

*i*nteraction

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*i*NSIDE:

**Employment of People with
Intellectual Disability**

The Australian Institute on Intellectual Disability

The Australian Institute on Intellectual Disability (AIID) operates as the information, research and development arm of NCID. The AIID is entering into a new and exciting phase that will see it expand its current role of delivering information to people with intellectual disability, their families, service providers and the broader community.

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i Editorial

A timely reminder – its time for an adventure not a crisis!

The global financial crisis will have a long-lasting effect on government funding for supports for people with disability. There will be no immediate effect but, with the Commonwealth budget and most State/Territory budgets going into deficit, experience tells us that it will be a long time before new funding is provided to support people with disability to meet their daily needs. Past experience also tells us that, no matter how many people are in urgent need of support and how many people are in crisis, funding will still not be found for people with disability until all ‘pet’ projects of politicians have been funded.

Will the large deficits lead to a reduction in support funding? Explicitly no! It is a brave politician who cuts funding to people who cannot survive except for the support they receive. But a cut by any other name is still a cut; whether it be an efficiency dividend or less than full indexation, the effect is the same – a cut in the support that people with disability receive.

Given the low priority that people with disability are given within governments, the time for action is **now**, not in a year's time when the ‘crisis’ has passed and governments are looking for ‘savings’.

Firstly, we must not be deflected by the crisis talk. The support needs of people with disability are not only important for the people involved and their families but the funding of these needs is crucial for our sense of ourselves as a fair and inclusive society. The allocation of taxpayers dollars is one of priority, not whim.

Secondly, we must safeguard what we have to ensure that politicians and bureaucrats do not slip into euphemistic ‘cuts’ language and call a cut ‘a cut’ and demand that there be no reduction in the real level of funding to people with disability.

Thirdly, in 2008, the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments allocated \$1.9 billion for support to people with disability over four years. These funds must not be wasted. Now more than ever, the dollars reaching people with disability must be maximized as it is highly likely that there will be no more for some time. Money spent on bureaucrats and processes must be avoided and the outcomes test applied rigorously to any such expenditure. Not only must such expenditure clearly demonstrate that there will be both qualitative and quantitative outcomes for people with disability, it must be regularly reviewed to ensure this remains the case.

Fourthly, current expenditure must be rigorously reviewed and any unnecessary processes and multiple bureaucratic hands urgently reduced.

Lastly, and most importantly, it is time for radical change. NOT the maintenance of the status quo advocated by the disability ministers in their communiqué of 6 March 2009, with further processes added to employ more bureaucrats! While it is a cliché to say that a crisis

with a challenge, it is invariably true. But there is another way of looking at it. A crisis can also present us with the opportunity to go on an adventure. [“An undertaking of uncertain outcome; a hazardous enterprise; an exciting experience; participation in exciting undertakings or enterprise” (The Macquarie Concise Dictionary)]. An adventure is greater than a challenge, as a challenge has the sense of overcoming something, whereas an adventure is going somewhere new with all the excitement and uncertainty that is involved. Where should we go? The adventure will start with everyone having faith – faith that people with disability and their families (where appropriate) are the best people to make decisions about their lives — that the decisions made are lived by them, and they alone bear the consequences of those decisions. So who better to have the incentive to make good decisions and, where circumstances change, to make alternative decisions? Many people with disability and their families will say that this is not much of an adventure (where is the excitement?), but they already have faith in themselves and in their community. Those they do not have much faith in are the bureaucrats and service providers who currently make the decisions about what lives they should live and then ignore the consequences. The adventure for people with disability and their families is to reaffirm the faith they have in themselves and each other and to ‘believe in change’.

Like all adventures, others have gone before us. They have shown that, if we believe in change, some politicians, bureaucrats and service providers will respond and be excited partners in our adventure. They have shown that this collective action has improved the lives of people with disability and saved money! At the moment fine rhetoric abounds, but it is not good enough to say that ‘people with disability should be at the centre of services’ — politicians must act to ensure that people with disability are at the centre of their lives, making decisions (however uncertain or hazardous) that will increase the quality of their lives and save the taxpayer money.

Mark Pattison
Executive Officer
NCID

*** Attention Retirees ***
– Keep those brain cells active! –

We are looking for **Volunteer Editors**
to assist with the editing of *Interaction*

Only requirements are:

- interest in, and some knowledge of, disability issues;
 - a few hours four times a year; and
 - a reasonable command of the English language.

For more information, contact:

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From School to *Real Work*

**A Social Inclusion Initiative
National Council on Intellectual Disability
March 2009**

***“They have a job just like their sisters
and brothers . . . and they’re valued.”¹***

- A brief overview of the status of open employment participation and people with intellectual disability in Australia
- A brief overview of the research findings about school-to-work practices that demonstrate effectiveness in assisting students with intellectual disability achieve open employment participation
- Suggested recommendation for NCID to present to government on a school-to-work policy for people with intellectual disability

Introduction

Before 1986, people with intellectual disability in Australia didn’t generally work in the open labour market in Australia.² It was believed that this group of people could not learn skills to be productive in regular business and industry.

At best, people with intellectual disability were offered sheltered workshops or day programs³. These programs, conflicting in their objectives, were considered a better alternative to institutions and thought to provide some with a vocational pathway to open employment⁴.

The research findings demonstrated that only a rare few moved from day programs and sheltered workshops to open employment, and that placement in a sheltered workshop was essentially *a terminal placement*.⁵

Research, beginning in the 1950s and confirmed in the early 1970s, provided evidence that people with intellectual disability, across the spectrum from mild to profound impairment, have the capacity to learn productive vocational skills.⁶

The findings of this research indicated that, with the right instruction, people with intellectual disability could learn the skills of many open labour market jobs. Describing this paradigmatic shift in knowledge, Wehman wrote:

From the research of Marc Gold in 1972 showing how persons with severe retardation could put together bicycle brakes to the initial demonstration that people with similar labels could be competitively employed less than 10 years later, it is evident that the increase in knowledge about transition has been incredible.⁷

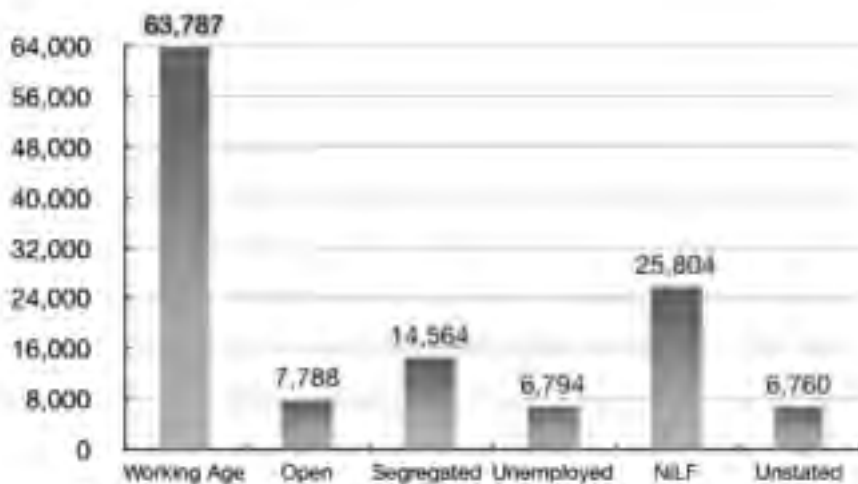
From the very first formal open employment program in 1976⁸, to a generation of such programs since, there is internationally over 30 years of evidence on *what works* when assisting people with intellectual disability to participate in the open workforce.

In response to this shift of knowledge, the Australian parliament passed the Disability Services Act in 1986 which enabled the funding of open employment models of assistance in Australia for people with intellectual disability.⁹

As a result, we have today a small number of specialist open employment services that support people with intellectual disability to work in the open labour market. These are world-class services that continue to demonstrate successful open employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.¹⁰

Yet the majority of students with intellectual disability in Australia leave school without any expectation of working. Most students are destined to become known in the data as *Not in the Labour Force* (NiLF), or placed in segregated or non-work programs, unlikely to move to a real job for the rest of their lives.¹¹

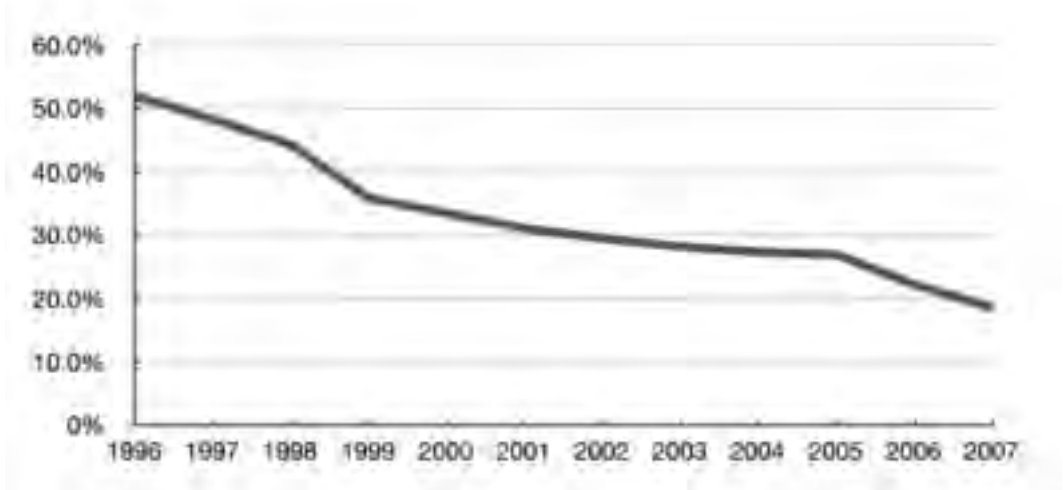
Chart 1: Employment Status of People with Intellectual Disability 2007¹²



We estimate that only one in ten Australians with intellectual disability of working age are employed in jobs in the community. Two out of ten attend sheltered workshops, and more than six out of ten are either unemployed, deemed not in the labour force, or unknown.

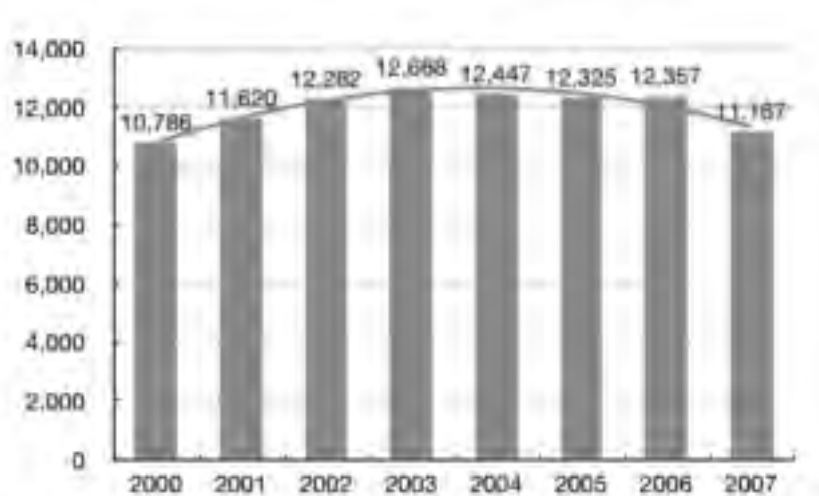
Since 2001, we have witnessed a disturbing trend in the open employment service data. People with intellectual disability are increasingly becoming a smaller proportion of jobseekers assisted by the Commonwealth open employment assistance program.¹³

Chart 2: Percentage of people with intellectual disability in the open employment program¹⁴



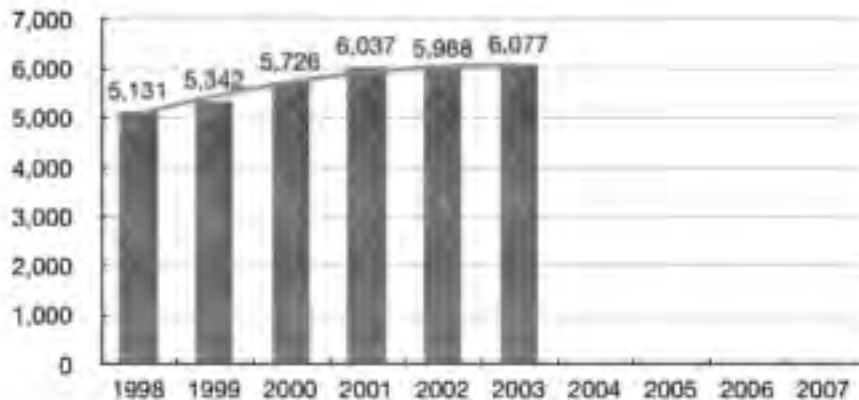
The actual number of participants with intellectual disability in the Commonwealth program has also stagnated and begun to decrease.

Chart 3: Number of consumers with intellectual disability of open employment services for the year¹⁵



The proportion of new jobseekers with intellectual disability entering the open employment program, reported by the 2007 Case-Based Funding Evaluation, was only 13.5%. At this rate, it is likely that the negative participation trend of people with intellectual disability in the open employment program is set to continue.

Up to 2003, the Commonwealth published the number of workers on a snapshot day each year as part of the Disability Service Census.

Chart 4: Number of people with intellectual disability employed on 30th June each year¹⁶

In 2003, there were about 6000 employees with intellectual disability supported by the Commonwealth open employment program. We are waiting for the Commonwealth to publish the data from 2004 to 2007 so that we can fully understand the recent trend. The data does suggest a stagnation trend from 2001 in the number of new workers with intellectual disability.

The data portrays an underemployment and social exclusion of substantial magnitude. And the data shows that the open employment program is failing to address this situation. This is clearly unacceptable. Furthermore, such a high unemployment and underemployment rate for persons with intellectual disability is unnecessary. Research and practice show that many, many more people with intellectual disability are capable of open employment.

Our experience is that employers do and will employ people with intellectual disability when this decision is based upon economic value, together with ongoing support from quality specialist employment assistance.

It is our belief, however, that our service systems do not generally have the expectation that youth with intellectual disability can and will move into open employment. These lowered expectations are shaped by outdated or inadequate training, and by a lack of exposure to programs that have fidelity with the evidence and successfully achieving positive open employment outcomes.

In simple terms, we must move from a position where open employment for young people with intellectual disability is demonstrated on a small scale, to a new position where it is expected and typical.

Australia must begin to implement national strategies that produce greater rates of open employment participation and social inclusion for this population group. The Australian Government's Social Inclusion agenda and the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy offer an opportunity to implement effective *joined up*¹⁷ solutions to assist young people with intellectual disability to successfully move from school to work.

It will require, however, a national leadership that has fidelity with the research evidence, facilitates collaboration across levels of government and service sectors, and a preparedness to test and trial new approaches.

It will require empowered parents and innovative educators to collaborate with quality specialist open employment services to vigorously set down a path for young people leaving school to go to *real* work.

If our goal for students with intellectual disability is the dignity of work and not welfare, the dignity of inclusion and not segregation, then the research evidence provides a way forward.

School to *Real* Work

What is school to *real* work transition?

A *transition* is literally a process or period of changing from one state or condition to another.¹⁸ *School to work transition* has been described as *a bridge from youth to adulthood*.¹⁹ It is a *coming of age or rite of passage*.

In our society, *transition may be defined as the life changes, adjustments and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from a school environment to independent living and work environments . . . a change in status from behaving primarily as a secondary school student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include having employment, participating in post secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships*.²⁰

School to work transition encompasses a critical developmental period between youth and adulthood. It flows from a time and place of compulsory schooling to valued adult roles in society — a society which highly values employment as a basis for social inclusion.²¹

Transition raises questions about the roles of parents, schools, employment agencies and others through this period. What should schools be doing that is effective in supporting young people move from school to work? What are the key skills that young people need to be successful in making this transition? What should parents and families be doing to support this developmental phase? And how should schools link students with adult roles and employment services to ensure a smooth transition?

Transition from school to work is often a period of anxiety for young people and their families. Making life decisions about future study, careers and personal relationships can be a daunting period of decision-making.²² There is no reason to doubt that, for young people with intellectual disability and their families, this transition is as at least as daunting, if not more so.²³ Yet the research provides us with some promising models which contribute positively to a successful transition to work and adult roles.

A presumption of employability in the open labour market

Our position is that potential can never be shown . . . changing expectancies, however, is where any hope to make major changes must begin.²⁴

A critical component of assisting young people with intellectual disability to successfully move from school to work is to have the expectation of open employment after school.

We must presume that people with intellectual disability have the capacity to be employed in the open labour market — a presumption supported by the research evidence, but one that needs

to be vigorously supported by the adults in the lives of young people – i.e. parents, educators and employment services.

Expectations have profound implications. If we agree that *schools are time-limited means to ends*,²⁵ what we do now is heavily influenced by the *ends* we are seeking to achieve. If our expectation is open employment, we have the technology for instructing and supporting young people with intellectual disability to achieve this goal.

A presumption of employability will cause us to investigate models of *school to work transition* that demonstrate positive findings. When we study successful models of school to work, we find models marked by high expectations that students will leave school in paid work and be linked to open employment services to continue this goal after graduation.

Parent-Teacher Partnerships

*Parent involvement is perhaps the most significant factor in the transition outcomes for students from youth into adulthood*²⁶

Parents are key in creating the expectancy that young people with intellectual disability will move from school to open employment. And creating a collaborative and informed parent-teacher partnership is essential in the success of a school to work transition model.

It is common, however, for many parents to currently expect that a non-work day program or a sheltered workshop is what their son or daughter can expect after graduation. With only one in ten young Australians with intellectual disability moving from school to open employment, it is not surprising that parents reflect these low expectations.

The research literature suggests that educators should begin a partnership with parents from the beginning of the transition process — a partnership built upon a collaborative and cooperative approach.²⁷

There are some key reasons. Parents have the most knowledge of their children and bring invaluable information to the planning, implementation and evaluation process of transition strategies. Parents are first and foremost lifelong advocates of their children and will be the only people to have a long term and stable contact with the student throughout the entire transition process.

Participation includes, but is not limited to, involvement in transition planning, supporting the development of skills and strategies, and becoming informed and familiar with the role of employment and adult support agencies. Parents and family members can also play a critical role through their contacts in the community when seeking opportunities for community-based instruction and on-the-job training.

Ultimately, parent participation is important in creating the expectancy that having a job in open employment after graduation is a realistic goal. Exposing parents to the research evidence of open employment for people with intellectual disability, and to meet other parents and people with intellectual disability who are examples of success, allow parents and students to have informed choices when setting goals for school to work transition.

Teachers are a critical component of the partnership with parents in the implementation and success of a school to work transition model. Innovative teacher advocacy in providing evidence-based school to work practices has been identified as a key factor of success.²⁸

The goal is open employment. Non-work support is supplementary to, not a replacement for, employment

*We believe, however, that all students must work in real jobs before they leave school. We believe strongly that paid employment before exiting school is highly correlated with successful adult employment.*²⁹

Work is a way of life in Australia. Like other western economies, having a job is considered to be a valued adult role providing not only income, but esteem, self worth, dignity, mental and physical health, and a large part of who we are as adults.³⁰ The current deep concern of the global financial crisis and its effect on jobs, underlines the importance of employment to social inclusion and participation in our society.

People with intellectual disability are typically at great risk of low expectations and being perceived as *unable to work* in open employment. This is a significant barrier as they move from school to becoming an adult. In response to this risk, this paper focuses upon inclusive employment as the primary goal of *transition* rather than the wider goal of *community inclusion*. This is not intended to minimise the importance of other adult roles, but rather to emphasise the substantial influence that employment can have on the social inclusion of one's life.

This position is also purposely intended to counter the misconception that many people with intellectual disability do not have the capacity to work in open employment and need to have *other options* when they leave school.

The broader goal of *community inclusion* involving home, recreation, art, sport and relationships, is a genuine human need for people with intellectual disability to be fulfilled, as it is for any member of our community. However, these adult roles and activities should not be perceived as *alternatives* to work. They are not. They are important aspects of personal growth and community participation and should be seen as *supplementary* to the role of work, not a replacement.³¹

Early development is critical to success in real work

*The education of children with disabilities is critical to the foundation of adult adjustment and success in work and the community.*³²

We need to interpret the developmental process of becoming an adult as beginning early. The research evidence emerging from brain science and developmental research emphasises the importance of early learning, particularly during the years before school.

As noted by the Prime Minister:

*Leading developmental researcher Jack Shonkoff argues that 'all children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn', and that it is from birth to age five that 'children rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds'. During this early period of life, brain cell growth and 'wiring' of connections drives 'remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains' and development of 'emotional, social, regulatory and moral capacities'.*³³

Research from many developmental fields of study, including literacy and positive behaviour, emphasises the early developmental period for creating a foundation of skills important for success as adults. The Prime Minister also noted the impact of early development on economic participation in later life.

*Professor James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, concludes that learning starts before formal education begins, and sets the foundation for success or failure at school and life beyond.*³⁴

The importance of early education and how this relates to adult roles is a critical understanding for parents and teachers to consider. For instance, teaching a young child to return toys to a toy box after play time may be interpreted as setting early habits and skills that become the adult skills of following instructions and completing tasks to a required standard — key competencies considered vital by employers. Here we see the opportunity of building developmental steps at an early stage for long term adult benefit — skills and habits which are easier to teach early rather than later.

Beginning *early* has another dimension that is particular to *school to work transition* models. For young people with intellectual disability at secondary school, early means setting career and post-school goals, gaining skills in community settings, work experiences and developing an expectancy of work after graduation.

For educators, it is about providing a curriculum both at school and in the community that prepares young people for adult and work roles. Research indicates that there is a greater likelihood of success in open employment if students, parents and educators utilise the time before graduation to begin to build expectancies and skills of adult and work roles.

Discrete school to work transition activities (i.e. transitional planning, work experience, community-based instruction) should begin before leaving school³⁵ and should include participation of progressively extended periods of time in community-based sites away from school.³⁶

The secondary school curriculum needs to move beyond the classroom, early, in order to prepare young people with intellectual disability for adult and work roles. The message for educators is that the goal of open employment is enhanced through ‘early intervention’ before graduation.

Inclusion

*All young people with disabilities should have the opportunity to be included in the workplace and schools. Special schools, segregated work activity centers, and programs that are designed only for people with disabilities must become institutions of the past. People with disabilities consistently perform better in typical work environments and natural community environments.*³⁷

The history of education for children with intellectual disability is dominated by their exclusion from compulsory education. When education was provided, this was frequently arranged by grouping together children with intellectual disability in segregated classes or schools.

Although many children with intellectual disability have increasingly had the opportunity to be included in regular classes, the habit of grouping students with disability together in special classes or schools is still pervasive.³⁸

The comparative educational research, however, has repeatedly shown since 1932 that students with intellectual disability do better academically and socially in inclusive classes than in segregated classes.³⁹

Brown, in his recent longitudinal research on school to work, highlights the important relationship of inclusive education to adult and work roles. He recommends that educators:

- *teach skills in inclusive settings at school, but also in community settings*
- *teach students under natural supervisory conditions instead of 1:1 or low ratio instructional groupings*⁴⁰

The core of Brown's message is that inclusion with peers in school, and in community settings while still at school, offers an opportunity to learn skills within real settings. Within these settings, students learn how to behave and adapt within the rhythms, interactions and difficulties of typical groupings that they cannot learn in segregated classrooms. This (early) development before leaving school provides a young person with the experience of the skills and behaviour required by their peer group both at school and among co-workers and customers at a work site.

Brown, however, provides a word of caution about inclusive education and its curriculum design at the secondary school level. He concludes that the position that the only place where students with disability can learn what they need to learn to lead a productive adult life is the general education classroom is absurd.⁴¹ Brown points out that inclusive education in the general education classroom needs to be supplemented with community-based instruction outside the classroom and, in particular, systematic instruction in inclusive workplaces. The best curriculum in the most inclusive school will not automatically lead to open employment unless there are also increasing opportunities for community-based instruction and training on-the-job in paid positions.

Self-Determination and Planning

*Promoting and enhancing the self-determination of youth with disabilities has become best practice in transition services.*⁴²

Self-determination is considered to be a characteristic of success in adult life. Self-determination is defined in the literature as a characteristic of individuals who choose goals, pursue them with persistence, evaluate progress, adjust strategies and solve problems in the process of achieving goals.

*School to work transition planning is about determining the steps in order to reach a future goal. Transition planning during secondary school offers parents and educators a process to begin to teach and facilitate the setting, implementation and monitoring of goals with a student.*⁴³

*One of the most important aspects of helping young people attain happiness, success and competence is the process of helping them set goals.*⁴⁴

The research has found that teaching young people to make choices and effective decisions results in enhanced transition outcomes including reduced problem behaviours, increased engagement in activity, developed problem solving skills, improved social skills, increased learning skills and higher work productivity.⁴⁵

Including the teaching of self-determination in the secondary school curriculum, and active student involvement in transition planning, are important evidence-based strategies that have a positive effect on employment outcomes.

Community-Based Curriculum

*. . . natural environments must be used when teaching. Natural environments refer to those environments that are frequented by nonhandicapped peers. In order to facilitate generalization of skills, instruction should occur within a variety of natural environments.*⁴⁶

A core feature of successful school to work transition programs is the practice of community-based instruction (CBI)⁴⁷. CBI is about instruction in natural settings, such as restaurants, shopping complexes, recreation centres, work sites and other age appropriate settings in the community.

CBI is not meant to replace inclusive education in terms of class-based curriculum, but rather to expand and complement this with instruction in community places outside the classroom.

Research has repeatedly found that skills are best taught in the environment where they are to be used. This finding becomes increasingly important for people with intellectual disability who invariably find it difficult to transfer or generalise skills from one environment to another.

Learning in the community allows students to be involved with the actual situation including the physical landscape and materials, the social demands of communication and behaviour, and learn skills among the typical distractions of the natural environment.

CBI exposes students to a variety of experiences while building skills to participate in activities that are typical in their community. These experiences provide a rich environment in which to learn adaptive social and communication behaviour with members of the community.

A key discussion on what to teach requires consideration of what skills will allow a student to be competent at home and in the community. Such a consideration needs to take into account the skills upon which the community and employers place high value, the strengths and weaknesses of the student, and the relevant skills required by different community settings.

Community-based instruction is not exclusive to models of *school to work transition*. A reading of research from early education through to employment indicates a convergence about the importance of typical and inclusive settings for adaptive development. We find this in the research of early intervention where there is great interest in how to provide parents with education on how to teach their child at home and in community settings.⁴⁸ We find this in the research on inclusive education where there is great interest in building the capacity of regular teachers in teaching to the diversity of students, including students with disability.⁴⁹ And we also find in the vocational research that the systematic instruction of skills on-the-job at a typical workplace produces the best open employment outcomes.⁵⁰

The message from research is clear. If we are to intervene and teach skills, we must resist the old habit of grouping young people with intellectual disability, but rather embrace and figure out how to teach skills in the settings where they are to be performed — be it at home, in the classroom, in the community or at the work place.

Systematic instruction

*Research has repeatedly demonstrated that systematic instruction in the community leads to learning and retaining new skills better than in a facility.*⁵¹

An important teaching component of community-based instruction is the systematic instruction of job skills. Systematic instruction is arguably the key instructional technology which provided the foundation for assisting people with intellectual disability to work productively in the open labour market.

It is a training model famously brought to the world's attention by Dr Marc Gold who demonstrated between 1967 and 1972 how people with significant intellectual disability – thought to be unable to work – could learn complex job tasks such as building bicycle brakes and assembling electronic circuit boards.

Gold utilised a training technique that involved the breaking down of job tasks into smaller steps (i.e. task analysis). The instruction is characterised by high levels of engagement with the task together with enough instruction to correct errors until mastery of the task is achieved. Gold demonstrated that, via this form of training, people with intellectual disability could achieve productivity and quality work levels commensurate with workers without disability.

Today, systematic instruction of skills on-the-job is a critical practice for open employment service. It is a key feature of those services that are achieving the best employment outcomes for people with significant intellectual disability.

Work experience while still at secondary school is pivotal to achieving open employment as an adult

We know that paid employment while in school directly relates to integrated employment in adulthood and, therefore, there must be a more coordinated and pronounced legislative statement about paid employment for students while they are still under special education entitlement in the public schools.⁵²

The importance of inclusion and community-based instruction leads to a core conclusion about the design of models of *school to work transition*. That is, students need to have increasing opportunities for work experiences throughout secondary schooling, which ultimately should be a major component of their final year of secondary school.

This emphasis will of course be guided by the goals and choices of the students and their families. The clear message from the research, however, is that an evolving focus upon employment during secondary school sets the foundation for the early development of skills and behaviours that are relevant for adult work roles after graduation.

The research points strongly to the importance of work experience for youth with disability while at school as a central factor in the success of open employment after graduation. Luecking, following 20 years of developing and evaluating school to work approaches, writes:

Since the mid 1980s, research has shown that youth with disabilities who participate in work experiences, especially paid work, while in secondary school are significantly more likely to hold jobs after they exit school than those who do not have these experiences. Simply stated, youth benefit from frequent and continuous exposure to real work environments throughout the secondary school years and beyond.

This same body of research has also demonstrated that work experiences during secondary school years are valuable for any youth with a disability, regardless of his or her primary disability label, race, gender, relative need for accommodation support, or any other

*descriptive characteristic.*⁵³

Luecking's research findings are timely and pertinent in pointing parents, educators and governments to pivotal activities for youth with disability in preparation for employment after school graduation. Work experience, including career explorations, job shadowing, internships, cooperative work placements, service learning, unpaid work and paid work (the *gold standard* of work experience), are important school-to-work activities that increase the likelihood of youth with disability to get and keep a job as adults.⁵⁴

A critical outcome of such an approach is the establishment of a strong connection to employment. This may take the form of a career pathway with links to employment opportunities and open employment assistance to continue supporting the employment goal after graduation.

Employers - Essential Partners

*Work experience is important for students to get exposure to the world of work. And work experience can only happen if there are employers who are willing to include young people.*⁵⁵

It is important to recognise the positive involvement of employers in the employment of people with intellectual disability. Many employers have employed jobseekers with intellectual disability and have publicly acknowledged the positive benefits that have accrued to jobseekers, co-workers, customers and the profit of the enterprise.⁵⁶

There is a growing body of evidence on why employers agree to include youth with disability in work experience or as employees. A central message to schools and employment providers is that *it is more effective to appeal to employer's self interest than it is to appeal to their potential altruistic interest in helping youth.*⁵⁷ Specifically, this means demonstrating how the inclusion of a worker will meet a specific business need.

The research indicates that disability is not the primary reason for hiring. Instead, the findings suggest that a valued contribution to an enterprise relegates disability in importance to the employer. Gold noted, over 30 years ago, in his competence/deviance hypothesis, that *the more competence an individual has, the more deviance will be tolerated in him by others.*⁵⁸ Recent research appears to confirm that it is the strengths of a jobseeker matched with the needs of a business that is key in setting up work experience and successful job placements. These findings stress the importance of school and employment personnel to understand the needs of business and industry in order to understand what employers want and need. Partnerships must emphasise how this will benefit the employers.⁵⁹

As long-term ongoing support for employees with intellectual disability is evidence-based practice, success of work experience and ultimately career employment, will require a maintenance of support and service to employers that is responsive and effective in meeting changing circumstances for the employee and the employer.

Service Collaboration and Cooperation - And Models That Work

*Effective transition planning and service provision depend on functional linkages between school and adult service agencies.*⁶⁰

The goal of open employment for students with intellectual disability requires collaboration and cooperation with employment and adult services before graduation.

The pathway from school-to-work crosses the boundaries of education and employment sectors. Open employment and adult agencies should be fundamental partners with schools and families in the planning and implementation of a school-to-work curriculum before graduation, and ongoing employment and adult support after graduation.

An early and strong collaboration offers the opportunity for shared resources and specialist knowledge of employment assistance to be shared across the education and employment sectors.⁶¹

The research provides some good examples of collaborative and cooperative models between students, parents, schools, employment and adult services, and employers.

The Transition Service Integration Model (TSIM)⁶²

This USA model integrates the resources and expertise of schools, employment and adult services. The three sectors work in partnership during the student's last year of school to develop a paid job and inclusive community activities when not working. The model provides services to enable students to secure open employment and access to non-work community environment prior to graduation. Post graduation employment assistance and non-work support is secured to continue after graduation. The result of the TSIM over 5 years between 1998 and 2002, of 293 students with severe intellectual disability, was an open employment outcome of 60%. The average wage was US \$6.20 and an average of 14 hours of work per week.

Bridges

This USA model was developed by the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD) and has assisted 15,000 students since 1989. The model which operates in several major cities in the US provides initial career counseling and job search, placement in a paid position with training and support and post placement follow-up support. Students from a range of primary disability groups are referred by teachers. The program has a job placement rate of 68%-90% with 75% of the youth completing 90 days on the job.

The South Australian State Transition Program

This Australian model creates a partnership between open employment, schools, vocational education providers, parents and relevant State and Commonwealth departments. As with TSIM above, the STP operates over the last year of school providing vocational education, training and work experience. The results of the STP for 335 students with intellectual, physical and learning disability, was an open employment outcome of approximately 41%.⁶³ We should acknowledge the key coordination role that PE Adelaide, a Commonwealth-funded employment service, had in the achievement of these employment outcomes.

The NSW Transition To Work (TTW) Model

This Australian model is not a collaboration with the school sector. It is a model which gives school leavers after graduation the choice of a *transition to work* program — school leavers who would otherwise enter State day programs after graduation. The program for 2004 and 2005 achieved an average open employment outcome of 34%.⁶⁴

It is important, however, to note the performance of one particular service within the NSW TTW program. *Jobsupport* for 2004 and 2005 achieved an open employment outcome rate of 70% for school leavers with moderate to severe intellectual disability with average

weekly wages of \$243 and 18 hours of work per week. Jobsupport is a Commonwealth-funded employment service which also operates a NSW-funded TTW service, *Community Work Options (CWO)*. CWO gives school leavers with intellectual disability extra help before they attempt paid employment, by providing them with successful work experience and by addressing issues that are preventing their acceptance by an open employment service.

The substantive results achieved by *Jobsupport* suggest that linking school leavers to high quality open employment service is a critical factor. One cannot help but wonder what the effect on these results would be if the school leavers had been provided similar experiences and training before graduation.

Quality Open Employment Service

As suggested above, quality open employment service is a critical element of an effective school to work transition model. The employment service carries the responsibility for ongoing support to ensure continued participation in employment and career development.

The research points to some key competencies that are linked to employment outcomes. These include practices of job development, systematic instruction on the job and long-term ongoing support to both the employee and employer.

It is this fidelity with the research evidence that is essential to quality employment service. These practices are however becoming increasingly rare rather than ubiquitous among service personnel. There is an urgent need to implement a national plan of training and technical assistance so that evidence-based practice may be fostered throughout the employment service sector.

For people with intellectual disability, successful outcomes require an understanding of key employment assistance research findings.

Job development

Typical recruitment practices (résumés, job matching and job descriptions) do not work for this group and act as barriers to their inclusion in the workforce. Best practice requires the development of jobs that meet the needs of employers and which match the strengths of jobseekers. This requires employment services to get to know the business, and determine a match between business needs and the strengths of jobseekers — demonstrating to business how existing job descriptions and organisation structures can be modified to include disadvantaged jobseekers is critical.⁶⁵

On-the-job training

Dr Marc Gold's research (1967-1976), demonstrating that people with intellectual disability could assemble complex bicycle brakes at productivity rates equal to people without disability, changed the focus from inability on the part of the jobseeker to learn to that of our capacity to teach job skills.

Research found that systematic training on-the-job, using applied behaviour analysis, was significantly superior in outcomes compared to off-site training due to the weak ability of people with intellectual impairment to transfer skills across settings.⁶⁶

Ongoing support

Ongoing support to the employee and employer is critical to maintaining long-term

employment success. The smallest change in employment circumstances (change of job duties, supervisor or co-workers) can quickly lead to a loss of competency, confidence and ultimately job loss, unless these changes are managed carefully. Ongoing support acts as a monitoring process to ensure that the job continues to meet the needs of the employer and the employee.

Putting it all together

This paper has provided an overview of the pieces of practice that contribute to the pathway of a student with intellectual disability from school to open employment. Transition to work success indicates that these evidence-based pieces are interrelated but not sufficient on their own.

Theme One - High Expectations

Having high expectations that a young person with intellectual disability will, like other students, make their way from school to real work is a fundamental value and belief — a belief that must permeate the efforts and strategy of students, parents, educators and employment service personnel.

Theme Two - An Early and Long-Term Perspective

Early development and education is critical to success as an adult. Brain science and early educational research provides strong evidence that the decisions and interventions we make now have a long-term impact. School to work transition is yet another period of early intervention whereby parents and educators can begin to plan and do things that we know have a positive impact of future participation in the workforce. Work experience while still at school is pivotal and linked to successful employment after graduation.

Theme Three - Inclusion and Natural Settings

Learning needs to take place in typical, natural, inclusive settings where children and people without disability hang out – regular classrooms, community settings and regular workplaces. These settings provide the basis for the most powerful and adaptive skill development. The implication for secondary school curriculum is that inclusive classroom-based education is necessary but not sufficient. Community-based instruction and instruction on-the-job are critical elements of a complete secondary curriculum to prepare youth with intellectual disability for open employment success.

Theme Four - Collaboration across Home, School, Employment/Adult services and Employers

Parents, teachers and employment agencies must work together across professional and purview boundaries to ensure a seamless transition from school to work. Each partner in this collaboration is required to play an important role that contains its own set of quality requirements. Transition planning at secondary school should occur well before graduation.

Theme Five - Successful models of school to work for people with intellectual disability have high fidelity in a combination of evidence-based practices

Research finds that a combination of inclusive settings, community-based training and on-the-job training are potent predictors of post-school employment for students with severe disability, regardless of intellectual functioning.⁶⁷ Success is not due to one thing alone but the combination of a number of evidence-based practices.

Policy Recommendation

That the Commonwealth seek to legislate the requirement of secondary education authorities to provide transition services to students with intellectual disability. To ensure that all students with intellectual disability have available to them an education to prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.

Such a legal requirement of secondary school authorities exists in the United States through Public Law 108-446 – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

Improving the quality of secondary education for students with disability should be perceived as an essential part of our national policy on social inclusion, the education revolution policy of the current Commonwealth government, and in fulfilling our obligations under the United Nations' disability rights instrument.

The law should require secondary school authorities to begin providing transition services to students with disability no later than 16 years of age. Providing effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment or education is an important measure of accountability for young people with intellectual disability and their families.

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Parent comment made on ACA on Channel Nine, December 2008
- ² There were exceptions, but these were few. For people with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disability, open employment was not considered feasible.
- ³ Models of service that continue today. These models are characterised by the grouping of people with disability in association with a belief that they cannot work in open employment. This model has gone by many names, including sheltered workshops, business services, disability enterprises.
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- ⁵ See Bellamy et al (1982), cited above; and Wehman, P. (1982). *Competitive Employment. New Horizons for Severely Disabled Individuals*. Paul H Brookes Publishers: Baltimore & London, see foreword and p. 6.
- ⁶ Clarke, A. M. & Clarke, A. D. B. (eds.). (1958). *Mental Deficiency. The Changing Outlook*. The Free Press: Glencoe, Illinois. Gold, M. (1972). Stimulus Factors in Skill Training of Retarded Adolescents on a Complex Assembly Task: Acquisition, Transfer, and Retention. (1972). *Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 76, 517-526.
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- ⁸ The Employment Training Program of the University of Washington at <http://depts.washington.edu/etp/history.shtml>. Mark Moss, J. M., Dineen, J. P., & Ford, L. H. (1986). University of Washington's Employment Training Program, in *Competitive Employment: Issues and Strategies* (Ed. Rusch, F.R.). Paul H. Brookes: Baltimore:
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in open employment. This employment agency has had substantial success and is today rated by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as operating four 5-star services. A rating that is rare and unique. With an average employment outcome rate of 75%, this service demonstrates that fidelity with the research evidence, open employment for people with significant intellectual disability is realistic and happening.

- ¹¹ It is difficult to glean the actual participation of people with intellectual disability in open employment due to the reporting formats and choices of Australian government data. *AIHW Bulletin 67* combines people with learning difficulty with people with intellectual disability; the *CSTDA data cube* doesn't separate open employment data from sheltered workshop participation, and the *FHCSIA Disability Services Census* has chosen not to publish *on the books* data of open consumer and employees since 2003, and now reports trends by combining intellectual disability with autism and specific learning difficulties. For this paper, we have had to be creative in presenting data. While accuracy cannot be assured, we do think that the data presented in the paper does at least give a general picture of the size of the issue.
- ¹² Chart 1 has drawn its figures from the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Data Cube*. We have split the AIHW data cube figure for *employment* into open employment and segregated workshops utilising the *FHCSIA 2007 Disability Services Census Report*. These figures do not add up to the AIHW figure for *employment* and are only used to be indicative of the size of participation. The open employment figure is likely to be inflated due to the definition being used by FHCSIA.
- ¹³ 30.9% in 2001 - to 18.4% in 2007. It was 48% in 1997, and is down 30% in ten years. *The Case Based Funding Evaluation (2007)* shows that the intellectual disability population was 13.5% of the cohort of jobseekers entering into the program from July to December 2005.
- ¹⁴ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
- ¹⁵ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
- ¹⁶ Figures drawn from the Commonwealth *Disability Services Census Reports*
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- ²⁷ Luecking, R. G. (2009). The Way to Work. How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition. Paul H Brookes: Baltimore. p. 83 - 98
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In Search of Best Practices of Inclusive Employment Assistance for People with Intellectual Disability:

A USA-site visit report to the Australian open employment sector

(USA, September-October 2008)

Peter Symonds

Note: The USA uses the term Supported Employment to describe open or community-based employment. When the term ‘Supported Employment’ is used, readers should understand it refers to community-based employment.

Introduction

To keep up with advancements in the field of open employment assistance for people with intellectual disability, it is important to interact with those professionals and services that are reporting the best outcomes.

Evidence-based practice requires us to study what processes and skills are being used to achieve best outcomes and how we can replicate and adapt these to other locations in order to improve.

The mutual sharing of practice is a professional tradition that is critical to knowledge dissemination and can take on many forms from site visits to published journal articles for peer review.

In the spirit of this tradition, I wish to report to the field what I have observed on a recent field trip to the United States during September to October 2008; how the *Ability Tasmania Group* (*Ability*) is interpreting and utilising this knowledge; and what implications this knowledge may have generally for the field in Australia.

Open employment and people with intellectual disability

Open employment developed from a belief that people with intellectual disability could secure employment in typical workplace settings. Beginning in the 1970s, USA research demonstrated the capacity of people with intellectual disability to learn job skills that had previously been thought not possible. Soon after, programs of open employment established a technology for placing, training and maintaining people with intellectual disability in open employment.¹

Australian replication of these programs led to the Disability Services Act 1986 which set out a new objective of *integration* for people with intellectual disability following decades of segregation. This Act directly led to the creation of the model of service known as ‘Open Employment’, whereby people were supported to find and maintain employment within their local communities at award-based wages.

Open employment models raised questions about the efficacy of segregated models of service for adults. Open employment was successful for the same client group typically found in Sheltered Workshops (aka Business Services and Australian Disability Enterprises) and day activity programs. Assumptions that people could not work in community-based employment, or had to get ready by being segregated, could no longer be sustained in light of the research evidence and demonstration.²

While many people with intellectual disability in Australia now enjoy careers in open employment (approx 6,500)³, and demonstration services continue to produce excellent outcomes (Health Check/Stars)⁴, the vast majority of adults with intellectual disability, however, are not in the labour force (approx 165,000)⁵ or are in segregated employment programs (approx. 13,000).⁶

Travelling to the USA

The aim of *Ability* travelling to the USA was to:

- Establish ongoing contacts with key individuals and organisations within the disability employment sector. This would provide *Ability* with the opportunity to gain knowledge on service practice from world leaders that could increase outcomes for clients, especially those with high support needs;
- Observe the implementation of individual client strategies designed to assist people with high support needs to gain and maintain work; and,
- Understand how those practises may be implemented within *Ability* with a focus on the structure and skills required to create such changes.

Why the USA?

As noted elsewhere in this paper, the USA disability experience is not uniform in its delivery of services. Many traditional services still exist that continue to segregate, congregate and exploit people with disability. However, there are a significant number of regions that foster a culture of improving outcomes for the people served through clearly articulated values, tested practises and peer reviewed research actively supported by funding bodies. This is combined with a sharing of information between agencies with strong linkages to external systems such as schools and universities to a degree not found in Australia.

Evidence shows that there is a direct correlation between the fostering of this culture and practises and the number of people getting into and remaining in work for extended periods. These outcomes far outstrip Australia's and are achieved with a population group that has far higher supports, in an economic environment that is much darker and often within a less flexible support system.⁷

The author believes the Australian disability employment sector has moved away from its traditional client group, focusing on clients that need little assistance and relying on the application of administrative practises to achieve results. There is little research that would support system development, a diminishing pool of expertise and a purchasing system that has made services inward looking and unwilling to share information or test established boundaries.

To find new models and practises, one must travel overseas.

Brief overview of the USA disability employment sector

Services, organisations and individuals visited

- *University of Commonwealth of Virginia. Rehabilitation Research Training Centre.* Drs. Paul Wehman, John Kregel, Grant Revell and Jenniffer McDonough. Review of best practice, outcome of research to date, accessing of web-based training.
- *Choice Group.* Employment Service, Richmond, Virginia - 3 worksite visits. Implementation of Customised employment.
- *Fasion School for Autism.* Richmond, Virginia - Review of a transition program and 3 worksite visits of people with very high support needs. Transition and work programs for people with autism.
- *Association of People in Supported Employment (APSE).* National Conference Organisational Change - Kansas City. Customised employment, marketing, optimal organisational structures.
- *Portal Industries.* Grafton, Wisconsin - Review of customised employment. Understanding one service's systems in rural Wisconsin for supporting people with high support needs.
- *Community Work Services.* Madison, Wisconsin - 4 work sites. Visiting a service that has operated a 'no refusal of service' policy for 25 years.
- *Professor Lou Brown.* University of Wisconsin, Madison. Discussions, and attending a transition workshop for families by Professor Brown - Stoughton, Wisconsin. Discussions on transition programs, wider system issues and optimal service structures. Discussions with a number of parents in rural Wisconsin re transition to work and the '*Employment First*' policy.

The broader systems

As noted above, there is much variance in the delivery of service in the USA from what would be considered world's best practice to what would be considered very traditional, segregated, exclusionary models of service. This often follows State boundaries as employment services are funded through Federal, State and County agencies.

States and regions are driving a change process that seeks to move the focus from segregated settings, such as sheltered workshops, to open employment models for people with intellectual disability.⁸ Some states have taken a stronger stand than others. Vermont for example has ceased funding new employment assistance places in sheltered workshops.

Washington State has a policy entitled 'The Working Age Adult Policy' which states that all individuals who receive services through the Developmental Disabilities system and who are of working age (18 to 65) will pursue or maintain employment if they are accessing government funding, except by 'exception to policy'. The State has done away with using government funding to support adults with developmental disability, with or without ongoing support needs, to pursue recreational and social activities. These other important areas of people's lives are now supported by home and independent living programs or generic community resources.⁹

A number of States have an *Employment First* policy.¹⁰ This means work in the community is

the first funding option for people, regardless of their support needs and is described below. This stands in stark contrast to current employment policy directions in Australia where opportunities for people with high or ongoing support needs in open employment are often restricted by services themselves and the Commonwealth investing in the development of sheltered workshops (business services).

US policies have a strong link to the civil rights agenda, working on the principle that segregating people with disability is as morally and technically as bad as segregating African Americans¹¹.

The author also sees the *Employment First* policy as the manifestation of the deeply held belief within the American psyche that all people should contribute to their community. This is not unlike the Australian view of the centrality of work where considerable government resources are streamed towards getting people into work.

The services: A snapshot

Most employment services are not-for-profit community organisations with about 150 clients and there is a close liaison between organisations. The purchasing of services by funding bodies is often done on an individual basis and people are able to transport funding to other services if they feel they would achieve better outcomes. Discussions noted that this was not an uncommon occurrence. Like Australia, demand for services outstrips supply and the state Rehabilitation Department has a waiting list of clients.

Conversations with a range of providers in four States indicate that the people assisted are individuals who would struggle to gain access to open employment services or perhaps even many sheltered workshops in Australia.

Successful services also appear to specialise, focusing on disability types or disability itself. It would be unusual to find an agency that would assist rehabilitation clients, mainstream job seekers and people with ongoing support needs. The author spoke to a number of commentators¹² who thought that specialisation meant a retention of skills and focus of purpose in the industry. The capacity to specialise has been threatened in the last eight years under the Bush Administration, who sought to place disability programs within mainstream labour market programs. The ability to use empirical data to support the case for specialisation was believed to be a strong influence in the retention of specialised services.

The services seen by the author were staffed by individuals who either had tertiary qualifications or who had access to staff with such for technical guidance and support. The services seen were located across major metropolitan areas (pop over 1 million) to small rural settings (pop 5000).

Findings

Employment First

This policy is described as:

'Making employment the first priority and preferred outcome of people with disabilities' ... Including those with complex and significant disabilities for whom job placement in the past has been limited or has not traditionally occurred'.¹³

This is the formal policy of a number of States. However, it flows down to individual services

that support people who would be deemed totally unemployable in Australia. *Employment First* explicitly questions the validity and usefulness of non-work programs, especially Day Support models and other service types where people go to become 'work ready'. The policy challenges providers to truly respond to the desires of clients to work regardless of the degree of disability.

I sought to conceptualise this policy at an organisational strategic and governance level and then to understand from observations and discussions what operational structures and skills were needed to support such an ethos. My meetings with various stakeholders including parents led to discussions around how an organisation could convey the appropriateness of such a policy to sceptical funding bodies, services staff and families.

It is fair to say that, if *Ability* or any other service in Australia adopted such a policy, it would have few, if any, peers. The outcomes for people with disability currently disenfranchised could be great but the challenges from board through to operational level are significant. The organisation would be running counter to the prevailing order, finding few allies but many enemies. For any organisation that adopts such a policy or advocates for it, the stress of being isolated should not be underestimated.

Services that sought to implement an *Employment First* policy would need: access to individuals and organisations that could provide technical skills and support; effective processes that focus on the skills and aspirations of individuals to a degree not found in most services; a transition program that had close links into referring agencies and which provides extended lead times to moving into work; and be supported by a strongly committed staff and board. However, these are all just manifestations of what may be the overriding requirement of a culture of 'moral leadership.'

Who received support

The *Employment First* policy obviously has an effect on who is supported. I was able to witness support being provided to a range of people with very significant disabilities, in both regional and metropolitan settings. These individuals were assisted to maintain long-term employment that went over many years, receiving wages at the minimum rate or above, and all with more than 16 hours work per week. This meant that people with significant physical, cognitive and behavioural barriers were able to access work in the community rather than segregated, congregated settings. The support provided was long-term and significant, but enabled the individuals to be taxpayers and removed the need for institutional care.

These individuals would have been unable to access employment services in Australia, except for perhaps 4-5 services. Their successful presence in open employment challenged the understanding I had on who was and was not 'employable'.

As many would be aware, the USA is undergoing a significant economic slowdown and unemployment rates in many of the States exceed Australia. In some parts of the USA I visited, unemployment rates stood at 7-8%, leading to concerns on the impact of the recession on employment for people with disability. However, there is an almost universal strategy of espousing the economic benefits to business through the employment of people rather than a charity focus. And this appears to be minimising any disruption to people's employment at the moment.

Professor Lou Brown noted that beginning the support of such individuals often was more

successful when begun with young people transitioning from school. Professor Brown noted that parents were having to look at transition and had quite different desires than elderly parents whose children may have been in sheltered workshops or day support programs for many years.¹⁴

Customised Employment

Reviewing the employment of people with very high support needs led to an introduction to the concept and application of *Customised Employment*. This is a system, developed by a number of individuals and adopted by some States, which allows the successful employment of people who would have otherwise been unable to gain and maintain employment due to their level of disability.

Customised Employment was developed in response to a peaking of outcomes gained through traditional *Open Employment* strategies in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the desire to re-energise the sector. It is described as:

*'Standing on the shoulders of Supported Employment'*¹⁵

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) defines Customised Employment as being 'The voluntary negotiation of a personalized employment relationship between a specific individual and an employer'

It further enunciated 10 principles that underpin Customised Employment, Wehman, 'Real Work for Real Pay', page 128, Paul Brookes Publishing, 2007.

There is still debate around the 'differentness' of the systems within *Customised Employment* from *Open Employment*. It has been suggested that it represents more of a desire to define the essence of existing practice than being a substantially new model.

While this debate is ongoing, the author was able to define elements within Customised Employment, such as the *Discovery* stage and the concept of *Zero Instructional Inference* (the teaching of skills only in environments where the skills are to be used) that appeared to hold considerable merit, especially for people with higher support needs, and in regions where there are fewer job opportunities.

The considerable body of literature around Customised Employment now allows organisations to evaluate its application (either in whole or part) to their service delivery models. While the debate continues as its role and application, the fact that a debate exists around the development of different strategies marks a significant difference to service development in Australia.

Transition from school to work

It was immediately obvious that there is a close correlation on the success of employment and the development of early and intensive transition to work programs, beginning in junior high (Grade 8).¹⁶ This is instrumental to successful work placements. The centrality of this was reinforced across all States and services visited.

Where there was a disconnection between work and school, there were low outcome rates. The converse held different results. Services in Washington State, which has a very strong Transition to Work program, had almost 70% of people exiting school and going straight into employment.¹⁷

While the funding structure allowed a closer relationship between school and employment

services, often the linkages had been formed by services approaching schools themselves and building partnerships at an individual school / schools at district level.

Services which were successful in Transition to Work had invested time in getting to know the policies and requirements that schools operate under and then marketed job development and job acquisition as vehicles to meet the requirements of school transition programs.

Employment services noted that they have also worked to use schools' language in their materials and spent time learning the culture and environment within the school program.¹⁸ Hot spots of success are identified as such and used to 'sell' the value of the linkages to other schools. The new Employment model due for implementation appears to recognise the critical nature of these linkages.¹⁹

The use of class or curriculum-based training was seen as 'time wasting' and indeed 'life wasting' for many people and especially for people with high support needs.²⁰ This has led to fierce debate among educators and employment providers around the value of the Bush education policy of 'No Child left Behind' which relies on class and curriculum-based testing to rank individual and school success. Many see it as a barrier to the successful integration of people with disability into workplaces.

It was often not possible to see the difference between a transition program and an employment program, especially when the student got closer to leaving school. People would increasingly spend time out in the community, optimally beginning paid work on a full-time basis, or as close to it as possible before the end of their school life.²¹

Training and skills

A comparison between the skills found within leading US services and the author's service shows a significant gap. The author suggests the skills differential is even greater between those US services and the general disability employment sector in Australia.

The desire to assist people with higher support needs to be underpinned by skilled staff. Dr Paul Wehman, Principal Director of the RRTC at the Virginia Commonwealth University at Richmond stated that skilled staff supported by a dynamic research and training network was the key to successful employment of people with high support needs.

As noted above, this work is done by peak bodies such as APSE and TASH, and individual services supported by Technical Assistance Units. The latter are often located in Universities, such as the one attached to the Virginia Commonwealth University. The US government actively supports these units and sees them as so critical that it has just funded another 10 Technical Assistance Units across the country.

The development of fostering a culture of investing in what may be termed R&D, and sharing this information, is at the foundation of the sector leading activities. The concept that a competitive purchasing system is the driver of best practice is redundant, having been dispensed with some time ago.

Issues for Ability Tasmania Group Inc and the wider Disability Employment Network

I discussed and observed policies, strategies, direct interventions and supports that challenged me and questioned my understanding of who is able to be supported in community-based

employment.

What was evident was that the desire to assist a group with significant disabilities is not a remote academic fantasy without application in the real world. Conversations and observations across the widest range of stakeholders in a number of States and across a broad economic landscape show the validity of such interventions, not only from an inclusion framework but also on the basis of economic return to the State and the individual.

Reflecting upon what is possible here, one is in danger of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and, through that, retreating to a position that relies on the external system being congruent with the desired world before feeling able to make any organisational or personal changes.

To paraphrase the US commentator on service systems, Michael Kendrick, 'what can one service do?'

Services and people that assist people who are deemed 'unemployable' or 'not work ready' will need to have both a strong values base as well as effective support and training strategies that underpin the former because it will be confronting the status quo.

For example, the *Employment First* ethos challenges the validity of exclusionary non-work models prevalent in Australia. And *Zero Instructional Inference* directly confronts the sectors embrace of VET-based courses over 'workplace based' training. These are challenges not easily sustained by a single organisation.

By reviewing the US experience, services wishing to support people with higher support needs may want to:

- Articulate their values clearly and live them at all levels of the organisation;
- Determine who they will and won't support;
- Determine the best fit of skills to meet the clients needs;
- Identify support and teaching strategies that are tested, powerful and relevant;
- Identify and cultivate a network of individuals and organisations that can build on expertise;
- Be prepared to test known boundaries of practice, understanding that the guiding ethos must be 'Do no Harm'.

Resources and Links

The above is a very general review of one visit to the USA.

The following is a list of resources that may expand on issues raised above — it is certainly not complete:

Association of People in Supported Employment (APSE): www.apse.org

TASH: www.tash.org

Rehabilitation Research Training Centre: www.worksupport.com

Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program: www.rcep7.org

Institute for Community Inclusion: www.communityinclusion.org

Community Rehabilitation - Program Rehabilitation Continuing Education: www.crprcep7.org
(These chapters are in a number of regions across the State)

Washington Initiative on Supported Employment (WiSE): www.theinitiative.ws

Professor Lou Brown, University of Wisconsin: www.education.wisc.edu/rpse/faculty/lbrown

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Mank, D., Cioffi, A., & Yovanoff, P. Analysis of the Typicalness of Supported Employment Jobs, Natural Supports, and Wage and Integration Outcomes. *Mental Retardation*, 1997, 35, 3, 185-197; Patterns of Support for Employees With Severe Disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 1997, 35, 6, 433-447; Employment Outcomes for People With Severe Disabilities: Opportunities for Improvement. *Mental Retardation*, 1998, 36, 3, 205-216
- ² Bellamy, G.T., Rhodes, L.E., Bourbeau, P.E., Mank, D. (1982). Mental Retardation Services in Sheltered Workshops and Day Activity Programs: Consumer Outcomes and Policy Alternatives. Paper presented at the National Working Conference on Vocational Services and Employment Opportunities, March 1982.
- ³ Disability Program Information Collection (1998-2006), see www.facs.gov.au
- ⁴ The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training produce health check performance data reports. These reports are not publicly available.
- ⁵ AIHW Disability Data Cubes – see www.aihw.gov.au
- ⁶ Disability Program Information Collection (1998-2006), see www.facs.gov.au
- ⁷ From observation and discussions with the Manager of Choice Group, Richmond and Staff at Portal industries, Wisconsin
- ⁸ See Training and Technical Assistance for Providers at www.t-tap.org. This US program is operated by Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Massachusetts. The program offers conversion from segregated day/employment programs to open competitive employment models of assistance.
- ⁹ Threlkeld, M. (2008). WiSE Seattle, Washington State. Conversations.
- ¹⁰ Minnesota Dept of Human Services 2007. www.mnapse.org
- ¹¹ See US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs Board of Education where the education policy of “separate but equal” was ruled as discriminatory and detrimental to the growth and development of African Americans.
- ¹² Wehman, P., Kregel, J., & McDonough, Conversations at Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008
- ¹³ Minnesota Dept of Human Services 2007 - www.mnapse.org
- ¹⁴ Brown, L. Discussion with parents meeting - Stoughton. Wisconsin Sept 2008
- ¹⁵ Griffin, C., Hammis, D, & Geary, T. (2007). The Job Developer’s Handbook. Paul Brookes Publishing
- ¹⁶ Wehman, P. (2006). Life Beyond the Classroom. Transition Strategies for Young People with Disabilities. Paul H Brookes.
- ¹⁷ Threlkeld, M. WiSE Seattle, Washington State. Conversations 2008
- ¹⁸ Threlkeld, M. (2008). WiSE Seattle, Washington State. Conversations.
- ¹⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. (2008). The Future of Disability Employment Services in Australia. Discussion Paper
- ²⁰ Shiranga B. Community Work Services Madison Wisconsin. Conversations 2008
- ²¹ Wehman, P. “Integrated Employment. If not now, When? If not us, Who”- *Research and Practise for People with Severe Disabilities*, 2006 31, 2

Becoming a Leader

Heather Forsyth

Adapted version of presentation given at the 'Having a Say' Conference, 2009

When I started in self-advocacy, I was 4' 11", but now I feel 6' 4". I am a person who lives with disability, but my disability cannot be seen. Many people ask me: "Heather what is your disability?". It hasn't been easy putting this presentation together. It has brought up many stored-away memories, some of which bring out very strong emotions in me.

I will now tell you how I became a leader and hope you enjoy the story of my journey so far.

Up until the age of seven, my grandparents cared for me. I did have a mother, but didn't know who she was. It turned out that she was a young, single woman — not a good thing in the sixties. When I was a baby and couldn't sleep, Pop would put me in his overalls and I would go to sleep — I thought that my grandparents were my parents. At the age of seven, I got to know my real mother and went to live with her and her new husband. Everything was okay until they started a family of their own. Things happened that I cannot speak about. It was at this time that I went to Dandenong special school. There were 10 children in the class. I felt that I didn't fit in and I didn't enjoy my time at the school; I didn't get what I needed. It would have been good if I had the chance to go to a *real* school. I left when I was 14.

For the next two years, I stayed at home. I was a couch potato — had nothing in my life and no money skills. They would not let me use the oven, the stove or the toaster. I wasn't even allowed to use the heater. Why? Because they were scared that I might burn myself! If I was cold, I would just get a blanket. If I had to get my own lunch, I would have cold baked beans. My family did everything for me because they didn't want me to do things for myself. They were scared that I might get hurt, or might not need them anymore and so they wouldn't receive any money from the Government for supporting me.

When I was 16, I worked in a sheltered workshop — I didn't enjoy my time there as felt I was back at school. I had to put my hand up if I wanted to go to the bathroom — I felt trapped and that I was being treated like a little child.

During this time, I would go to Centrelink and look on the jobs board. My reading skills weren't good so I would get a Centrelink person to help me. A job was found for me at an umbrella factory in Dandenong. At last I was working in the real world — it was better than the sheltered workshop! I worked at the umbrella factory for two years. We worked as a team — I was treated as an adult not a child. The people from Centrelink also gave me support to learn how to do the job. After three years, I lost my job (as did other people) at the umbrella factory because of a lack of work. The umbrella factory closed down.

In 1981, I went to work at a Gateways Centre in Doveton which was being run out of a public

hall. I did cleaning at a bingo centre and cooking lessons in a café making cakes and sandwiches. This is where I learned my money skills. My life changed when I was 21: I met a kind, good looking man called Doug. We dated for three years, then got married.

Up to the age of 24, I was a single woman. After I was married, I was not just 'Heather' anymore — I changed my identity and became Heather Forsyth, the wife of Doug. We rented a unit in Dandenong — we became tenants. I had to learn how to keep house, how to do the family shopping and how to budget. I learnt that if I spent all my money on records and tapes there would be no money for food for the week. I had to learn how to cook for a man who was very fussy — I kept cooking the same meal every night. Tuna casserole was all I could cook. It was easy — get a hot pot packet and a tin of tuna, put it in the oven and you ended up with tuna casserole! In the end, he went to his mother and said 'for goodness sake can you teach her to cook something different'. The next thing I learned to cook was soup. Well, it started off as soup. I didn't know that I had to add more water. In the end we had stew!!!! Tuna casserole is now off the menu. Here is a tip, ladies: Doug is now the househusband and I don't do the cooking anymore — but it's now my choice not to cook. I learned how to be a good housewife by following Doug's mum around the house watching and asking her questions. Doug and I have been married now for 21 years.

Not long after we were married, a friend invited me to a BBQ. A group of people with disabilities were going to talk about setting up a self-advocacy group. I didn't know what self-advocacy was but was interested. I went to the BBQ and listened and asked some questions. I liked the idea of self-advocacy, of being able to speak up for myself. The local group was set up and I became a volunteer, but I still wanted to know more. So I joined the committee and then became the treasurer. They taught me how to do the books, answer the phone and do other office duties. I used a pencil to write down the numbers because I was scared to make a mistake — at least with the pencil I could rub it out. Then I got a paid job in the disability field.

I wanted to help other people with a disability. I didn't want them to go through what I had. The Inclusion International Congress was held in Melbourne in September 2002. I enjoyed the conference. But I was at a low point in my life — I had low self esteem and lacked confidence. I was scared to be away from work if I was sick — I thought I would get into trouble. I felt disempowered and was scared to speak up for myself. I had to get my confidence back somehow. In 2002, I applied to go on the first Disability Advisory Council of Victoria. I was the only person with an intellectual disability on the Council — I stayed on it for three years. During this time, I got some funding through the women's community leadership grants program. With this money. I did two courses at the Public Interest Advocacy Centre in Sydney. I learned about advocacy and media skills (I was the only person with an intellectual disability in both of these courses). What did I learn? How to work the media. Here's the tip: do your research, know your subject.

At this time, other things were starting to happen in my life. You see I love country music. My favourite artist is Slim Dusty. The song that you hear at the start of this presentation is a Slim Dusty song. Doug, my husband started to do a show at the local community radio station 3rpp and I stayed at home. It got to a point where Doug spent more time at the radio station than he did with me. I got sick and tired of Doug being at the radio station and told him so. So he suggested that I come and see what the radio station was all about. I went and I liked the feel of the radio station. I said that I'd like to learn how to do a show.

People thought that I wouldn't be able to do it because of my disability. But I showed them!

All the people at the radio station supported me, and I got my own country music show where I played *lots* of Slim Dusty.

In 2003, I felt I needed a change and got a job as a project worker with VALID in Fitzroy. VALID stands for the Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability.

In 2005, VALID helped me do the leadership plus course. I learned leadership skills such as how to speak in public. At the end, I received a certificate. There were 25 people with all different disabilities doing the course — I was the only person with an intellectual disability. Through this course, I learned how to be a leader.

In 2006, I was invited by VALID to go to the Inclusion International Congress in Acapulco, Mexico. I was really happy to go to the Congress. I went there to represent people with disability in Australia and to make a presentation about self-advocacy in Victoria. It was a big event, with 1500 people from all over the world attending.

What did I learn?: How to travel; that I needed a money belt to make sure that my passport and money were safe; how to pack my suitcase well; and that I had to get injections to keep me healthy.

The main language in Mexico is Spanish. I don't speak Spanish. So I found it hard to understand what was being said. We were lucky to get a set of headphones that translated into English what was being said. This made us feel included in the Congress as we could understand what the presenters were saying. I was lucky to travel with my friend Tony, who is a person whom I respect and who respects me. Neither of us had travelled overseas before.

If you've never travelled outside Australia, it's an eye opener!

The highlights of my trip were:

- Meeting people from all over the world
- Seeing people in wheelchairs doing a Mexican dance at the opening ceremony and ballet at the closing ceremony
- Hearing Robert Martin from New Zealand speak about his life in an institution — everyone was in tears.
- Seeing a different culture
- Buying a Mexican hat for Doug.

The challenges were:

- The long flight (34 hours)
- Huge airports the size of small cities
- A mix-up with our room on arrival
- The fact that there were only five people from Australia and they were all from Victoria
- Coping with the different money
- And one very sleazy taxi driver

I still work for VALID as a project worker and I now support people who have all kinds of disabilities, not only people with an intellectual disability. I help them to build on their skills — it's not easy. I am always learning how to do things from my work colleagues. We're not all perfect in this world. If I'm not sure how to deal with a situation, I ask for help. It's okay to ask for help.

Sometimes I need help to see things in a different way so that I can support people in the

right way. My work colleagues often ask me about things because they want to see things from a different viewpoint. You see they don't live with a disability.

Every year, Valid hosts the 'Having a Say' Conference, which is a conference for people with disability. Last year, over 1000 people attended. Next year will be the 10th 'Having a Say' conference — it will be a big celebration. My role at the conference is the same as all the other staff members at VALID. I get stuck in and work hard. Some of the things that I do at the conference include:

- Hosting open mike sessions
- Offering peer support
- Chairing sessions
- Judging competition
- Talking to people
- Helping people with directions
- Supporting my work colleagues

I do whatever I can to make the conference successful. The 'Having a Say' conference each year is the highlight of my year.

Some of the other highlights of being a leader include:

- Representing self-advocates on the Board of the National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID)
- Being the chairperson of NCID's 'Our Voice' committee
- Being a Board member of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)
- Being a presenter at the ASSID National and Disability Support Worker conferences
- Representing NCID and people with intellectual disability on the Telstra and Disability Consumer committees
- Being on panels at various conferences
- Being a member of the Kew Project reference group. (This group looked at the impacts of people moving from Kew residential services into community settings.)
- Being on the National Disability and Carers Ministers Advisory Council (that was with Mal Brough).
- Being a member of a group who advised the Department of Human Services on the new Disability Act in Victoria.
- Being on the organising committee for the 2009 'Having a Say' conference in Geelong
- And providing support to other people with disability who want to learn skills and gain the confidence to speak up for themselves.

Some of the goals that I have achieved in order to become a leader have been:

- To deal with things that have happened to me in the past, to get over things, to move on.
- To learn how to support and provide peer support to other people with a disability who want to learn skills like chairing at meetings.
- To gain confidence in talking to a range of people including other people with disability, staff and management of services, people in Government departments and politicians.
- To learn how to have my say in meetings in the right way and how to facilitate discussions between groups of people.
- To gain confidence in the provision of self-advocacy training to self-advocates and staff

in services.

- To practise ways of standing up for myself when people try to intimidate or bully me. You know I still find this hard but I want to get to the stage where I can deal with them on my own without support.
- To stop saying 'sorry' for everything, even when I haven't done anything wrong.

So what makes a good leader?

- Someone who is a good listener
- A good role model
- Someone who can see other people's abilities
- Someone who is not scared to ask questions
- Someone who is willing to get stuck in and help out
- Someone like me

Finally, I have not been able to do these things on my own and I would like to thank all of the people who have supported me on my journey so far.

problem?



The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is a free and independent dispute resolution service for people with complaints about telecommunications or internet services.

If you have tried to resolve a complaint with your phone or internet service provider, but are not making any progress then contact the TIO.



Got a problem with your phone or internet service? The TIO may be able to help.

Website	www.tio.com.au
Freecall	1800 062 058
Freefax	1800 630 614
TTY	1800 675 692
Interpreter service	131 450

Book Review

Mitchell, D. (2008)

What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education. Using evidence-based teaching strategies.

Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: London and New York

In current journal discussions, there is an emphasis on the need for *evidence* to justify professional practice, to inform parent decisions in the development of their children, and for government to ensure the greatest efficiency and effectiveness of finite resources.

That *evidence* should support the fundamental practice of professionals does seem rather obvious. For isn't this elemental to the meaning of *professional*; be they doctor, psychologist or teacher?

The lack of evidence supporting educational practice, however, was the theme of a 2008 edition of the Australasian Journal of Special Education (AJSE). The editorial stated:

. . . what we would argue is that both science and trained and organised common sense seem to be lacking in education, and that these two facts are not unrelated. In this issue, we examine the case for 'A Scientific Approach to Special Education' specifically.

It is a *wake up call* to realise how little research evidence support interventions for people with intellectual disability labels past, present and future. For example, the placement and grouping of people with intellectual disability in institutions, sheltered workshops or special classes lacks supporting research evidence to demonstrate superior outcomes to remaining in homes, regular classes or real work. Yet our society and professions continue to invest heavily in interventions that lack evidence. What does this say about what drives policy and professional practice?

Within this current environment of trying to bring coherence between research and practice, David Mitchell has published an important text, *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education. Using evidence-based teaching strategies*.

Mitchell, shares the concerns of the editors of the AJSE:

Teachers around the globe are anxious to develop genuine, evidence-based policies and practices in their teaching of children, . . . yet this field is notorious for the significant gap that exists between research and practice.

Mitchell presents the evidence for 24 teaching strategies drawn from over 2000 research articles that have demonstrated effectiveness in controlled research. He highlights from the research that teachers account for 30% of achievement and hence the importance of using evidence-based teaching strategies for the benefit of students.

Mitchell's book provides a wonderful synthesis of the research providing within each chapter a definition of a strategy, the underlying idea of the strategy, an outline of the strategy with examples and a brief review of the evidence on the strategy.

This provides any keen student of evidence-based practice the opportunity to gain a sound introduction, and to "dig deeper" and read further on the topic. The book essentially provides

an introductory overview of twenty-four “big ideas” supported by the research.

The book does offer more evidence of the growing professional voice that student labels of “special” or “disability” are not useful when considering good teaching practice. Mitchells reminds the reader that:

. . . for the most part, learners with special educational needs simply require good teaching.

All the strategies in the book are about good teaching that has supporting research evidence.

Most of the strategies I present in the book are relevant to all learners with special education needs, indeed to all learners.

This begs the question as to why we need to distinguish learners by any label that is descriptive of individual human differences when talking about evidence-based teaching practice.

As was found in the review of teaching reading research (*Interaction, 18#4, 2005*), it is enough to know that someone is having difficulty with reading to intervene and draw from the research evidence to guide the intervention. Dr Shaddock et al (2007), in a report prepared for the Commonwealth education department, noted from a literature review:

Disability is not a uni-dimensional construct and it is incorrect and potentially misleading to generalise about ‘students with disabilities’.

Perhaps it is time for writers to speak of learners or students together with the notion of evidence-based practice without the fumbling and misleading terms of “special” or “learning difficulty” (see *A World Without ‘Special Needs’, Interaction, 16#4, 32-34*). This does not deny individual human differences, but understands that all learners need good teaching.

The text by Mitchell is a wonderful contribution to the need to bridge the gap between research and practice. This text should sit on the desk of anyone willing to criss-cross that bridge and to delve into the rich source of knowledge that exists for those willing to take an evidence-based pathway . . . and so act as a professional should.

Paul Cain

MY WORD!

a reflection on people with disability in society

by Christine Regan

The 2009 TROPFEST winner is gold!

I always look forward to getting free stuff with my Sunday Herald. I am not sure what it is but I even like the stuff I don't generally like, because it's free and it feels like a present. I am not sure what it says about me...

Another sad fact is that I am very vulnerable in the cinema when I watch a film. I become a total believer. I am absorbed into everything I see on screen so, in reality, I am fatally allergic to horror, extreme violence, deep emotion, sinister science fiction and let's not talk about sex! If I value my mental health, which I fear is fragile at the best of times, I must filter what I watch in the dark. Even on TV at night!

Consequently, I always anticipate with eager excitement the free TROPFEST DVD. Because the films are only seven minutes long, I can take a chance, especially if I watch during the day. Some films I enjoy, some annoy me, some repulse me but all fascinate me. I love watching for the annual TROPFEST feature which must be included in each film to prove it was made within the allotted time; this year it was *spring*.

The 2009 TROPFEST winner is a production called *Be My Brother*, directed by Genevieve Clay. The lead actor is Gerard O'Dwyer who also took out the award for best actor.

It is the story of strangers waiting for a bus. There is a young man in a hoodie who sits off to one side, a girl sitting in the middle seat and a man with Down Syndrome who is loudly orbiting nearby in pretend combat with an imagined enemy. The woman is clearly discomforted by the man talking to himself and glances at the hoodie man who shrugs his indifference.

The woman becomes more disturbed and turns away when the man with Down Syndrome takes out a hand-held voice recorder and approaches her. Speaking loudly into the recorder, he describes her and her actions, saying "not too attractive, touches her head..." This grabs her attention and she turns to face him. He introduces himself as Richard, offering her his hand which she touches in distaste with the merest fingertip. He quickly begins to engage her with his bold and amusing approach, quoting convincingly from Shakespeare, Frank Spencer and the Lion King. By now she has forgotten her prejudice and is reciprocating the conversation.

Richard moves towards the hoodie man who responds with a "no thanks" and huddles further into his sweater. Turning back, Richard presses play on his recorder and the woman hears how he is hurt when his brother ignores him. The woman advises him to tell his brother how he feels. Then Richard's bus arrives. Now broadly smiling, the woman records how entertaining she finds Richard to be, shakes hands in farewell and Richard gallantly kisses her hand.

The hoodie man boards the bus but the driver cannot accept his twenty-dollar note. Hostilities

rise until Richard gets on and pays both fares. When the hoodie man sits beside Richard, Richard hugs him. Looking in through the bus window from the bus stop, the woman's smile fades as she realises the hoodie man was Richard's ignoring brother all along.

In only a few short minutes, the woman's pre-conceived intolerance of a person with intellectual disability falls away as she talks to Richard and begins to view him as a person. In this story, the person with intellectual disability has to be the more mature and persistent of the three adults. What is the harm in a little gentle fun? By the time the bus arrives, the woman has clearly immensely enjoyed the encounter. This is so often the story with people with intellectual disability if they are allowed/empowered to simply be themselves. What matters is the personal interaction. Why is this modest act so hard for so many?

Sadly, Richard's brother remains disengaged. A poignant ending to an otherwise uplifting tale. This ending is a reality check worth its inclusion.

Congratulations to the Australian filmmaker whose keenly observed story is so well produced. Congratulations to the actors, particularly Gerard who steals the show with his commanding acting and integrity. Congratulations to the TROPFEST judges who made a powerfully correct decision on the winner.

As an aside, I watched both the producer/director Genevieve and star Gerard receiving their awards. Gerard's confident acceptance speech truly warmed my heart. Gerard declared he wants to be a big movie star!

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