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South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment

Australia

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BRISBANE 8TH – 12TH JANUARY

Authentic outcomes from a PhD in vision impairment: Positives, Pitfalls, and Publishing

Jane Brown

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Session overview

- What is a PhD?

- Why take on a PhD?

- The PhD process

- My PhD story

- Positives & pitfalls

- Why share research?

- My tips

- Questions/comments

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What is a PhD?

A Ph.D. candidate must submit a project, [thesis](#) or [dissertation](#) often consisting of a body of original academic research, which is in principle worthy of publication in a [peer-reviewed](#) journal (Wikipedia, 2016)

In most cases, a PhD:

- Is an advanced postgraduate degree involving three or more years of independent research on an original topic
- Is carried out with the support of one or more expert academic supervisors
- Results in a thesis that offers a *significant original contribution to knowledge*
- Confers the title 'Doctor' upon successful candidates
- Is the highest academic degree a student can achieve and is considered the *de facto* entrance qualification for a career in academia (Find a PhD, 2016)
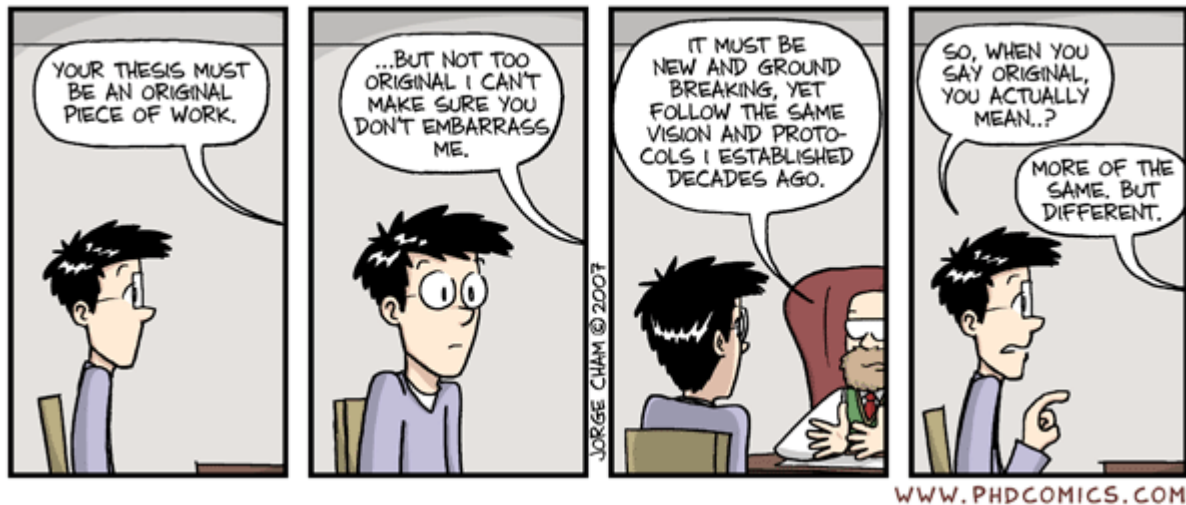
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The lighter side – PhD comics
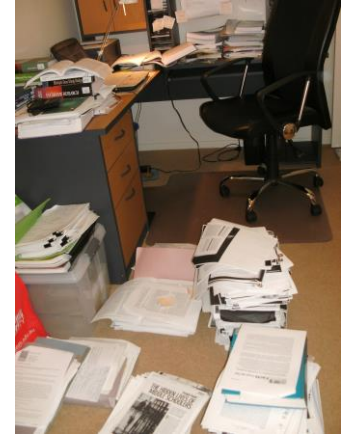
Why take on a PhD?

- Recommendation

- Area – lack of research (make a contribution)

- Linked to daily professional practice (improve practice)

- Like writing, being organised, researching & are motivated to seek answers/solve problems

- Broaden life opportunities/future career path

Brown, J.E. (2012). *Understanding the Post-School Transition of Young People with Vision Impairment* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.

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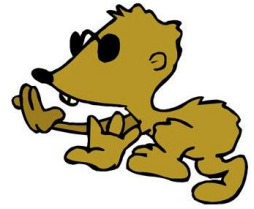BRISBANE 8TH – 12TH JANUARY

The PhD process

1. Create a research proposal

2. Literature review

3. Confirmation of candidature seminar

4. Data collection tools & piloting

5. Conduct research (data collection/results)

6. Produce/write original thesis (chapters - introduction, literature review, methodological overview, findings/results, implications & conclusions)

………….

7. Examination/PhD defence

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My PhD story

1. Create a research proposal

• Adolescents experience 2 major difficulties → engaging social world & world of work; successfully completing high school, engage in further education = high rates of unemployment

• Final hurdle in their education (i.e., transition from school to adult life) had not been examined in a systematic way (i.e., what are they prepared *for* during secondary school and what do young people actually *do* in their post-school lives?)

• *Research questions:*

  o What school and life experiences *facilitate transition* from secondary school to post-school life for adolescents with vision impairment?

  o What school and life experiences *do not facilitate transition* from secondary school to post-school life or adolescents with vision impairment?

  o How could *transition from school-to-adult life be enhanced* for adolescents with vision impairment?

• *Ethical clearance for research – submit early (make adjustments as needed)*

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My PhD story continued…

2. Literature review

• 882 references in EndNote library (360 citations in thesis) – journal articles, books, reviews, reports

• *The Qld context*

- 2004 - 119 students VI major disability → Qld state *secondary* schools (Queensland Government, Department of Education, Training, and the Arts, 2007)

- 2009 - 152 students VI → Qld state *secondary* schools (Queensland Government, Department of Education, Training, and the Arts, 2009)

• *Gap:* Studies indicated a lack of success in equipping adolescents with VI for adult life; cognitive capacity to *contribute to* and *participate in* society → contributions & life satisfaction diminished; ultimate goal for young people with VI → "healthy growth towards adulthood" (MacGregor & Farrenkopf, 2000, p. 654) – goal is not realised in practice

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My PhD story continued…

3. Confirmation of candidature seminar

- "students are admitted to candidature on a *provisional basis* subject to successful completion of the candidature confirmation procedure. This procedure assists the generation of quality research through the early detection of problems with the research program" (Griffith University, 2017)

- Feedback received → independent assessor; discussion/questions from attendees
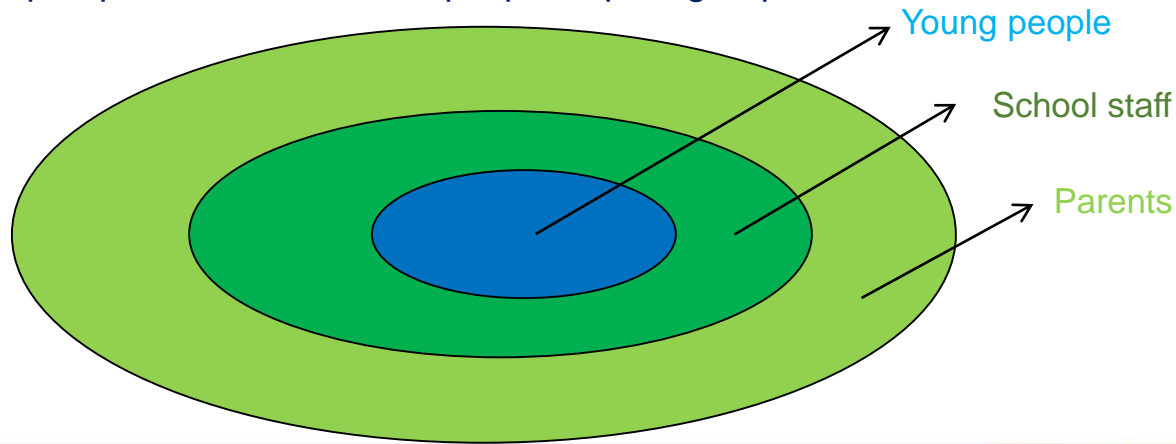

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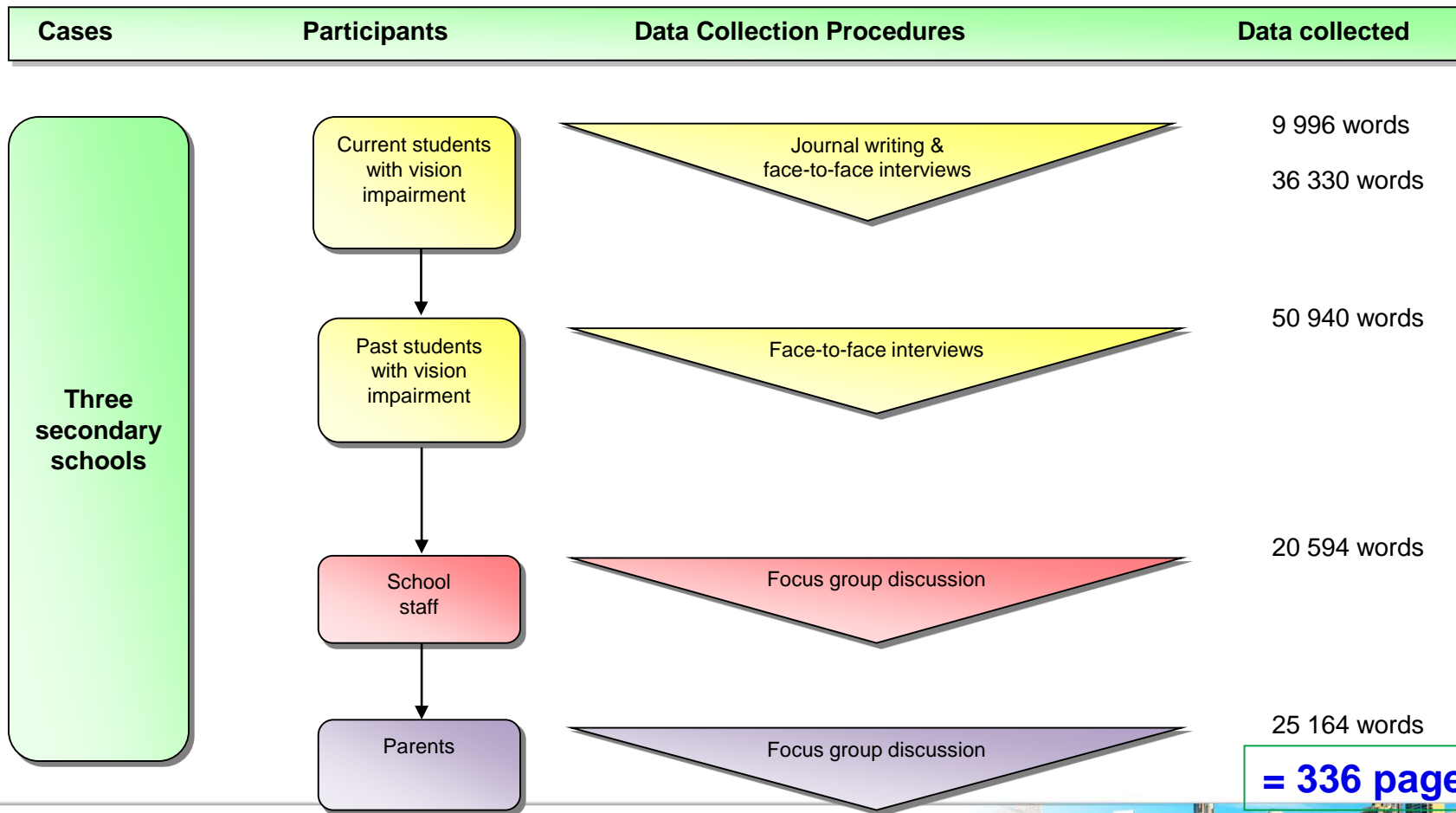BRISBANE 8TH – 12TH JANUARY

My PhD story continued…

4. Data collection tools & piloting

- Qualitative – descriptive case study approach (Gay, Mills, & , Airasian 2009); examine *perspectives* (Neuman, 2006) of key stakeholders & significant others on the *influences* that affect transition to post-school life

- ***Recruitment**

- CAPTURING perspectives across multiple participant groups

Young people

School staff

Parents

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Cases	Participants	Data Collection Procedures	Data collected

Three secondary schools

Current students with vision impairment
→ Journal writing & face-to-face interviews — 9 996 words / 36 330 words

Past students with vision impairment
→ Face-to-face interviews — 50 940 words

School staff
→ Focus group discussion — 20 594 words

Parents
→ Focus group discussion — 25 164 words

= 336 pages

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My PhD story continued…

5. Conduct research (data collection/analyse results)

• 5 x journals, 10 x on-on-one interviews, 2 x focus group discussions

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My PhD story continued…

Perspectives *of young people*

- **Results (snapshot)**
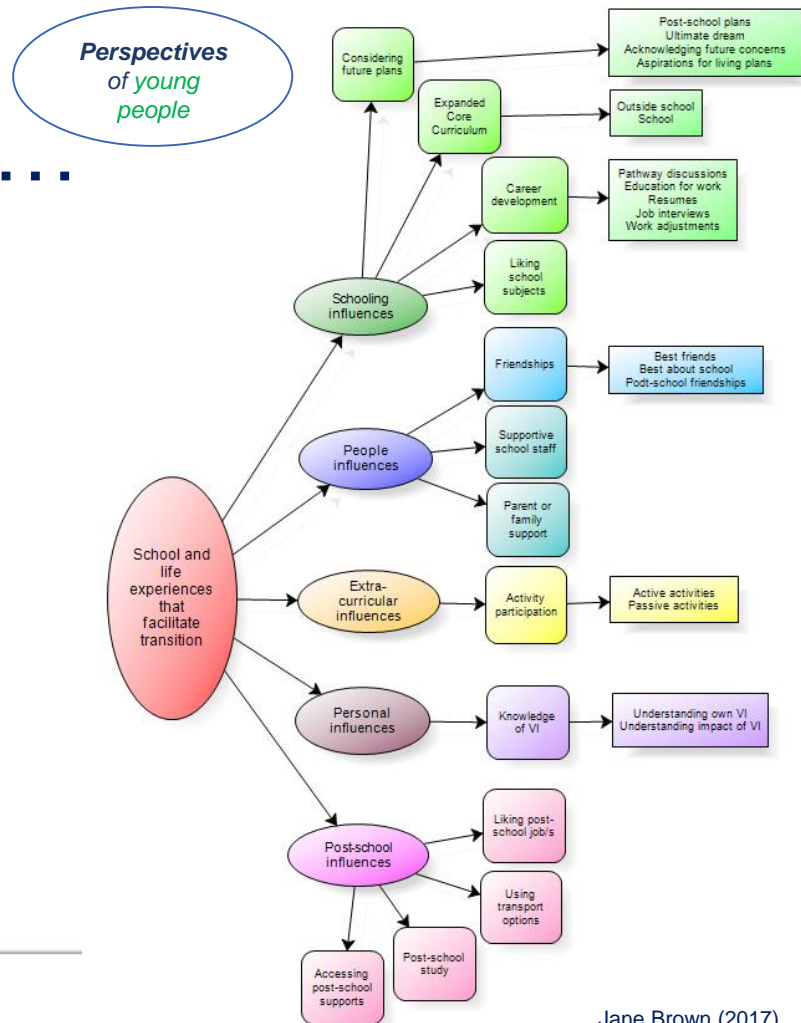- *Experiences that facilitate transition*
  - ECC experiences (life skills & social skills) at school
  - Career development (school subjects – linked to work)
  - Friendships
  - Structured post-school planning
- *Experiences that hinder transition*
  - Concerns – transition planning & prep for post-school life
  - Travel challenges (community)
  - Limited ECC – school timetables
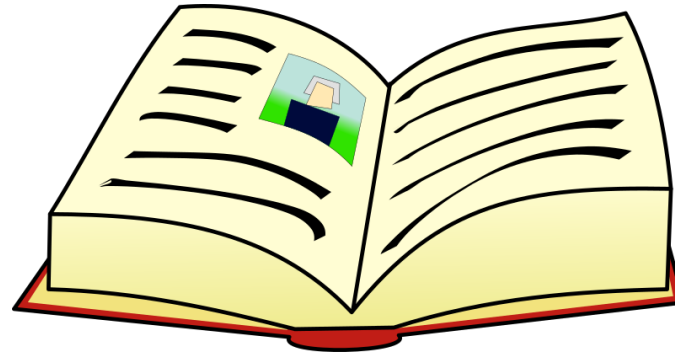 - Friendship difficulties
- *How post-school transition could be enhanced*
  - Community experiences while at school
  - Earlier post-school planning
  - Boost participation in extra-curricular activities

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My PhD story continued…

6. Produce/write original thesis (chapters - introduction, literature review, methodological overview, findings/results, implications & conclusions)

- Chapter drafts – re-working drafts
- Links between chapters
- Proofreading & formatting
- Submission

7. Examination process

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Positives

- Built stamina, perseverance; sense of accomplishment

- Made a contribution to VI research in Australia & internationally

- Built networks with VI educators & researchers around the world

Pitfalls

- Time taken to complete (5 yrs)

- Can be a lonely journey

- Can be tricky managing commitments - work, study etc.

- Recruitment in field of VI - challenging

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Why share research?

- Information sharing:

  - *"No one will ever know what you know unless you write it down"*

- VI specialisation:

  - *"How do we defend what we are doing if what we are doing has not been recorded?"*

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Sharing research

- ## Conference/seminar presentations
  - Griffith HDR conference, Gold Coast (2008) – Confirmation of PhD candidature practice
  - Australia's Disability Employment Network Conference, Brisbane (2009) – Preliminary findings
  - CEC Convention, Nashville, TN (2010) – comparing preliminary tensions across students, staff, parents
  - Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Brisbane (2010) - Qualitative Data Analysis including visual models to present data using *NVivo*
  - SPEVI-Qld presentation (2011) – Benefits of participating in an international conference
  - AASE, Gold Coast (2011) – results including tensions across students, staff, parents
  - SPEVI Conference, Sydney (2011) – overview of final results

- ## Publications
  - 2012 - Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness (American Foundation for the Blind)
  - 2011 & 2013 - Journal of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment
  - 2009 - Book chapter in 'Educational Planet Shapers: Researching, Hypothesising, Dreaming the Future'

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Tips

- Select supervisors wisely (number of supervisors, consider stages, expertise, & personnel required during progress, e.g., examination)
- Own it & drive the project yourself
- Write every day – make progress
- Become immersed in the research culture at your university (e.g., join research groups, HDR workshops & forums, technology workshops offered by library)
  - Thesis autopsy, preparing for your confirmation seminar, surviving your PhD, thesis & academic writing - clarity, getting published, surviving the supervisory relationship, polishing the thesis, creating long documents
- Become familiar with:
  - Publication manuals (e.g., APA, 2010)
  - Books on publishing (e.g., Sadler, 2006)
  - Books on research (e.g., Silverman, 2010)

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Tips continued…

- Apply for scholarships/bursaries
  - APA
  - QCT Teacher Research Grant
  - GUPSA bursary
- Utilise available resources to research students:
  - Endnote (885 references in my PhD library), *NVivo*, *Leximancer*, research experts in library, statistics/qualitative data analysis personnel)
- Utilise research funds wisely (attending conferences, purchasing programs, ordering journal articles not available locally or electronically)
- Keep a research/PhD journal (process & reflection)
- Hard drives – back up, back up, back up
- Schedule goals & routine meetings with supervisors
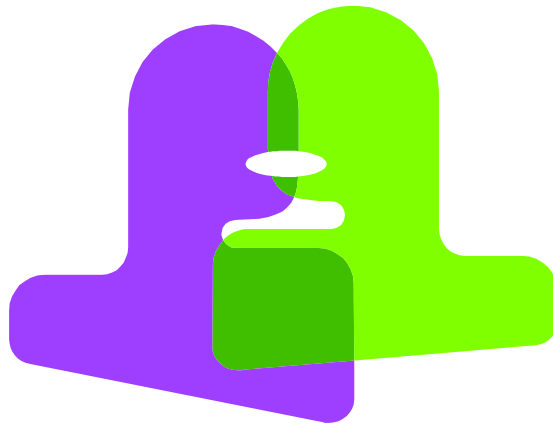
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Questions/comments

- Jane Brown:

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