my awareness (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008) regarding how my practice was changing in response to implementing student-led IEPs. To me, this theme demonstrated that implementing student-led IEPs was encouraging me to challenge my beliefs and approach the IEP process differently, thus having an important impact on my practice as an LST. Recognizing my growth as an LST through implementation of student-led IEPs was an important theme that contributed to answering my research question. I observed that implementing student-led IEPs was providing me with the opportunity to learn and grow in my practice much like the student-led IEP process gave students the opportunity to learn and develop.

Theme C: Resource impacts of student-led IEPs

In my experience with the IEP process prior to my research, the only resources typically used were the official paperwork to document a student's IEP and time to meet with the student and their family. However, I observed that student-led IEPs required creating resources to support student engagement with the student-led IEP process and careful consideration of how existing resources were impacted. I found that implementing student-led IEPs took more thought and preparation in the planning process compared to other IEPs, including the creation of resources specific to my context and the needs of my students. For example, I found that other

educators had created graphic organizers to explain student-led IEPs to students (Hawbaker, 2007) but the existing graphic organizers did not meet the needs of my teaching context. Therefore, I decided to make my own series of graphic organizers in PowerPoint which I called My IEP. To facilitate student-led IEPs, I had to plan ahead and use or create resources that would engage students in learning about and then developing their IEP. At the same time, I had to make sure that all of the necessary legal components of the IEP process were addressed, such as describing how the student's disability impacted their learning. In my field notes, I stated that "[n]arrowing down all of the possible activities, instruction, and resources that could be used to directly address the needs of the IEP process in a way that is meaningful but still efficient and effective" (Field Notes, August 2024) was a challenge. My data illustrated that I was grappling with the competing demands of student-led IEPs and working to sort through the resources that would make implementation of the process possible. Noting the added effort in preparation for student-led IEPs was important because it illustrated a contrast in my process for implementing student-led IEPs compared to other IEPs.

Although I had considered material resources as I planned for implementing student-led IEPs, it quickly became apparent to me that time was an important resource for both students and Learning Services Teachers (LSTs) in the student-led IEP process as well. In my six years as an LST, my experience was that finding the time to commit to the IEP process was already an obstacle for some parents, students, and LSTs. In the 2024-25 school year I had approximately 38 students on my caseload which would have translated to 114 hours of work if I implemented student-led IEPs with every student. In my field notes, I worried that "[s]tudents, parents, and teachers may find it onerous to invest exponentially more time in a student-led IEP process compared to the IEP process they are used to" (Field Notes, August, 2024), acknowledging that

time use was a challenge associated with student-led IEPs. Highlighting the significance of time use in student-led IEPs was important because student-led IEPs took me approximately three hours with each student compared to one hour for other IEPs. Therefore, I put effort into carefully considering how time was used as a resource. In preparing activities to include in the student-led IEP process, I noted that "it is important to balance engagement in the student-led IEP process against realistic time constraints" (Field Notes, August, 2024), demonstrating intentionality in considering both resources: activities and the time it takes to work through them. My consideration of time constraints was significant because acknowledging time as a resource allowed me to consider how I might use time carefully.

Making the most of the time that was available meant that I created resources for the student-led IEP process with efficiency in mind. An example of a resource I created was the My IEP PowerPoint slides, which helped guide the student through the student-led IEP process with graphic organizers. The slides were also used to present a student's IEP development to parents during the IEP meeting itself. I designed the My IEP slides in such a way that "the work student does in that activity can be partially or fully included in their IEP" (Field Notes, August, 2024), which demonstrated that I created resources to be used in multiple ways as a means of respectfully considering time. Highlighting how I aimed for efficiency demonstrates how I responded to the resource impacts of student-led IEPs; in implementing student-led IEPs, it was important for me to be as efficient as possible in my use of resources, including materials and time for the IEP process. Ultimately, grappling with the use of resources and time for student-led IEPs was a major consideration throughout my research and impacted my implementation of student-led IEPs.

Articulating the theme *Resource impacts of student-led IEPs* helped me to clarify some important challenges that I identified in implementing student-led IEPs. In my nine years working as a teacher, six years of which have been in the role of LST, I have observed that how to use resources is something I consider regularly. Therefore, I was not surprised when I identified resource impacts as a theme in my research. I had not specifically considered time as a resource before, but it quickly became apparent to me that students, parents, and LSTs all treated time as something that they had limited amounts of and therefore time became a significant resource in the context of student-led IEPs. Overall, this theme addressed my research question by demonstrating how resource impacts shaped my process for implementing student-led IEPs.

Theme D: Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs

In my experience with the IEP process prior to my research, I engaged in discussion with students about their IEP and encouraged their involvement in IEP meetings but there were not specific resources or a strategic plan for supporting student engagement with the IEP process. My data showed that supporting students to engage in a student-led IEP process required (1) meeting the needs of my teaching context, (2) scaffolding the process, (3) employing differentiation and adaptation to meet various learning needs, and (4) developing rapport and trust with students.

(1) As I reviewed student-led IEP protocols in preparation for developing my own, my field notes remarked on the authors' emphasis that their materials were "meant to be adapted for the best implementation of the teacher using it" (Field Notes, August, 2024). Recognizing that the materials could be adapted was important because my approach to implementing student-led IEPs was shaped by my context and experiences. Situating my research in context was also central to my constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview. I noted that I felt "confident

in making adaptations that suit the needs of my context without betraying the intention of the authors or integrity of the practice they describe" (Field Notes, August, 2024) and was able to move forward with making changes. I adapted various pieces of the student-led IEP protocols that I reviewed to develop a student-led IEP process suited to the context of my practice. It was important to me to be able to support students to engage with student-led IEPs and the first step was considering student needs in the development of the IEP process.

(2) Scaffolding meant student-led IEPs could be approached through a series of attainable steps. I emphasized in my field notes the need to "break down the process in a way that students can easily follow and engage with" (Field Notes, August, 2024), and I put a lot of thought into how I would do so. Separating student-led IEPs into steps was important because the steps made the student-led IEP process more manageable for the students and I to move through. In the end, I scaffolded student-led IEPs using graphic organizers, direct instruction in understanding components of the IEP, and rehearsal to prepare students to lead their own meeting. In my reflexive journal I observed that "[r]ehearsal of the IEP meeting allowed [the student] to notice and make small corrections to [their] IEP" (Reflexive Journal, October 4, 2024), illustrating my attention to scaffolding that would support student success in the student-led IEP process. I saw scaffolding as important because breaking the IEP process down into steps supported students to engage with student-led IEPs.

(3) Differentiation and adaptation were methods I wrote about in my field notes and reflexive journal as I used them to support student engagement throughout the student-led IEP process. Differentiation meant adjusting materials to meet the needs of the student (Hossain, 2012) and adaptation meant changing the approach to support student learning (Tremblay & Belley, 2017). I reflected on the "importance of meeting [the] student where they are at" (Field

Notes, August, 2024), meaning that support needed to be built into the student-led IEP process to meet the needs of students. I observed that building support into the student-led IEP process through differentiation and adaptation meant students with various levels of ability could engage with the development of their IEP.

Additionally, the resources I developed for student-led IEPs were able to be differentiated or adapted to support students' individual learning needs. For example, the PowerPoint slides I developed (My IEP slides) could provide many of the supports that a student with a disability would typically have available to them through their IEP, including: breaking down the process into manageable steps, providing visual representation of concepts to support student understanding, and giving students the option to use typing or voice-to-text technology in crafting their responses. In my reflexive journal, I reminded myself to "see each student as an individual and to differentiate the instruction and support I provide for them based on their own individual needs" (Reflexive Journal, October 24, 2024). It was important for me to see each student as an individual because each student-led IEP, while following a similar process, was unique to the student leading the process. For me, differentiation and adaptation were important because each student came to the student-led IEP process with different learning needs and I needed to adjust my materials or approach to meet those needs so that I could support students to engage with student-led IEPs.

(4) It seemed to me that, in order to make changes to meet the unique needs of each student in a student-led IEP process, it was important that I connect with students on an individual level and understand their needs. I reflected on the idea that "[d]eveloping rapport with the student was important for the student-led IEP process so that they could feel more confident in sharing vulnerable information about themselves and their learning" (Reflexive

Journal, September 26, 2024). I observed that developing rapport with the student was important to supporting student engagement with student-led IEPs because building trust with the student encouraged them to be more open in telling me about their learning needs. I remarked that "[s]tudent-led IEPs have given me an opportunity to get to know the students that I work with better than a regular IEP process would have allowed for" (Reflexive Journal, October 24, 2024) and how I saw developing rapport as a really positive aspect of student-led IEPs. Because student-led IEPs were asking students to be vulnerable in describing their disability and sharing their learning needs, I noticed how important it was for me to develop rapport and trust so that the student felt safe and supported engaging with the development of their IEP.

Articulating the theme *Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs* allowed me to describe aspects of my approach in supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs. In analyzing my data, I noticed that my efforts to support students went beyond breaking down the student-led IEP process through scaffolding. I realized that I also needed to bring myself into the process when I developed rapport and trust with students. I employed skills from my nine years of teaching in order to differentiate and adapt materials for various learning needs in student-led IEPs, but I also brought a personal touch to the student-led IEP process when I worked one-on-one with each student and developed rapport with that student in order to support their progress. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) explained that constructivism frames an inextricable relationship between the researcher and the subject they are studying. Therefore, seeing my work in implementing student-led IEPs as connected to my own experiences and interactions with the world fit within my constructivist epistemology. To me, this theme demonstrated how practical skills as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) applied through scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation came together with personal skills in developing rapport and trust with students to

support students to engage with student-led IEPs. My research question was addressed by describing how scaffolding, differentiation, adaptation, and developing rapport and trust came together in my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice.

Theme E: Skill development through student-led IEPs

Before starting the student-led IEP process, I had read about student skills and IEPs and noted in my data set that I made mention on student skills repeatedly (Field Notes, August, 2024). Where Theme A: *Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative* focused on the shift that happened to reframe student-led IEPs for student learning, Theme E: *Skill development through student-led IEPs* emerged as a result of the shift to student learning being the focus of student-led IEPs. Through student-led IEPs, I noticed students had the opportunity to develop skills that could be important for their future endeavors. I coded these as: (1) self-determination, (2) self-expression, and (3) self-advocacy. While these three skills are often emphasized in student IEPs as necessary for student progress and future success (Davis & Cumming, 2019), the skills are not taught as part of the regular K-12 BC school curriculum where I am a teacher. As a result, student-led IEPs are unique because they give students the opportunity to learn and practice self-determination, self-expression, and self-advocacy skills.

I emphasized in my reflexive journal that "an important purpose of the student-led IEP process is to help students build skills" (Reflexive Journal, October 18, 2024). The process of students building skills was significant to me because the particular skills demonstrated a tangible gain of student-led IEPs for students. I further noted that students who found the process challenging "are also those who may have the most to gain from practicing the skills needed to lead their own IEP development" (Reflexive Journal, October 18, 2024) because student-led IEPs provided an authentic opportunity to utilize self-determination, self-expression, and self-

advocacy. I observed that student-led IEPs could be used to support students in learning and practicing skills identified as important but not directly taught in the classroom.

Self-determination was a specific skill that I noticed students building through student-led IEPs. While autonomy meant exercising a measure of control in a situation, self-determination specifically meant taking action to make and implement choices that determine direction of one's life (McGahee et al., 2001). In my reflexive journal, I described how I oriented questions in the student-led IEP process towards building student self-determination skills: "The student and I do a review of their old IEP and I will ask, 'does this goal still feel relevant to your learning this year? Do we need a new goal? Based on your learning needs, what do you think would be a good goal to work towards this year?'" (Field Notes, October, 2024). My questions were specifically targeted at supporting the student to choose a direction for their IEP and their learning, thus practicing self-determination skills. Students then presented the goals they had set to their parents in the student-led IEP meeting, solidifying the student's leadership in determining the direction of their learning plan. Fostering self-determination skills through student-led IEPs was significant to me because it contributed to centering the student and their learning in the student-led IEP process. Focusing on student learning in student-led IEPs meant that I had the opportunity to target certain skills such as self-determination skills.

My data also showed observations of students gaining practice in self-expression. In the context of student-led IEPs, self-expression was a student's ability to express personal interests and goals (Royer, 2017). I reflected that, in the student-led IEP process, "students are put in a position where they have to say more than they might in a regular IEP meeting because they are the ones who are leading the conversation; if they say nothing, there is no one jumping in to fill the silence" (Reflexive Journal, October 30, 2024). For me, putting students at the center of the

IEP process meant that student-led IEPs were a unique opportunity for students to express themselves by describing how their disability affected their learning and articulating their own needs. By centering students in leading their IEP development, I observed student-led IEPs as an opportunity for students to build skills in self-expression.

In my data, I observed that student-led IEPs were also an opportunity for students to practice self-advocacy skills. My reflexive journal described when "I saw [the student] developing a stronger voice for themselves over the course of the student-led IEP process and even over the course of the IEP meeting itself" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024). My observation of students developing a stronger voice indicated to me that they were building self-advocacy skills through student-led IEPs. In my reflexive journal, I noted two students who engaged with student-led IEPs "said that they would be willing to share the My IEP slides with their teachers in order to advocate for their learning needs" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024), highlighting that students had the opportunity to immediately use the self-advocacy skills they had practiced through student-led IEPs. For me, the development of self-advocacy skills through student-led IEPs was important because it meant that students went beyond describing their learning needs to building the skills to ask for those needs to be met with specific supports in the classroom. I saw students building self-advocacy skills as another facet of skill development facilitated through student-led IEPs.

Articulating the theme *Skill development through student-led IEPs* gave me the opportunity to describe how student skill development emerged as a result of the shift to student learning being centered in student-led IEPs. In my reflexive journal, I expressed that "[i]t was really positive to see that growth and development" (Reflexive Journal, October 8, 2024), demonstrating my pride in seeing the student developing their skills in self-determination, self-

expression, and self-advocacy. I was excited by the impact my change in practice was having and the success I observed in my students as they developed important skills through engaging with a student-led IEP process. To me, this theme demonstrated that student-led IEPs could be an important process for students to practice life-long skills.

Summary of themes

My analysis of my data and the five themes that I developed allowed me to observe how implementing student-led IEPs brought change to my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). I noticed, through my data, how student-led IEPs shifted the IEP process from summative to formative, which gave me the opportunity to consider the purpose and person being centered in the development of the IEP. I observed my growth as an LST, making a conscious effort to develop my practice and apply what I was learning through my research as I implemented student-led IEPs. I had to consider the resource impacts of student-led IEPs as well as how to support students to engage with a student-led IEP process. Finally, I observed how student-led IEPs affected student skill development, which emerged as a result of the shift to centering student learning in the IEP process. Reviewing the five distinct and informative themes that I developed, I came to understand that student-led IEPs can be approached as a catalyst for change in how LSTs frame and execute the IEP process. For me, each theme represented a change in how I approached IEPs. In describing themes and detailing their significance, I have: provided a detailed account of each of the five themes that I developed, included data extracts to illustrate the themes, and discussed how each theme contributed to my research. In the next section, I will articulate the limitations of my research.

Limitations

My research focused on investigating a change in my practice through the implementation of student-led IEPs. I chose to approach my research through self-study as my methodology, which allowed me to center my own practice as the problem for exploration (LaBoskey, 2004). There were some limitations that emerged in the context of self-study. A limitation is not a weakness, but rather acknowledges the uniqueness of this work to who I am as a person and the nuances of my particular teaching assignment. My research: 1) focused on me as the unit of analysis, 2) did not include the perspectives of students or parents, and 3) was specific to my context. I will describe each of these limitations and how they affected my research.

The first limitation of my research was that using a self-study methodology meant I was the unit of analysis for the study. There are many approaches to any study and I chose to focus on myself in the context of my practice. This does not mean there is a right or wrong way to focus in an investigation, but it is important to highlight the other considerations that emerge out of the choice in focus. Because I was the unit of analysis for the study, student-led IEPs were explored from my perspective exclusively and my observations were collected as data through my reflexive journal and field notes. It was important to note that I was the unit of analysis because this presented a limitation in that I did not have access to other perspectives based on the methodology that I chose. However, LaBoskey (2004) argued that engaging in self-analysis was necessary to understand and improve one's practice as a teacher. So, while self-study limited the unit of analysis for the study to me and my perspective, it allowed me to explore my practice deeply and provide a depth of analysis in noting the changes that student-led IEPs brought to my

practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) in British Columbia. I mention this as a limitation, and not a weakness to the study.

The second limitation of my research directly results from the prior limitation in that a self-focused investigation meant I did not have access to the perspectives of others. Therefore, my research does not include data on how parents or students viewed student-led IEPs. It was important to note this limitation in my research design because parents and students are significant stakeholders in the IEP process. I would encourage further research in the area of student-led IEPs to collect feedback from parents and students to investigate their perspectives on student-led IEPs. For me, focusing my research and data collection on myself as the unit of analysis meant that I was able to respond to my research question.

The third limitation of my research was that my investigation of student-led IEP implementation was specific to my context. In focusing on my practice specifically, I explored the possibilities of teaching within my own context, one teacher in one school in one School District in BC. So, my work may not be generalizable beyond my context. LaBoskey (2004) argued that self-study research on teacher knowledge and learning must be grounded in context in order to be true to the teacher's practice and surrounding circumstances. At the same time, my findings may not be matched under different circumstances, such as different policies for IEP development, different support from school administration, or different perspectives on teaching practice. It was valuable for me to focus on my own context because it allowed me to be improvement-aimed and responsive in research, both of which adhere to the principles of self-study as described by LaBoskey (2004). It was important to acknowledge that focus on my own context was a limitation of my research in that my results may not be universal; my process and experience of implementing student-led IEPs may not fit perfectly within the contexts of other

LSTs. Moreover, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) also invites the researcher's role and perspective in making meaning, so my analysis of the data resulting from my investigation was unique to me. Nevertheless, in describing my process for implementing student-led IEPs, my investigation responded to my research question and may be helpful to other educators in how they might approach a student-led IEP process in their contexts.

In this section, I have described three limitations of my research: 1) using a self-study methodology meant I was the unit of analysis for the study, 2) I did not include the perspectives of students or parents, other stakeholders in the IEP process, in my study, and 3) my investigation of student-led IEP implementation was specific to my context. My research adhered to the principles of self-study in being self-focused, improvement-aimed, responsive, and grounded in context (LaBoskey, 2004). For me, self-study allowed for deep analysis of my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice and permitted me to respond to my research question. My analysis of my data and limitations of my research may be helpful to other educators who approach student-led IEP processes in their contexts.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided details about my findings, illustrating how I moved through the research process and what resulted. I described how I collected data through my field notes and a reflexive journal. A detailed account was provided of the coding process and steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that I took to analyze my data. I analyzed each of the five themes that were developed through the data analysis process: (1) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative, which described an important shift that was happening in the IEP process through the implementation of student-led IEPs. (2) Learning Services Teacher growth through student-led IEP implementation, which described my development as Learning

Services Teacher (LST) resulting from implementing student-led IEPs in my practice. (3) Resource impacts of student-led IEPs, which described the resources that I had to consider or create in preparing to implement student-led IEPs. (4) Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs, which described the work I was doing to support students to engage with student-led IEPs. (5) Skill development through student-led IEPs, which described student skill development resulting from engaging with a student-led IEP process. Data extracts were integrated within the story of each theme to give a sense of the breadth and depth of my data that contributed to the development of the theme. I explained that analysis of my themes allowed me to understand student-led IEPs as a catalyst for change in my practice and responded to my research question. Limitations of my research in the context of self-study as my methodology were acknowledged and described.

In Chapter 5, I will bring together the findings from my Chapter Two literature review and the themes I identified in Chapter Four in response to my research question and sub-questions. I will articulate the relationship between each sub-question, my literature review, and the themes I developed in Chapter 4. I will discuss how the themes address the sub-questions. Then I will respond to my primary research question and discuss my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST).

Chapter Five

In my research, I sought to answer the question: What has been my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in British Columbia? From my primary research question, five sub-questions emerged: (1) How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs? (2) What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs? (3) What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs? (4) How have student-led IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST)? (5) How have student-led IEPs affected student success? To respond to my research question and sub-questions, I conducted a literature review to gain a sense of what others had learned about student-led IEPs and to situate my investigation in context with previous research on IEPs. I then engaged in the research process myself, using self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) as my methodology as it allowed me to focus on my own process with engaging in student-led IEPs. Data was collected through a reflexive journal and fieldnotes, and I analyzed my data through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I wove analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with data extracts to tell the story of each of my themes.

In this chapter, I will bring together the findings from my Chapter Two literature review and the themes I identified in Chapter Four in response to my research question and sub-questions. I will articulate the relationship between each sub-question, my literature review, and the corresponding themes and discuss how the themes address the sub-questions. I will respond to my primary research question and discuss my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST).

Table 2

Connections between research sub-questions and themes

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
1. How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?	(A) Summative to formative (C) Resource impacts (E) Skill development
2. What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs?	(A) Summative to formative (D) Supporting students (B) Learning Services Teacher growth
3. What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs?	(C) Resource impacts (B) Learning Services Teacher growth (A) Summative to formative
4. How have student-led IEPs affected my work as an LST?	(A) Summative to formative (D) Supporting students (B) Learning Services Teacher growth
5. How have student-led IEPs affected student success?	(D) Supporting students (E) Skill development

Sub-Question 1: How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?

Table 2.1

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
1. How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs?	(A) Summative to formative (C) Resource impacts (E) Skill development

In consideration of the sub-question *How have I come to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs*, I reflected on three themes that emerged from my data analysis: (A) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative, (C) Resource impacts of student-led IEPs, and (E) Skill development through student-led IEPs. I will discuss each and connect to my literature

review findings, my own learning through the research, future impacts on my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), and potential considerations for others engaged in IEPs.

(A) Summative to formative: In analyzing my data, I came to understand that student-led IEPs shifted the IEP process from a summative process that produced an evaluation *of* a student to a formative process that was *for* the student and their learning. Lau (2016) articulated that summative can be seen as an "evaluation" (p. 511) or "assessment" (p. 512) of the student while formative can be seen as "aimed at helping students' learning" (p. 512). In the context of IEPs, summative meant focusing on assessing the student and their learning whereas formative meant focusing on the process and how a student was learning. Thus, for me, student-led IEPs were distinguished from other IEPs due to the reorientation of the IEP process to center around the student and their learning through student-led IEPs. Shifting my understanding of IEPs was significant because the shift meant re-thinking not only the process, but the purpose of IEPs. I was encouraged to change how I planned for and executed IEP meetings by prioritizing student learning in each step of the IEP process. Centering the student in their own IEP process is something I will continue to emphasize in my practice, through student-led or other IEPs.

Seeing student-led IEPs as a formative process did not appear in my literature review in Chapter Two, nor did I find the notion of formative and summative when I went back to re-examine the literature after developing the theme. The research I reviewed spoke to the student learning that takes place in a student-led IEP process, but did not label the shift that takes place in student-led IEPs as formative. I discerned a difference, not so much in language, but in framing between the literature I reviewed and my own investigation; my literature review indicated that implementing student-led IEPs would result in a different process, whereas my data and the theme I developed highlighted that student-led IEPs provided a different purpose, or

framing, of the IEP process for me. It was an important distinction, and one that addressed how I came to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs. I will continue to seek opportunities for centering the student and their learning in student-IEPs, which can be as simple as asking the student questions and soliciting their input on their IEP. Framing the student-led IEP process as formative may help other educators to distinguish student-led IEPs from other IEPs and orient their approach to the student-led IEP process to be centered on students and their learning.

(C) Resource impacts: My data indicating resource impacts of student-led IEPs illustrated another distinguishing characteristic of student-led IEPs; in student-led IEPs, resources were created or adapted specifically to support students in learning about and developing their own IEP, which is different from other IEPs which do not use resources to support student engagement with the IEP process. Hawbaker (2007) argued that "you will have to make creative adaptations" (p. 4) to facilitate student participation in student-led IEPs, which my data demonstrated agreement with. Highlighting the adaptations and resources necessary to support student engagement as a distinguishing factor of student-led IEPs may help other educators to better understand the level of preparation and resources necessary to implement student-led IEPs compared to other IEPs. It will allow other educators to consider what resources they might need to successfully implement student-led IEPs and to seek or create those resources before moving forward with student-led IEPs. For me, my data distinguishing student-led IEPs based on resource impacts emphasized the need to create resources to support student engagement with student-led IEPs. Having created resources, such as a PowerPoint presentation that broke down the student-led IEP process into manageable chunks, I will be able to use them in future student-led IEPs.

(E) Skill development: My data showed that opportunities for student skill development distinguished student-led IEPs from other IEPs. Even before implementing student-led IEPs in my practice, skill development was something I expected to see in my data. In the literature I reviewed, Konrad (2008) emphasized that students leading their IEP meeting "gives them excellent practice with self-determination skills [and] self-advocacy" (p. 238), while Howard et al. (2021) argued that "many of the skills learned to support participation throughout the IEP process can be generalized to other opportunities" (p. 291), highlighting skill development as a distinguishing characteristic between student-led IEPs and other IEPs.

However, it was interesting that my data from my research further illustrated how student-led IEPs put students in a scenario where they had to employ self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills in order to move the IEP process forward; since students were the ones leading the IEP process, if they said nothing, the student-led IEP would come to a halt. Danneker and Bottge (2009) highlighted that through student-led IEPs, "students had the opportunity to use self-determination skills in an authentic setting (p. 228). The significance I noted was that, where other IEPs craft goals around skills like self-determination and self-advocacy, student-led IEPs provided the instruction and opportunity needed for students to actively practice those skills. For example, when I worked with students in a student-led IEP process to articulate their learning goals for the school year. Furthermore, I realized that student-led IEPs could be used as an intervention, or specific action taken by LSTs or classroom teachers to target improvement in an area of difficulty for a student. Other IEPs only outlined interventions but were not designed as specific action to target improvement themselves. My data implied that myself and other educators wanting to support student skill development might consider student-led IEPs as an avenue to do so.

Overall, my data indicated that student-led IEPs were distinguished from other IEPs through framing student-led IEPs as a formative process, orientating resources towards supporting student participation in the student-led IEP process, and giving students the opportunity to develop skills through student-led IEPs. Understanding differences between student-led IEPs and other IEPs as a formative process provided me with the opportunity for reorienting the purpose of IEPs to center around student learning, to seek or create resources that will support student learning through student-led IEPs, and to implement student-led IEPs as an intervention to support students in learning skills.

Sub-Question 2: What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs?

Table 2.2

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
2. What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs?	(A) Summative to formative (D) Supporting students (B) Learning Services Teacher growth

In consideration of the sub-question *What have I observed as benefits of student-led IEPs*, I reflected on three themes that emerged from my data analysis: (A) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative, (D) Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs, and (B) Learning Services Teacher (LST) growth through student-led IEPs. I will discuss each and connect to my literature review findings, my own learning through the research, future impacts on my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), and potential considerations for others engaged in IEPs.

(A) Summative to formative: My data indicated benefits for students, parents, and teachers when student-led IEPs shifted the IEP process from summative to formative. Framing

student-led IEPs as a formative process meant focusing on student learning as the goal of IEP development rather than evaluation of the student. In the literature I reviewed, Davis and Cumming (2019) argued that the "[s]tudent-led IEP is an effective way of helping students with [disabilities] understand their disabilities and self-advocate for needed supports and services in school and beyond" (p. 92). Correspondingly, my data showed centering student learning as the primary objective of student-led IEPs and I framed the IEP process as formative as a result. Cavendish et al. (2017) noted that students could be "supported as...active agents in determining their own needs" (p. 229) through student-led IEPs. My data similarly demonstrated that practicing decision-making and autonomy was an important part of a formative process for students in student-led IEPs. The significance I observed was that students benefited from student-led IEPs when centering student learning provided opportunities to develop deeper understanding and advocacy of students' learning needs. Opportunities for student learning is something I will monitor moving forward with student-led IEPs.

My data demonstrated benefits for parents and teachers were achieved by centering student-learning in the IEP process through student-led IEPs as well. Student-led IEPs benefited parents and teachers when they had the opportunity to understand the student better through a more collaborative and interactive meeting facilitated through framing student-led IEPs as a formative process. Royer (2017) noted that "increased student talk time meant decreased special education teacher...talk time" (p. 246) in student-led IEP meetings, meaning that parents and teachers had more opportunity to hear from the student. Hawbaker (2007) further argued that, for student-led IEPs, "[t]he meetings and the resulting IEP were more of a team effort rather than a teacher directed meeting" (p. 2). Therefore, student-led IEPs provided parents and teachers with the opportunity to hear from the student and to understand the student's needs from the student's

point of view. Other educators might look to student-led IEPs as a process that benefits students in terms of learning about their IEP and that benefits parents and teachers in terms of learning about the student. I will continue to support both students and parents to understand a student's IEP and their learning needs by framing the IEP process as formative.

(D) Supporting students: My data showed that students benefitted when their learning needs were met to support their engagement with a student-led IEP process. Martin et al. (2006) stated that knowing "students can participate more fully in their IEP meetings [meant] steps should be taken to increase this participation" (p. 315). I noted that it was important to understand student learning needs and to build in instruction and support to facilitate meaningful participation in the student-led IEP process. Howard et al. (2021) suggested employing strategies "to support students leading conversations and contributing information" (p. 294) in student-led IEPs. My data showed that supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs meant implementing strategies such as scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation aimed at meeting students' learning needs. For example, in student-led IEPs I gave students the option of typing their IEP goals, which met the needs of students who struggled to write due to difficulty with spelling or fine motor function. A simple adaptation like typing supported students to express their thoughts in written form and engage with the student-led IEP process. Supporting student engagement was important in implementing student-led IEPs because each student came to the IEP process with distinct needs and I had to adjust my approach slightly to help each student. From my investigation, other educators may note the importance of supporting student engagement in order to gain benefits from student-led IEPs. In my practice, I will continue to use scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation to support student engagement with developing their IEP so that they can reap the benefits of student-led IEPs.

(B) Learning Services Teacher growth: My data indicating Learning Services Teacher (LST) growth through student-led IEP implementation showed how student-led IEPs influenced the development of my practice. In the literature I reviewed, Hawbaker (2007) articulated that making adaptations "is what we do best in special education" (p. 4) demonstrating that LSTs constantly changed and evolved in their practice in order to meet the learning needs of their students. My data highlighted that I had to be thoughtful and purposeful in implementing student-led IEPs, especially with regard to making creative adaptations, to meet the needs of my students, and my practice. The significance I noted was how effort and intentionality in implementing student-led IEPs stimulated my growth as an LST and therefore benefitted my practice. Recognizing growth as a benefit of student-led IEPs may encourage other educators to see implementing student-led IEPs as an opportunity for not only change in their practice, but development as educators. Recognizing the potential benefit for further growth as an LST through implementing student-led IEPs will encourage me to continue doing so.

Overall, my data indicated that benefits of student-led IEPs existed for students when the IEP process was designed to support student engagement and meet students' learning needs. Students also benefited when they had opportunities to practice decision-making and autonomy in student-led IEPs. Parents and teachers benefited from student-led IEPs when they had the opportunity to understand the student better. As an LST, I benefited from student-led IEPs when I was able to grow and develop in my practice. Recognizing the benefits of student-led IEPs throughout my data provided the opportunity for considering how student-led IEPs could be a positive change for stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers. Other educators may see the benefits of student-led IEPs indicated by my data as reasons to move forward with implementing a student-led IEP process in their contexts.

Sub-Question 3: What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs?

Table 2.3

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
3. What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs?	(C) Resource impacts (B) Learning Services Teacher growth (A) Summative to formative

In consideration of the sub-question *What have I observed as challenges of student-led IEPs*, I reflected on three themes that emerged from my data analysis: (C) Resource impacts of student-led IEPs, (B) Learning Services Teacher (LST) growth through student-led IEPs, and (A) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative. I will discuss each and connect to my literature review findings, my own learning through the research, future impacts on my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), and potential considerations for others engaged in IEPs.

(C) Resource impacts: My data indicated that resource impacts of student-led IEPs were an area of challenge I encountered in terms of creating or navigating the use of resources for student-led IEPs. Hawbaker (2007) described the importance of using strategies to support student engagement in the student-led IEP process and I further explained how strategies and resources for student-led IEPs often needed to be tailored to my teaching context and the needs of my students. However, my data illustrated how building strategies, or resources, to support student engagement with student-led IEPs was a challenge because these efforts took significant work to do and required more time. As a teacher with nine years of experience, I understood that teachers already faced high workloads and adding more to those workloads would be a challenge associated with implementing student-led IEPs. My data showing resource impacts of student-led IEPs also highlighted that time was considered to be a resource by teachers, students, and parents. Scheef et al. (2024) acknowledged "the significant amount of time required to guide

students through the [student-led IEP] process" (p. 3), a point confirmed when student-led IEPs took me approximately three hours over three sessions compared to one hour of a single meeting time for other IEPs in my practice. Therefore, the increased amount of time was a challenge in both the literature and my findings.

In the literature, Danneker and Bottge (2009) pointed out "the lack of understanding among the special education teachers about the amount of time and resources needed to prepare students for their IEP meetings" (p. 230) as a barrier to student-led IEPs. It was important in my investigation, therefore, to acknowledge the challenges I observed in implementing student-led IEPs. By highlighting the challenges of student-led IEPs related to resources, my research might help other educators to prepare to meet the challenges directly or consider whether the challenges of student-led IEPs can be overcome in their contexts. Some educators may simply not have enough time in their schedules to dedicate to implementing student-led IEPs in full. In that case, they might consider implementing student-led IEPs with just a few students. Educators could also consider using student-led IEP resources, such as graphic organizers to explain a student's IEP, or find other ways to achieve some benefits of student-led IEPs, such as supporting student autonomy, without implementing a full student-led IEP process. In my practice, challenges related to resource impacts of student-led IEPs were something I needed to examine because I had a large caseload of students and limited time to work with them all. I reflected that, as students engaged with student-led IEPs, the process might become more efficient year over year, and I would be able to implement student-led IEPs with more students. I would also consider using parts of student-led IEPs rather than implementing a full student-led IEP process for every student.

(B) Learning Services Teacher growth: My data indicating Learning Services Teacher (LST) growth illustrated challenges I observed as I developed in my practice as an LST through implementing student-led IEPs. In the literature, Martin et al. (2006) argued that, in student-led IEPs, "teacher...behavior takes teacher concentration to change" (p. 314). The point highlighted the difficulty LSTs faced in shifting their expectations, and therefore their behavior, in student-led IEPs. Similarly, my data illustrated the challenge I faced in shifting my role away from leading the IEP process to supporting students to take the lead in student-led IEPs. The significance I noted was the difficulty I encountered while consciously changing my behavior to let go of expectations I previously held for other IEPs in favor of implementing student-led IEPs.

Eisenman et al. (2005) and Hawbaker (2007) described a certain level of risk-taking on the part of the LST as inherent in implementing student-led IEPs and I perceived risk-taking as a further challenge in the context of letting go of my expectations and management of the IEP process through student-led IEPs. One example of letting go was following through on choices that students made in the student-led IEP process, even though I might not have made those choices as an LST. Other educators may take heed from my investigation and prepare to experience some level of discomfort as they change their practice and take risks in implementing student-led IEPs. My data indicated that challenges arose from implementing student-led IEPs as a change in my practice, but that growth also emerged as a result of this change. I will continue to engage with the challenges related to consciously changing my behavior and taking risks to implement student-led IEPs because I see overcoming the challenge as a sign of growth in my practice.

(A) Summative to formative: My data indicating a shift in the IEP process from summative to formative illustrated the challenges I faced in orienting parent expectations in

student-led IEPs. In framing student-led IEPs as formative, and therefore centering student learning in the process, it was important to acknowledge students as the leaders in the development of their IEP. However, making this shift posed a challenge when parents were used to having the teacher lead the development of the IEP. In the literature, Scheef et al. (2024) articulated "family expectations that teachers lead IEP meetings" (p. 6), while Danneker and Bottge (2009) revealed that "[m]ost of the adults...expected the student to be an observer" (p. 230) in the IEP process, illustrating tension between expectations of parents and the shift to student learning and leadership in student-led IEPs. My data similarly indicated a habit of looking to the teacher as the authority in an IEP process, which I observed as a challenge of student-led IEPs.

Danneker and Bottge (2009) explained that, "[p]rior to [student-led IEPs], adults considered students incapable or unwilling to be more independent" (p. 231), illustrating that it can take a new experience like seeing the student take on a leadership role in their IEP process for adults to shift their expectations. I took steps to mitigate the challenge by establishing norms with parents ahead of time which centered the student and their learning in student-led IEPs. I will continue to take the step of establishing norms with parents for future student-led IEPs. Other educators may expect to face some resistance to centering the student, rather than the LST, as the leader in student-led IEPs. Expectations could be managed, however, by being proactive and setting expectations with parents ahead of time that center the student as the leader in a student-led IEP process.

Overall, my data indicated that challenges of student-led IEPs included the work that goes into managing resources needed for student-led IEPs, stepping back in the student-led IEP process, letting go of my own expectations as an LST, and moving away from the habit of

teacher as authority in the IEP process. Recognizing the challenges of student-led IEPs through my data is not to dissuade others from implementing student-led IEPs, but to provide an opportunity for considering how to navigate the challenges related to student-led IEP implementation. Other educators may choose how to allocate limited resources like time towards student-led IEPs or use some resources from student-led IEPs without implementing a full student-led IEP process for every student. They might balance the potential benefits of growth my data indicated for student-led IEPs against the risk-taking inherent in introducing a new process to their practice. Other educators may take steps to mitigate challenges of student-led IEPs by being pro-active in their approach and planning.

Sub-Question 4: How have student-led IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher?

Table 2.4

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
4. How have student-led IEPs affected my work as an LST?	(A) Summative to formative (D) Supporting students (B) Learning Services Teacher growth

In consideration of the sub-question *How have student-led IEPs affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST)*, I reflected on three themes that emerged from my data analysis: (A) Shifting the IEP process from summative to formative, (D) Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs, and (B) Learning Services Teacher (LST) growth through student-led IEP implementation. I will discuss each and connect to my literature review findings, my own learning through the research, future impacts on my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), and potential considerations for others engaged in IEPs.

(A) Summative to formative: My data indicated shifting the IEP process from summative to formative affected my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) because a formative framework prompted me to reconsider not just the process but the purpose of IEPs. Reframing IEPs as formative and centered around the student and their learning had a significant impact on my approach to the IEP process. Martin et al. (2006) argued that "students learn the skills necessary to be effectively involved in their IEP meetings when...the adult IEP team members expect student participation" (p. 300), which meant I needed to reorient my thinking to approach student-led IEPs in a way that facilitated student engagement in the IEP process. Student-led IEPs affected how I planned for and executed the development of IEPs by prioritizing student learning in each step of the IEP process, from creating new resources to working with students to develop their IEP. Framing the student-led IEP process as formative may help other educators to recognize student learning as an important purpose of the IEP process, which will affect how they plan for and execute student-led IEPs to facilitate learning opportunities for students.

(D) Supporting students: My data showed that my work as an LST was affected through supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs. In preparing to implement student-led IEPs initially, I scaffolded the IEP process and developed resources, such as graphic organizers, that supported students in walking through the steps of developing their IEP and expressing their learning needs. Developing new resources was a tangible example of how supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs affected my work; the official paperwork to document a student's IEP did not fit the objective of centering student learning in the IEP process, so I had to make resources that did. Therefore, my data indicated that initial implementation of student-led IEPs meant more work for me, as an LST, compared to other IEPs.

Eisenman et al. (2005) argued that jumping into implementing student-led IEPs "prompted [teachers] to put ideas into action" (p. 203), meaning that getting started in the student-led IEP process was sometimes the best way for an LST to figure out what to do. My data similarly indicated that taking action in supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs affected my work as an LST because I came to recognize more clearly what a student needed in order to engage with the IEP process. Ultimately, I noted that by having jumped in and invested effort to develop strategies and resources for supporting students, I could continue to use those resources in my work as an LST going forward. Other educators should anticipate putting in more work to implement student-led IEPs initially but should keep in mind that the resources they create will be useful in their practices moving forward. By jumping into implementing student-led IEPs, educators may come to recognize what supports students need in their contexts to successfully engage with student-led IEPs.

(B) Learning Services Teacher growth: My data demonstrated that implementing student-led IEPs affected my work as an LST through growth and change in my practice. Scheef et al. (2024) articulated that teachers "who had experience facilitating student-led IEPs rated barriers as less challenging to overcome" (p. 12), demonstrating growth and increased confidence in implementing student-led IEPs once the teachers had tried them. Similarly, my data indicated that I learned more about how to support students in leading their IEP development and made progress in stepping back from my usual leadership role with each student-led IEP I facilitated. Therefore, student-led IEPs affected my practice as an LST when I became more thoughtful and intentional in how I engaged with IEP development. Eisenman et al. (2005) highlighted "[t]eachers reported with pride that they felt they were making a difference with students" (p. 201) through the implementation of student-led IEPs. My data illustrated how

implementing student-led IEPs encouraged me to think about how I could change my practice to honor the value I placed on student independence and achieving success that is meaningful to the individual. Having started with implementing just a few student-led IEPs, my data illustrated that my practice as an LST was affected by my growth, such as increased confidence and knowledge about student-led IEPs. I had new knowledge of IEP development to bring to my practice and will approach all IEPs with more thought and understanding of how I can impact the IEP development process as an LST.

Overall, my data indicated that student-led IEPs have affected my work as an LST through shifting the IEP process from summative to formative, supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs, and experiencing growth in my practice. Framing student-led IEPs as a formative process was foundational for the change that affected my work as an LST because it reoriented my thinking about and planning for IEPs to meet the goal of student learning. Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs led me to create resources that facilitated student engagement in IEP development and allowed me to understand student needs in the context of developing their IEP. Experiencing growth in my practice as an LST encouraged me to be more thoughtful and intentional in how I engaged with IEP development. Implementing student-led IEPs gave me knowledge to use as I engage with student-led IEPs in the future.

Sub-Question 5: How have student-led IEPs affected student success?

Table 2.5

Research sub-question	Corresponding themes
5. How have student-led IEPs affected student success?	(D) Supporting students (E) Skill development

To address how student-led IEPs affected student success, it is important to first frame what student success looked like immediately, in the short term, and in the long term. In the context of my research, immediate success looked like students engaging with the student-led IEP process to make meaningful contributions to the development of their IEPs. Short-term success looked like students demonstrating learning from the student-led IEP process, such as development of self-expression skills. Long-term success looked like students applying what they have learned through the student-led IEP process, including understanding of their IEP and skills they have developed, to other aspects of their education and other pursuits. An example of long-term success was students using self-advocacy skills at work or self-determination skills to plan for the future. Because my research took place over a single school semester, the time did not permit me to address long-term success yet.

In consideration of the sub-question *How have student-led IEPs affected student success*, I reflected on two themes that emerged from my data analysis: (D) Supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs and (E) Skill development through student-led IEPs. I will discuss each and connect to my literature review findings, my own learning through the research, future impacts on my work as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), and potential considerations for others engaged in IEPs.

(D) Supporting students: My data demonstrated supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs gave students structure and guidance to meaningfully engage with their IEP and

the IEP development process, thus affecting student success. Danneker and Bottge (2009) argued "students who received instruction could be prepared to lead their IEP meeting" (p. 231), illustrating that students had meaningful contributions to make to the IEP process when they were supported in the process. I noted that supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs was important because each student came to the IEP process with different levels of ability and learning needs, meaning that I had to adjust my materials or approach to meet those needs. Student-led IEPs affected student success because every student had the opportunity to understand their IEP, express their learning needs, and lead the development of their IEP. My data indicated that scaffolding the IEP process, applying differentiation and adaption to resources, and developing rapport with students all contributed to support which saw students make meaningful contributions to their IEP development. Therefore, I discerned that students achieved immediate success in engaging with student-led IEPs. In my practice moving forward, I will be able to use the structure for scaffolding the IEP process alongside the resources I developed, in part or in full, to support students to engage with their IEPs, student-led or not.

(E) Skill development: My data indicated that students developed valuable skills through the student-led IEP process, thus affecting student success. In my review of the literature, authors linked self-determination skills (Danneker & Bottge, 2009; Davis & Cumming, 2019; Hawbaker, 2007) and self-advocacy skills (Cavdenish et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2006; Mason et al., 2002; Royer, 2017) to student-led IEPs. Royer (2017) also highlighted a student's ability to express personal interests and goals as a student-led IEP objective. Correspondingly, I noted the development of self-determination, self-advocacy and self-expression skills in students throughout their engagement with student-led IEPs. Davis and Cumming (2019) argued "[i]mplementation of a student-led IEP process is one instructional

action that can provide valuable opportunities for students...to develop and practice self-determination, self-advocacy, and other skills critical for success in high school and beyond" (p. 97), illustrating the value of student-led IEPs in affecting student success.

In my six years of experience as a Learning Services Teacher (LST), I have often seen self-advocacy or self-determination highlighted as goals for students to work on. However, self-determination and self-advocacy skills are not explicitly taught as part of the K-12 BC school curriculum where I am a teacher, meaning that the need for students to develop self-determination and self-advocacy skills has been identified (Davis & Cumming, 2019) but a path to supporting the development of these skills has not been established. Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) advocated for direct instruction to teach students about their IEP and facilitate skill building and student involvement in the development of their IEP. My data similarly indicated that student-led IEPs affected student success in that student-led IEPs provided an opportunity to teach, and gave students the chance to practice, self-determination and self-advocacy skills. I noted that students achieved short-term success through student-led IEPs when they demonstrated self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills by engaging with a student-led IEP process. For example, a student used self-determination skills when they articulated their learning goals for the coming school year. Moving forward in my practice, instead of simply listing skill development as a goal in a student's IEP, I will use student-led IEPs to support students who need the most help in building self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Other educators are encouraged to use student-led IEPs as a targeted intervention to support students in developing self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills.

Overall, my data illustrated that student-led IEPs affected student success immediately and in the short-term by supporting students and facilitating student skill development. Supporting students by scaffolding the IEP process and making student-led IEPs accessible to students meant that students had the opportunity to achieve immediate success through engagement with student-led IEPs. Guiding the development of their own learning plan allowed students to develop and practice self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills through student-led IEPs, thus achieving short-term success. Moreover, supporting students through scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation allowed for me to facilitate engagement with student-led IEPs for students with a wide range of abilities and learning needs. My data illustrated that student-led IEPs went beyond identifying skills as goals for students; student-led IEPs showed a potential path to support students in developing and practicing self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills. I will continue to use student-led IEPs to support students' immediate and short-term success while observing whether or not student-led IEPs can also facilitate long-term success for students. Other educators may see my data indicating immediate and short-term success for students through implementing student-led IEPs and choose to implement student-led IEPs as an intervention to support students in their contexts.

Primary research question: What has been my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher in British Columbia, Canada?

Prior to implementing student-led IEPs, the IEP process was a responsibility of my job as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) and I saw that IEPs served the purpose of documenting student learning needs and highlighting supports for those learning needs that could be applied in the classroom. However, through implementing student-led IEPs, I came to see that the IEP process held far more potential than I had utilized in the past. For me, student-led IEPs have been

a catalyst for change in my practice. Student-led IEPs led to a: (1) shift in my understanding of the IEP process, (2) change in my approach to supporting students in the IEP process, and (3) experience of growth as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). Resource impacts of student-led IEPs will have practical implications for my continued engagement with student-led IEPs in my practice. However, the changes I observed as a result of implementing student-led IEPs will still have an impact on my practice as an LST. I will now review the three ways student-led IEPs impacted my practice as an LST.

(1) Shift in my understanding of the IEP process: Student-led IEPs changed how I thought about the IEP process. Through implementing student-led IEPs, I shifted my perspective on the IEP process. I came to understand student-led IEPs as a formative process that was for the student and their learning, rather than a summative process that resulted in an evaluation of the student for the school system. Reframing the IEP process as formative was a significant change in my practice because it transformed how I thought about the purpose of IEPs and therefore how I engaged with the IEP development process to center student learning.

In implementing student-led IEPs, I positioned myself as the facilitator of the process while the student became the leader in developing their IEP. Placing students in a leadership role through student-led IEPs meant encouraging parents to move away from the habit of looking to the teacher as the authority in the IEP process. To this end, I asked parents to direct questions about the IEP to their child and only stepped in to provide guidance if the student did not have an answer. My data indicated that student-led IEPs supported students to practice autonomy. For me, autonomy as an aim meant structuring student-led IEPs so that students had the opportunity to make meaningful decisions in the IEP process, such as deciding what goal the student wanted to work on that year or what supports the student would access. Students expressing themselves

in meetings with their parents and exercising autonomy through decision-making were important parts of establishing a formative process and the student as leader in student-led IEPs.

For me, shifting my perspective on IEPs and taking a step back in the IEP process changed my practice by allowing me to turn IEP development, a responsibility of my job as an LST, into a learning opportunity for students. My data indicated that student-led IEPs were an opportunity for students to develop self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills. I had previously been driven to center the student in their IEP development, frequently trying to ensure that the student had a voice and that the student was respected in their IEP meeting. So, in some ways, I may have been aiming towards a more student-driven approach for some time. However, implementing student-led IEPs gave me the opportunity to be more purposeful in centering students in their own IEP process and to understand how to do so.

Framing student-led IEPs as formative will have a lasting impact on how I approach IEPs, student-led or not, because now I have a better understanding of, and strategies for, centering students in the IEP process. I encourage other educators to consider how framing the IEP process as formative might reorient their thinking about the process. Further progress along the path to a formative process could be taking a step back in the IEP process when possible and elevating student voices in IEP meetings with parents so that IEPs can become more centered on the student and their learning.

(2) Change in my approach to supporting students in the IEP process: Student-led IEPs changed how I approached the IEP process. In preparing to implement student-led IEPs, I considered how I would structure the IEP process to be accessible to students. It was important to me to support students in engaging with student-led IEPs and the first step was considering student needs in the development of the student-led IEP process. I scaffolded the IEP process by

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creating a PowerPoint presentation called My IEP that organized the components of an IEP into graphic organizers. I observed that the My IEP slides were helpful in supporting students to engage with student-led IEPs because the slides gave a clear structure to the student-led IEP process. The slides provided many of the supports that would typically be provided to a student with a disability, including: breaking down the process into manageable steps, using visual representation of concepts to support student understanding, and giving students the option to use typing or voice-to-text technology in crafting their responses. Supporting student engagement was important in implementing student-led IEPs because each student came to the IEP process with distinct needs and I had to adjust my approach slightly for each student.

Thinking through student needs in the development of my student-led IEP process and creating the My IEP slides allowed me to support students with various abilities and learning needs. I noticed that implementing student-led IEPs changed my practice because student-led IEPs encouraged me to consider how best to support each unique student to engage with student-led IEPs. I used the skills I had gained in scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation throughout my six years' experience as an LST to approach student-led IEPs as a change in my practice and to create a structure that would facilitate student engagement with the development of their IEP. Although I may not implement student-led IEPs with each student on my caseload in the future, structuring student-led IEPs to support student engagement will have a lasting impact on my practice because I will be able to break down the IEP process and use the My IEP slides that I created to support student understanding of their IEPs. Scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation through graphic organizers in My IEP slides worked for me to support student engagement with their IEP. I encourage other educators to use any of these strategies or to

consider how they might structure the IEP process in their contexts to support student understanding of, and engagement with, their IEP.

(3) Experience of growth as a Learning Services Teacher (LST): Student-led IEPs changed how I experienced the IEP process. When I implemented student-led IEPs in my practice, I experienced growth as an LST by being thoughtful and purposeful in my approach facilitating a student-led process. Student-led IEPs encouraged me to think about how to develop my practice in alignment with the value I hold towards students achieving success in a way that is meaningful for them. For me, centering students and their learning in student-led IEPs meant that I made a conscious effort to take a step back and allow students to lead their development of their IEP. My data indicated that I experienced growth in this process by consciously honoring student decisions and letting go of control. For example, I followed through with the choices that students made in developing their IEPs, even if those were not choices I would have suggested as an LST. I observed that letting go meant putting aside my own expectations and desires in the student-led IEP process in order to prioritize student leadership and learning. My experience of letting go in student-led IEPs demonstrated growth as an LST because I was making a conscious effort to change my engagement with the IEP process and, in doing so, changed my practice. I learned a new way of interacting with students through student-led IEPs, one that changed the student-teacher dynamic by encouraging students to take on a leadership role in developing their IEP.

Keeping a reflexive journal to collect data in my investigation was particularly useful in highlighting my growth as an LST because I could see the progression of my thoughts aligning with my actions in implementing student-led IEPs. I began my investigation with a belief in supporting students to be independent and achieve individual success but I noticed the conscious

effort needed on my part to align my practice with this belief. As an LST, I am often looking for ways to support students in their growth but implementing student-led IEPs also gave me the opportunity to grow and change in my practice too. I suggest to other educators that letting go of some expectations and desires as an LST is helpful in implementing student-led IEPs and can lead to growth for the educator as well as the student.

My data indicated that student-led IEPs had an impact on resources in my practice, most notably time. Student-led IEPs took more time to implement compared to other IEPs. Each student-led IEP session took approximately one hour, which meant that the student-led IEP process for one student took three hours in total. This was two more hours than other IEPs, per student, which usually took one hour. With approximately 38 students on my caseload, it was unrealistic to implement student-led IEPs for every student. Therefore, the changes I observed in my practice through implementing student-led IEPs will have an ongoing impact in other ways. I will continue to support students to engage meaningfully with their IEP by elevating student voices in the IEP process and encouraging students to make decisions about what supports are helpful to their learning, development, and leadership growth. I will be able to use parts of the student-led IEP process I developed, such as the My IEP slides, to support student engagement with their IEP. I will make a conscious effort to let go of my expectations in order to center students in their IEP.

Overall, my data indicated that implementing student-led IEPs changed how I thought about the IEP process, how I approached the IEP process, and how I experienced the IEP process as an LST. As a result, I framed student-led IEPs as a catalyst for change in my practice. Using self-study as my methodology in my research necessitated a focus on me as the unit for investigation (LaBoskey, 2004). However, what I have learned in my process for implementing

student-led IEPs can be shared to support other educators to implement student-led IEPs in their contexts. I encourage other educators to try student-led IEPs and to observe how a new process may catalyze change in their practice, opportunities for their students, and growth as educators.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed each of my research sub-questions by bringing together the themes I developed through data analysis in Chapter Four and the literature on student-led IEPs I gathered through my literature review in Chapter Two. I articulated the relationship between each sub-question, my literature review, and the corresponding themes and discussed how the themes addressed the sub-questions. I responded to my primary research question and discussed my process for implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) in British Columbia. I explained that student-led IEPs have been a catalyst for change in my practice, having an impact on how I thought about, approached, and experienced the IEP process. I highlighted aspects of student-led IEPs that I will carry forward in my practice and suggested that other educators might benefit from trying student-led IEPs to stimulate change and growth in their practice.

In Chapter Six I will return to the context I shared in Chapter One and explain why I chose to investigate student-led IEPs. I will reflect on my research process and address what worked well for me and what did not. The future of student-led IEPs in my practice will be discussed, as will the practicality of student-led IEPs more generally. I will identify areas for further investigation that came out of my research process and explain how I will expand on what I have learned so far.

Chapter Six

In this chapter, I will return to the context I shared in Chapter One and articulate the problem I was trying to solve through my research question. I will describe how investigating student-led IEPs showed me a path to addressing the problem. I will reflect on my research process and address what worked well for me, what did not, and how my research process met the needs of my teaching practice. The future of student-led IEPs in my practice will be discussed, as will the practicality of student-led IEPs more broadly. I will identify where I can expand on the work I did to investigate student-led IEPs in my research and I will propose possibilities for spreading change in implementing student-led IEPs in British Columbia.

The problem for investigation

Articulating the problem

When the Individual Education Plan (IEP) was first introduced, the concept signified important development in how students with disabilities were supported in schools in Canada and the United States (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Tremblay & Belley, 2017). In British Columbia, Canada, IEPs were introduced to recognize and accommodate students with disabilities, developmental or neurological differences, and chronic health challenges in the education system (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). However, there remains a possibility for the IEP process to evolve further to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In Chapter One, I argued that students should have significant input in the IEP process that guides, among other things, the support the student receives for their learning needs (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016). However, as of yet, British Columbia students do not take much leadership in the IEP process.

I have worked as a teacher for nine years and a Learning Services Teacher (LST) for six years. As an LST, I work closely with students with disabilities to support their learning and the IEP process is an important part of my practice. Every year it is my responsibility to ensure that the students on my caseload and their families have an opportunity to meet with me and work through the IEP process to update their IEP. Prior to my research, I had not observed students being invited to take a primary leadership role in the development of their IEP and I found this problematic. I wanted to see a student's role in their IEP process change and have students taking on the responsibility for, and engagement with, the development of their own IEPs.

The lives of the students I work with are varied and have many different trajectories, which means that students' perceptions of, and paths to, success are also very different; hence the leadership of the learner in the individualization aspect of an IEP is important. I considered student leadership in their own IEP as an area that could benefit from closer consideration. I wanted to connect my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) more closely with the value I place on student independence and students achieving success that is meaningful to them as individuals. The problem I was trying to investigate through my research was to implement change in my practice around IEP development as a means of supporting students to articulate their learning needs and take ownership of their education. Therefore, my research focused on a change in my practice through the implementation and observation of student-led IEPs. I chose to investigate student-led IEPs because I understood student-led IEPs to be a process that would center the student and allow them to become the leader in developing their education plan. Through my investigation of student-led IEPs in my practice, I saw a path to student leadership in the development of their own IEP and student ownership of their education.

Path to exploring the problem

From collection and analysis of my data, I came to understand student-led IEPs as a catalyst for change in my practice. Implementing student-led IEPs led to significant changes in how I engaged with the IEP process. I observed that, as a result of changes I made to my practice, students were encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning plan. Implementing student-led IEPs in my practice as an LST changed how I (1) thought about the IEP process, (2) approached the IEP process, and (3) experienced the IEP process. Through these changes, I saw a path to solving the problem of supporting student ownership in their education. I will now unpack each of the three impacts noted above.

(1) Student-led IEPs changed how I thought about the IEP process - My data indicated that implementing student-led IEPs shifted my framing of the IEP process. I came to see student-led IEPs as a formative process that was for the student and their learning, rather than a summative process that produced an evaluation of the student. Framing student-led IEPs as a formative process was important because the reframing transformed how I thought about the purpose of IEPs and therefore how I engaged with the IEP process to center student learning. For example, I positioned myself as the facilitator in student-led IEPs, placing students in a leadership role. Supporting students to be leaders in student-led IEPs also meant encouraging parents to move away from the habit of turning to the teacher as the authority in the IEP process. In a leadership role, students had the opportunity to exercise autonomy by making choices and exercising a measure of control in student-led IEPs.

My data indicated that centering student learning in student-led IEPs meant students had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their IEP and learning needs. I noted that student-led IEPs may have been the first time that someone had spoken to the student about their

disability so explicitly. To me, students being asked about their IEP indicated that the IEP

belonged to them and encouraged them to take ownership in developing the IEP. Therefore, I

observed that part of the path to supporting student ownership was through framing IEPs as a

formative process in order to center student learning and support student leadership and

autonomy.

My data demonstrated that centering the student and their learning through student-led

IEPs also provided the opportunity for students to develop skills through the student-led IEP

process. Developing skills like self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy meant that

students were able to articulate their learning needs, make choices for their learning plan, and ask

for help when they needed it. Therefore, I observed that part of the path to supporting student

ownership in their education was through opportunities for students to build the skills that would

allow them to take action in determining the direction of their IEP and their education. For me,

as an LST, framing the IEP process as formative is still worthwhile whether IEPs are student-led

or not. Other IEPs do not provide the same opportunity for students to be immersed and lead

every aspect of the IEP development process but I will still ask students questions about their

learning needs, preferences, and goals so that students are supported to be centered in the

development of their IEP.

(2) Student-led IEPs changed how I approached the IEP process - I employed

scaffolding, differentiation, and adaptation strategies to help make the student-led IEP process

accessible to students. For example, I created a PowerPoint presentation called My IEP slides

with graphic organizers to break down the IEP process for students. The My IEP slides

scaffolded the development of a student's IEP into manageable steps and provided adaptations,

like visual representation of concepts, to support student understanding. I also observed that it

was relatively easy for me to differentiate within the slides themselves, meaning that I made adjustments to the content of the slides to meet the unique learning needs of the individual student.

My data indicated that considering student needs as I developed a student-led IEP process for my teaching context and creating the My IEP slides allowed me to support students with various abilities and learning needs more effectively than I had in other IEPs. For me, the shift to structuring the IEP process in a way that was accessible to students meant that students had the opportunity to be actively and meaningfully involved in every aspect of the IEP process. Therefore, I observed that part of the path to supporting student ownership in their education was through how I supported students to engage with their IEP development and making the IEP process accessible to students. I approached student-led IEPs with student learning in mind and I, in turn, learned more about how to support students to engage in the development of their IEP.

(3) Student-led IEPs changed how I experienced the IEP process - I consciously changed my actions and behavior in student-led IEPs to center the student and their learning, demonstrating thoughtful and purposeful engagement with the IEP process. I realized that it would not have been possible for students to take on a meaningful leadership role in developing their IEP without me, as the LST, learning to let go and allow the student to embody that leadership role. My data indicated that I experienced growth as an LST when I made a shift in my practice to facilitate, rather than lead, the IEP process. I learned a new way of engaging with the IEP process so that I could be effective in elevating the student's voice and their choices in the development of their IEP, even when I would not have made the same choices as an LST. I had to consciously take a step back from my familiar leadership role so that the student had the opportunity to take ownership in the development of their IEP. Therefore, I observed that part of

the path to supporting student ownership was in my thoughtful and purposeful engagement in the IEP process as an LST.

Summary of the problem for investigation

The challenge I was investigating was to implement change in my practice as a means of supporting students to articulate their learning needs and take ownership of their education through their IEP by shifting the process from being guided by the LST to the student being the leader. Implementing student-led IEPs resulted in significant change for my engagement with IEPs, student-led or otherwise. Engaging with the IEP process differently meant that I framed the IEP process as a formative process to center student learning and I used strategies to support student understanding and engagement with their IEP development. I was thoughtful and purposeful in learning to let go and allowing the student to embody the leadership role in student-led IEPs. I noticed students taking on more responsibility in the development of their IEPs when I, as the LST, stepped back as the leader in the IEP process. Next, I will reflect on my research process and discuss what worked well for me, what did not, and how my research process responded to the needs of my teaching practice.

Considering the research process

Using research to investigate my practice

I engaged in a rigorous research process to investigate a change in my practice with regard to the implementation of student-led IEPs. First, I conducted a literature review to gain a sense of what others had learned about student-led IEPs and to situate my investigation in context with established knowledge regarding IEPs. Next, I engaged in the research process myself, using self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) as my methodology. I used self-study as my methodology because it gave me the opportunity to focus on my own process for implementing

student-led IEPs in my practice. I collected data through a reflexive journal and fieldnotes, and my data was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In some ways, the research process was similar to the process I typically follow to implement change in my practice. For example, to investigate a new method of assessment for my teaching practice, I review the literature or other available resources and talk to colleagues, try the method with my students, and examine the results to determine if the method worked well within my teaching context to meet the needs of my students and my practice. Comparing my investigation of student-led IEPs through self-study with my typical process for a new aspect of my teaching practice, the parallels between the two indicate that research was a useful tool for me to engage with to investigate the implementation of student-led IEPs in my practice. Overall, following a research approach that included review, implementation, and analysis allowed me to investigate student-led IEPs as a change in my practice. Using the self-study methodology was a key component of my research process, which I will discuss next.

My practice and the self-study methodology

LaBoskey (2004) argued that self-study research often stems from recognizing areas of practice in need of improvement, and this was true for me; I sought to implement change in my practice to better support students in taking ownership of their education. The space self-study held for improvement in practice was important because I observed that my research gave me the opportunity to grow as a Learning Services Teacher (LST) and build on my learning with each of the student-led IEPs I implemented.

Self-study was helpful as a research methodology in that it allowed me to focus closely on my own practice and ground my research in my teaching context. LaBoskey (2004) argued for centering the researcher in their work through self-study and emphasized the critical role the

researcher must play in shaping the execution and understanding of the research. Furthermore, my constructivist epistemology and pragmatic worldview acknowledged that my research would be shaped by my context and experiences. Centering the research on my experiences in implementing a change in my practice and grounding my research in my teaching context was important to me because the decision meant that I was able to apply the knowledge I gained through the research process to make meaningful changes in my practice and have a positive impact on my students.

Using the self-study research methodology meant implementing a change in my practice while simultaneously investigating that change (LaBoskey, 2004), which gave me the opportunity to improve my practice by applying what I learned immediately. Keeping a reflexive journal to collect data in my investigation was especially helpful in highlighting my growth as an LST because I could observe the evolution of my thoughts aligning with my actions in implementing student-led IEPs as I reviewed the entries. Using self-study as my methodology meant that observations I made in my reflexive journal could be put into action in the next student-led IEP session, in real time. For example, early on in the student-led IEP process, I noted that parents were experiencing difficulty moving away from the habit of seeing the LST as the authority in the IEP development process. Therefore, I became intentional about directing questions to the student in front of the parents, which reminded the parents to continue centering the student in the student-led IEP process. Because my constructivist epistemology frames the production of knowledge as emerging from a researcher's experiences and interactions with the world (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014), I observed how my experiences with implementing student-led IEPs allowed me to generate knowledge that built with each student-led IEP process.

As a result, self-study worked well for me because my practice progressed alongside and through the research process.

I observed some limitations of my research in the context of self-study. Using self-study as my methodology necessarily meant I was the unit of analysis for the study (LaBoskey, 2004). Consequently, student-led IEPs were explored from my perspective exclusively and I did not have access to the perspectives of others. Students and parents are important stakeholders in the IEP process and gathering feedback from their perspectives on student-led IEPs is an aspect of student-led IEP implementation I want to explore in the future. Engaging in research through self-study also meant that my investigation of student-led IEPs was specific to my context. Therefore, my experiences and process for implementing student-led IEPs may not fit with the contexts of other researchers or LSTs. However, sharing what I have learned through my investigation of student-led IEPs may support other educators to understand student-led IEPs better and consider implementing student-led IEPs in their own contexts.

Summary of the research process

Overall, research was a useful approach to investigate a change in my practice. Engaging with review, implementation, and analysis through the research process was similar to the process I would typically follow to integrate new methods in my teaching practice. Using self-study as my methodology met the needs of my teaching practice in several ways, by emphasizing improvement in practice as a priority in research, by allowing me to focus my research closely on my practice and ground the investigation in my lived teaching context, and by giving me the opportunity to apply what I was learning right away into practice. Some limitations that emerged in the context of self-study, like the fact that student-led IEPs were explored from my perspective exclusively and an investigation specific to my context, meant that my results may not be

relevant to other contexts. Ultimately, engaging in the research process showed me a means to responding to the problem I set out to investigate. Sharing my research process and what I have learned may support others in making meaningful change in their context around student-led IEPs.

Practical impacts for an impractical practice

Practicality of student-led IEPs

My data indicated that student-led IEPs provided numerous benefits for students and I ultimately came to understand student-led IEPs as a catalyst for change in my practice that supported me to grow as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). However, I observed that implementing student-led IEPs had significant impacts on resources, particularly the use of time as a resource. Based on the time required to engage in student-led IEPs, it is not practical in my teaching context to apply a student-led process to every IEP I develop throughout the school year. Student-led IEPs took more time to prepare for and implement, compared to other IEPs. Each student-led IEP session took approximately one hour, and three were required for each student-led IEP, which resulted in a total of three hours to work through one student-led IEP process. By comparison, other IEPs usually took one hour total. Therefore, for me, it was unrealistic to implement student-led IEPs with each of the 38 students on my caseload.

Striking a balance between good pedagogy and practicality is something that I have had to do in my nine years as a teacher. For example, as an LST and a classroom teacher, I know that providing one-on-one support to students and guiding their learning in ways that connect with the student's specific learning strengths and knowledge base can be beneficial for the student's understanding of new concepts. However, it is impractical for a teacher to provide one-on-one support for each student enrolled in their class on a daily basis. What is more, not every student

requires an intense level of one-on-one support to meet their learning goals. Upon further reflection, I realized that I will still be able to use the knowledge that I gained through my research to support the students I work with. The impracticality of implementing student-led IEPs with all of my students means that I will need to find other ways of applying what I learned in my investigation to make a similar positive impact in my practice. I will discuss the ongoing impacts student-led IEPs will have on my practice next.

Impacts on my practice

Despite the time challenge of implementing student-led IEPs, my investigation will have a lasting impact on my practice as an LST. I will: (1) implement some student-led IEPs, (2) support students through a formative framework, and (3) use the resources I developed in the research for student-led IEPs moving forward.

(1) Implement some student-led IEPs – Moving forward, I will continue to implement student-led IEPs in my practice with some students who I believe will benefit the most from engaging with a student-led IEP process. For example, I might choose to use a student-led IEP process with a student who needs to build self-advocacy skills or stands to gain from exercising more autonomy in developing their education plan. Although it is not practical to implement student-led IEPs with every student on my caseload, I will still be able to draw on my experience and the resources I created to evaluate where needs would be best met through student-led IEPs and implement a student-led IEP process with those students. Perhaps, with time and experience, my capacity around student-led IEPs will shift.

(2) Support students through a formative framework - Learning to frame student-led IEPs as formative will have a lasting impact on how I approach IEPs because I have developed a better understanding of, and strategies for, centering student learning in the IEP process. For

example, I will support students to practice decision-making and autonomy as much as possible in the development of their IEP. I will support students to understand their IEP and to make informed choices regarding their learning goals by using the resources I created, like the My IEP slides, or sharing the official paperwork to document an IEP with the student so that we can review the document together. Prior to implementing student-led IEPs through my research, I was driven to center the student in the development of their IEP by consistently asking the student questions about their learning and goals in the IEP meeting. However, my efforts had varying degrees of success depending on the willingness of the student to speak up or the cooperation of the parent in allowing their child to lead. Implementing student-led IEPs and framing the IEP process as formative allowed me to understand the tools and actions needed to be more purposeful in centering students in their own IEP process. Supporting students through a formative framework in my practice will mean continuing to monitor for opportunities to center the student in their IEP and facilitating student learning in IEP development, student-led or otherwise.

(3) Use the resources I developed for student-led IEPs - Having created the structure for scaffolding the IEP process, I will be able to use the student-led IEP process I developed alongside the resources I created to support student engagement with their IEP even if I am unable to implement a full student-led IEP process with each student. I will partially implement student-led IEPs in my practice, meaning that I will use parts of the student-led IEP process to support students to engage with the development of their IEP. For example, I can use graphic organizers in the My IEP slides I developed to support students in understanding and responding to different aspects of their IEP. Using parts of student-led IEPs, rather than implementing a full student-led IEP process for every student means I will still be able to support students and reap

some of the benefits my data indicated in my investigation. In implementing student-led IEPs, I observed that students had meaningful contributions to make to the IEP process when they were supported in the process. I will continue to use the resources I created to provide structure and guidance for students to meaningfully engage in the development of their IEP, student-led or otherwise.

My invitation to others

For other educators considering a process for implementing student-led IEPs in their practice, I suggest that the educator reflect on the values they hold in their practice and whether or not those values align with student-led IEPs. Not every educator wants to let go of control in ways that student-led IEPs demand, nor is every educator prepared to support students in engaging with a student-led IEP process, including the scaffolding and support for learning needs that entails. If, however, the educator is committed to the idea of framing the IEP process as formative and to giving students the opportunity to practice autonomy in that process, student-led IEPs may be a catalyst for change in their practice and in the lives of the students that they work with.

Eisenman et al. (2005) recommended both starting small and jumping in to get started in implementing student-led IEPs and, based on my experience, I believe that both approaches have merit. Implementing part of a student-led IEP process to start, like using graphic organizers to scaffold understanding of the IEP for students, may be less intimidating than changing an entire IEP process and a partial change can still yield some benefits of student-led IEPs that my data indicated. On the other hand, jumping into student-led IEPs, as I did, allowed me to gain a new perspective on the IEP process, to experience growth as an LST, and to gain experience with

student-led IEPs. Either starting small or jumping in can be a valid entry point to implementing student-led IEPs.

I appreciated how the implementation of student-led IEPs was a catalyst for change in my practice and that student-led IEPs will have a lasting impact on how I think about, approach, and experience IEPs moving forward. Through this process, I have come to understand more about the student-led IEP process and I feel empowered to make further adjustments to implement student-led IEPs in the future or to select which parts of student-led IEPs to carry forward in my practice. How an LST starts with exploring student-led IEPs, starting small or jumping in, may depend on the resource impacts of student-led IEPs, especially time, in their context as well as the LST's willingness to engage with a change in practice.

Summary of practical impacts

Through this process, I have come to recognize that implementing student-led IEPs with all of the students on my caseload is not a practical approach for my context. However, I can still apply what I have learned through my investigation to have a positive impact on my practice by implementing some student-led IEPs, supporting students through a formative framework, and using the resources I developed for student-led IEPs. I encourage other educators to examine whether or not their values align with student-led IEPs. If the answer is yes, resource impacts may influence whether other educators start small or fully commit to implement student-led IEPs. Either way, student-led IEPs have been a catalyst for change in my practice and may lead to similar outcomes for other educators' practices.

Expanding the work of student-led IEPs

Engaging diverse learners

Following the advice of McGahee et al. (2001), I implemented student-led IEPs with students who I believed would be successful in the process. However, in the future I will implement student-led IEPs with more diverse learners, such as students who have more difficulty engaging at school or who struggle academically. As a result of my research, I believe that a student-led IEP process has a lot to offer students who are at-risk, meaning those students who face adversity beyond their disability and struggle to engage academically as a result. Framing the IEP process as formative and centering the student in their learning may provide students who are at-risk with an authentic learning opportunity that feels relevant to them; developing their own IEP. Student-led IEPs would also support students who are at-risk to practice autonomy, something they may struggle with in other areas of their lives, and develop important skills like self-determination and self-advocacy. Due to resource impacts of student-led IEPs, I will not be able to implement student-led IEPs with every student on my caseload but I will use a student-led IEP process with a few students who I believe could benefit the most from leading the development of their IEP

Gathering feedback

One of the limitations of using self-study as the methodology in my investigation was that I did not include the perspectives of parents and students. I am curious to gather feedback on the experiences of other stakeholders of student-led IEPs. I will be able to do so in my practice moving forward. My data indicated that stakeholders in the IEP process had to shift their understanding of the IEP process in order to engage with student-led IEPs. Therefore, the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders had an effect on how students engaged with student-

led IEPs. Gathering feedback from diverse stakeholders will help me to see student-led IEPs from more diverse perspectives, which will in turn allow me to make adjustments to my implementation of student-led IEPs to make the process more accessible and meet the needs of students.

Spreading change

My data demonstrated that one of the biggest resource impacts of student-led IEPs was use of time; implementing student-led IEPs in my practice took triple the amount of time compared to other IEPs, which had a significant impact on my practice as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). Solving the problem of time essentially requires more money to either hire more LSTs or to give existing Learning Service Teachers more hours allocated specifically to IEPs. Ultimately, at this moment and due to constraints, implementing student-led IEPs throughout British Columbia may not be realistic. While resource impacts of student-led IEPs and the financial considerations that accompany them are a significant factor, respect for teacher autonomy in their professional practice and giving teachers choice about what changes they make in their practice is also relevant. Despite the benefits of student-led IEPs demonstrated by my data, it would be unrealistic to expect every LST to use student-led IEPs in their practice. Therefore, solutions to support student-led IEP implementation must preserve teacher autonomy while providing incentives to try new processes.

One option I propose to support the implementation of student-led IEPs is to provide LSTs additional time through funding for one year to implement student-led IEPs. Funding from the BC Ministry of Education could be applied for by the LST and then allocated to the school to make hiring decisions that would result in the LST having the time needed to implement student-led IEPs. How much time the LST needs to implement student-led IEPs will depend on their

caseload and teaching context. Being provided with the time and space to prepare for, and implement, student-led IEPs may help LSTs overcome the psychological and logistical hurdles of trying something new in their practice. Just as I needed this time, LSTs need time allocated to implementing student-led IEPs in order to create resources to support student engagement with the process that meet the needs of their teaching context, like I did when I created the My IEP slides. Therefore, funding student-led IEP implementation for one year could allow LSTs to create resources. LSTs might then use the resources they have created in years to come, improving the likelihood of the LST continuing to implement student-led IEPs. If LSTs try student-led IEPs it will give stakeholders, including parents, students, and the LSTs themselves, the opportunity to experience the benefits of student-led IEPs. Having tried the student-led IEP process, stakeholders might like it and want to do it again. Time to implement student-led IEPs will allow familiarization with the process so that LSTs feel confident moving forward with partial or full implementation of student-led IEPs in their practice.

A second suggestion I propose to support the implementation of student-led IEPs is to provide the option for students to earn credits towards graduation for completing a full student-led IEP process. Student-led IEPs implemented through a formative framework that centers student learning provides students with the opportunity to engage in an authentic learning opportunity that has a clear connection with their goals and achieving success that is meaningful to them. Moreover, my data indicated that student-led IEPs can support students to learn important skills such as self-expression, self-determination, and self-advocacy. Therefore, allowing students to earn high school credits by engaging with student-led IEPs is a reasonable proposition because learning is taking place and skills are being developed that could count towards students earning credits for graduation. Some students with IEPs struggle to earn enough

credits to graduate, which means that earning credits through a student-led IEP could be helpful. As an LST, I spend time in various ways to support students to graduate and I also spend time developing IEPs; pooling that time to achieve both objectives, if students were able to earn graduation credits through a student-led IEP process, would make student-led IEPs more viable in my context and encourage me to allocate my time and resources to implement student-led IEPs with students who need support to graduate.

The BC Ministry of Education requires all students to complete a capstone for graduation, which has some connection points to student-led IEPs. A capstone is described by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2019) as "a rigorous learning opportunity that allows students to reflect and share in personally meaningful ways" (p. 15), which demonstrates some similarity to the reflection and sharing a student engages with through a student-led IEP process. According to the BC Ministry of Education (2019) a capstone includes three main components: (1) self-assessment and critical analysis, in which students reflect on their experiences in school and out of school, (2) process and representation, in which students create a capstone presentation, and (3) showcase and celebrate, in which students present their learning journey to an audience. Additionally, the capstone must connect to the BC Ministry of Education Core Competencies: communication (communicating, collaboration), thinking (creative thinking, critical and reflective thinking) personal and social (personal awareness and responsibility, positive personal and cultural identity, social awareness and responsibility).

There are a number of aspects of the capstone that connect with the process I developed for student-led IEPs. For example, I observed that student-led IEPs gave students the opportunity to reflect on how their disability affects their learning and to express their learning needs. Similarly, the capstone "allows students to reflect and share in personally meaningful ways"

(British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 15), meaning that both student-led IEPs and the capstone ask students to engage in self-reflection and to express their thoughts. However, the requirement to connect to the Core Competencies is not met by the process I developed for student-led IEPs. For example, the student-led IEP process does not include creative thinking, which is a Core Competency. Therefore, the student-led IEP process that I engaged in with students does not meet all of the requirements outlined by the BC Ministry of Education (2019) for a capstone at this time.

Nevertheless, the capstone illustrates that the BC Ministry of Education curriculum has scope for a project that includes self-assessment, representation of learning, and presentation to an audience to earn graduation credits. I observed students engaging with self-assessment, representation of learning, and presentation through a student-led IEP process, which indicates to me that the BC curriculum could award graduation credits for the learning that takes place in a student-led IEP process. Another possibility is expanding on the student-led IEP process to more closely adhere to the capstone requirements. Based on my research findings, I anticipate that a student-led IEP process that is expanded to meet the needs of a capstone would take additional time to implement with students, likely more than the three hours it took for me to implement a student-led IEP with one student. Therefore, time allocation for LSTs emerges as a challenge again.

Overall, the existing BC Ministry of Education curriculum demonstrates that curricular guidelines could expand to allow for credits to be earned towards graduation by completing a full student-led IEP process. Additionally, LSTs could expand the student-led IEP process to meet the requirements of a capstone. Either option would give students the opportunity to earn credits for graduation through the learning and skills engaged with through student-led IEPs. The BC

Ministry of Education could also provide funding for LSTs applicants that would be used to release some of the LST's time for one year so that the LST could implement student-led IEPs. I propose these options with the hope that student-led IEPs can spread beyond my practice to support students across the province.

Summary of expanding the work

To expand on the work I have done to investigate student-led IEPs through my research, I will implement student-led IEPs with diverse learners and I will gather feedback on student-led IEPs from students and parents. On a larger scale, although implementing student-led IEPs throughout the province of British Columbia may not be realistic due to resource implications, I proposed solutions to support student-led IEP implementation that preserve teacher autonomy while providing incentives to try a new process. First, I suggested that LSTs be provided with additional time through funding for one year to implement student-led IEPs. Second, I suggested providing the option for students to earn credits towards graduation for completing a full student-led IEP process. Either option gives LSTs the opportunity to implement and learn from student-led IEPs in their contexts and give students the opportunity to engage with developing their IEP through a student-led process and taking ownership of their education. Wider change for the IEP process may spread as a result of individuals becoming involved with opportunities like those I have proposed.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I returned to the context I shared in Chapter One and articulated the problem I was trying to solve through my research. I explained how investigating student-led IEPs showed me a path to solving the problem, by engaging with student-led IEPs as a catalyst for change that altered the way I thought about, approached, and experienced the IEP process. I

reflected on my research process and addressed what worked well for me, what did not, and how my research process met the needs of my teaching practice. In particular, I described how the self-study methodology met the needs of my teaching practice in my research. The future of student-led IEPs in my practice was addressed and I will be able to use what I have learned through my investigation to implement student-led IEPs in part or in full in order to support students in the IEP process. Expanding on the work I did to investigate student-led IEPs in my research will mean implementing student-led IEPs with diverse learners and gathering feedback on student-led IEPs from other stakeholders in the process. I proposed possibilities for spreading change in implementing student-led IEPs in British Columbia by providing LSTs additional time through funding for one year to implement student-led IEPs and providing the option for students to earn credits towards graduation for completing a full student-led IEP process. I suggested that broader change in the IEP process may result from individuals engaging with opportunities to implement student-led IEPs.

Conclusion

I stepped out on the research path with the idea in mind that students should be empowered to "take ownership for their own education" (Davis & Cumming, 2019, p. 92) and have a voice in their own Individual Education Plan (IEP). The research process guided me to investigate student-led IEPs as a change in my practice in a way that was at once familiar and more rigorous than I had engaged with in the past. In the process I realized that, by centering students in their learning through student-led IEPs, I had the opportunity to learn and grow as a Learning Services Teacher (LST). I view my research as a stone thrown into a pond: My research has had the biggest impact on the person closest (me) and created waves for some

students on my caseload who engaged with student-led IEPs. Perhaps my data and the lessons I

learned will ripple out to affect further change and more student-led IEPs in the future.

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