Investigation of post-school transition programs being provided for students with an intellectual disability in special schools in Victoria.

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Abstract

Special Schools and Special Development Schools in Victoria cater for students with a range of disabilities both physical and intellectual, and are required to provide post-school transition education and career pathways for their students. This study aims to examine how a number of Special and Special Development Schools, collectively referred to as special schools, prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition, which programs are being implemented and developed to ensure that these students are given the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers and what is regarded as a successful post-school outcome.

Extensive research and substantial policy reform in the United States (US) has led to improvements in transition programs and practices there. In Australia, however, legislation related to transition-focused education for students with disabilities has not been put in place and there have been few studies in Australia to investigate post-school transition programs for young people with intellectual disabilities (Beamish, Meadows & Davies, 2010).

Literature from Australia, the US and the United Kingdom (UK) indicates that strategies to improve post-school outcomes for students with an intellectual disability are being developed. Schools in these countries are implementing programs to facilitate post-school transition and research shows that successful post-school outcomes can be achieved through programs aimed at developing skills that prepare students for the workplace.

In the US, Kohler (1996) undertook extensive research in this area and developed a framework to identify quality transition practice. Her framework is the only research-based transition model currently available (Beamish et al., 2010). Five common themes emerged from the literature and these align with Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996). The categories, indicative of best practice, are: student development, student-focused planning, family involvement, interagency collaboration and program structure. One of the aims of this study is to identify how teachers are preparing students and to investigate which programs are being implemented and Kohler’s framework serves as a framework for analysis in this study.
This study utilises information collected to determine the number of students transitioning from Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria at the end of 2013; the resources being used and the programs being delivered. Qualitative data were collected through open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews. Responses to questionnaires and interviews revealed common themes and patterns that reflected the themes emerging from the literature.

Findings indicate that twenty Victorian special schools (28 percent of all Victorian special schools) are developing and delivering programs based on these themes. However, they are doing so intuitively rather than in a systematic or planned way. Some of the recommendations drawn from the study suggest that there is a need to develop and provide more resources to support teachers and parents of students with an intellectual disability; to give them the opportunity to undertake transition-focused education as early as possible and to stay at school longer.
Declaration

i. the thesis comprises only of my original work towards the masters except where indicated,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is less than 24,200 words in length, exclusive of tables, references and appendices.

Signature:........................................
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Career Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Career Information Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEECD</td>
<td>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>Disability Employment Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Disability Employment Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DiES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills (UK)</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Human Services (Victoria)</td>
</tr>
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<td>DSN</td>
<td>Disability Support Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFYA</td>
<td>Futures for Young Adults</td>
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<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Disabilities Education Act – 1975 (US)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence quotient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIPs</td>
<td>Managed Individual Pathways</td>
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<td>NDCO</td>
<td>National Disability Coordination Officer Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDIS</td>
<td>National Disability Insurance Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH&amp;S</td>
<td>Occupational Health and Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>Program for Students with Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCDO</td>
<td>Regional Career Development Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Special Development School</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Special School</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSG</td>
<td>Student Support Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education (Australia wide)</td>
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<td>TTE</td>
<td>Transition to Employment</td>
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<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (Victoria)</td>
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<td>VELS</td>
<td>Victorian Essential Learning Standards</td>
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<td>VETiS</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training in Schools (Victoria)</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter the aims and scope of the study are set out in Section 1.1. Section 1.2 provides the background to this inquiry and also explains my interest in the post-school transition of students with an intellectual disability. The background to the inquiry also includes a summary of the history of disability in Australia. Section 1.3 is an overview of the study with references to external events that have influenced policies in Australia.

1.1 Aims and Scope of the Study

This study investigates how secondary school students with an intellectual disability, are being prepared for post-school transition, how teachers support them as they transition post-school, and which post-school transition programs are being implemented in 28 percent of Special Schools (SS) and Special Development Schools (SDS) in Victoria. The study utilises literature in the field to identify best practice overseas and in Australia, to identify research that has already been conducted in this area and to examine subsequent findings. These findings and the data from participating schools will contribute to the identification of the success factors of current transition programs.

The aims of this study are:

- to identify how teachers in special schools prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition;
- to investigate which programs special schools implement to successfully transition students with an intellectual disability from school to post-school;
- to identify the key success factors of these programs.

1.2 Background to the Inquiry

1.2.1 A Personal Journey

In 2010, I visited a special school in northern Tasmania catering for students with a range of intellectual and physical disabilities from mild to severe (Clerke, 2013). I visited a class of 10 to 12 year olds preparing for their next session, gardening. The garden had been set up in partnership with a local community group and the students were being taught workplace skills, teamwork, organisation, socialisation and
communication. For those with an intellectual disability, these are skills that do not come easily.

The students, many of whom struggled with verbal communication, were keen to find out how many dots they had on their progress charts. They all knew what each colour meant. There were high fives and much applause for Jake who had apparently been falling behind but now had a full complement of green dots.

We headed out to the garden where the supervisor was waiting. Jake took charge. Talking non-stop, he handed out gloves and tools and began digging and planting. When he had lined up five pots with tiny trees sticking out, he handed back his gloves, dusted off his hands and stood proudly next to his work.

‘*Do you think I’ll be a real worker one day?’* NSS12S

This special school left an impression on me. Here were students whose chances of obtaining open employment were low but they were being given real life work experiences and the opportunity to see themselves as future workers, just like everybody else. On my visits to other special schools, I witnessed many programs being implemented to educate students with an intellectual disability for life after school and I was interested in discovering what transition programs were being developed and implemented and where students were transitioning to post-school.

### 1.2.2 Australia’s Response to Disability

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Australia’s policies affecting people with a disability were borrowed from England where institutions for the mentally and physically disabled were based on a medical model. Wolfensberger (1969) reported that in this period, intellectual disability was regarded as a welfare or medical issue rather than a social one. Responsibility for the care of the intellectually disabled at this time was not the province of families but of institutions and people with a disability were looked after and cared for in institutions.

In Australia in the early twentieth century, and until the early 1970s, there was a widely held belief that people with disabilities, then referred to as ‘the disabled’, needed constant care and assistance. Parmerter (2011) reported that people with disabilities at this time were regarded as unable and incapable of living independently, of supporting
themselves through employment or of achieving an education. Because of their mental or physical impairments they were thought of as not being able to fit in with society or even of being able to look after themselves. Institutionalised care was provided in the form of asylums to confine the insane and incapable. The ‘disabled’ were incorporated into the Lunacy Act No. 45 1898 and those who proved under this Act to be incapable of managing their own affairs were declared to be insane or of unsound mind and separated from society.

For many years, different types of intellectual disability were not acknowledged and mental retardation, physical and mental impairments and other handicaps were commonly held to be a “manifestation of divine disfavour” (Lindsay, 1996, p. 12). Often people with disabilities were incarcerated in jails or subjected to long term confinement in asylums where they became invisible to the rest of society (Loosemore, 1980).

After WWII, when thousands of returning soldiers needed physical and mental rehabilitation, major changes were made to the care of the ‘disabled’. In Australia in the 1950s there was increased acceptance that the Commonwealth had to be responsible for all people with disabilities, and institutions were established for an increasing number of disabled adults and children (Lindsay, 1996). In the 1950s and 60s, many charitable organisations were formed with the intention of raising funds and providing support, services and resources for children and adults with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities set up sheltered workshops in order to provide employment for their children and organisations such as the Spastic Society, the Crippled Children’s Association and Australia Cerebral Palsy Association were formed (Loosemore, 1980).

It was during the 1970s in Australia that attitudes towards people with disabilities began to change. The Australian government’s policies around this time still focused on maintaining a welfare approach by providing services and funding for the ‘disabled’ but in 1974, legislation to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities was developed. (Quality of life is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4.) The Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974 was passed to fund organisations to employ people with disabilities and provide training programs.
Swedish researcher, Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle: “making available to all intellectually disabled people, patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life or society” (p. 20) in *Theories of normalisation and social role valorisation* played a significant role in influencing government policy, overseas and in Australia. Wolfensberger (1969) was responsible for bringing Nirje’s principle of normalisation into the US which resulted in changes to the US government’s policies regarding people with disabilities.

As a result of Nirje’s (1969) and Wolfensburger’s (1969) research and, the United Nation’s *Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975*, the US government developed policies to protect individuals from discrimination and promote integration, where possible, into mainstream education, employment and accommodation. This move away from incarceration and institutionalisation was a move towards giving people with an intellectual disability the same opportunities to experience life as everyone else. Prior to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1975*, at least one million children with disabilities in the US had been denied any public education, and at least four million more had been segregated from their non-disabled peers. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004.)

These new policies and the changing legislation showed that governments were aiming to improve quality of life and develop opportunities for further education, training and employment for people with disabilities in the US. Research in Australia in 1976, however, showed that despite the extra funding that had been provided under the *Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974*, subsequent workshops and therapy centres were inefficient and ineffective. Loosemore (1980) reported that there was very little structured training available in government funded workshops and not all workshop employees were qualified.

The United Nations’ *Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975* had been one of the first documents to shift the focus of the debate from health and welfare to broader economic and political considerations, including human rights. In 1981, the *International Year of Disabled Persons* not only heightened community awareness of disability related issues but also became a major force for change socially, politically and economically. While it focused mainly on physical disabilities, the theme of the
*Year* provided a vehicle for all people with disabilities to continue their push for greater autonomy, wider recognition of their rights and the opportunity to participate in the services and programs used by other people without a disability. In 1983 a further review of Australian programs that had been funded under the *Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974* was conducted.

In Australia, by the early 1990s, disability was finally being viewed as a human rights concern and a community responsibility. When disability was regarded as a charity or welfare issue, responsibility was in the hands of those who were charitable and the rights of those with disabilities were diminished, however, when viewed as a human rights issue, those with disabilities were viewed as equal but different to those without a disability. Reforms being developed at this time included: the *Disability Reform Package*, the *Commonwealth and State Disability Agreement 1991* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. This Act, which is Australia’s most current legislation, made it unlawful to discriminate in the areas of employment, provision of goods, services and facilities, and accommodation. In the area of education there was greater emphasis on developing social and work readiness skills. The aim of these changes was to strengthen the employability of students with intellectual and physical disabilities.

A new piece of Australian Federal government legislation, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, an addition to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, ensured those with a disability were not discriminated against by educational institutions and were given access to the same quality of education available to everyone else. As a result of this, educational institutions were required to ensure that their programs and courses were accessible according to the new legislation.


The right to work is a fundamental right. It is essential for realising other human rights and forms an inseparable and inherent part of human dignity. Every individual has the right to be able to work, allowing him/her to live in dignity. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), persons with disabilities have the right to work on an equal basis with others. (United Nations’ CRPD, 2006)
Following its ratification, the CRPD was given entry into force in May 2008 by Australia and the rights of people with disabilities were given new attention.

In 2014, the National Disability Strategy, developed by the Australian government, was introduced. Its aim is to maximise the potential and participation of people with disability. The first general principle of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is that people with disability have the same right of access to services as all Australians.

1.3 Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 outlines the aims of the study and the background to the inquiry, including my own relationship to the study and a general historical background within the Australian context. Chapter 2 reviews extant literature from Australia, the US and the UK that examines transition-focused education for students with intellectual disabilities. The review identifies emerging themes among the various practices that are described in the literature and identifies what are considered successful post-school outcomes for students with a disability.

Chapter 3 details the development of the research methodology and research methods to achieve the aims of this study. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the qualitative and descriptive data collected from the 20 special schools participating in the study. Chapter 5 contains two case studies that focus on the experiences of one Special School and one Special Development School implementing post-school transition programs. Chapter 6 presents the discussion and conclusion of this study.

Summary

‘A Personal Journey’ in Section 1.2.1 illustrates one of the types of activities that special schools are providing for students with an intellectual disability to give them the opportunity to experience the workplace and prepare them for when they leave school. The boy’s statement about being a real worker one day showed that, despite his intellectual disability, his aim was to be employed, just like everyone else.

The short history of disability in Australia indicates that government policies have been developed so that people with disabilities are not discriminated against. More recent
policies and strategies being developed in Australia and overseas specifically for young people with an intellectual disability, reflect Nirje’s principle of normalisation from 1969, and are aimed at ensuring that they are given the same opportunities to experience life as everyone else.
Chapter 2  Review of the Literature

In this chapter, a review of the extant literature on transition programs, transition-focused education and research into post-school transition preparation for students with an intellectual disability from Australia, the US and the UK is undertaken. The US and the UK have similar systems of education and government, language, heritage and needs and their response to disability is similar to that taken up in Australia. Strategies, policies and initiatives have been developed in each of these countries to improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities and these are also reviewed.

The definition of disability (Appendix 3) is very broad in policies and legislation from each of these countries. In Australia, the definition of disability, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, includes a range of psychiatric, sensory, physical and intellectual difficulties. Australian government initiatives are directed towards all students with a range of abilities and disabilities and adjustments are made for students with an intellectual disability.

The purpose of the review of the literature is to identify what research has been undertaken in the area of transition-focused education and post-school transition for students with an intellectual disability. Section 2.1 examines the literature on transition-focused education and what this means in Australia, the US and the UK. The earliest research, already mentioned in the background to the inquiry, is from Nirje (1969) who developed the Normalisation Principle for the ‘mentally retarded’ and Wolfensberger (1969) who was responsible for the English translation of Nirje’s research and instrumental in taking this principle to a wider readership. In the early nineties, Kohler and others (Kohler, 1993; Kohler, 1996; Kohler and Field, 2003) developed a comprehensive framework of quality transition practice.

Section 2.2 examines government initiatives and section 2.3 examines Kohler’s (1996) Taxonomy for Transition Programming and the themes as they have emerged from this research. Kohler’s research has been referred to extensively in the literature and the categories developed in her Taxonomy form the basis of the findings of this study. Quality of life is discussed in section 2.4 and section 2.5 focuses on what success means and the limitations of these programs.
2.1 Transition-Focused Education

Transition-focused education is referred to in the literature as the broad range of programs being delivered to students with an intellectual disability in order to support them in their transition from school to post-school. For the purposes of this review, programs focusing on developing employability skills, such as workplace experiences and workplace familiarisation, vocational education and work-centred activities as well as activities that provide students with life skills aimed at improving their experiences post-school, have been labelled transition-focused education. What emerges from the literature is that special schools should be preparing students with an intellectual disability, by providing a range of programs and initiatives during secondary schooling, to effectively make the move from school to post-school (Kohler, 1993; Kohler & Field, 2003; Scholl & Mooney, 2004).

Literature from Australia and the US indicates that transition-focused education should prepare students with disabilities for their lives after school, should be an essential aspect of regular school activities, should begin early in secondary school and be fundamental to the curriculum being delivered to students with an intellectual disability (Kohler & Field, 2003; Meadows, 2006). Further research by Luecking (2009) in the US and Parmenter (2011) in Australia found that the provision of transition-focused education and the provision of work and life skills programs when preparing young people with an intellectual disability for adult and work roles, was a significant factor in their successful transition from school to post-school.

While Australia and the US have regarded transition education as essential, the UK has been slow to develop transition programs in schools for students with an intellectual disability. A report in 2004 from the UK Department for Education and Skills (DfES), *Every Child Matters*, makes no mention of transition practices for students with a disability about to leave school and instead focuses on the importance of the services being provided for students while they are still at school. Kaehne and Beyer (2008) indicated that unlike Australia and the US, planning for employment and work experience does not feature in transition planning in UK schools. *The Wolf Report* (2011) provided a raft of recommendations to improve post-school outcomes for students with an intellectual disability, including those with a learning disability or low achievers but Crawford (2012) found that UK schools were still focused on the move
from childhood disability services to adult disability services and indicated there was no expectation of employment and there was a lack of coordinated transition planning in general. According to Crawford (2012), Australia and the US have been more effective in implementing transition-focused education and in providing support for students with a disability while at school than the UK (p. 27).

2.2 Government Initiatives

Early Australian policy, such as the *Handicapped Person’s Assistance Act 1974*, focused on the welfare and care of the disabled, unlike the US where the emphasis has been on education and training. In 1981, the *International Year of Disabled Persons* had a profound effect on raising awareness of disability in Australia and there was a move towards realising Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle. The emphasis in this period was on enhancing and protecting the rights of people with a disability, at the same time providing opportunities for them to contribute to the wider society and providing greater access to education and training to improve their employability. However, these changes still tended to be undertaken from the standpoint of acting for people with disabilities rather than with them. In 1983, in response to the *International Year of Disabled Persons*, a review of the *Handicapped Person’s Assistance Act 1974* in Australia was undertaken. For the first time, people with disabilities were consulted and were able to report their concerns about access to education, training and employment.

The Australian, US and UK Governments have all legislated to prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities. In the US, there was direct government influence on policy and programs specifically assisting transition to employment post-school and the US enacted *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1975*, which was amended in 1990, 1997 and 2004. The UK and Australian policies focused on ensuring that people with disabilities were not discriminated against in society in general, rather than providing specific guidelines about education, training and employment. In 1992 Australia enacted its current legislation, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the UK enacted the *Disability Discrimination Act* in 1996.

In Australia, the *Disability Services Act 1986* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* which were a direct result of the 1983 review, represented further changes towards empowering people with disabilities and emphasised people’s abilities rather than their
disabilities. The aim was to integrate people with disabilities into the general community wherever possible and the Acts provided a framework to ensure that students with a disability were free from discrimination in the education system and were able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. These changes were closely aligned with Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle.

According to Luecking (2009), only the US IDEA amendments in 1997 mandated workplace preparation in schools for students with disabilities. He referred to this as a “participatory approach to education and service planning for students with disabilities” (p. 175). The Act required that students be involved in their own transition planning and that their preferences and interests be taken into account when transition services were being planned while they were still at school. The Act reflects the findings of Kohler’s research in 1993 which resulted in the publication of Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996).

The US National Council on Disability (2000) reported however, that despite the advances in education, disability rights policy, the support of federal mandates, and increased funding of programs and initiatives for youth, including those with a disability, post-school outcomes were still poor. Luecking (2009) reported that there was still a pressing need to connect secondary school curricula and structure with the realities and demands of life beyond high school.

The US government responded to these negative reports, which suggested that there was a crisis for youth with disabilities (NCD, 2000), and amendments to IDEA in 2004 became effective in July 2005. The purpose of these amendments was to improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities by increasing access to education for these students and finding ways to close the achievement gaps between groups of students with varying abilities and disabilities. Some of the strategies of IDEA (2004) to help students with disabilities transition from school to post-school included ensuring that during the last two years of high school, students participated in vocational education classes, in paid work experience in the community and in transition planning. Martinez (2007) indicated that to “help keep the bar of expectations high – to give them a life like everyone else, [it is necessary] for transition planning to start at school” (p. 3).
In Australia, the *Disability Standards for Education* came into effect in August 2005 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2005). These *Standards* underlined the continued obligations of education and training providers to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education without experiencing discrimination and to participate in educational courses or programs on the same basis as students without disabilities. Educational programs being provided for students with a disability were reviewed. The government developed strategies aimed at strengthening transition from school to work, developing social skills and work readiness training, empowering parents in the education of their children and training them to be equipped to support them.

These *Standards* are reflected in the educational initiatives of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The *Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework* (DEECD, 2013) and *Guidelines for implementing the Victorian careers curriculum framework for young people with disabilities* (DEECD, 2013) were designed to provide quality career development programs in schools for all young people, including students with a disability. The more recently published, *Strengthened Pathways Planning* (DEECD, 2014) has been developed specifically for students with a disability. These initiatives align closely with Kohler’s findings (Kohler, 1996) and there is a strong emphasis on building work-readiness skills; encouraging external organisations and agencies, parents and teachers to play a significant role in the transition process; supporting work and career focused activities and encouraging student self-development.

The Australian government, the DEECD and DHS provide a range of both human and material resources for special schools in Victoria. Human resources such as a Student Support Group (SSG), Transition Planners, Regional Career Development Officers (RCDOs) and National Disability Coordination Officers (NDCOs) are available. Material resources such as Futures for Young Adults funding (FFYA), the Transition to Employment initiative (TTE), the Disability Support Network (DSN), Career Information Centres (CICs), the Career Action Plan (CAP) and a variety of instructional videos can be accessed though schools and websites (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, [DEECD], 2010; DEECD, 2013; DEECD 2014; Department of Human Services [DHS], 2009).
Schools that enrol students with an intellectual disability are required to implement a SSG. This group is made up of parents, teachers and other support professionals who work together to establish shared goals for the students’ futures and works closely with students and families.

Transition Planners from DHS provide post-school support to help students transition from school to adult life and work closely with students and their schools to identify and document transition goals. Their roles vary depending on a student’s transition needs. RCDOs, a service which is available to all students in all sectors, promote strategies to improve student engagement, retention and completion, leading to sustainable pathways and effective transitions.

The NDCO Program works strategically to assist people with disability access and to participate in tertiary education and subsequent employment, through a national network. The NDCOs work with stakeholders at the local level to reduce systemic barriers, facilitate smooth transitions, build links and coordinate services between the education, training and employment sectors.

FFYA is government funding that provides post-school support for young people to help them to develop the skills needed to access further education, training or employment, or participate in community activities. The TTE initiative in Victoria is being developed as part of the FFYA program and provides a clear pathway for young people with a disability leaving school who are interested in pursuing further education, training and employment. The DSN supports special schools to form partnerships with service providers and the community and external providers are accessed through councils and the DHS. Schools are also able to access Disability Employment Services through this network.

CICs are accessible through Centrelink and the CAP is a planning document available from the DEECD. It is owned and managed by the students and intended to reflect their career development and learning. The CAP helps young people to develop their awareness and understanding of education, training and employment options, and to develop the skills, knowledge and capabilities to effectively manage their own careers and transitions throughout their lives. The CAPs incorporate three stages of career development: self development, career exploration and career management.
‘A Job Well Done’ is a video available from the DEECD developed to support students with a disability in their planning for external work experience. ‘Broaden Your Horizons’ is a website containing resources relating to young people with disability. This resource provides comprehensive information about available post-school options and support services.

2.3 Themes Emerging from the Literature

In 1993, Kohler and her colleagues at the University of Illinois conducted extensive research into transition programs and practices in schools transitioning students with a disability. Kohler developed five categories regarded as indicators of best practice which were published in Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996). In the US, these categories were developed into a “model for planning, organising and evaluating transition education, services and programs” (p. 1). The categories were: student development, student-focused planning, family involvement, interagency collaboration and program structure (Kohler, 1996).

There has been no similar research on a national scale conducted in Australia but in 2010, a study to benchmark practice in schools throughout Queensland, Australia, was conducted and 46 practice items were developed (Beamish et al., 2010). These 46 items were designed to gauge how well Kohler’s practices were being implemented in schools in Queensland.

The Guidelines for implementing the Victorian careers curriculum framework for young people with disabilities (DEECD, 2013) reflect the categories in Kohler’s (1996) research and offer suggestions similar to Kohler’s recommendations that transition-focused education is essential when preparing for post-school transition. Work experiences, either in-house or external, and transition-focused education are regarded by Kohler as important contributing factors to successful post-school transition. The Guidelines recommend that students with a disability should be encouraged at school to develop both work and living skills and undertake real-life workplace learning experiences that will be important in the achievement of career goals and entry to the paid workforce.
Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle is reflected throughout the literature and research has indicated that it is essential for students with an intellectual disability to have the same opportunities as everyone else. Hyde, Carpenter & Conway (2010) indicated that students with disabilities should have the same opportunities to develop workplace skills that are available to students in mainstream schools. Frameworks and guidelines have been provided by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Department of Human Services (DHS). The DHS is a Victorian Government department delivering community services and one of its aims is to improve the lives of people with a disability. The DEECD (2014) supports Nirje’s Normalisation Principle, specifically in the area of employment.

Every young person with a disability who is able to work should have an opportunity to participate in employment and be actively supported to do so (DEECD, 2014, Strengthened Pathways Planning for young people with disabilities, para 1).

The Guidelines require special schools in Victoria to prepare their students for post-school transition by delivering career and transition programs similar to what is offered to students in mainstream schools and to support students with a disability as they make the transition from school to post-school services. The Victorian careers curriculum framework and the Student support group guidelines focus on students with a disability and while they are not mandated, they are designed to provide all schools with processes to support them in meeting their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The materials can be adapted to suit the individual needs of students with disabilities and offer a wide range of suggestions as to how career exploration, planning and management; transition education and work preparation programs can best be delivered to students with a disability (DEECD, 2010; DEECD, 2013).

### 2.3.1 Student development

Kohler developed five categories in her Taxonomy, one of which is student development and includes life skills, career and vocational activities and work experiences. There was a strong indication from the literature that a program of activities specifically designed to develop work and employability skills while ensuring that students’ specific
needs are met is regarded as important to student development (Kohler & Field, 2003; Luecking, 2009; Parmenter, 2011; Scholl & Mooney, 2004).

The importance of undertaking work experiences is a critical component of student development in the transition process for students with an intellectual disability. Participating in work experience is regarded as an important contributor to increased knowledge and enhanced skill development, while providing opportunities to apply these skills both within and beyond the school. Kohler and Field (2003) indicated that work experiences can help a student to identify career interests, skills and abilities, explore career goals, identify on-the-job support needs, develop employability skills and good work habits, gain an understanding of employer expectations and an understanding of the workplace.

In the US, amendments to IDEA in 2004 mandated that transition-focused education be provided for all students with a disability, with work experience being an essential component. Real-life experiences in the workplace give these students the opportunity to spend time in a job, based on their interests and preferences, during their last years of schooling (Luecking, 2009). Providing students with an intellectual disability with experience in a real workplace or undertaking real-life training with an employer is an important part of transition to work practices and some researchers have suggested that students participate in job shadowing, work sampling and volunteering (Stodden, Dowrick, Gilmore & Galloway, 2001). A key recommendation from this research is that students should have multiple work experiences outside the classroom in authentic workplaces.

There is strong evidence from Australia (From school to real work, 2009) and the US (Fabian, 2007; Luecking, 2009; Stodden et al., 2001) that work experience is a key indicator of success. In Victoria, the DEECD Guidelines stress the importance of giving students opportunities to experience work and understand the requirements for entry into the workplace. They explain the expectations of employers and provide advice on employees’ and employers’ rights and responsibilities. The suggestions in the Guidelines are similar to the recommendations and suggestions given by researchers in the area of post-school transition for students with a disability. Kohler (1996)
emphasises the importance of student development through transition-focused education
and the Guidelines also support this.

In the UK, however, work experience for students with a disability who are still at
school is not an essential part of transition planning. The Wolf Report (2011), a review
of vocational education, highlighted the importance of introducing vocational education
into all schools and recommended changes to the current system. Although the report
reviewed vocational education in general, students with disabilities were considered.
Wolf found that in order to improve post-school outcomes for young people with a
disability, high quality experiences in the workplace should be an important component
of any transition program.

2.3.2 Self-determination

The second category is student-focused planning or self-determination which Kohler
regarded as one of the keys to the success in post-school transition. The DEECD
Guidelines considers young people with a disability and their parents or carers as
essential in the career pathway and decision making process in order to determine their
own strengths and interests. In the past, professionals made all the decisions regarding
the future of these young adults but the concept of self-determination or student-focused
planning has emerged with the aim of allowing the person with a disability to become
involved in determining what they need and want (Halpern, 1994). In 1983, the Review
of the Handicapped Person’s Assistance Act, 1974 consulted people with disabilities
and their views were considered. Studies by Kohler (1996) in the US and Meadows
(2006) in Australia showed there is clear evidence that including students in their own
transition planning leads to the improvement of their ability to identify goals and
experience success post-school. Laragy (2004) supports Kohler’s findings and
subsequent research found that self-determination has become a fundamental principle
of many transition programs.

The DEECD Guidelines support the evidence that self-determination is a significant
factor in the transition process and suggest that students are assisted to develop a Career
Action Plan (CAP) to “capture their increased self-awareness and self-management
through career development....[and] develop skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours
to effectively manage their careers and transitions throughout their lives” (p. 2).
Kohler (1996) reported that the purpose of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) is to ensure that students become part of their own career and transition planning. ILPs ensure students are included in decision making, while also developing their career awareness and self-determination. Schools in Australia and the US implement ILPs for all students with an intellectual disability to cater to their specific needs. Laragy (2004) found that discovering the preferred options of the young person through a process of self-determination assists them in making these preferences become a reality. Literature from Australia (Levinson & Palmer, 2005) supports the research that has been undertaken in the US and there is agreement that students should be actively involved in the transition planning process. More recent reports from Australia found that ensuring the self-determination of students by encouraging student choice and decision-making is one of the success factors for any transition program and helps with the smooth transition of students with disabilities into the adult community (Stewart, Freeman, Law, Healy, Burke-Gaffney, Forhan, Young & Guenther, 2010; From school to real work, 2009).

2.3.3 Parental involvement

Kohler’s (1996) third category, family involvement, refers to the importance of empowering parents, carers and families and involving them in planning for the future and in the career development journey of their children. Wehman (2006) maintained that parent involvement is “perhaps the most significant factor in the transition outcomes for students with a disability from youth into adulthood” (p. 24). In Victoria, the DEECD Guidelines have been written for parents as well as students, acknowledging that the parent is critical to the transition process. The DEECD recognises that “better outcomes are achieved when the key people in a student’s life are included and engaged with planning, supporting and implementing the educational program” (p. 2).

The National Council on Intellectual Disability in Australia in its report From school to real work (2009), indicated that empowering young people with an intellectual disability to participate in decision-making in conjunction with their families is key to the success of the transition process. The report also offers reasons why creating a collaborative and informed parent-teacher partnership is essential.
It is the parents who have the most knowledge of their children and who bring invaluable information to the planning, implementation and evaluation process of transition strategies (p. 11).

Hyde et al., (2010) and Meadows et al. (2006) also reported on the significance of parental and family involvement in determining the effectiveness of post-school transition for students with a disability. Research from the US, Luecking (2009) and Stewart et al., (2010) also found that it was important to engage families in planning for work experiences, to create mutual expectations and to help parents navigate the many disability service providers.

2.3.4 Interagency collaboration

Kohler’s (1996) fourth category is interagency collaboration. This category outlined the importance of having schools work closely with outside agencies to ensure successful outcomes for students with a disability. The DEECD Guidelines suggest that the transition process should be supported through partnerships between the school, parent communities and external support agencies. Falvey and Coots (1986) found that linking students with an intellectual disability to community based services prior to leaving school contributed to effective integration into society.

Prior to Kohler’s research, studies in Australia emphasised the importance of educators establishing and maintaining links with relevant services and agencies. For instance, Parmenter and Riches (1990) maintained that to experience a successful transition from school to work, each student with a disability, should have access to disability organisations and networks. In addition to this, possible employers, parents, community resources, government agencies and private industry need to cooperate and collaborate to successfully engage these students.

Research has shown that parents and families need support to not only understand the purposes of each disability support agency and provider but to find out what is available and suitable. Parmenter and Riches (1990a) regarded establishing strong links to employment services and other disability services as essential for students in their successful transition from school to post-school. Riches (1996) findings supported this earlier research and found that strengthening interagency collaboration was “a critical feature of transition programs for students with a disability” (p. 88).
Further research conducted in Australia by Laragy (2004) supported these findings from the US and she recommended that strengthening interagency collaboration could be achieved by establishing teams working with outside agencies at the individual, school, community and, central policy and planning levels. Meadows et al., (2006) found that one of the positive ways of supporting students in the transition phase is by maintaining links with adult service providers and community agencies.

Open employment and adult agencies should be fundamental partners with schools in the planning and implementation of a school-to-work curriculum before graduation and ongoing employment and adult support after graduation (From school to real work, 2009, p. 18).

More recent research from the US emphasised the importance of interagency collaboration. Levinson and Palmer (2005) and Luecking (2009) reported that a successful school-to-work transition program is one that integrates a variety of school and community agency personnel working together to identify relevant transition needs and plan appropriate services. The suggestions set out in the DEECD Guidelines also support the “inclusion of parent communities and external support agencies to aid the smooth transition of students with an intellectual disability through their final years of schooling” (p. 2).

2.3.5 Program structure

Kohler’s (1996) fifth category is program structure, which refers to the philosophy of the program being delivered, program policy, evaluation and planning, resource allocation and human resources development. The DEECD Guidelines also acknowledge the importance of the role of teachers and other staff in schools in developing programs to aid the successful transition of students from school to post-school life and ensuring that individual needs are met.

According to Kohler (1996) appropriate resource allocation and human resources are essential in delivering a successful transition program and the literature examined in this chapter indicates that the roles played by teachers, parents and families, counsellors, therapists, psychologists and others involved in the education experience of students with a disability, are significant in successfully transitioning them to post-school services, employment or education. The Guidelines emphasise the importance of
ensuring that “relevant staff are available to support the students throughout their school years” (p. 2).

Literature from Australia (Laragy, 2004), from the US (Kohler, 2003) and the UK (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004), stated that to support students with a disability to achieve their preferred outcomes while at school and for students’ career awareness to be developed, it is essential to have fully informed and well trained teachers who are crucial to young people with an intellectual disability.

A report to Minister Garrett (2010), Australia’s then Minister for School Education, Strategies to support the education of students with disabilities in Australian schools identified that targeted support was needed to assist students with a disability to achieve post-school success. The report made the point that in order to be successful in schools, programs require skilled and expert staff: “quality teaching is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement” (p. 8).

While acknowledging the importance and influence of teachers in special schools, an examination of the effect of teacher quality on the delivery of transition programs and an evaluation of the programs being delivered, however, is outside the scope of this study. The aims of this study are to identify how students with an intellectual disability are being prepared for post-school transition, to investigate what programs are being implemented and what schools regard as success factors.

2.4 Quality of Life

Research in Australia indicates that many people with a disability require ongoing, extensive support in more than one major life activity in order to participate in integrated community settings and enjoy the quality of life available to people with fewer or no disabilities. Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle is reflected in much of the Personal Wellbeing Index – Intellectual Disability (PWI-ID) literature. There is general agreement that it is important to give people with an intellectual or physical disability the same opportunities to experience life as everyone else. There is emphasis on the importance of enabling students with a disability to have access to the same experiences and opportunities in education, training and employment as their able peers
to allow them to enjoy the same quality of life that is enjoyed by others in the community.

Quality of life is measured on the Personal Wellbeing Index Scale (PWI) which uses eight domains to measure the quality of life: standard of living, health, life achievement, personal relationships, personal safety, community-connectedness, future security and spirituality-religion (Tomyn, Fuller Tyszkiewicz, & Cummins, 2011). People with an intellectual disability can be tested using the Intellectual Disability (PWI-ID) version.

Meadows et al., (2006) and Parmenter (2011) reported that transition-focused education for students with an intellectual disability should concentrate on the acquisition of the skills that will assist in achieving quality of life while still at school. Another publication, the National Disability Strategy Consultation Report for the Australian Government, Shut Out (2009) outlined the importance of developing workplace and employability skills to develop in these students which contribute to important life and social skills that others in the community take for granted.

Although Australia, the US and the UK have introduced disability legislation aimed at improving the quality of life for students with a disability, there is evidence to show that not all eight items on the PWI-ID Scale have been achieved. Research conducted by Meadows et al., (2006) at Griffith University in Queensland, identified where students with a disability transition to when they leave school and found that this cohort is underrepresented in employment and vocational education training post-school. Parmenter (2011) found that post-school employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in Australia are much lower than their peers without a disability. Crawford (2012) reported that post-school expectations for students with a disability in the UK are not being met.

Measured against the domains in the PWI-ID Scale, the quality of life for these students as they move to the adult world remains poor. The OECD (2010) report indicated that people with disabilities living in Australia have the “poorest quality of life among people with disabilities anywhere in the developed world” (p. 14). In other words, while research has provided evidence that transition-focused education programs are effective, quality of life was not being achieved in the transition from school to post-school for students with an intellectual disability.
2.5 Meeting post-school expectations

The school environment can provide students with an intellectual disability with opportunities to experience different workplaces and disability services, spend time with trained experts on individual career plans and develop work and social skills to prepare for a future beyond school. Schools in Australia and the US have the capacity to provide transition-focused education in secondary special schools and in the UK there is a move towards providing more targeted career planning and vocational education. Unemployment rates for young people with a disability in each of these countries, however, remains high and there is less likelihood they will gain open employment when they leave school (Crawford, 2012).

Since the 1980s there have been many suggestions on ways to improve the transition of students with a disability from school to post-school in Australia. The National Disability Strategy Consultation Report (2009) showed that despite transition-focused education being delivered in Australian special and mainstream schools for students with physical or intellectual disabilities there is still much to be done to ensure that these programs achieve successful post-school outcomes. The Report expressed the concern of parents that “their children had slipped through the cracks of the system after formal schooling ended” (p. 34).

While transition-focused education provided in US schools for students with an intellectual disability is regarded as effective, once these students leave school, the support ends. A documentary called Best kept secret (Buck, 2013) revealed that the transition experience from school to post-school is referred to as ‘falling off a cliff’ (Walsh-Sarnecki, 2012). The documentary highlighted an inspirational teacher from John F Kennedy High School in Newark who worked with students with an intellectual disability to improve their social and survival skills with a particular focus on skills to increase their post-school employability. In 2012, the teacher faced the prospect of her entire class going off that cliff. Parents and teachers called it ‘falling off a cliff’ because of the scarcity of continuing support in adult education programs or accommodations.

In the UK, despite the introduction of a support service for young people in Learning to succeed: a new framework for post 16 learning (1999), Mittler (2008) found that young adults with disabilities were still experiencing multiple barriers. Parents and carers
reported that their children were not prepared for life post-school and compared it to ‘being dropped off a cliff’ (Kaehne & Beyer, 2008).

The aim of the UK government initiative in 1999 was to ensure a smooth transition from compulsory schooling to post-16 learning and to the world of work. Stewart et al., (2010) noted that the government provided little direction to policy development focused on specific issues facing youth with an intellectual disability. According to Cameron (2012), one of the reasons for this, is that the main concern in UK schools is the quality of the education being delivered while a child with a disability is still at school, rather than preparation for life after school and implementing transition-focused education.

**Summary**

This study is concerned with the training and education of young people with an intellectual disability while they are still at school. The earliest literature in this chapter is from 1969 when Swedish researcher, Nirje in his Normalisation Principle, suggested that all people with an intellectual disability should have the same opportunities as everyone else to experience all aspects of life. In the 1970s, Nirje’s principle influenced US government policies and subsequently other governments’ policies. There was a change in society’s attitudes and strategies were put in place by various governments to ensure that people with an intellectual disability were not discriminated against and had the same opportunities as everyone else. Much of the research indicates that although there was legislation put in place, access to the same opportunities as everyone else in all aspects of life is still not happening.

The literature review encompassed existing programs and policies, legislation, research, community-based articles, ministerial papers and speeches, databases, school policies and other documents. The review revealed that most of the research into post-school transition programs has been carried out in the US where government policies ensure that schools, both mainstream and special schools are developing effective models for successful post-school transition of students with an intellectual disability. There is less literature available on transition or vocational education in the UK.
The review of the literature in Australia on preparation for post-school transition for students with an intellectual disability revealed that Federal and State governments have not mandated that schools provide specific programs for students with an intellectual disability. Education departments and disability organisations, however, have developed strategies and resources to support schools to deliver transition-focused education which ensures that special schools are supported to provide targeted support for their students during their secondary schooling.

Since 1993 when Paula Kohler conducted her research in the US on transition-focused education, much has been written in Australia and the US to support her findings. The UK has been slow to develop transition programs in schools for students with a disability and preparing students with an intellectual disability for post-school employment or further education was not part of the strategies being developed to support these young people.

This study is concerned with identifying what special schools are doing to prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition and what programs are being implemented to promote the training and education of young people with an intellectual disability while they are still at school. Kohler’s research has informed the questions in the surveys and interviews to identify how teachers in special schools prepare students for post-school transition and determine what programs are being developed and implemented.

The third aim of the study is to identify the key success factors of the transition programs being implemented in special schools. The literature indicates that transition-focused education, workplace skills and other transition programs are an essential aspect in the education of students with an intellectual disability but there is little research of into the success of these programs. There is, however, evidence that the successful transition to post-school employment, education and training is not happening despite the efforts of schools and dedicated teachers. The low participation rates in higher education, training and employment would suggest that few young people with disabilities are able to make this transition.
Chapter 3  Methodology

In Chapter 2, the research literature illustrated the importance of giving students with an intellectual disability the opportunity to experience the same aspects of life as their non-disabled peers. The literature also indicated that developing and implementing programs to transition these students from school to post-school by providing workplace familiarisation programs, work experiences and career pathways is likely to enhance a successful transition.

Selection criteria were developed and 70 (71 percent) of the 98 Victorian government special schools, 21 Special Development Schools (SDS) and 49 Special Schools (SS), were identified as suitable for this study. These special schools cater for students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities at secondary level and had a cohort of students transitioning post-school at the end of 2013.

To address the aims of the study which are: to identify how teachers in special schools in Victoria prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school, to investigate which programs are being implemented and to identify key success factors, it was necessary to survey and interview teachers in special schools to understand their current practices and where possible, observe the activities in which students are engaged. This chapter describes the procedures undertaken to collect this data.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 3.1 explains that this is a qualitative study utilising descriptive and qualitative data. Section 3.2 is a discussion of the use of case studies and Section 3.3 explains the rationale for the sample of participating schools.

3.1 Research Approach

Descriptive and qualitative data were collected through online questionnaires or using email, and face-to-face or telephone interviews. Specific information was provided through the questionnaires on type of disability, numbers of students graduating in 2013, post-school destinations, classroom activities, program implementation and daily activities. Qualitative data were collected through the open-ended responses to the questionnaires and through semi-structured interviews. Anecdotal evidence and details
of programs were provided by the participants, regional offices and websites. The option of emailing work or posting this information to an address was given.

Participants provided details of their programs in print, on DVDs, as weblinks and on USBs. Some provided links to YouTube clips, documentation on external agencies, work experience forms, lists of placements, assessment templates, case studies and individual students’ progress sheets (de-identified). They also provided lessons plans, outlines of projects, assessment sheets, details of which resources had been adapted and classroom activities. Regional offices and disability services organisations also provided relevant information.

3.1.1 Participants

In Victoria there are 114 (98 government, ten independent and six Catholic) Special and Special Development Schools catering for students with physical and/or intellectual disabilities. The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is used to determine the severity of intellectual disability. SSs enrol students with an IQ over 50 and below 70 and SDSs enrol students with an IQ below 50. Special schools in the study catered predominantly for students with a mild to severe intellectual disability, significant learning needs, Autism or Down Syndrome. Special schools for hearing and vision impaired students and special schools with only primary aged students were excluded.

Seventy government special schools met the criteria for selection and were chosen to take part in the research as they have similar governance, needs, requirements and systems and come under the same jurisdiction. This information was accessed through the MySchool website and individual school’s websites.

The principal of each of the 70 schools was contacted via email (Appendix 5), with a request to conduct research. Included in the email was a plain language statement (Appendix 6), a consent form (Appendix 7), and the first questionnaire (Appendix 1). Twenty-eight principals responded to the request for research; twenty consented to participate (thirteen SSs and seven SDSs); eight declined to participate and 42 did not respond. The 20 principals who agreed to participate in the research passed the questionnaire onto an appropriate staff member who was more closely connected with the transition programs in the schools. Each of these schools responded to the original
questionnaire and the subsequent one (Appendix 2). Interviews were conducted with the participant responding to the questionnaires.

Of the 20 participants to the first questionnaire, 13 were SSs which represents 26 percent of the total number of government SSs in Victoria. Seven were SDSs which represents 13 percent of the total number of SDSs in Victoria. These 20 participants provided data on current education and transition to work strategies and programs being implemented to prepare students for post-school pathways and which resources from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) are used. Data on specific programs and the numbers of students transitioning at the end of 2013 were also collected.

Quantifying the different types of disability in the special schools taking part in the study was difficult. There is a range of disabilities across the schools and within each of the schools. The first questionnaire asked participants to indicate the main type of disability, the majority of responses referred to ‘intellectual’, two schools did not respond and only seven were specific about the types of disability.

The schools taking part in the study had students with a range of intellectual and physical disabilities, including: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, chromosomal disorders, Fragile X and severe behavioural disorders. There was a range of moderate disabilities such as learning and behavioural needs, to severe intellectual disabilities, and students with physical and multiple disabilities as well. The SS in one of the case studies was selected as this was a school catering exclusively for students with ASD. The SDS was selected as it was the largest participating school in the metropolitan area. Both participants had indicated on the original survey that they would be willing to be interviewed.

Coding was used for the interviewees and the schools. The first letter or two letters indicate the school, the next letter indicates the position held in the school (P = Principal, T = teacher, S = student) and the figures indicate the year the quote was provided. The two case studies contain pseudonyms for the two interviewees.
Table 1: Characteristics of the 20 special schools in Victoria participating in the study. (n=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of school</strong></td>
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<td>Special Development School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of special schools</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School location</strong></td>
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<td>Leading Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of students in Year 12 at the end of 2013</strong></td>
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<td>Special Development Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Schools</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of students</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 *Questionnaires*

An initial questionnaire was developed to determine how schools prepare students for post-school transition, what programs were being implemented and what was regarded as success. The questions were constructed to answer the aims of the study. The first questionnaire with a rationale for each of the questions (Appendix 1) was trialled in one SS. Emails containing the questionnaire, a plain English statement and a consent form were sent to the principals of 70 special schools. A total of twenty special schools responded.

Responses to the first questionnaire provided details of transition education being developed to support students with an intellectual disability for post-school. Participants provided information on transition programs and activities being implemented and reported that transition education in these schools was either highly successful or successful. This information provided a general overview of what schools were doing and whether they regarded their programs as successful. In order to define success, to
determine whether schools used similar programs and resources and to gather more specific data, a second questionnaire (Appendix 2), was sent to the participating schools.

Meadows et al., (2006) and Beamish et al., (2010) maintain that Kohler’s (1996) research is the most comprehensive in the area of transition for students with an intellectual disability. The responses from the 20 special schools suggested that the transition practices in these schools aligned with Kohler’s categories. More specific and detailed information was required to identify which programs and transition activities were being implemented; to determine the outcomes of certain programs; to gain some insights from teachers into the themes that had emerged from the literature; to define success and to understand what motivated teachers to provide transition-focused education to students with an intellectual disability.

3.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

Upon receipt of the principal’s permission, semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3) were conducted over the phone or face-to-face with a sub-group of the 20 participating schools.

Eight participants who were implementing post-school transition programs for students with an intellectual disability indicated they would be available to be interviewed within the timeframe provided and were contacted by phone. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone with four participants and four participants were interviewed face-to-face. Transition or career advisors in three Victorian Regional Offices were also interviewed.

3.1.4 Case Studies

The case study inquiry contains a sample of two of the 20 schools in the study. Further interviews were conducted with two participants, one from each type of special school. Two of the participants, who were interviewed face-to-face, agreed to be interviewed a second time in order to develop case studies.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather more information on the transition programs being delivered in special schools and to describe and illustrate what was typical to these settings. This was typical case sampling designed to be illustrative
rather than definitive (Patton, 2002). The two schools, one Special School and one Special Development School were selected as they had a significant cohort of students with an intellectual disability. The SS was specifically for students with ASD and the SDS catered for a large number of students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities.

Summary

This was a qualitative study of special schools in Victoria and used questionnaires and interviews to gather data. This chapter has included a discussion of the settings and participants. The questionnaires sent to special schools and subsequent interviews determined which transition programs each school implemented, how schools approached the post-school transition of students with an intellectual disability and what teachers regarded as a successful post-school transition. In the next chapter, the findings from each of the questionnaires and the interviews with teachers will be presented.
Chapter 4 Findings

In this chapter, data from the first questionnaire (Appendix 1), and the second questionnaire (Appendix 2) were collected, transferred to excel spread sheets, after which graphs were developed. Qualitative responses from the interviews were also transferred and analysed.

In Chapter 4, I describe how teachers prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school. I also describe the activities and programs being implemented in 28 percent of special schools in Victoria and identify the key success factors of these programs. These programs, the activities being implemented and the resources being accessed in the 20 special schools in the study align with Kohler’s categories in her Taxonomy and were consistent with best evidence based practice (Beamish et al., 2010; Kohler, 1996).

Four of Kohler’s five categories have been referred to in this study: student development; parental involvement; self determination or student-focused planning; and interagency collaboration.

1. Student development refers to the programs being implemented, including external courses, traineeships, apprenticeships, volunteer programs, work preparation workshops and classes and work experience.

2. Parental involvement is when parents and families are actively involved in and are regarded as essential to successful post-school transition.

3. Self-determination or student-focused planning ensures that students take an active part and are involved in their career planning.

4. Interagency collaboration is when the school works closely with post-school services and connects with a range of outside agencies, and disability, industry and other services visit students.

4.1 Data Collection

The two questionnaires sent to participants required qualitative and descriptive responses. The first questionnaire asked participants in questions 2, 3 and 4 to list the main types of disability of the students in each school, the year levels taught and the number of students transitioning post-school at the end of 2103. The purpose of these questions was to determine which schools were suitable for the study and had students
with an intellectual disability, were enrolled in secondary levels and were leaving school at the end of the year.

Responses to questions 5 and 6 provided detailed information on the type of transition activities being provided as part of transition-focused education and which resources, both human and material, were being accessed to support a successful transition. These responses revealed that schools were engaging in similar programs and activities.

Participants gave the number of transitioning students and where they transitioned to in their responses to questions 6 and 7 and in question 9 indicated which service providers worked with the schools and the students. Questions 10 and 11 asked participants to rate their programs and how they defined the success or effectiveness of these programs.

Information provided by responses to the first questionnaire was used to frame some of the questions in the second questionnaire. Responses to Question 2 provided numerical data on specific post-school options the number of students transitioning at the end of 2013. A detailed list of transition programs and activities, staff positions and resources were provided in questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 and participants were asked to indicate on apprenticeships. Information collected from participating schools indicated that some of courses and TAFE Certificates being offered at SSs were, Transition Education, Retail, Horticulture; Hospitality and Information Technology were offered.

While only a small number of SDSs offered external or in-house work experience, these were important activities for SSs and students were given the opportunity to visit a variety of workplaces. Despite students requiring a high level of support, the SDSs in the study actively engaged their students in workplace familiarisation, work experiences, career planning and other work related activities where possible.

Career planning is mandatory for all students in Victorian secondary schools and Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) planning is part of this. The majority of special schools in the study were involved in this planning and career information nights for students, their parents and families were held.

4.1.2 Activities Offered in the Final Years of Secondary Schooling. (n=20)

The responses to the first questionnaire indicated that the 20 special schools participating in the study offered a range of activities so students were able to develop
the skills to take part in everyday life. The second questionnaire listed these activities to determine which ones schools were developing and implementing. Some were specifically related to the workplace, workplace familiarisation, OH&S training, interview practice and resume writing. These activities and others, travel training, Duke of Edinburgh and life skills, were designed to provide their students with the opportunity to have the same experiences as their non-disabled peers. All of the activities align with recommendations from Meadows et al., (2006) and Parmenter (2011) that transition-focused education for students with an intellectual disability should concentrate on the acquisition of the skills that will assist in achieving quality of life while still at school and post-school.

![Figure 1: Transition activities being offered in Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria. (n = 20)](image)

Life skills were regarded as very important to the students. All of the special schools in the study offered a variety of activities aimed at building independence and were often designed to suit each student’s individual needs. As well as offering a variety of life skills, all of the 20 special schools in the study provided work related activities. These activities included: work and social skills, and personal development; recreation and leisure based activities; sport and fitness programs, and other community based and employment related activities. Students were given lessons in travel training so they could get to workplaces independently and, as part of the work experience program,
mandatory OH&S training was provided. All students who undertook external work experience were required to complete OH&S training. For students in SDSs who had much higher needs, OH&S training was still offered as part of the transition-focused education programs even if students did not participate in external work experience. SDSs in the study were not able to offer the same activities as SSs because of the difference in the abilities of their students with an intellectual disability.

Some activities which required a higher level of ability were offered to students where appropriate. The Duke of Edinburgh program, which involved a range of skills and activities was offered in both types of schools but only taken up by a small number of students.

4.1.3 Resources to Support Students to Transition to Post-school Options

The information collected from the responses to question 6 on the first questionnaire from the participants produced information of the types of resources being accessed.

![Bar Chart]

Figure 2: Resources to support the post-school transition of students with an intellectual disability being accessed by Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria. (n = 13)

Special schools were using a range of human and material resources, accessing networks and government funded programs and resources that were available online or
from other schools. Question 8 on the second questionnaire provided a comprehensive list of resources being used in Victorian special schools. It was not possible to determine why some schools and not others made use of the resources provided by the DEECD and DHS. No distinction has been made between SSs and SDSs in this section as the number of responses to this question was small (n=13).

The resources included human resources available in schools and from various government departments: the Student Support Group (SSG), DHS Transition planners, Regional Career Development Officers (RCDOs), National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program. All 13 of the schools responding to this question worked closely with the students and their families by forming SSGs. Ten special schools put students in contact with a Transition Planner from DHS to provide post-school support. Three schools accessed a RCDO and two had an NDCO work with their students.

The material resources included networks and government funded programs such as Career Information Centres (CICs), Futures for Young Adults (FFYA), the Disability Support Network (DSN) and resources that are available online or are school-based: the Career Action Plan (CAP) and ‘Broaden Your Horizons’, a website, and ‘A Job Well Done’, a video.

Two schools accessed CICs, nine were eligible for FFYA funding and eight schools found support through the DSN. CAPs were accessed by ten schools to enable students to be involved in their own career development. Five schools made use of a video, ‘A Job Well Done’, to help with planning for external work experience and only one school accessed the website, ‘Broaden Your Horizons’.

4.2 Underlying factors important to transition programs in special schools

Data collected from the first questionnaire provided evidence that transition practices in Victorian special schools align with the categories developed by Kohler (1996). Schools provided detailed information on the activities and programs being provided, resources being used and explanations of what they were doing. To address the third aim of the study which is to identify key success factors of transition programs for students with an intellectual disability in special schools, a Likert scale which included Kohler’s
categories, was provided in question 9 in the second questionnaire to determine the level of importance participants place on certain factors. These factors are further explained using qualitative data collected from the responses in interviews and to open ended questions.

Participants were asked to rate the importance of factors that contributed to the success of a school’s transition program. The most important factor according to 15 special schools in the study was the involvement of parents. Having skilled teaching staff was regarded by the majority of participants as extremely important but there was little or no information provided in the open ended responses.

The following factors which aligned with Kohler’s (1996) categories were also rated highly: interagency collaboration, student-focused planning and career planning. None

### Figure 3: Factors important to transition programs in Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria. (n = 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Low importance</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace learning opportunities</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-agency collaboration</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determination</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career planning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government advice and information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government policy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the participants indicated that any of these factors had a low importance. While self-determination was considered important in transition, it is noteworthy that the input of personnel such as parents, skilled staff both at the school and from outside organisations was seen as extremely important to building the capacity of the students. Only a small number of participants regarded government policies, resources and information provided by various government departments, as important.

Each of these factors will be examined further in this chapter. Direct quotes from participants are included. The quotes from students were provided by the participants. There are no quotes from parents as parents and students were not interviewed as part of this study.

**Parental involvement**

One of Kohler’s categories was _family involvement_ and Figure 3 indicated that 14 of the 15 participants regarded the involvement of parents as extremely important and one indicated that it was very important. This involvement was regarded as a significant factor in successful transition outcomes for students as they move through school. High importance was placed on educating parents about the transition process and none of the participants gave this a low rating. Participants regarded the role of the parents in the lives of students with an intellectual disability as significant. From interviews with teachers and principals, it is clear that having parents take an active role in the transition process for their children was important to a successful post-school transition.

The parents of the students with an intellectual disability in the schools participating in the study worked with transition planners and coaches to help set goals for their children and gained a greater understanding of the programs the school provides. Parents were encouraged to attend information sessions where outside organisations, post-school providers, disability services and employment agencies were invited to talk to parents and families. These information evenings also informed parents about FFYA, TTE and post-school options, and provided information on the type of support available and what is the most appropriate for their child. Schools provided opportunities for parents to visit Disability Service Day Centres and other post-school settings, and workshops were run for parents with representatives from various organisations attending the school to share information. One participant made the comment that:
‘Kids will start their own adult lives but the decision-making has to involve the parents as well, as these kids will probably never leave home.’ B14T

From the findings in Figure 1 and subsequent interviews, there was a strong indication that involving parents in the transition education of their children was vital.

**Workplace learning opportunities**

Another of Kohler’s categories was *student development* which can include: life skills development, career and vocational programs and work experience. *Error! Reference source not found.* indicates that providing real-life experiences in the workplace and in the community, and opportunities to experience the world of work, were regarded by 13 participants as an extremely important factor and by two as very important.

Teachers in these schools have provided students with an intellectual disability with the same experiences as students in mainstream schools. There was general agreement from participants during the interviews that teaching students about the workplace is essential. They indicated that work experience in these schools provided students with opportunities to explore a range of different workplaces outside the school and they were able to practise their skills in a real setting.

The interviews highlighted a major concern about work experience. There was general agreement that finding suitable work placements was not an easy task and teachers reported that it was often difficult to get communities and businesses on board to support their work experience programs. They relied on outside agencies and DSNs to find appropriate placements for their students.

‘There is no point in sending one of our students to places they have no interest in as they soon get bored and often become uncooperative. Finding suitable placements is hard but there are some great success stories – we would like a lot more.’ C13T

In-house or external work experience was regarded by participants as a contributing factor to the successful post-school transition for students with an intellectual disability. Schools participating in the study reported that it was important for students to be given a range of external work experiences in order to gain a greater understanding of their strengths and interests. Students with an intellectual disability were also encouraged to see how manufacturing companies, factories, construction companies and offices...
operate. There was also a desire for the students to undertake work experience in places that might be potential sources of employment post-school. The two comments below are illustrative of the degree to which participants felt that this was important.

‘Research has shown that successful transition to work is more successful when the students begin work at school and make a seamless transition into their work place.’ SG13T

‘The preparation of these skills provide the students with real life learning and this can support many of them to gain employment.’ B13P

Some of these placements were in child care centres, a bike shop, farms, a tyre business, primary schools, local supermarkets, offices, garden centres, retail outlets and retirement homes.

In some schools, in-house work experience opportunities made use of outside expertise. In one school a café had been created in partnership with a local café business. Another café was developed in partnership with the local TAFE and students were combining work experience with a TAFE course in hospitality. One school had started a café in a retirement village to take advantage of a space that had been empty for a long period of time and this enterprise was not only providing real-life work experiences for the students but providing a much needed service for the elderly citizens. A community garden was developed in the grounds of one school and outside groups helped with maintenance and supervision. In another school, a beauty salon operated once a week.

Some local businesses contracted the students at the schools to shred paper, collate documents and deliver pamphlets. One school provided in-house work experience by giving students extra responsibilities around the school including the raising and lowering of the flag; grounds maintenance; working in junior classrooms; running assemblies, organising ANZAC ceremonies and making speeches.

In-house work experiences tended to be connected to the schools’ life skills programs and students were ‘employed’ in veggie gardens, the canteen or in the school’s recycling program. Participants reported that having some students undertake external work experience was often difficult because of the level of support required from the school and from employers.
'McDonald’s has a work experience program specifically designed for our kids but a teacher has to be present at all times. This means that the kids can only work a few hours a day and only if someone is available. ’BH13T

The schools in the study had access to organisations offering supported employment for people with disabilities and were able to offer work experience to secondary students with a disability. Some schools had students undertake work experience in places like the local opportunity shop, McDonald’s, Bunnings and in Kevin Heinze Gardens where work experience students needed a degree of independence.

**Interagency collaboration**

Kohler (1996) regarded *interagency collaboration* as a key success factor and in Figure 3 interagency collaboration is rated by eleven of the special schools participating in the study as extremely important and four as very important. The participants who were interviewed indicated that maintaining good relationships with disability services and agencies was essential and connecting parents with these services was an important part of their transition programs.

Transition visits to post-school placements were part of the transition-focused education program in 13 of the participating SSs and two of the SDSs as shown in Figure 1, especially towards the end of the students’ final year. Post-school services were also able to come to the schools on informal or formal visits.

**Self-determination**

Kohler refers to this as *student-focused planning* where students actively participate in planning strategies being put in place in schools. The responses from the participants in the study indicated that involving the students in their own goal setting and career planning was essential. Figure 3 shows student self-determination is rated by nine of the participants as extremely important, three as very important and three regarded it as moderately important.

Interviews with teachers and principals indicated that post-school decision-making involved not only school staff and families but took into account the needs and desires of the student. To support students in special schools, a School Support Group (SSG) made up of the principal, parents, and teachers, worked with each student and in the final years of schooling the SSG works closely with the student on more focused career
planning. Each student had an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to ensure that students become part of the career and transition planning process which included students in decision-making, developed students’ career awareness and self-determination.

**Career planning**

Career planning comes under the heading of Kohler’s *student development* and it is one of the key factors of successful transition-focused programming. All participants placed importance on the high level of career planning that special schools were able to offer and these schools have developed transition-focused education programs specifically designed to develop work and employability skills while ensuring students’ specific needs and interests are catered for.

**Government advice and information/government policy**

Figure 3 indicated that less than half of the participants felt that government advice and information and government policy was important to the success of their transition programs. The interviews revealed that most schools were accessing the resources available through the DEECD and were following guidelines. The DEECD has provided *Guidelines for Implementing the Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework* for all schools to follow when preparing students for post-school transition. MIPs and CAPs were used by all schools in Victoria and special schools adapt the material so students with disabilities could understand it more easily and it was more suited to a student’s individual needs. The language was made simpler, illustrations were included and tick boxes were provided in sections where students needed to make comments.

**Overview**

Participants indicated that these factors: parental involvement, workplace learning opportunities, interagency collaboration, self-determination and career planning contributed to the success of the transition programs being implemented in the special schools in the study. The participants in the study indicated that they were working closely with students on transition-focused education, career pathways and skills to prepare them for post-school transition. As one teacher noted:

‘All of our students have an intellectual disability and it is already difficult for them to find post-school employment. If they are not prepared for this challenge by mastering appropriate work-skills while at school, this task would become an
Some of the schools in the study made use of DVDs to teach students vital information about working in a structured work place. Two DVDs being used in some schools are: ‘A Job Well Done’ and ‘Ticket To Work’ which teach students about the expectations of work and how to interact with employees and employers. They include basic information to teach students to find their own way to the work place and to build their confidence.

The schools in the study have developed programs to help students integrate into their communities and offered programs that developed communication, personal, living and leisure skills. Some of the other activities provided as part of the transition-focused education in a small number of schools included: learner driver education, artist in residence programs and participation in the Duke of Edinburgh initiative. These activities were designed to support the students when they moved from school to post-school and into the community and provided them with the skills to be able to work, socialise and move towards independence.

The majority of the participants interviewed reported that preparing students with an intellectual disability while they were still at school was vital, and students had confidence in their teachers. School offered a controlled and supportive learning environment for the students to practise their work skills before they left.

‘If students feel safe and supported, they are more able to deal with change.’

‘Change is difficult for most people let alone someone with intellectual disability who relies on routine. They have known school’s four walls all their lives so it makes sense that they would need preparation for a different environment and differing set of expectations.’

Many students with an intellectual disability had difficulty handling change and relied on routine. Schools were more familiar with the students, and were therefore well equipped to prepare them for change. There was some indication that students were more able to accept changes while they were still at school and their stress was reduced.
'Our students do not operate well with ‘surprises’. They need to be aware of the expectations around a day’s work, routines, ethics of work, times of work and rest breaks and appropriate social interactions.’ G13T

‘Preparation helps reduce the stress on the students and while at school there is time to practise required skills over a longer period of time.’ G13T

Transition programs in the special schools in the study have been designed to help students develop skills that will allow them to stay on task, take directions from a range of people, increase their confidence and enhance their communication skills. One participant reported that programs to teach workplace skills gave the students a greater understanding of what is expected and helped them to discover their interests.

Another reason given as to why preparation for post-school transition was important was that special schools were able to help their students connect with employment and other agencies before they left school. Participants reported that providing access to information about work experiences and workplace skills was essential in and by having schools deliver this information, parents were included.

‘We can provide the level of support they need. It helps them identify and experience different learning. It helps inform parents and students about what they are both interested in and be ready for post-school.’ WP13T

4.3 Transition for students in Victorian special schools

4.3.1 Success

The first questionnaire contained two questions designed to identify key success factors of the transition programs in special schools. Question 10 asked participants to define success. Question 11 asked participants to rate the success or effectiveness of the programs in their schools and all of the schools indicated that the programs were highly successful or successful. Question 12 in the second questionnaire required more specific information about what was meant by a successful post-school outcome.

The majority of participants reported that success was when transition programs enhanced students’ employability skills and led to increased confidence and improved social and life skills. Success was also when students and their families were happy with their post-school destinations and found appropriate placements in Day Centres or in further education and training.
Students were given opportunities to develop some degree of independence with these activities including: travel training in order to use public transport, interview practice, speaking to employers, customers or clients and making phone calls. Developing independence, assertiveness and resilience by engaging in these activities was noted as being one means of measuring the success of transition programs in special schools.

‘Success is when they (the students) come back from work placements just happy to have made new friends.’ BH14T

Another measure of success was cited as being when families and parents were happy with their children’s post-school outcomes. There was general agreement that the student’s happiness was a priority and this could be measured when students and their parents returned to the school to share the transition experience that was working out for the families. Most participants reported that post-school success was when students were happily engaged in whatever they were doing, able to go about their lives as independently as possible and were able to cope with the inevitable changes that came with life in general.

Accessing the most appropriate placement that meets a student’s individual needs was regarded as a successful outcome. Participants indicated that one measure of success is when students are placed in a suitable Day Centre that challenged them to continue to develop their skills and where they felt safe and supported. Two participants felt that transition to a Day Centre should be regarded as a career pathway.

‘Finding the appropriate adult centre can be a challenge for some of our students and placement in any service is not automatic. We encourage the students and their parents to see this as part of a career pathway.’ BH13T

While most of the transition programs being implemented in schools focused on employability skills and training, all of the participants felt that obtaining employment, both supported and open employment was not the only measure of success.

4.3.2 Challenges

Participants were asked in the interviews about the challenges they and their students faced. The interviews with eight participants provided information on what they felt needed to change to ensure that students with a disability had a successful post-school transition.
Participants were asked in interviews and in the second questionnaire, question 10, why preparing students with an intellectual disability with workplace skills while they are still at school is important and what they felt needed to change so that students could transition successfully to employment post-school. Question 11 asked what was considered a successful post-school outcome.

While all of the participants were very positive about the value and effectiveness of the transition programs being implemented in their schools, they also reported that transitioning to post-school employment or education did not often happen. Working full time for some students with an intellectual disability could be challenging and part time or volunteering positions were sometimes more manageable but often hard to find. Many parents and students looked for the easier option of enrolling in a disability service.

Changing the attitudes of society, employers, parents and even the students themselves, was regarded by many participants as a significant challenge. While parents wanted the best for their children, few parents expected that their child would enter employment when they left school. A challenge for the participants was to make parents aware of their children’s ability to engage in the work force and have the expectation that they could be employed. Ensuring that parents understood what the future held and what their children would be able to do in the future was important and the education of parents was as important as the education of their children.

There was general agreement from all of the participants that parents often did not see their children as being able to work and the schools and many agencies were working with parents to provide support and encouragement to change these attitudes. Some participants indicated that many parents have disabilities themselves or are unemployed and it was difficult getting their son or daughter to and from work.

‘Many families found it difficult to cope with the loss of the babysitting option at school where their sons and daughters are safely looked after for five days of the week.’ BH14T

One teacher noted that sometimes the parents themselves were resistant to the idea of their children finding work.
‘Parents worry that getting a job will affect their child’s pension and they don’t want to lose their benefits.’ BH13T

The majority of participants reported that because the students’ experiences while at school were positive, leaving the safe and secure environment of school and entering the world of adults was unsettling. Both parents and students became anxious about the future. Focusing on the successful transition of these students by introducing transition programs and activities while they were still at school, and as early as possible, was important to all of the schools in the study and a means of working towards addressing the challenges they faced.

4.4 Post-school destinations

Question 7 in the first questionnaire asked where students transitioned to when they left school. Only 14 of the 20 participating schools in the study responded to this question which is 20 percent if the total number of special schools in Victoria. A more comprehensive list was provided in question 2 in the second questionnaire and all participants provided numerical data. While this might not be representative of all special schools in Victoria, the data support the findings in the literature that a significant number of students with an intellectual disability do not transition to employment or further education post-school. Figure 5 shows the post-school destinations of 177 students graduating from nine Special Schools (150 students) and five Special Development Schools (27 students).

![Figure 4: Post-school destinations of students with an intellectual disability from Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria. (n = 177)](image-url)
Disability Service Day Centres engaged young people with disabilities in some work related activities and a range of interactive experiences and skills building programs. Many of these activities were designed to increase participants’ wellbeing and interpersonal relationships. In 2013, 89 (50 percent) of the students graduating from 14 Special and Special Development Schools planned to move onto a Day Centre. All 27 students from SDSs planned to attend a Day Centre.

Supported employment refers to businesses and organisations that have been established specifically to employ people with a disability who needed ongoing support or faced barriers to employment and these organisations employed 53 (30 percent) of special school leavers from the 14 special schools in the study. Disability Employment Services (DES) provided specialist help for people with a disability who required support to find or maintain sustainable employment and 26 students (15 percent) used this service.

In 2013, the Transition to Employment Program (TTE) was a service provided through various organisations for people with an intellectual disability once they leave school and caters for those students who need extra help before they attempt paid employment. Ten students (two percent) accessed this service. Only three students from these 14 special schools, went onto open employment (1 percent) or further education (2 percent).

The data reflect the OECD data from *Sickness, disability and work: Breaking the barriers; a synthesis of findings across OECD countries* (2010). Despite increased efforts to develop and expand employment integration measures, employment levels for young people with a disability in the UK and the US have not improved. “The level of employment for these young people is 40% compared to 70% for young people without a disability” (p. 51).

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data 2009, Australia has similar rates of unemployment for people with a disability.

In 2009, almost two-fifths (38%) of young people (15-24 years of age) with disability were fully engaged. Young people with disability who were not fully engaged were either working part time (25%), studying part time (7%) or doing neither (68%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).
Summary

General information, strategies and guidelines for successful transition were available from the DHS and the Victorian DEECD. Special schools adapted this information and were developing programs, creating DVDs and units of work and producing models of best practice to be shared. They were offering a variety of opportunities and experiences for their students in order to achieve a successful post-school transition which for many participants did not necessarily mean employment or further education.

The literature indicated that a successful post-school outcome for students with an intellectual disability was employment but evidence from Australia, the UK and the US, suggested that this was not happening and participation in the workforce by young people with an intellectual disability is low. These findings were supported by the post-school destination data for 177 students with an intellectual disability collected from the 14 of the special schools participating in this study. Figure 5 shows that half the graduates from these special schools at the end of 2013, transitioned to Disability Service Day Centres and only a small number moved to some form of employment.
Chapter 5  Findings – Two case studies

In this chapter, two case studies developed from further interviews with two participants are presented. The first one is from a Special School and the other from a Special Development School. These two schools are representative of what the special schools in the study are undertaking in order to transition their students with an intellectual disability from school to post-school. The purpose of the case study approach is to focus on how each school develops and implements programs to support post-school transition.

5.1 Case study one – A Special School

This Special School (SS) catered for students with moderate to severe levels of Autism. The full time role of the interviewee, Mary, in the school was the Futures for Young Adults coordinator. Mary reported that having someone in this position contributed to the success of the school’s transition program. She organises and facilitates the school’s work experience program, spent much of her time finding suitable work experience placements for the students; visited students on work experience and released teachers so they could also make visits. She liaised with external organisations and parents; organised information evenings and visits to Disability Service Day Centres, and worked with teachers to develop student profiles. She facilitated transition meetings with DHS to determine the best outcomes for the students, and provided information to parents and students about appropriate funding and placements post-school.

‘Work experience is a key component of programming from Year 9 onwards and our school is committed to ensuring that each student has a viable post school option and access to work if appropriate.’ BH14T

According to Mary, the most significant aspect of the school’s transition program was the support that the school was able to offer to parents and families in the final years of schooling. Mary indicated that it was very important that each student’s individual needs were met and that post-school placements were appropriate and suitable. Mary worked closely with the students, their parents and external agencies to ensure that everyone was well informed and the right choices were made.

A Day Centre was the post-school destination for the nine graduating students in 2013 at the school. There were a limited number of placements in these Centres each year and
students had to be deemed suitable by the school to be accepted. Mary explained that a suitable Day Centre was the preferred destination for these students. Even though most would be turning 18 and would legally be adults, because of their intellectual disability she felt that they were not ready for employment when they left school. According to Mary, the students still needed a supportive environment and further education in basic skills after they left school and these could be provided by Day Centres. She felt that eventually these students might be able to work but were not ready as soon as they left school.

Mary indicated that for some students, and their parents, the transition from school was difficult. School was where they were safe and happy, knew the rules and were comfortable with the staff and other students. Parents often became anxious towards the end of their child’s secondary schooling.

“For some parents it is a form of grieving for loss of the safe environment that they and their children have become used to for the past twelve years.” BH14T

External work experience was seen as essential to the school’s transition programs but Mary reported that finding work placements was one of her most difficult tasks. She agreed that getting the students out into the workplace was important but this was not always easy to organise.

Mary said that businesses in the community were not usually designed for employees with disabilities and employers were often reluctant to take on any of the students without supervision. The cost of providing a teacher to supervise one student was prohibitive so this particular school relied on sending their students to supported employment organisations which were specifically set up for people with disabilities.

The school organised Vocational Group Programs and students could attend different placements as part of a group. One of these was the Collingwood Children’s Farm where the students worked together or with other employees cleaning out water troughs, feeding animals, cleaning the barn, collecting eggs and gardening. Other placements suitable for groups were Vatmi Industries and the Kevin Heinze Garden Centre where students were supervised by the staff at these centres as well as by teachers from the school.
The purpose of external work experience for this school was not only to have students engaged in the workplace, learn work and social skills but also to be able to develop independence by finding their own way to work, catching public transport, going to the local shops and interacting with other employees.

In-house work experience was also an essential part of the school’s transition program. Outside organisations engaged the students to fill envelopes, deliver pamphlets and pack items in cardboard boxes. Students also worked around the school on meaningful tasks for the office and the canteen.

The school adapted the VELS framework (Victorian Essential Learning Standards) for literacy and numeracy for all students. In the final years of schooling, teachers concentrated on ensuring that classes focus on activities that were useful, relevant and appropriate for students with an intellectual disability who were about to enter the world of adults. Some of these activities were filling in forms, writing their signatures, writing resumes and taking part in interviews.

Understanding the students’ abilities and needs was essential to their smooth post-school transition for this Special School. Much time was spent ensuring that parents and students were able to make informed choices about the Day Centre they would attend, what funding was available and what agencies were there to support the student once they left school. According to the interviewee, another critical factor in the transition process was ensuring that the students were able to identify their own skills and capabilities so they were better able to make well informed decisions about what they would do post-school.

The Special School worked with the students on their CAPs from Year 7. This is a working document for all students and helped students identify their short and long term goals. Students were encouraged to make their own choices and be part of the decision-making process. From the beginning, teachers talked with the students about having a career and what this would mean when they left school, they believed that having a career was not just about getting a job but meant moving to the next stage of learning and education which in this case, was to a Day Centre.
Mary said that parents often needed guidance to help them make the right post-school choices. This school, as most of the special schools in the study have indicated, helped parents make informed choices and provided workshops, information sessions and opportunities to visit Day Centres. A workshop designed for parents to inform them about post-school options called ‘Navigating the Journey’ was held at the school.

Most students at the Special School have been attending since the age of five. As the children become part of the senior school, their parents often became more anxious about their future and became more actively involved. The school prided itself on being able to offer targeted support to these parents.

Places at Disability Service Day Centres were limited and students were not always suited to the placement that they, and their parents, would have liked. Some Centres were unable to cater for students who had severe disabilities or who had behavioural or communication issues. The Day Centres offered Open Days for students and parents and were always willing to come and talk to the school, show parents around and even take some students for a day at a time. The teachers in this Special School knew the students very well and Day Centres relied on information provided by the school so that the students they select were a good fit for them.

Maintaining close links with disability services, networks and other agencies, was essential, and Mary nurtured these relationships that had been forged over many years.

5.2 Case study two - A Special Development School

The second interviewee, Kate, was the work experience and transition coordinator at a Special Development School (SDS). For her, the most important aspect of her school’s transition program was the ‘whole package’ that was presented to the students when they left the junior school for the senior campus, usually when they turned fifteen. Students know that as they became seniors, the school had high expectations of them.

The transition program was individualised according to the level of the ability of the students. For instance, some aspects of the program might be inappropriate or unsuitable for some students with high needs, some have sensory needs and some were not toilet trained. Others had severe behavioural issues which prohibited them from engaging in many activities or had profound intellectual and physical disabilities.
The nine graduating students in 2013, all had high needs and all of them found suitable placements in appropriate Day Centres when they left the school. Although all of these SDS students transitioned to a Day Centre, the school placed a strong emphasis on transition-focused education and placement in a Day Centre was considered part of a student’s career planning.

Work experience was an important aspect of the school’s transition program, however, the number of suitable placements and level of ability of their students made it difficult for the school to provide enough work experiences. Because of the limited number of places available the school ran their work experience program over three years so that every student was able to have a turn. This flexibility ensured that students who might not have been ready had a chance to develop the skills they needed. The level of ability of the students was a significant factor in determining what they did.

‘The students often surprise employers with what they are able to do. One student with multiple problems has ended up being a star. The work environment suited him.’ B14T

Kate had been able to find work placements in McDonald’s where students filled cups, cleaned tables, learned how to speak to customers and other employees, emptied bins and learned work skills. Because of their more complex higher needs, the students undertook this work experience in small groups under the supervision of a teacher for a few hours a day. Students were encouraged to do things that they would not normally do and learned how to handle situations that might be confronting or confusing.

The school used amended AusVELS, and in the senior years, literacy and numeracy were further adapted so that learning was made relevant and applied to real-life. The focus of learning was made more practical and students went to the canteen to work on maths, to measure weight and height and when they were engaged in travel training, buy a ticket and measure mileage and distance. The students were taught functional literacy and numeracy and were shown how to write a resume.

‘Not all of our students are even able to write their names but all are given the opportunity to fill out the forms to the best of their ability.’ B14T

As far as possible, students were involved in the transition process. Many of the students were not able to articulate what they needed or wanted and although they could
fill in feedback sheets with diagrams and emoticons, it was often difficult to analyse answers. Kate reported that student choice was at the core of each student’s ILP and when they entered the senior school, it was the role of the teachers to ensure that students and parents were able to make informed choices and had realistic post-school expectations.

Kate said that parents relied heavily on her for the information that they needed about possible futures for their children, even after the children left school. She found parents were very anxious and it could be a stressful time. They were being asked to make decisions about something that would affect their children for the rest of their lives.

She reported that some parents would have liked the school to do all the work in choosing a suitable placement and to organise everything. She developed strategies to get parents to take responsibility for their children’s futures. She commented:

‘Parents would like me to do it all. It is an unknown and parents do not know what they want – beyond wanting their kids to be happy. They just want them settled.’ B14T

The school ran Expos, information sessions and workshops which again were dependent on the level of ability of the students. Kate made sure that the information parents received was appropriate and parents with children who had no formal language skills or who had a severe disability did not hear the same messages as parents whose children might be able to participate in a Certificate course.

Kate emphasised the importance of having a good relationship with the disability services and agencies in the area. The Day Centres also needed to be confident that the school would provide all of the relevant information about each student so that they could be assured that the students they enrolled were suitable and that students, and parents, were happy with their choices. The teachers at the Special Development School had detailed knowledge of each student which was shared with the Day Centres to help them with their decisions. Even though there were often many staff changes at the Day Centres, the relationship between the school and the Day Centre continued.

The Special Development School had a Day Centre close by and the school took groups of students regularly to work on a gardening program with the older clients at the
Centre. The students dug garden beds, undertook the planting of and looking after veggies and learned how to maintain the garden.

**Summary**

The two case studies are examples of transition programs in a Special School and a Special Development School. Both schools delivered transition-focused education to provide opportunities which were suited to the level of ability of the students they taught and supported. The students at both these schools will all transition to Day Centres in 2013 and both interviewees indicated that their students were not ready for the world of work even though they would leave school at the end of the year.

For these students, achieving post-school success meant a suitable placement in a Day Centre, and being confident and happy with their choices. Being able to experience the world of work in a supervised environment was also a measure of success for these students and for the teachers, including parents in the transition process contributed to the success of their programs.

The word ‘career’ was important in the language being used when talking to the students about what they would do when they left school. A career for these students with an intellectual disability however, did not necessarily mean getting a job. Attending a Day Centre was still referred to as a career pathway in these schools’ transition programs.
Chapter 6    Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings from the data collected from the special schools participating in the study in the context of the extant literature on the post-school transition of students with an intellectual disability. The limitations of the study, recommendations, suggestions for future research and conclusions are included in this chapter.

6.1 Discussion

The aim of the study was three fold. The first aim was to understand how teachers in special schools in Victoria prepare students with an intellectual disability for post-school. The second aim was to discover which programs special schools implement to successfully transition their students and the third was to identify success factors of these programs.

The 20 special schools in the study were developing transition-focused education programs that align with the categories in Kohler’s Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996). Kohler identified five categories: student development, student-focused planning, family involvement, interagency collaboration and program structure, as critical factors for achieving success in the transition of students with a physical or intellectual disability from school to post-school. The data collected in the study support these findings and Scholl and Mooney, 2004 and Hyde et al., 2010 indicated that this type of transition-focused education contributes to better in-school and post-school outcomes and student achievement.

According to the findings, the schools in the study were implementing transition-focused education that reflects Kohler’s five categories. Observations made during visits to schools showed that many schools were providing work place learning opportunities such as work experience and work placements, life skills and career and transition education which Kohler refers to as ‘student development’. The programs being implemented in these schools were student-focused and involved students in the transition process to encourage self-determination, they promoted family and parental involvement and engaged in interagency collaboration. Few of the participants in the study had read Kohler’s research but her categories were at the core of their programs.
and the activities being developed. The resources provided by the DEECD and DHS contained strategies and suggestions that also aligned with Kohler’s research.

Work experience was a key part of transition-focused education and there was general agreement that workplace familiarisation was a key factor in the success of any transition program being implemented in special schools. These findings support those of Benz, Lindstrom, & Latta (1999) who indicate that one of the most significant factors to achieve a successful school to work transition for students with a disability was the opportunity to undertake work experience while still at school.

‘Work experience is very important to these kids and they know they have to be ready for the challenge.’ B14T

Luecking (2011) reported that the work experience students undertake must be relevant to the students’ interests and capabilities so it can help them identify career pathways, skills and abilities; explore career goals; and develop employability skills and good work habits. Hyde et al., (2010) identified work experience as a critical aspect of post-school transition success. He regarded it as important in ‘increasing students’ knowledge, developing their skills and providing opportunities to apply these skills’ (p.92). One teacher noted that one of her students found working in a fast food restaurant a positive experience, not only because he was learning about the workplace.

‘Joe’s favourite task was clearing tables because then he could talk to lots of people. He became very attached to an elderly lady who came in each day while he was there for a coffee. I suspect that she really came in to talk to Joe.’ BH14T

The findings in the report, From school to real work (2009), showed that one of the most important aspects of helping young people attain happiness, success and competence is the process of helping them set goals. Kohler (1996) and Parmenter (2011) reported that promoting and enhancing the self-determination of youth with disabilities has become best practice in transition-focused education. Halpern (1999) indicated that in the past, professionals made the decisions, but the concept of self-determination has emerged with the aim of allowing the person with a disability to determine what they need and want. Having students with an intellectual disability involved in their own transition planning, leads to the improvement of a student’s ability to identify goals and communicate these and by giving the students the opportunity to make choices, there is improved communication and students feel
empowered because they are part of the decision-making process *(From school to real work, 2009; Hyde et al., 2010)*. The special schools in the study ensured that students were involved in the discussion of their futures from the beginning through the SSGs, ILPs and early career planning.

Equally important to a successful transition was the input of parents. Kohler (1996), Martinez (2007) and Meadows et al., (2005) found that active involvement of young people and their parents was integral to the transition process (Kohler, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003; and Meadows et al., 2005). The special schools recognised this and were in a position to be able to educate parents about what the future holds for their children. This study provided strong evidence collected through questionnaires, interviews and observations that these special schools were ensuring that parents had access to resources and information, were given the opportunity to visit placements, to develop an understanding of career pathways and also to understand what their children were capable of achieving.

The findings were supported in the literature. Wehman (2006) maintained that the involvement of parents was perhaps the most significant factor in the post-school transition for students with an intellectual disability. The case study participants and a small number of others, however, reported that this was not always an easy task. Some parents have a disability themselves and it was difficult for them to encourage or assist their children, they often did not understand the requirements of the workplace and were not equipped to support their children to find work. For these reasons, providing transition-focused education for students with an intellectual disability while they were still at school was important. Parents needed to be involved in planning and decision making in order to be able to understand what was required, what the schools were engaged in and what options were available (Luecking, 2009; Stewart et al., 2010; Hyde et al., 2010).

Interagency collaboration was regarded as a critical feature of any transition program by many researchers (Laragy, 2004; Luecking, 2009; Parmenter & Riches, 1990; Riches, 1996). Kohler’s research (1996) found that transition programs in schools were more “effective when close links with outside agencies and services were established and schools interacted effectively with community service providers to identify and address
students’ needs and provided student assessment information to relevant service providers” (p. 62). Maintaining links with adult service providers and community agencies was seen as very positive by Meadows et al., (2005) and data from the schools in the study also showed that time spent working with outside agencies developed strong relationships which achieved the best for the students.

All special schools participating in the study were engaged in activities that fostered interagency collaboration and parental involvement. They provided opportunities for parents and students to visit post-school services and invited disability and other employment services spokespeople to the school. Most schools in the study offered tour days for parents while other schools brought in representatives from TAFE, Disability Employment Services (DES) and Transition to Employment (TTE) organisations. The experiences of special schools in the study supported the findings that establishing strong links with employment services and other disability organisations was an essential part of the post-school transition for students with a disability.

The importance of developing a good relationship with outside agencies was highlighted by one teacher:

“To achieve positive post-school outcomes it is vital that the agencies get to know the exiting students and most agencies come in early in the year to talk to parents and students.’ BV13T

Governments in Australia, the US and the UK are developing policies and strategies to ensure that people with disabilities are included in all aspects of life, including employment, but the evidence shows that this is not happening and many young people with a disability remain unemployed. Luecking (2004), Levinson & Palmer (2005) and Beamish et al., (2010) found that, despite the implementation of transition-focused education and the development of programs aimed at transitioning students with an intellectual disability into the workplace, the numbers of young people with a disability actually enrolled in further education or participating in the workforce was low.

All of the special schools in the study regarded their transition-focused education programs as successful. For these schools, successful transition can mean an improved quality of life for students, developing confidence, achieving happiness and having students and parents satisfied with their post-school destinations.
‘Success can be measured by the number of past students who come back to the school to talk about what they are doing. We can tell that they have made a good choice.’ BV13T

6.2 Conclusions

The aims of this study were to investigate how secondary school students with an intellectual disability, in special school settings, were being prepared for post-school transition, how teachers supported them in their post-school transition and what was regarded as a successful outcome. The conclusions drawn here are based on only 20 special schools in Victoria.

To conclude this thesis, these 20 Victorian government special schools (28 percent) were ensuring that students with an intellectual disability were actively involved in the post-school transition process and were making informed choices where possible. These special schools were implementing a variety of programs that focused on developing employability skills in students with a disability and were delivering successful transition-focused education programs, following government guidelines, meeting parental expectations and preparing their students with an intellectual disability for post-school. They were providing opportunities for their students to experience work and familiarise themselves with the workplace. Communication, OH&S and social skills were being taught before students went out on work experience to increase the students’ confidence and through special school programs, students accessed TAFE, VCAL and VETiS subjects.

The study found that participants in the 20 Victorian government special schools were developing transition-focused education programs that aligned with Kohler’s *Taxonomy for Transition Programming* (Kohler, 1996). These categories in the *Taxonomy* represent factors critical to the success of post-school transition programs for students with disabilities. The 46 practices used by Beamish et al., (2010) which go across Kohler’s five areas would be useful in any further evaluation of the transition programs in these schools.

Evidence from the literature has indicated the importance of offering a range of programs that develop workplace skills and work experience is a key factor in the success of the transition programs being implemented in special schools in Victoria.
While the 20 special schools in the study were implementing a range of programs, most participants reported that the most relevant and successful was the work experience program. While providing work experiences was regarded as critical to the post-school success of these students, finding suitable placements was difficult. Places of work are not set up to provide the level of support needed for students with an intellectual disability. Students with an intellectual disability take time to learn and often it was the level of ability that prohibited students from undertaking work experience and developing the skills required to enable them to find employment.

Educating parents along with their children was a priority of the transition programs in special schools in Victoria as participants regarded parents as the main advocates for their children and needed to be well informed. Special schools were educating parents about what the future held for their children and encouraged their close involvement in their children’s transition education.

Students were engaging in activities while still at school to prepare them for work but this study has shown that post-school employment does not always happen. Despite government policies and strategies being developed to ensure that people with disabilities are included in all aspects of life, including employment, evidence shows that many young people with a disability remain unemployed (OECD, 2010).

Although students were not moving onto employment, this did not mean that the programs being developed were not successful. The study’s findings showed that preparing students with an intellectual disability for post-school by developing workplace skills was not only about becoming employable but also about increasing the students’ knowledge and enjoyment of the world beyond school.

Within Victoria, prevailing government strategies encourage schools to develop career pathways for students with intellectual disabilities and to offer the same opportunities and experiences as mainstream students. The special schools in the study were actively engaged in delivering what they considered to be successful post-school transition programs and these programs were achieving positive outcomes which were not necessarily employment or further education.
The study indicated that success should not only be confined to achieving post-school employment or moving onto further education. Successful transition can also mean having an improved quality of life, developing confidence, achieving happiness and student and parental satisfaction with post-school destinations. Comments from a principal of a Special School supported this:

‘Success for our students is when they are successfully placed in programs that will increase their potential to work, volunteer or participate in community life.’

BS13P

Nirje’s (1969) Normalisation Principle of “making available to all intellectually disabled people, patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life or society” (p. 20) was being realised in 20 special schools in Victoria where students with an intellectual disability were being given the same opportunities as everyone else.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to the study. The limitations relate to the study’s small sample size and the use of participant reported data. The study’s total number of participants is thirteen Special Schools and seven Special Development Schools out of a total of 70 special schools which enrol secondary students with an intellectual disability in Victoria. This amounts to only 28 percent of government special schools in Victoria and limits the ability to generalise. It is likely that the 20 schools that agreed to be involved were more likely to have transition-focused education programs compared to those that did not respond. This might mean that the positive results achieved could be an inflated assessment of the level of transition-focused education across Victoria.

6.4 Recommendations

Eight participants from the 20 special schools in the study were interviewed and their responses to the questions asked contributed to the recommendations in this section. They provided success stories, information on their main challenges and issues, and explained what they felt could be done better. They also indicated what they regarded as the most important to the success of their transition programs. Kohler’s themes were
presented and they were asked to comment on how important these were to their programs.

1. **Increased parental involvement**

The findings from this study, confirmed that one of the key success factors in the transition programs for students with an intellectual disability is parental involvement. Special schools need to engage parents in the development of career pathways and educate them along with their children. Parents play a key role in the lives of their children and special schools should have the capacity and the resources to be able to educate the parents, to remove some of the anxiety and provide support for them as well as the students.

Once a student with an intellectual disability leaves school, he or she is no longer the responsibility of the school or the DEECD and parents are often left to deal with what happens next on their own. Some parents have a disability themselves and do not have the capacity to encourage their children and these parents need to be provided with extra support. Although disability agencies offer post-school support for students, some parents have become reliant on the teachers who have nurtured their children for six or twelve years.

‘Even after the kids have left school, parents will ring me and ask for help and expect me to continue the role of looking after their children.’ BH13T

More resources should be provided for parents to support them in this transition phase so that they are encouraged to become more involved. It is a recommended that information sessions be held by DEECD and the DHS, to help guide parents and provide advice on funding arrangements, housing options and post-school care for their children.

2. **Redefining post-school success**

A positive post-school outcome for these students is not necessarily post-school employment or further education. Evidence from the special schools in the study showed that students did not move into post-school employment but there were other positive outcomes that needed to be acknowledged.
Volunteering, undertaking further training or engaging in some other work related activity should also be regarded as successful outcomes. One school reported that students who were not capable of doing independent work experience were supported to do volunteering in organisations with staff support. One school had students help with *Meals on Wheels* and in another school, students visited the elderly in a local residential home. It is recommended that there be a re-conceptualisation of what is considered as work for students with an intellectual disability.

### 3. Exposing students to transition-focused education as early as possible

The literature recommends that students should be exposed to transition-focused education as early as possible in their secondary schooling in order to give them enough time to learn the skills they will need post-school (From school to real work, 2009; Scholl & Mooney, 2004; Stewart et al., 2010). In the US, the 1997 IDEA amendments required that students with a disability be involved in programs at school that would help them achieve long-term vocational goals by the time they reached 16 years old (NCD, 2000, p. 5). In Victoria, the DEECD made recommendations that schools involve students in their career planning as early as Year 7 and in Year 9 programs should be in place to provide workplace learning opportunities (DEECD, 2014, p. 18).

Starting early with transition-focused education and work experience is important. One of the reasons for this, participants reported was because these skills needed to be reinforced over time and students with an intellectual disability took longer to learn new skills. The skills being taught to give students with an intellectual disability the best chance of post-school success in the workplace often take them a long time to learn and participants reported that constant reinforcement and reminding was required. Extending the school leaving age would provide the support needed for students with an intellectual disability who needed more time to fully grasp the skills being taught. Starting the transition process as early as Year 7, is recommended and would enable students to be exposed to transition-focused education early in their secondary schooling.

### 4. Creating suitable employment

A disturbing contributing factor to the low employment rate for young people with an intellectual disability is the loss of jobs previously available to people with disabilities.
Currently more and more aspects of the work force are becoming automated and expertise with technology is required. The creation of jobs specifically designed for people with disabilities, incorporating them into the ‘mainstream’ world of employment rather than relying solely on supported employment organisations is vital if young people with disabilities are able to transition into work.

Disability services and employment services could develop partnerships with larger community organisations such as the health sector or local councils which would provide access to jobs that can be done by people with a disability and have the ability to provide real outcomes. Because of the higher level of support required by some students leaving school, more funding to make targeted places available with support in open employment would provide many students with employment post-school. It is therefore recommended that employers could be offered incentives as a way of ensuring that there are supported places for people with disabilities in a variety of businesses. This would create suitable employment for many special school leavers.

This recommendation could be realised by creating a system where businesses are encouraged to take on employees with disabilities, offering incentives for work places or increasing the number of on-the-job training placements so that people with intellectual disabilities can continue their education and training post-school and eventually find suitable employment.

‘Businesses aren’t set up for our students and there should be some incentives for these places to take these students on and give them a chance.’ BH13T

6. Educating employers

Employment opportunities need to be increased and continually developed to provide real employment. Without the support of employers no amount of assistance at school will make a great impact on the number of students who gain meaningful employment. Although special schools have access to work experience providers they are often small organisations and this makes it hard for employment outcomes post-school.

Educating employers to show them how productive people with disabilities can be as employees is recommended and could change their attitudes so that employers recognise the positive aspects of employing a person with disabilities. Employers need a
better understanding about people with disabilities and a greater awareness of their capabilities.

Most businesses in the community are not designed for people with disabilities and employers are often reluctant to take on employees who need extra support. Advertising the fact that students with a disability can work and are good workers would change and challenge employer and community attitudes.

6.4.1 Recommendations at the state level

1. Increased funding for schools
Providing funding for more support teachers in special schools would enable students with an intellectual disability to engage more actively with the community and in workplaces. This would be one way of ensuring that work experiences are meaningful and can be undertaken by all students.

2. Creating a central knowledge bank
The special schools in the study were working on programs that cater for individual needs and having a forum where teachers could share examples of best practice would provide other schools with a wide variety of activities, their outcomes and challenges. A central knowledge bank on the DEECD website where schools could access information and resources, share successful experiences and contact other schools engaged in similar programs is recommended.

3. Increased post-school support
DEECD resources that support the transition programs being delivered in schools were effective and these programs worked well. Post-school support for students, however, is lacking. More sustainable pathway options and support networks post-school are needed and the DEECD should be actively working with disability agencies to provide this support.

4. More specific guidelines
For those with high needs, post-school planning should involve the development of life skills, support their independence and provide a range of activities that will give them quality of life. A key success factor for these students is the development of transition-
focused education programs. The DEECD provides schools with *Guidelines for Implementing the Victorian Careers Curriculum Framework for Young People with Disabilities*. The *Guidelines* contain suggestions which require special schools to adapt the material to suit the needs of their students. Special schools should be provided with specific guidelines, resources and strategies that will support a young person with an intellectual disability to actively participate in the workforce if they are able.

The DEECD’s *Guidelines* are written for parents and students as well as teachers. The DEECD recognises that “better outcomes are achieved when the key people in a student’s life are included and engaged with planning, supporting and implementing the educational program” (p. 2). Ensuring that parents understand the transition process is recommended. Participants placed high importance on involving parents in the transition process and it is recommended that educating parents is essential.

6.4.2 **Recommendations at the School Level**

1. **Changing the attitudes of parents**

The education of parents is as important as the education of their children. Low expectations of parents have been referred to and teachers are actively working to change the attitudes of parents. Parents need to be better informed about what will happen post-school and what options are available. This could be done by providing workshops to explain the programs that schools are implementing; by establishing forums and support groups so parents can discuss issues and share information and by encouraging parents to be more actively engaged with disability organisations. Links with parents whose children have successfully transitioned post-school with current parents is recommended.

2. **Making work experience manageable**

Schools need greater access to employers, disability employment agencies, trade skills training and more opportunities for school-based apprenticeships. Greater flexibility is required to allow staff to be released from classroom duties to support students in the work place and on work experience. Students with an intellectual disability need more time to master the skills being taught and added support to provide this time is recommended.
6.5 Future Research

This study provides some indication, based on a 28 percent response rate, that government special schools in Victoria, catering for students with an intellectual disability, are developing transition-focused education programs to prepare their students for post-school. The 20 special schools in the study are teaching work related skills and workplace familiarisation; their programs help develop confidence in the workplace and provide students with valuable work experience. These findings reflect research indicating that developing transition-focused education and work skills is essential to give students with an intellectual disability the best chance of success post-school.

While there is general agreement that these programs are important, how successful they are is inconclusive. This study shows that few students transition to post-school employment and ABS data show that employment rates for young people with a disability are low. Further research is needed to determine what parents and students regard as a successful post-school transition. Further research on the effectiveness of transition-focused education programs is also recommended.

Questions for parents and students that have arisen from this study that might be answered by future research: What does it mean for a student with an intellectual disability to be employed? What does post-school success mean to a young person with an intellectual disability?

Other questions outside the scope of the study have been raised.

1) How is effectiveness or the success of transition-focused education programs measured if students do not obtain employment or access further education when they leave school?

2) What is the purpose of implementing transition-focused education programs for students with an intellectual disability if post-school employment and further education is not happening?
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Riches, V.C., Parmenter, T., & Robertson, G. (1996). *Youth with disabilities in transition from school to community*. Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University, School of Education, Unit for Community Integration Studies.


Appendices

Appendix 1    Questionnaire one

First questionnaire sent to 70 Victorian special schools.

Questionnaire (Your answers are not limited to the space provided)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey questions</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the name of your school? Postcode: _________</td>
<td>To be able to send reminders to those schools that had not responded; To keep a record of schools responding; To determine metropolitan and regional schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. List the main types of disability of your students. (eg autism, intellectual, cerebral palsy etc)</td>
<td>To determine which schools have students with an intellectual disability and therefore suitable for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What levels of schooling does your school cater for?</td>
<td>To determine which schools have secondary students and therefore suitable for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Prep – Year 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Years 7 – 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Years 7 – 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many students will be transitioning from school to work or further education at the end of 2013?</td>
<td>To determine which schools have secondary students transitioning and therefore suitable for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you have transition/vocational/work experience/work skills/employability programs in place for students who are about to leave your school? If YES, please sum up in a sentence or two the main focus of your program.</td>
<td>To determine which schools implemented transition programs and therefore suitable for the study To address the second aim of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Describe the programs that are in place to support your students in their transition from school to work or further education. Please answer in as much detail as possible and include any relevant information in an attachment. (If you have information that would contribute to this research but are unable to attach it, please post it if possible, to this address: 19 Prospect Hill Rd, Camberwell, 3124. I would be very grateful.)</td>
<td>To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Where do your students transition to after they leave your school? (Include number of students and names of the organisations where possible)

- Supported employment ________
- Open employment ________
- Further education ________
- Another institution ________
- Other: ________

To provide numerical data on post-school destinations

8. Does the school follow up these students once they leave school? YES/NO

How is this progress measured?

To determine students post-school progress

9. Which disability service providers work with your school/students and in what ways do they support you, the students and your school?

To determine the level of collaboration with outside organisations to address the first aim

10. How do you define success or effectiveness when referring to these programs?

To identify key success factors to address the third aim

11. How would you rate the success or effectiveness of your program? (circle one)

- Highly successful
- Successful
- Building
- In need of review

To identify key success factors to address the third aim

12. Would you and any staff involved in the programs mentioned above be willing to participate in further research in the form of interviews over the phone or in person?

To identify which respondents would agree to further interviews.

Thank you very much for taking the time to provide this feedback. It is really appreciated.
Appendix 2    Questionnaire two

Additional questionnaire sent to the 20 schools responding to the original questionnaire and participating in the study.

*Questionnaire (Your answers are not limited to the space provided)*

1. What is the name of your school?
   Postcode: ____________
   To be able to send reminders to those schools that had not responded
   To keep a record of schools responding
   To determine metropolitan and regional schools

2. Indicate the number of students transitioning to each of the following post-school options:
   Open employment ____________
   Supported employment ____________
   Further education ____________
   Disability employment services ____________
   Transition to employment services ____________
   Adult day services ____________
   To provide numerical data on post-school destinations

3. The following are some of the activities that support students in their transition to post-school options. Which activities are part of the transition program in your school?

   *industry visits, careers information nights for families, disability and other services visit students at the school, parental/family visits to post-school services, school-based apprenticeships, school-based traineeships, TAFE taster days, transition to TAFE, placements in post-school services, vocational education, work preparation workshops/classes, external work experience, in-school work experience, volunteer programs, MIPS planning, part-time enrolments in post-school services*

   To address the first aim of the study (to determine how teachers are preparing students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition)
4. Indicate whether your school has staff in the following positions:

- transition coach
- work experience coordinator
- careers advisor

To address the first aim of the study (to determine how teachers are preparing students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition).

5. Does your school offer VCAL or VETiS subjects?

To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented).

6. Are any students at your school currently undertaking a TAFE course?

To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented).

7. Please select the activities offered to students in your school (you may select more than one)

- Life skills programs
- travel training
- resume writing
- interview practice
- workplace familiarisation
- OH&S training
- Duke of Edinburgh

To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented).

8. Please select which of these resources your school accesses to support students in their final years of secondary schooling (you may select more than one)

- Career Information Centres
- transition planners via DHS
- NDCO program
- FFYA
- Disability Support Network
- Career Action Plans
- Student Support Group
- “Broaden Your Horizons”
- “A Job Well Done”

To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented).
9. How important is each of the following to your school’s transition program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Planning</th>
<th>Government Policy</th>
<th>Government Advice and Information</th>
<th>Inter-Agency Collaboration</th>
<th>Self-Determination</th>
<th>Parental Involvement</th>
<th>Skilled Teaching Staff</th>
<th>Work Place Learning Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

To address the first aim of the study (to determine how teachers are preparing students with an intellectual disability for post-school transition)

To determine what contributes to the success of these programs

10. Explain why you think it is important to prepare your students with work place skills while they are still at school.

To determine key success factors

11. What do you feel needs to change to ensure that students with a disability transition to employment post-school?

To understand the challenges in implementing transition programs in special schools

12. What do you consider successful or positive post-school outcomes for the students in your school?

To determine key success factors

13. Do your students undertake external work experience? [Depending on the answer, participants will be directed to the next question or to the end of the questionnaire.]

To address the second aim of the study (to determine which programs are being implemented)

14. What are the benefits of work experience for the students in your school?

To determine key success factors

Thank you very much for taking the time to provide this feedback. It is really appreciated.
Appendix 3  Definitions

Disability

The definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 is broad and can include a range of psychiatric, sensory, physical and intellectual difficulties.

Section 2.2.3 A person with a disability is able to participate in courses or programs provided by an educational institution, and use the facilities and services provided by it, on the same basis as a student without a disability if the person has opportunities and choices in the courses or programs and in the use of the facilities and services that are comparable with those offered to other students without disabilities.

Intellectual disability

Intellectual disability has been defined by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) as characterised by sub-average intellectual functioning; an IQ that is assessed as 70 or under and deficits in at least 2 areas of adaptive behaviour, i.e., communication, self-care, home living, mobility, social skills, self direction, learning, leisure and work (IDRS, n.d.).

In clinical terms intellectual disability is often defined in terms of the severity of the condition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical term</th>
<th>IQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MILD intellectual disability</td>
<td>55 - 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERATE</td>
<td>30 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVERE</td>
<td>under 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overview of intellectual disability by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], (2008) indicated that “almost 60% of people with intellectual disability have severe communication limitations, which distinguishes intellectual disability from other major disability groups for which severe limitations are more concentrated in self-care and mobility” (p 2).
Low needs and high needs students

These students are also referred to as moderate to severe or profound intellectual disabilities. The international Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems – Tenth Revision, (ICD-10), published by the World Health Organisation, provides the following IQ ranges: Mild – 50-69; Moderate – 35-49; Severe – 20-34; Profound – below 20. For the purposes of this paper, there has been some distinction made between students with an intellectual disability who need a high level of support and those who require a low level of support.

Special and Special Development Schools

Special schools in Victoria have two categories of students – those who have an IQ of 50 and below are accommodated in a special developmental school and those with an IQ of above 50 and below 70 can attend a special or specialist school. All students can attend a mainstream school if this is theirs or their parents’ preference. This study concentrates on non-mainstream schools.

Transition-focused education

This refers to the general overview of the education being delivered to students with an intellectual disability in order to transition them from school to post-school. Transition-focused education includes the range of programs being implemented in schools, including special schools, to aid the transition of students with an intellectual disability. Kohler & Field (2003) defines transition-focused education as

Programs that are directed toward adult outcomes and consist of academic, career, and extracurricular instruction and activities, delivered through a variety of instructional and transition approaches and services, depending on the local context and students’ learning and support needs [and] ...represents a shift from disability-focused, deficit-driven programs to an education and service-delivery approach based on abilities, options, and self-determination. (p. 176)

Transition programs

Programs that have been developed in schools, including special schools, which are specifically designed to transition students with a disability from school to post-school options.
Appendix 4 Interview questions

The following questions were prepared for interviews with teachers/leaders on transition programs in Special and Special Development Schools in Victoria.

This project is an investigation of current education and transition to work strategies and programs provided for secondary students within special schools in Victoria. In particular the study will examine what programs special schools implement to prepare their students for post-school pathways. The research focuses on the effect of education programs for students with an intellectual disability.

Interview questions

1. Name of the school

2. How long have you been at the school?

3. What is your role in the school?

4. Please provide details about the programs your school is providing for students.

5. What activities are undertaken in these programs?

6. What outcomes are achieved? How are they measured?

7. Do you have any work experience programs?

8. Which programs are the most effective and how is this measured?

9. What contact do you have with outside organisations to support the students to transition from school to post school?

10. What outside funding is available for these programs?

11. Where do most of the students transition to?

12. Do you have any success stories you would like to talk about?

Further interview questions:

(a) What do you feel is the most important aspect of your transition program?
(b) What do you think the students gain from engaging in this aspect of the program?

(c) What are the main issues in delivering your transition program?

(d) What could be done better – at a school level and the system level?

(e) What does post-school success mean:

- for your students?
- for you?

(f) These are the four themes that have emerged from the literature and from my understanding of what schools are doing. From your perspective as a teacher in a Special School, how important are these themes in your school?

- Work place learning opportunities (work experience), life skills and career and transition education; Career planning
- Student focused planning – student self-determination;
- Family involvement – involving parents, carers and families in planning for the future of their children. What is the input of parents?
- Interagency collaboration – working collaboratively with outside agencies.
Appendix 5  Email to principals

Project: An investigation of current education and transition to work strategies and programs provided for secondary students within special schools in Victoria.

Dear (Principal’s name)

I am completing a Masters of Education at Melbourne University. My research involves surveying special schools about students with a disability and their transition post school. I hope that you and the staff at (School name) will be able to support me in this research.

I have received approval from Melbourne University Ethics Committee (Reference No: HREC: 1239192.1) and approval from the DEECD (Reference No: 2013_001986).

I have attached the necessary documents which explain my research and the purpose of the questions. If you need any further information, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Please find attached:

- a plain language statement that explains my research
- a consent form that needs to be filled in and returned to me
- the survey questions which need to be saved to your desktop and then forwarded to me once you have answered all of the questions

The most important aspect of this research is to discover what programs special schools have in place to support students with a disability to transition from secondary school. It would be greatly appreciated if you are able to attach as much supporting documentation when returning the survey. If this is not possible, please post it to me at 19 Prospect Hill Rd, Camberwell, Vic, 3241.

Thank you for your kind support

Yours sincerely

Ms Sharon Clerke
Mob: 0430021940
Appendix 6    Plain language statement

Project: An investigation of current education and transition to work strategies and programs provided for secondary students within special schools in Victoria.

Introduction

We would like to request permission for yourself and staff in your school to participate in the above research project, which is being conducted by Ms Sharon Clerke (Research Student), Dr Linda Byrnes (Supervisor) and Dr Barbara Kameniar (Co-Supervisor) of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne. This project, which has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, will form Ms Sharon Clerke’s Masters of Education thesis. The aim of the project is to identify and describe successful programs and strategies being implemented in special schools in Victoria that cater for secondary students with intellectual disabilities who are about to transition to work or further education.

What will I be asked to do?

Should you agree to participate you would be asked to contribute in the following ways:

You will be sent a questionnaire to fill out with details about your school, the type of students in your school and what strategies are in place to help them in their transition from school at the end of Year 12. The questionnaire is designed to find out how special schools are preparing their students for life after they leave school. The questionnaire has ten questions. These will focus on what programs are being implemented in your school, how effective they are, which disability service providers you work with and how many students participate.

All schools will be asked to comment of the effectiveness of their programs and three schools will be selected for further research in order to develop case studies. This will involve audio-taped interviews with teachers involved in the programs and/or the Principal, by phone and/or in person. These interviews should only take an hour each.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. The questionnaire requires your school to be named but in any written reports your school and location will not be identified. Schools and staff will not be identified in any written reports. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers.

The data will be used to determine effective programs and strategies special schools have in place for students with an intellectual disability to help them transition post-
school. The data will be kept securely at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

**How will I receive feedback?**

Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a summary of the findings will be made available to you. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences and in academic journals. The final report will be shared with special schools and disability service providers.

**Will participation prejudice me in any way?**

Please be advised that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

**Where can I get further information?**

Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the researchers on the phone numbers or email addresses given below. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

**How do I agree to participate?**

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and returning it by return email.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Linda Byrnes (Supervisor)               Dr. Barbara Kameniar (Co-Supervisor)
Ph: 03 83440981                             Ph: 0425 699 980
Email: lbyrnes@unimelb.edu.au               Email: b.kameniar@unimelb.edu.au

Ms. Sharon Clerke (Research Student)
Ph: 039277 590
Email: s.clerke@student.unimelb.edu.au
Appendix 7   Consent form

Project: An investigation of current education and transition to work strategies and programs provided for secondary students within special schools in Victoria.

Name of participant: ________________________________________________

Name of investigator(s): Ms Sharon Clerke (Research Student), Dr Linda Byrnes (Supervisor), Dr Barbara Kameniar (Co-Supervisor)

I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

I authorise the researcher to use for this purpose the information I have provided in the questionnaire and if my school is selected as a case study, the interviews.

I acknowledge that:

(a) I have been informed of the project and have received a copy of the information and the questionnaire;

(b) I have received adequate explanation of all the likely risks, effects or inconvenience arising from participation in the project;

(c) I understand that this project is for research purposes;

(d) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

(e) I understand that I will be audio-taped for the purpose of interviews;

(f) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;

(g) I have been informed that copies of transcripts will be returned to me for verification, participants to be referred to by pseudonym or identified by name in any publications arising from the research;

(h) The data will be kept for a period of five years in a secure location and then destroyed.

Signature ___________________ (Participant)    Date _______________
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:
Clerke, Sharon

Title:
Investigation of post-school transition programs being provided for students with an intellectual disability in special schools in Victoria

Date:
2015

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/51053

File Description:
Investigation of post-school transition programs being provided for students with an intellectual disability in special schools in Victoria.