



SPEVI

South Pacific Educators
in Vision Impairment

Australia

SHINING THE LIGHT ON VISION EDUCATION

2017 CONFERENCE

BRISBANE 8TH - 12TH JANUARY



Preparedness of vision impaired students for future employment

Views of students, families and vision support teachers

Natalie Kaine

Paediatric Occupational Therapist
Vision Australia
PhD Student
The University of Sydney

Professor Roger J. Stancliffe

Professor of Intellectual Disability
Centre for Disability Research and Policy
The University of Sydney

Dr Christine Chapparo

Senior Lecturer
School of Occupational Therapy
Faculty of Health Sciences
The University of Sydney



Introduction

- Employment in Australia (Vision Australia, 2012):
 - 58% are unemployed not by their own choice
 - One third of respondents report under-employment
- Similar rates reported in USA, UK and Canada
- Financial hardship; welfare-dependent; social isolation; reduced lifestyle choices; risk to emotional wellbeing
- Key factors associated with successful employment
- Pro-active, pre-emptive approach required



Background

- Barriers to employment
- Suitability of traditional pre-employment programs:
 - Mainstream programs
 - Transition programs for students with disabilities
 - Vision-specific

(Vision Australia, 2012; McDonnall, 2011)



Background

- Factors associated with successful employment
 - Levels of education
 - Print access
 - Independent travel
 - Work experience
 - Good communication and social skills

(Vision Australia, 2012; McDonnall, 2011)



Career Education for Children & Adolescents

- Importance of incidental visual learning
- Importance of families

“[an] important finding was the positive association between early parental support and future employment for youth with visual impairments” (McDonnall, 2010, p.43)

“Children’s career exploration and development is also influenced by key-figures, such as parents.” (Oliviera, Taveira, & Porfeli, 2015, p.166)

“Youths and their parents want the youths to obtain employment following their education, yet they will likely not be aware of important factors that may contribute to their ability to do so” (McDonnall, 2011, p.464)



Career Education Continuum

- Key area of learning
- Expanded Core Curriculum (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010)
- Career Education model (Wolffe, 1996, 2014):
 1. Awareness
 2. Exploration
 3. Preparation
 4. Placement
 5. Maintenance
 6. Mentoring
- First three stages typically develop across childhood and adolescence



Existing Studies: Preparedness for employment

- Studies in USA, UK and Canada
- Demonstrated importance of work experience:
 - Obtain knowledge about work through direct participation
 - Understand employer expectation
 - Obtain transferable skills
 - Evidence of ability to work, eg reference
- Work experience and students who are vision impaired

(McDonnall, 2010, 2011)



Existing Studies: Preparedness for employment

- What is likely to result in successful job attainment?

“Studies involving this population have supported the importance of self-determination, early work experiences (including the number of experiences), academic competence, level of education, parental support and expectations, health, level of functional vision, and use of assistive technology” (McDonnall, 2011, p.454)

- Continued trend towards low rates of employment



Need for Research

- International studies – generalisability to Australia?
- Predictors of future employment
- Importance of work experience vs academic workload in high school
- Limited research into benefits of career education programs for younger children
- Transition to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

(McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; McDonnall, 2011; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011; McDonnall & O'Mally, 2012)





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RESEARCH STUDY

Higher Degree by Research – PhD
The University of Sydney



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Overview of Research Study

- Qualitative research study
- Two stages
 - Stage 1: Pilot Study: Student preparedness for employment
 - Stage 2 Main study: Career education programs for children
- Ethics Approval for pilot study granted by The University of Sydney's Human Ethics Committee



Stage 1: Pilot Study

Aim

- To identify the perceptions of student preparedness for employment from vision impaired students, families and vision support teachers

- Inform Stage 2 Study into career education programs for children



Stage 1: Pilot Study

Research Questions

1. What do participants believe are important factors for future employment for young people who are vision impaired?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the views amongst the participants on preparedness of young people who are vision impaired for future employment?
3. What would participants recommend as essential inclusions in career education programs for younger students (5 - 14 years) who are vision impaired to prepare them for future employment?





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RESEARCH METHODS



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Research Methods

Participants

1. Young people (15 - 20yrs) who are vision impaired and attend or attended mainstream educational settings
2. Parents/carers of young people who are vision impaired
3. Vision Support Teachers (NSW DEC, Catholic and Independent Schools)



Research Methods

Recruitment

- Vision Agencies
- Educational Support Services
- Relevant Medical Services
- Documentation



Data Collection

- Focus Groups

“Focus group methodology is an effective technique for gathering rich, in-depth accounts of people’s thinking, experiences and attitudes” (Plummer-D’Amato, 2008, p128)

- Location of groups
- Description of group process – participants; duration; interview guide
- Digital recording of the interviews



Data Analysis

- Transcription of digital recordings
- Content + analysis of group interactions
- Coding the data
- Creating categories
- Identifying themes

(Charmaz, 2003; Green & Thorogood, 2009; Liamputtong, 2011)





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FINDINGS



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Key Findings

- Expectations and attitudes about employment
- Enablers and barriers to being “work ready”
- Important skills to develop
- Awareness of jobs and choosing career paths
- Roles and responsibilities



Key Findings

- Formal and informal career education
- Work Experience

“I know how important [work experience] is for those students ... to build their confidence, for them to get a few experiences, and you see the difference.”

(G., Vision Support Teacher)

“there was a whole lot of skills they learn through the process [of participating in work experience] which I think maybe we need to facilitate more if we can”

(L., Vision Support Teacher)



Key Findings

Question 1:

Important factors for future employment

“the more that can be done [sooner rather than later], what’s the worst thing that’s going to happen. You know, they’re going to be this incredibly socially engaged, intelligent, articulate, responsible independent traveller who can get a job!” (A., Vision Support Teacher)

[Data analysis continuing]



Key Findings

Question 2:

Similarities and differences in views amongst participants on preparedness for future employment

[Data analysis continuing]



Key Findings

Question 3:

Essential inclusions in career education programs for younger students to prepare them for future employment.

“I think it would be really useful for children, earlier on, to start looking at those things, not when they get to year 10 ... they need to ask questions about themselves, ‘What do I like doing? What’s out there? Who does jobs? What’s required of different jobs?’ ... You know, start directing, don’t leave it all till high school” (B., Parent)

[Data analysis continuing]



Conclusion

- Preparedness for future employment – what did we learn?
- Contribution to Australian knowledge base
- Implications for families, educators and service providers
- Challenges
- Next steps and future research



High school students volunteering at Vision Australia



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