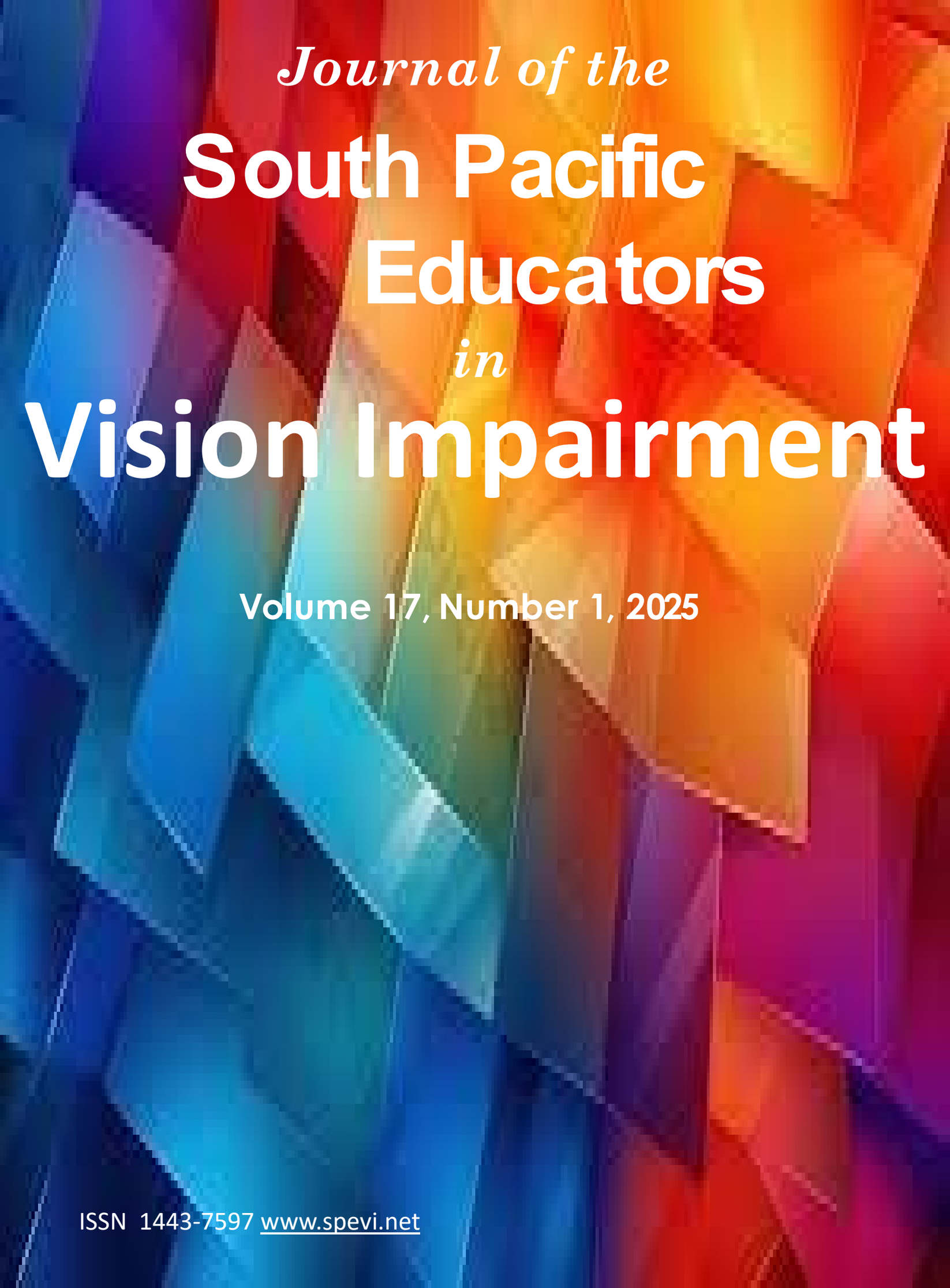

Volume 17, Number 1, 2025

ISSN 1443-7597 www.spevi.net

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Role of the SPEVI Journal

The South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. SPEVI acts as the professional body in matters pertaining to the education and support of preschool and school-age students who are blind, have low vision, deaf-blindness, or additional disabilities.

The Editorial Committee intends the Journal to be a vehicle for informing researchers, administrators and educators working in government and non-government education organisations, as well as specialist and generic teachers, orientation and mobility (O&M) instructors, allied health professionals, parents and others in our communities about research, issues, policies and their implications for practice in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Region.

Editorial Committee

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Dr Frances Gentle AO, NextSense Institute, and Macquarie University, NSW

Dr Sue Spooner, University of Auckland

Dr Michael Steer, AM, NextSense Institute, University of Newcastle and Macquarie University

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Design of front cover by Lena Karam

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Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views or policies of SPEVI and have been presented to stimulate informed debate.

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SPEVI Journal Subscription and Membership

SPEVI membership is open to educators, professionals and parent groups supporting children and adults with vision impairments. This Journal is provided free of charge and is available on the SPEVI website: https://www.spevi.net/jspevi/

Membership information and forms are available on the SPEVI website: https://www.spevi.net/join/

Call for Articles

Original manuscripts, reports and news items are sought for the refereed and non-refereed sections of the next issue of JSPEVI. Topics appropriate for the journal include, but are not limited to the following:

- original research studies, with practical relevance to education of persons who are blind or vision impaired,
- literature and book reviews,
- conceptual, policy or position papers,
- descriptions, reviews or evaluations of innovative instructional curricula, programs or models of education for persons who are blind or vision impaired, and
- letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor

Members of the editorial committee wish to encourage discussions of important issues that affect the education of children and adults with vision impairments. The journal should be a vehicle for continuing dialogue about current and future directions. The editorial committee invites letters that explore the many issues facing professionals and families supporting learning with sensory disabilities, particularly those arising from articles in the journal.

Guidelines for Contributors

Manuscripts that are of a scholarly nature should be submitted electronically, with the content subdivided into the following two files:

File 1 Author information

Authors must submit a separate file containing (a) the manuscript title, (b) author or authors' name, professional title/status and organisational affiliation of authors, and (c), preferred contact details (address, email, fax, telephone) for the principal author (or co-author) who will be handling correspondence.

File 2 Manuscript

Manuscript presentation: Manuscripts should be submitted in Arial 11-point font, double line spaced, with left aligned paragraphs, 2.54cm page margins (normal margin setting) and numbered pages. A running title header should be included on each page (with no authorship information included).

Size limit: The preferred size limit for scholarly manuscripts is 5000 words or less. The preferred size of agency reports is one A4 page of single line text.

Abstract: Academic manuscripts should include an abstract of 120 words or less, giving a brief summary of the overall content. The abstract may be followed by a list of keywords.

Figures and tables: Numbered figures and tables should be included in the manuscript. Tables should be created using a table function, and figures submitted in Black and White, with consideration to the readability of the figure when reduced for publication.

Referencing guidelines: Citations and references included in manuscripts should conform in style to the American Psychological Association (APA). APA guidelines are available on the Griffith University website: https://www.griffith.edu.au/library/study/referencing/apa-7

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Compliance with ethics requirements: For manuscripts reporting original research studies, authors are responsible for ensuring that the reported research has been

conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, with full compliance with all ethical requirements and legislation. This includes adherence to privacy and confidentiality guidelines regarding publication of participant information, including de-identification of participants' information and data. Authors must confirm in the manuscript that written consent has been obtained prior to publication if participant information is included. Where such a person is deceased, authors are responsible for securing written consent of the deceased person's family or estate. Authors are encouraged to consult the Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council's **National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – Updated 2025**, see https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2025

Manuscript review process: Manuscripts will be acknowledged upon receipt. Following preliminary editorial review, articles will be sent to members of the Editorial Advisory Panel and where warranted, to consulting reviewers who have particular expertise in the subject. This journal uses the "blind review" system. Reviewer feedback will be sent to the author/s with an invitation to revise the manuscript content and/or respond to the reviewers' comments. The review process may sometimes take up to three to four months. The names of consulting reviewers will periodically be published in the journal. Reviewed manuscripts will remain the property of South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI). Authors will be advised in writing if their manuscripts are not accepted for publication.

Manuscript submission: Please forward your contributions to the Convening Editor, Dr Bronwen Scott, Email: editorjspevi@gmail.com

Editorial

Dr Bronwen Scott

Welcome to the seventeenth volume of the Journal of South Pacific Educators for Vision Impairment (JSPEVI). As we embark on another year, the journal's aim continues to be fostering scholarly exchange among organizations and individuals dedicated to advancing education for learners with blindness and low vision. All volumes of the journal are available in an open-access digital format, facilitating the widespread sharing of knowledge and insights through the SPEVI website: https://www.spevi.net/jspevi/.

This edition also marks a change from an annual to a biennial release of JSPEVI, designed to align with future SPEVI conferences. Attracting submissions for publication presented ongoing challenges in 2024, and no issue of the journal was released last year. This change is intended to encourage conference presenters to submit their work for publication, leveraging the momentum and collaborative spirit generated at each SPEVI event.

The 2025 SPEVI Conference in Brisbane marked the 70th anniversary of SPEVI, highlighting the organisation's ongoing commitment to advocacy and knowledge-sharing. You can read more about the history of the organisation on the SPEVI website (https://www.spevi.net/history/), and about the 2025 conference in the report from Australian SPEVI Presidents Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe later in this volume.

The year 2024 marked the 200th anniversary of braille, a milestone that was also commemorated at the Brisbane conference. One notable achievement has been the creation of the SPEVI Position Statement on Braille Literacy. This statement underscores the essential right of all pre-school and school-aged students with blindness and low vision across Australia to receive high-quality instruction in braille literacy and numeracy, promoting both equity and excellence in education. In this volume, Jo Minniss provides an overview of the development of this pivotal Position Statement. Additionally, PhD student Aasha Rose is making significant contributions in the field of braille, presenting her research on current braille literacy assessments. Her work aims to inform the development of a standardised assessment suite to enhance both instruction and evaluation of braille literacy.

A major focus of this volume is the critical importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) in preparing students who are blind or have low vision for future employment. Research presented by Melissa Fanshawe underscores persistent high unemployment rates among this population and identifies the ECC as essential for teaching skills that promote independence and work readiness. However, the implementation of ECC in Australian schools remains inconsistent due to systemic barriers, lack of trained staff, and ambiguity over teaching responsibilities. The

findings call for a national prioritisation of the ECC, development of clear scope and sequence documents, and greater support for educators to ensure equitable opportunities for students with vision impairment.

Two papers discuss the ECC and the UK's Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), highlighting both frameworks' shared goal of bridging educational gaps for students with vision impairment. While the ECC is widely used globally and focuses on individual skill development, the CFVI adopts a universal design approach, emphasising inclusive environments. Both frameworks face challenges in implementation due to lack of mandate and limited teacher training, but their integration is shown to improve student outcomes and independence.

Additionally, the journal features three case studies illustrating the complexities of developing and implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students who are blind or have low vision. These studies emphasise the importance of collaborative, student-centred planning involving educators, families, and students themselves. Effective IEPs are shown to foster agency, support transitions to alternative learning media (such as braille), and require ongoing adaptation to meet evolving needs. Barriers include resource limitations, administrative burdens, and the need for professional development, but the benefits for student inclusion and achievement are substantial.

Several papers featured in this journal were authored by current students enrolled in the Master of Disability Studies program, a collaborative initiative between Macquarie University and the NextSense Institute. These contributions reflect the program's commitment to fostering advanced professional skills and research expertise among its students, who specialise in areas such as blindness, deafness, and sensory disability. Through their coursework and research, these students are equipped to address the educational and support needs of individuals with sensory disabilities, ensuring that their work is grounded in the latest evidence-based practices and contemporary disability contexts. Their involvement in this volume highlights the valuable perspectives and innovative approaches emerging from the next generation of professionals in the field.

Thank you to each author for their invaluable contributions. I would also like to acknowledge the JSPEVI Editorial Committee and Advisory Panel, without whom the journal would not be possible. Thanks also once again to Lena Karam for her assistance in formatting and ensuring the journal is accessible.

Dr Bronwen Scott
Editor
editorjspevi@gmail.com

Presidents' Report

Dear Readers,

As co-presidents of SPEVI Inc we are pleased to present to you our report for the 12 months since our AGM in June 2024. This has been a very busy year, mainly due to preparing for the SPEVI 2025 Conference, where we celebrated 70 years of SPEVI and 200 years of braille. It was wonderful to catch up with so many of you either online, or, finally in-person, in our own Brisbane City. You can read more about this successful event in our separate report in this volume of JSPEVI.

We thank you all for being a part of SPEVI. It is because of you, our members, that we keep motivated to work as hard as we do, as volunteers. We feel happy and privileged in the knowledge that our SPEVI community is thriving and in a healthy financial position. We look forward together to witness SPEVI continuing to grow into the future.

At the time of writing this report, SPEVI Inc. had 12 Life members, 51 General Members, 58 Qualified Specialist Teachers members, and 38 Associate members, with an overall total of 158 active Members. SPEVI Inc Members benefitted from special members' discounts for conference registration, and we saw a nice influx of people (re) joining as a result. When your membership is about to expire you will receive an automated message. If you are unsure about your membership status, please contact the SPEVI Secretary, email: spevisecretary@gmail.com.

SPEVI Inc's online membership registration system supports automated payment transactions and invites memberships from Australia and Pacific Island Countries, with New Zealand applications directed to the SPEVI NZ Secretary.

SPEVI is an active organisation, and with the support of members and the Committee of Management continues to play an important role in the VI education field. COM members are leaders of working groups that consist of members also outside the COM. We always welcome interested members to SPEVI working groups. Please do reach out to us if you would like to become more involved.

SPEVI Communities of Practice

SPEVI currently has four active Communities of Practice (CoP). These are the SPEVI Deafblind Education CoP (established in 2024 by convenor Julie Tait), the Early Intervention for young children with vision impairment (EIVI) CoP (established by convenors Lara Anderson and Sharon Duncan, in collaboration with Bronwen Scott) and the Parents CoP (established by convenor Melissa Fanshawe and Melinda Whipp, parent rep for Vision Australia). The fourth CoP is the PhD Mentoring Group led by Melissa Fanshawe, to support researchers completing Doctorates in vision related fields. Four PhD students meet on a regular basis.

For all information and to register in advance to attend any SPEVI CoP, see https://www.spevi.net/communities-of-practice/

We encourage you to share news of our upcoming Communities of Practice, as a great way to stay abreast of new and relevant information.

JSPEVI

Volume 16, Number 1, 2023 of the Journal of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (JSPEVI) was published on 10 March 2024. Since 2024 JSPEVI has a partnership with Informit (https://about.informit.org/Opens in a new window). Informit provides a robust platform that connects publications to a vast network of researchers, educators, and libraries across Australia and New Zealand, as well as globally. This partnership increases discoverability through major academic databases and discovery services, ensuring that content reaches a diverse audience. A huge thank you to Bronwen Scott, editor, for her work in forming this partnership for SPEVI and for collating yet another excellent edition, which includes articles by leading educators and researchers and present an excellent way of keeping up to date on latest research and practices throughout the South Pacific. Current and past issues of JSPEVI are available on the SPEVI website JSPEVI page for free download.

SPEVI Website, News List, LinkedIn account and Facebook Pages

One of SPEVI's key aims is to promote and facilitate the interchange of information and collaboration among educators, professionals, parent groups and the broader community concerning education and equal opportunity for persons with vision impairment. SPEVI's website, news list and Facebook pages are essential in achieving this aim.

Website

The SPEVI website at https://www.spevi.net, created by Phia Damsma in 2015, provides a wealth of information about SPEVI and vision impairment education. The website serves as a repository for SPEVI publications, links to useful resources, and announcements of upcoming events. SPEVI Inc Member opportunities for discounted Professional Development are advertised on the Home Page. We aim to ensure the website is current and accurate and welcome your input into any additions or changes to content. We are calling for a working group who can identify and fix broken links. Please email the webmaster, webmaster@spevi.net.

News List

Subscription to the SPEVI News List is open to members and non-members. The List, moderated by Phia Damsma, was established in early 2011 and currently has 573 subscribers who share information from the field of VI Education, including current research, technology advances, and educational practices. You can read here how to subscribe to the SPEVI News List. Note: unfortunately, changes to

Google Groups' policy mean that only Gmail accounts can be directly added to this list by the list moderator. Other email accounts will receive an email with instructions how to complete their subscription, so please be aware of this. Please note that receiving emails from the SPEVI News Lists does not imply that your SPEVI membership registration is current. For enquiries about SPEVI membership, and to ensure you are eligible for member benefits, please contact the SPEVI Secretary, email: spevisecretary@gmail.com.

Facebook pages

SPEVI currently has two Facebook pages. The first, general Facebook page is managed by Ben Clare in collaboration with Yin Yin Htay from SPEVI New Zealand. The SPEVI Facebook page currently has over 500 followers. Along with the website, the SPEVI Facebook page is a useful outward facing representation of SPEVI, educating the general public on SPEVI's work and activities. The SPEVI Facebook page has again proven its worth as a great tool for communication about the January 2025 SPEVI Conference. We thank Carla Silveira, for her assistance in creating engaging Facebook tiles and posting about our conference sponsors, exhibitors and events.

The second SPEVI Facebook page is called 'Educators supporting students with V.I. in Maths' and is moderated by Pranitha Moodley and Melissa Fanshawe and administered by Charlie Roberts. This Facebook page in Maths continues to grow with 221 members. This group is private and was started 3 years ago for teachers, support staff and parents to connect, collaborate and learn from each other. It is a SPEVI promoted page and is a forum for sharing information, news, opinions and discussions about teaching Maths and using Access Technology and graphics when teaching and supporting students that are blind or have low vision.

The last few postings discussed transition questions for students transitioning to year 7 and covered accessibility issues with screen readers and recommended platforms that could be used for ease of navigation. Transition tools for Foundation and year 7 students were discussed emphasising a must have tool kit for schools to purchase for their incoming students. The discussion around calculators continues with apps and prices shared with the group. Thank you to the admin and members in this group for their support and let us keep the chats ongoing.

LinkedIn

SPEVI Inc has a presence on the LinkedIn professional network.

Follow us on the SPEVI LinkedIn account: https://www.linkedin.com/company/south-pacific-educators-in-vision-impairment-inc

Supporting Research and Development

Survey importance of Specialist/Advisory Teacher Vision Impairment

A/Prof Melissa Cain and A/Prof Melissa Fanshawe distributed a survey through SPEVI Inc, looking at the importance of the Specialist/Advisory Teacher Vision Impairment in Australia. Following recent situations in States where the role of the has not been well understood, input was sought from teachers to explain the importance of the Specialist Teacher and the impact it has on students with blindness and low vision. The results are currently being prepared for publication.

Research into inherited retinal diseases

Late 2023 SPEVI Inc has responded positively to a request from Emily Shepard (Usher Kids Australia) and Eden Robertson (UNSW) to support a Priority Setting Partnership (PSP) that explores priority areas of needed research into inherited retinal diseases, in partnership with researchers from UNSW Sydney and CMRI. The project was conducted over 2-years and resulted in a Top 10 list of research priorities as defined by patients, carers and clinicians regarding the diagnosis and treatment of Inherited Retinal Diseases. Here is a short video that summarises what the project involved: https://youtu.be/7PTH1HZfVo0 .

Usher Kids expressed a strong desire to involve patient advocacy, policy groups and other organisations working with children with IRD such as SPEVI in this endeavour. SPEVI Inc agreed to support this PSP by raising awareness, supporting recruitments and disseminating research findings through our members and news list. In August 2024 we shared information from Eden Robertson from UNSW to recruit workshop participants. As the Inherited Retinal Disease Priority Setting Partnership was coming to its final stages, they were looking for individuals with lived experience AND health /support professionals to participate in two online workshops. In September 2024 we received a formal thank you letter for the promotion/support from SPEVI for their work to identify the priorities for inherited retinal diseases in Australia, which we are happy to pass on to you, our SPEVI members. On 24 the top 10 research priorities findings from this research was presented at NSW Parliament House. Our sincere congratulations to Emily and Eden, and we hope to keep involved with their work into the future.

Vision and Hearing website Trinity University

SPEVI Inc shared with members the news from Professor Karen Waldron and Dr Mike Steer, co-editors of the website, which can be found at https://www.trinity.edu/sites/students-vision-hearing-loss

The website has undergone an update and additional submissions are invited from experts in Vision and Hearing on a wide range of topics related to the journal's twin focal interest areas, so that the website can add updated Research and Practice both in Vision and Hearing. Contributions from SPEVI members are particularly

welcome. The Site aims to be knowledgeable and appreciative of diverse regional, community, and cultural needs.

PhD Research

We are always happy to support current research in the field.

- A new, research dedicated Community of Practice was established in 2024: the PhD Mentoring Group led by Melissa Fanshawe, to support researchers completing Doctorates in vision related fields. If you are interested in attending, please contact Melissa.
- One of our SPEVI members, Karen Croake, requested participation in research she is conducting research for her PhD using a Delphi study to identify the best pedagogical strategies for teaching braille literacy to beginning readers in a mainstream classroom.
- Jodie Martire, a PHD candidate at the University of Queensland shared her current research with SPEVI members for discussion and feedback.
- A number of PhD students shared their research at our SPEVI 2025 conference in Brisbane, in person or online.
- We distributed requests for participation in PhD research on Braille Literacy and Quality of Life by Aasha Rose.

Supporting Professionalism of Members

SPEVI Zoom account

SPEVI Inc's Professional Zoom account (since 2024) has been instrumental to enable meetings of the SPEVI Committee of Management, online hosting of and registration for the many professional development events that we have supported, including some of the Communities of Practice and for our 2025 Conference too!

VI Education Professional Learning

SPEVI Inc is delighted to be able to continue our offer of member discounts for professional learning in VI education. This past year SPEVI financially contributed to ensure discounted registration by our members of for NextSense Continuing Professional Education (CPE) events (NSW) and Statewide Vision Resource Centre's professional learning (PL) events (SVRC, Victoria). SPEVI Inc will engage with our partners NextSense and SVRC to keep offering member discounts for PD events in 2025. Please contact the SPEVI secretary if you wish to know more.

SPEVI Inc Position Statement on Braille Literacy in Australia

In this statement, SPEVI Inc. sets out its position on braille literacy in Australia with the primary aim of making explicit the fundamental right of quality instruction in braille literacy and numeracy for all pre-school and school age students with

blindness and low vision throughout Australia, as a means of ensuring equity and excellence in education.

This statement addresses the challenges, gaps and opportunities in braille education, promoting the right of students with vision impairment to an equitable education in literacy and numeracy.

It seeks to advocate for recognition of, improved access to, and support for, braille literacy as a fundamental tool for communication and education.
Sincere gratitude and thanks go to Jo Minniss for leading the statements, the authors, Jo Minniss, Skye Jones, Aasha Rose, Frances Gentle, Melissa Fanshawe, Phia Damsma, Emily White, Christine Casey, and Tricia d'Apice, and the members of the Australian Braille Authority Executive for their input.

The Statement was finalised after many months of consultation and is published on the SPEVI website at https://www.spevi.net/statements/

This Statement has already become a valuable resource and influence in policy to advocate for students' rights to access braille education and materials. 27 February 2025 was an exciting day for braille literacy in Australia: the Position Statement of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment Inc. on Braille Literacy in Australia was released on the Australian Curriculum students with disability site.
https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/student-diversity/students-with-disability

Submissions and Representations on behalf of members

During the past 12 months, SPEVI Inc has participated in the following submissions and representation on behalf of its members:

Australian Braille Authority

On 14 March we submitted SPEVI Inc's Braille report to Tristan Clare, chair, for their annual general meeting.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

In April 2023, Frances Gentle on behalf of SPEVI, responded to a call from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to engage with their review of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO). SPEVI focused on Occupation 241513, "Teacher of the Sight Impaired," which is one for occupations grouped under "Special Education Teachers." In preparing our submission, we drew upon SPEVI's Teacher Elaborations and Principles and Practice position statements, along with a desktop review of the occupation descriptions for specialist vision teachers used by education service providers across Australia.

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

Melissa Fanshawe has been liaising with ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority) who are wanting to ensure their website has an inclusive approach to content. We will be collating some materials from throughout Australia to create a strong representation for inclusive resources, along with our Braille Literacy statement.

Blind Citizens Australia

February 2025 Blind Citizens Australia reached out for a meeting to explore collaboration Between SPEVI and BCA, particularly around opportunities to improve and increase engagement and support to young people with blindness and low vision. It is hoped in the near future our organisations will start working closer together on this important goal.

Disability Standards for Education

In Feb 2025 Frances Gentle kindly put in a submission on behalf of SPEVI to the DSE Disability Standards for Education consultation process.

International Council for Education of People with Vision Impairment

In April 2025 the SPEVI Co-Presidents accepted the invitation to represent SPEVI Inc and attend board meetings of the Pacific Region branch of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI Pacific). In a reciprocal arrangement, Emily White, the current president of ICEVI Pacific, represents this organisation on the Committee of Management of SPEVI Inc.

International Council on English Braille

In December 2024, the ICEB included a link to the SPEVI Inc. braille statement. https://groups.io/g/iceb-announce/attachment/64/0/ICEB%20Newsletter%20Issue%2017%20(2024-12).pdf

In April 2025 SPEVI Inc submitted a report to the newsletter of the International Council on English Braille – Australia, which should be published in May 2025.

With thanks to Leona Holloway for her assistance in this process.

Leaders in Vision Impairment

In April 2025 one of the LEADERS in VI from WA contacted the leaders incl. SPEVI, as they are looking to establish eText and ePub options for our students. SPEVI is interested in being involved in anything to do with students' digital access.

New South Wales Education Standards Authority

In March/April 2025 Bill Sakoulas kindly provided SPEVI feedback for NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)'s consultation survey on a number of elective 7–10 draft syllabuses.

Monash Assistive Technology Society Centre Launch

On 10 December 2024 Melissa Fanshawe represented SPEVI in person at the official launch in Melbourne of Monash University's hub for research, education and impact in the disability space, the MATS (Monash Assistive Technology and Society) Centre.

Monash ARC Linkage Project

SPEVI Inc. is a partner organisation in the Monash University Australian Research Council Application for research funding for a Linkage grant, with many of the Departments of Education across Australia, Vision Australia, Round Table and University of Southern Queensland. The aim of this project is to improve mathematics accessibility, to overcome current barriers to collaboration and access to graphics and calculation that BLV students face studying mathematics in upper secondary school. In November 2024 it was announced that the application for this grant had been successful. SPEVI is excited to be involved with such an important project.

Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

April/May 2025: a SPEVI working group has been established with the aim of SPEVI seeking (and sharing) data each year from the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) on the number of and support provided for students with varying levels of vision impairment. If you are interested in joining this working group, please contact the SPEVI Inc secretary. With thanks to Frances Gentle for proposing this project.

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Curriculum Reform Team

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is currently updating all of their resource materials to align with Australian Curriculum version 9 and has had a strong focus on accessibility. SPEVI have been actively involved in providing feedback in subject areas. Thank you to Frances Gentle, Melissa Fanshawe, Pranitha Moodley, Bill Sakoulas, Jacqui Donnelly, Therese Campbell, and Aji Kathir, who have attended the consultation groups and others who may have responded to the development of the final syllabuses. We are thankful to Bill Sakoulas and Jacqui Donnelly who have represented SPEVI on the Technical Advisory Groups to provide feedback on proposed curriculum documents for the needs of students with blindness and low vision.

SPEVI is pleased that NESA is genuinely interested in consultations with SPEVI members related to vision impairment and education.

NESA Diversity (Disability) Focus Groups

SPEVI received an Invitation from NESA to the Diversity (Disability) Focus Groups for Term 4 'Have your say', November 2024. Jacqui Donnelly, Bill Sakoulas, Melissa

Fanshawe and Cathie Wiltshire have provided input into the diversity (disability) focus groups representing students with blindness and low vision on behalf of SPEVI.

We very much appreciate the opportunity to ensure access and equity for : Music 11–12 syllabuses, Legal Studies and Law and the Community Life Skills 11–12, Economics 11–12, Biology and Biology Life Skills 11–12, Chemistry and Chemistry Life Skills 11–12, Earth and Environmental Science and Earth and Environmental Science Life Skills 11–12, Physics and Physics Life Skills 11–12, Dance and Dance Life Skills 11–12, Drama and Drama Life Skills 11–12.

NESA Diverse Learning Focus Groups

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) invited SPEVI to join the Diverse Learning Focus Groups in August to November. The purpose of these meetings is to gain feedback on how the syllabuses meet the needs of students with disability. The focus groups covered the primary curriculum (Creative Arts K–6, HSIE K–6, PDHPE K–6, Science & Tech K–6), HSIE K–6, History 7–10 & Geography 7–10, PDHPE K–6 & PDHPE 7–10, and Visual Arts 7–10, and secondary English, History and Mathematics 11–12 syllabuses. Melissa Fanshawe and Bill Sakoulas attended on SPEVI's behalf.

Earlier in the year NESA invited SPEVI to join its Technical Advisory Groups. We extend our thanks to Frances Gentle, Pranitha Moodley, Therese Campbell, Melissa Fanshawe, Aji Kathir, Bill Sakoulas and other members for contributing their ideas and perspectives on the Years 7-10 syllabuses (including Life Skills content): English, Mathematics, Creative Arts, Visual Arts Years 7-10, and Aboriginal Languages K-10. Finally, we thank Frances Gentle for representing SPEVI as 'critical friend' for NESA and reviewing the Support Documents relating to two Additional Teaching Support documents, for inclusivity and accessibility for students with sensory needs.

Note: We are looking to form a group of members who can make themselves available to provide a response on behalf of SPEVI and its members when NESA reaches out for input from SPEVI in Focus or Advisory Group meetings. Please contact the secretary if you are interested in being part of this.

NESA Education Syllabus Launch

On 28 October 2024 Melissa Fanshawe represented SPEVI at the launch of the Education Syllabus of NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)

World Intellectual Property Organization

30th October to 1st November: Ben Clare represented SPEVI at the Right to Read conference for Pacific Islanders by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) hosted by NextSense.

NextSense LEADERS Meeting

17-18 October 2024: SPEVI was represented by Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe at NextSense's 'Leaders in Blind and Low Vision Education' event. Representatives of Education Departments and education service providers shared information and discussed challenges and opportunities in the field of VI education in Australia and New Zealand.

NDIS and Qualified Specialist Teachers

At the request of a member during the previous SPEVI AGM, we contacted the NDIA to find out requirements for Qualified Specialist Teachers (vision impairment) to register as NDIS service providers. We share the response as this may be helpful for other members as well.

To become registered, a person must have a suitability assessment, which includes both their good standing (financially and key personnel), as well as the services provided and a self-assessment against the practice standards. The business must then engage a quality auditor to undergo an audit and then if successful will undergo worker screening.

In the self-assessment stage, the business is asked to upload documents that are relevant, such as Specialist Teacher status with SPEVI. So, it will certainly help to be registered as Qualified Specialist Teacher (Vision) with SPEVI, but we could not guarantee it would obtain provider registration, as there are so many other elements that are required in the progress.

This link was provided:

https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/providers/becoming-registered-provider/registration-requirements-process-and-timeline

Information was updated on SPEVI NDIS webpage

Please make sure you check and confirm this information as changes can be made by the NDIA anytime.

Occupation Standard Classification for Australia

In March 2025 SPEVI welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed ongoing maintenance strategy for the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA). We sincerely thank Frances Gentle for submitting SPEVI's response to the Bureau. As an organisation dedicated to the education and professional development of individuals working with people who are blind or have low vision, we recognise the importance of maintaining an up-to-date and inclusive classification system that accurately reflects contemporary occupations and workforce trends.

We are delighted to advise that ABS accepted our recommendation to change the occupation title to “Specialist Teacher (Vision Impairment)” and adopted seven of the 11 task descriptors proposed in our April 2023 submission. The Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) is now available. A big Thankyou and Congratulations to Frances Gentle and all SPEVI members involved in this successful submission!

What you can do: SPEVI encourages all specialist vision teachers to identify themselves as holders of this position when asked by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. During Frances’ engagement with the ABS contact person, she was asked if this specialist position was disappearing. Apparently, the number of people who are registered as vision specialists through the ABS system is rapidly diminishing.

SPEVI LIVES (Leaders in VI) Meeting

SPEVI LIVES meetings provide a free and important platform for leaders and organisational representatives in VI education to discuss current research, practitioner initiatives, resources and issues with others in the field. The last LIVES meeting took place on Tuesday 14 January 2025, during the SPEVI 2025 Conference. This session was not recorded. It was a great catchup between colleagues. Attendees are invited to share their news from the field in a friendly and casual atmosphere, with no meeting minutes taken to allow for free discussion. Anyone who is or feels a leader in the field, is acting as representative of your organisation, or is self-employed, is very welcome to join our meeting.

Closing words

As a member of SPEVI Inc, we hope that our report will make you feel proud and strengthen your ties with our organisation. Please contact us if you would like to join any of the working groups/subcommittees, a future Committee of Management, or otherwise would like to be more actively involved in all the exciting new endeavours. We encourage you to invite other friends and colleagues, professionals and parents, to join SPEVI Inc. and start enjoying the benefits of SPEVI membership. These were evident with the discounted registration fees for the SPEVI 2025 Conference and on a permanent basis with the Professional Development events, including SPEVI Communities of Practice, the News List, Facebook updates and the JSPEVI Journal. We are confident that this long list of SPEVI member benefits, SPEVI’s important contributions to the field, and the organisation’s strong support and crucial public voice for all its members is ample reason to join or rejoin SPEVI. Information about the different categories of membership is available on https://www.spevi.net/join/.

In closing this Presidents’ report, we extend our appreciation for the important contributions of our friends and colleagues in SPEVI, including SPEVI’s office bearers (some of whom kindly contributed to this report) and the professionals and families who support the right to quality education for students with blindness and low vision.

As we continue to grow our offerings to SPEVI members (e.g. Conference, SPEVI Symposia, Communities of Practice and discounted Professional Learning), we encourage you to visit the SPEVI website to access resources. These include current and past volumes of JSPEVI Journal, SPEVI conference papers and presentations, and the wealth of information and links to resources and activities in VI education.

As Co-Presidents, along with the Committee of Management, it has been a great privilege working together, contributing to SPEVI's direction and member priorities and striving to make SPEVI Inc grow and thrive. Please do reach out if you would like to be involved in some way!

It is now time to hand over the reins to new leadership, but we are grateful for all the support from our SPEVI Community through the years.

Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe
Co-Presidents, SPEVI Inc.

May 2025

Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe, Co-Presidents, at the SPEVI 2025 Conference in Brisbane (Jan 2025)

Australian Co-Presidents Phia Damsma (top-left), Melissa Fanshawe (top-right), New Zealand President Lynda Williams

Importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australian Schools in Addressing Future Unemployment of People Who are Blind or Have Low Vision - Melissa Fanshawe

Abstract

Upon completion of their studies, people who are blind or have low vision will compete in the same employment market as their peers, have equal requirements of their workload and the same expectations to complete tasks. Using a qualitative survey and interviews, this study sought to find the importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australian schools. The results revealed a shared belief among stakeholders of the importance of teaching Expanded Core Curriculum skills to enable people with vision impairment to live and work independently. However, implementation varies throughout Australia due to differences in school systems and access to trained and qualified staff. The findings demonstrate educators believe the ECC is important for employability of students who are blind and have low vision. To date, there is a lack of scope or sequence for what should be taught in this curriculum, and debates remain over who should teach it and when in Australian schools.

Implications for Practitioners: Educators should consider ways to prioritise the Expanded Core Curriculum nationally, to prepare students for further education and employment.

Keywords: Employability, blind, low vision, Expanded Core Curriculum, disability specific skills.

Introduction

The low unemployment and underemployment rates for people who are blind or have low vision (BLV) have prompted a need to consider factors which influence employment for people who BLV. Employers may perceive barriers exist to employing people who are BLV in the workplace, as they are unsure what modifications are required to access work and move around the workspace (Steverson, 2020). There are also concerns around the ability of people who are blind or have low vision to access materials and information pertinent to perform allocated job tasks (Cullen, 2011). However, despite promoting the benefits of diversity in hiring people BLV (McDonnall & Crudden, 2018) and increased accessibility through technological advances (McDonnall & Cmar, 2019), the unemployment figures remain alarmingly high (Blind Citizens Australia, 2020; Vision Australia et al., 2018).

Studies (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011) show clear links between strong implementation of the Expanded Core Curriculum, employment and richer quality of life. This study sought insight from educators about the importance of formally teaching the ECC in the Australian education system. A survey provided at a

conference of South Pacific Educators of Vision Impairment had 66 responses from educators, parents, teachers, advisory teachers – vision impairment, therapists, school and statewide school system administrators, and representatives from blindness organisations. Further interviews were undertaken of students, teachers, advisory teachers and teacher aides.

Participants in the focus groups and interviews were asked

- In regard to the Expanded Core Curriculum, what is working well in Australian Schools,
- In regard to the Expanded Core Curriculum, what would you like to see/think is important to implement?
- What are some potential roadblocks & ways to overcome them?

Literature Review

Employment opportunities for people BLV

The exceedingly high unemployment rate for people with vision impairments is increasingly recognised as a matter of concern both within Australia and internationally (Bell & Mino, 2015; Blind Citizens Australia, 2013, 2020; Crudden, 2012; Cullen, 2011; Koehler, 2020; McMorrow, 2018). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) found 83.2% of people of working age participating in the labour force, compared to 53.4% of people with a disability employed in any capacity. In Australia, it is estimated that only 24% of Australian people who are blind or have low vision are employed full time (Vision Australia et al., 2018).

This corresponds with similar figures in Canada and New Zealand, with 28% and 32% of people who are blind or vision impaired, respectively, in full time employment (Vision Australia et al., 2018) and 44.2% of people BLV participating in the American workforce (McDonnall & Cmar, 2019). These figures are particularly alarming when employment generates wages, provides a sense of purpose and is argued to be the “cornerstone of social inclusion” (Blind Citizens Australia, 2013, p. 1).

Employee Attitudes

Despite recent research and practices implemented to show the benefits of a diverse workforce (Cullen, 2011; McDonnell & Crudden, 2018), Dong et al., (2017) found negative attitudes by employers created hesitation in hiring people BLV over their sighted peers, regardless of background and skills. The Willing to Work report (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016) noted that potential employees with disabilities felt that negative employer attitudes are the largest barrier to employment. These findings were supported by a report to Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability by (Blind Citizens Australia, 2020), whereby people who BLV expressed frustration at gaining a job,

even though they were suitably qualified. It is also reported that it took longer for graduates who are BLV to find employment (Blind Citizens Australia, 2020).

Barriers to obtaining employment have also been identified within the hiring process (McNeil, 2016). Lack of accessibility to online platforms or incompatibility of technology to access the applications were reported as barriers for people with BLV (McDonnall & Cmar, 2019). Visual diagrams and pictures within the application forms or other pre-interview assessments created inequitable access for people who BLV (Naraine & Lindsay, 2011).

Access to the Workspace

In the study *Barriers to Employment*, McMorrow (2018) found that after negative employee attitudes, transportation to the workforce and mobility within the work environment were the largest concern for respondents. Crudden's (2015) investigation of the impact of transportation for people BLV found the availability of public transportation and Orientation and Mobility training were barriers for people BLV in the workforce. The author suggested "flexible schedules …, working from off-site locations, or subsidize[d] transportation" (Crudden, 2015, p. 458) would assist people in accessing employment. In a later study Crudden et al., (2017) found that training in getting to and from the workforce would also increase employee confidence.

Accessibility within the workspace, in terms of mobility within the environment and access to technology have also been raised by Steverson (2020), who suggested that an earlier age of onset of vision impairment, increases the barriers experienced. Schuck et al (2018) found that prior Orientation and Mobility training provided, and the individual's problem solving-skills and confidence can increase competence in the workforce. Similarly with current technology available, access to content should be more accessible (McDonnall & Cmar, 2019; Vision Australia et al., 2018). However, Dong et al., (2017) has found employees lack confidence in requesting accommodations, lack knowledge using technology and are concerned of their employer's attitudes if they are to advocate for their needs.

Outwater-Wright (2020) argues that it is leadership in a workplace that should actually be creating safe and accessible environments for all employees, with the "tools, resources and technology" (p.71) for every person to do their job. This is supported by legislation; Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability states that people with disability need access to life skills that will enable them to participate fully and equally in education, the workforce and as part of the community (United Nations, 2006b). Furthermore, Dong et al., (2017) believes creating accessible environments for all employees would also increase employee productivity and employee job satisfaction.

Graduate preparedness

For people who are blind or have low vision, there are unique barriers that result from vision impairment (South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment, 2016). Vision is the sense that allows people to learn incidentally, synthesise information and respond to the environment (Author, 2019). Hatlen (2000) and Mani (1998) found that students who master compensatory skills to independently access the curriculum whilst in school, have the best chance of employment. These skills are important to ensure access to what is required in education or employment, and they are prepared for competitive job markets (Vision Australia et al., 2018).

Education of students who BLV in Australia

Historically in Australia, students with vision impairment were educated in special schools with a focus on the Expanded Core Curriculum content and skills, particularly life skills, orientation and mobility and braille. Following the ratification of the United Nations Convention of the rights of persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006a) by more than 70 countries, including Australia, it became a law to provide “education that ensures the right to education of people with disabilities at all levels, aiming to eliminate barriers that exclude or marginalize these learners” (Opie, 2018, p. 76). According to Article 24, p3, this includes “facilitating the learning of braille, alternate script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills” (United Nations, 2006a) in addition to “measures taken to employ teachers…who are qualified in braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education” (Article 24, p.3).

This led to the move for inclusion of students with disabilities within mainstream schools. Students would attend the least restrictive environment. For students with vision impairment, this meant that unless there were additional disabilities, students would be educated in their local schools. There are still a number of schools in Australia which have special education units, specifically coded for vision impairment, and a small number of schools specifically for students with vision impairment with the dedicated resources and expertise to implement disability specific skills. However, most students with vision impairment will attend a mainstream school and are likely be the first student with a vision impairment in the school.

Teaching of the Expanded Core Curriculum

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), devised by Hatlen (1996), is a set of disability specific skills that are believed to be required by students who are blind or vision impaired, to compensate for what is incidentally gained by people with regular vision (Allman & Lewis, 2014; Hatlen, 1996; South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment, 2016). These skills includes assistive technology, compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, sensory efficiency, career education, independent living

skills, recreation and living skills, self-determination and social interaction skills, which assist for access in education (Allman & Lewis, 2014).

Over the last 25 years, a large and growing body of research has argued that people with vision impairment require explicit teaching of the Expanded Core Curriculum in preparation of future employment. The aim of the Expanded Core Curriculum is to explicitly teach knowledge and skills whilst students are still in schools to enable independent and successful graduates (Barraga & Erin, 2001; Blatch et al.,1998; McLinden et al., 2016; Palmer, 2005; Rosenblum, 2006, 2014). Douglas and Hewett (2014) believe explicitly teaching these skills increases agency for students. The authors are supported by McLinden et al. (2016) who believes ECC provides skills required to be independent. The knowledge and skills gained through the ECC, has been proposed to prepare young people who are blind or low vision for the workforce and believed to be able to address unemployment issues (Cullen, 2011). However, despite the link to employment preparation, there is still uncertainty over who should be teaching the ECC and when (Allman & Lewis, 2014; Blackshear, 2014; Hatlen, 1996; Levin & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Lohmeier et al., 2009; Siu & Morash, 2014; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011).

Methods

Understanding the link between explicit teaching of the Expanded Core Curriculum and employment, the researcher wanted to investigate the importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australian schools. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Southern Queensland and signed informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to undertaking any research.

Participants

Participants were recruited at the South Pacific Educators of Vision Impairment (SPEVI) conference in January 2020, of approximately 120 conference delegates. Sixty-six participants engaged in the survey. Interviews of classroom teachers, teacher aides and advisory teachers (VI) were also undertaken (n= 12).

The chief investigator is a qualified teacher of students with vision impairment, with twenty-five years' experience in schools, as well as has lived experience, as a mother to a child with a severe vision impairment. The researcher was known to some participants, which was addressed in the research design to ensure ethical standards were upheld.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected through focus group of educators (n= 66) consisting of specialist teachers of VI, statewide administrators, therapists, O&Ms and other associated stakeholders of education of students with vision impairment. In the focus group, participants were asked to provide answers to three questions on a written survey. There was a total of 65 responses for the first question (In regard to the ECC, what is

working well?), 58 responses for the second question (In regard to the ECC, what would you like to see/think is important to implement?), 54 responses to the 3rd question (What are some potential roadblocks? & ways to overcome them?**).**

The results were entered into Excel. Data was analysed through assigning a code to comments of themes. Interviews were done in person, or online through Zoom. The interviews were recorded and uploaded to Panopto to transcribe. Any identifying names, schools or locations were removed for privacy. The researchers checked the transcription and original recordings for accuracy and uploaded to Excel. Once data was coded, a process of thematically grouping codes to determine key themes was undertaken. The findings will now be explored.

Results/findings

Although the questions had been created to elicit information about the knowledge and skills required of students completing secondary schools, a number of barriers to implementing the ECC were identified by stakeholders within school environments for students who are blind or have low vision.

Barriers to access

Schools and systems

An overwhelming theme (n=24) was that the school staff and school environment influence the implementation of the Expanded Core curriculum. Respondents explained there was a vast difference in the “acceptance of schools to provide adjustments and inclusion for blind and low vision students” (Response 2). Parental expectations and communication with families also influenced an educator’s ability to teach the ECC, as “some parents are not willing for their students to do “life skills” programs” (Interview, Sam, teacher).

Whilst classroom teachers wanted to include students in the classroom for the majority of the time, Advisory Teachers recognised the disability specific skills of the Expanded Core Curriculum were essential to ensuring inclusion; “[we need] acknowledgment of the importance of explicit teaching of skills/ work in ECC on a daily basis” (Interview, Chris, specialist VI teacher). However, translated into the classroom, this was more difficult “we need time to teach the specific skills, but if we teach the skills, it's not inclusion” (Anita, classroom teacher). This was echoed by an experienced teacher aide during an interview; “there is not enough time to teach the basic life skills that sighted kids take every day for granted” (Teacher aide 1).

Similar to the findings of Lohmeier (2009) and Lohmeier et al., (2009), time featured as a major barrier to implementation of the Expanded Core Curriculum in the focus groups. This included time to implement the ECC as well as other subjects, time to learn about new technologies, time to make modifications and the time needed by the students to have “the rigour to try and maintain the pace of their peers” (Harry, classroom teacher).

Access to specialist staff

Specialist staff are employed in all states and territories of Australia to assist teachers and schools with inclusive teaching practices and support students to access the academic, physical and social environments of the school. However, lack of qualified Advisory Teachers, the large geographical distribution of the population and high numbers on caseloads, meant not every student had equitable access to “high quality teaching from teachers who are qualified and have expertise” (Survey Response 28).

As a result, many schools provide teacher aides to assist classroom teachers through supporting students BLV in mainstream schools. This was concerning to a respondent who commented, “Aides are not teachers. Who moderates to ensure students are being taught by expert teachers?” (Survey response 133). As vision impairment is such a low incidence disability, many teacher aides and classroom teachers may have not had experience or training in how to instruct a student with vision impairment. Respondents shared that pre-service education gives little training to general classroom teachers, which concerned Advisory Teachers that students were being taught by teachers or teacher aides who don’t have braille knowledge and skills, to provide adequate instruction. “For inclusion to work they still need qualified teachers of VI i.e. blind child needs a teacher who has braille skills” (Response 14).

Consistent with the findings of Jones et al., (2018) teachers, and Advisory teachers expressed their concern about their limited knowledge of technology. Respondents expressed how rapidly technology changes and that they cannot keep up with what is available or cannot access the technology to explore it further.

You hear of this piece of equipment and you think, oh that sounds really good, but without the hands on you don’t know whether that is going to be useful tool or not and it may sound really good but ineffective for whatever the task you thought it might be for and of course the cost is prohibitive (Interview Helen, Specialist VI teacher).

Four of the interviewees and eight respondents in the survey also mentioned ongoing training; training programs to keep Advisory teachers current, and training for teachers and teacher aides who had students in their classrooms. The responses suggested mentorships and communities of practice which would enable “access for teachers to more skill development online with close consultation between teachers sharing information” (Response 77). It was also noted a “formal sequencing/pathway document would assist mainstream schools and educators to see how the ECC stage for the student can fit into the curriculum” (Response 73).

Discussion

Despite the overwhelming response of the importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australian schools, it has met with some challenges in implementation. This research shows that there is still insufficient clarity surrounding the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australia, who should teach it, what should be taught and when. This aligns with the research of Wolffe & Kelly, (2011), who found “general agreement that these areas are important, [but] teachers and advocates continue to debate how to accomplish the task, given the time constraints of the school day and who was responsible for teaching which elements of the ECC” (p 341).

Australian advisory teachers shared their overwhelming support of the Expanded Core Curriculum, but acknowledged barriers existed to implement the ECC in all schools. One such explanation from the findings is the school systems and barriers, where lack of understanding may exist from classroom teachers or school administrators as to how implementing a disability specific curriculum can actually aid inclusion. Access to specialist staff was another barrier to implementing the Expanded Core Curriculum. Advisory teachers felt they had insufficient time to make an impact in schools. This was supported in the literature discussing high caseloads and complexity of the job (Opie, 2018), the diversity of ages, diagnosis and skills (Siu & Morash, 2014) and the geographical distribution of schools (Brown & Beamish, 2012). This meant the teaching of students who are blind or have low vision, rested largely on classroom teachers who are unlikely to have received training in the Expanded Core Curriculum, VI specific pedagogy and adaptive technology (Keil & Cobb, 2019; Pogrund, 2017). The result of which is a highly variable ability to implement the Expanded Core Curriculum for students who are blind or have low vision in schools.

Limitations

Due to ethical diligence to ensure educators were not identified, demographics were not collected in the survey which limits the context around the situations addressed in the responses.

Implications for practitioners and future research

This research has shown that educators clearly value the importance of the Expanded Core Curriculum and understand the role it plays in future employment. However, in Australia, like in other countries, “there is concern that the teaching of such independence skills is often neglected in school education and that young people with vision impairments do not leave compulsory education with the necessary independence skills in place” (Wolffe & Kelly, 2011). It would be beneficial to create a scope and sequence of the Expanded Core Curriculum to enable guidance for educators towards preparing students for employment.

Conclusion

If we are serious about changing the employment opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision, the Expanded Core Curriculum is essential. This will enable people to have access to the workspace, highlight work readiness skills and necessary Assistive Technology skills to contribute in the workforce. It provides agency and independence for our graduates entering the workforce. Whilst there currently remains debate over who should teach the Expanded Core Curriculum in Australian schools, prioritising the implementation of the Expanded Core Curriculum in schools, may be one way to address the unacceptable employment rates.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the SPEVI organising committee for enabling data collection at the SPEVI conference.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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An investigation of current braille literacy assessments - Aasha Rose

Abstract

Braille literacy is essential for some people with blindness or low vision (BLV), yet no comprehensive tool effectively assesses braille literacy skills. This study identified and evaluated eight global braille literacy assessments using internet searches, including Google Scholar and Scopus. Findings showed that while various assessments exist, none provide a holistic measure covering all literacy components. To address this gap, the next phase of this PhD research will recruit an international expert panel to establish a consensus on a “gold-standard” assessment. Educator feedback will ensure the development of a practical, effective tool. This research will contribute to the creation of a standardised assessment suite to support braille literacy instruction and evaluation.

Introduction

In 2024-2025 the world celebrates 200 years of Louis Braille. While a version of braille, more precisely embossed text, had its inception in the 1700s, braille as we know it today was created as a six-dot reading and writing system in 1824. Despite 200 years of some people with blindness or low vision (BLV) using braille to read and write there is as yet no formal educational framework for the attainment of braille literacy (Croake et al., 2024). Since 1962 practitioners have developed assessments measuring individual components of braille literacy (Lorimer, 1962; Tooze, 1962) yet, very few assessments have been validated for use in education settings. The author has explored the current global suite of assessments through the examination of original articles. Analysis of validity, reliability, and the assessed components of braille literacy has been conducted alongside an investigation of forward citations from the original articles to locate and analyse further research articles utilising or critiquing these assessments. The aim of this article is to document the process taken to locate and examine the global suite of braille literacy assessments and to outline the possible implications of their use. A discussion of findings indicates that the assessments are lacking in validation and standardisation and may not be appropriate for students with BLV learning in mainstream schooling environments.

Research Background

It is well documented that good literacy leads to improved life outcomes (Baker & Street, 1994; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Stromquist, 2009). In a study conducted by Ryles (1996), 74 American participants with BLV were interviewed. Twenty-two participants were considered extensive braille users and had an unemployment rate of 33% compared to the total sample (58%). Ryles (1996, p. 7) concluded that “those who had learned to read braille as their original reading medium and used it extensively were employed at a significantly higher rate”. Although Ryles article has

been cited in 88 follow up articles, including articles already published in 2025, there is no mention of assessments to determine participants' braille literacy, simply a self-report of reading habits.

Rose et al. (2024) conducted a recent scoping review as part of their doctoral studies to determine whether braille literacy levels impacted Quality of Life (QoL). Two review questions were addressed:

1. How is braille literacy defined, conceptualised, and measured?
2. Does braille literacy lead to better QoL outcomes for people with BLV?

The overarching finding was that research into the literacy acquisition of students with BLV is scarce. No measures for assessing braille literacy were identified, however, researchers have used a variety of literacy measures (at times unvalidated) with small sample sizes impacting the ability to generalise findings (Argyropoulos & Martos, 2006; Day et al., 2008; Knowlton & Wetzel, 1996). A key result was that little is known about valid and reliable measures of braille literacy and various researchers and practitioners have used different criteria and benchmarks to assess components of braille literacy, leading to inconsistencies in how braille literacy levels are measured and reported (Laroche et al., 2012; Martiniello et al., 2022; Mohammed & Omar, 2011). This lack of standardisation makes it difficult to compare findings across studies and to develop appropriate educational guidelines even though global researchers agree that providing education in braille for some children with BLV ensures effective access to literacy and the curriculum, while also fostering positive future outcomes (Cain et al., 2021; Dodd & Conn, 2000; Emerson et al., 2009; Toussaint & Tiger, 2010).

Method

The key findings from the scoping review (Rose et al., 2024) alongside themes from a secondary qualitative analysis supported the need to identify current braille literacy assessments being used globally. The current author located and investigated eight braille literacy assessments through internet searches using Google, Google Scholar, and University of Southern Queensland database searches including Scopus. Each assessment was analysed for structure, purpose, target population, and applicability across different educational settings. Additionally, factors such as linguistic considerations, assessment validity, and accessibility for students with varying levels of braille proficiency were explored. This comprehensive review provides insights into the strengths and limitations of existing assessments, highlighting gaps in current assessment methods and potential areas for future development.

Findings

Literacy is regarded as a fundamental necessity for enhancing a person's quality of life, including improved physical and mental health, enhanced education,

employment, and income opportunities, positive personal relationships, and access to recreation and leisure activities (Barrett & Riddell, 2019; Lane & Conlon, 2016; McIntosh & Vignoles, 2001). However, current educational practices often fail to include braille literacy (Kenny et al., 2023) and this may be due to the lack of conceptualisation of braille literacy and the lack of valid measures to assess braille literacy in the global literature so teachers rely on what they have always done to teach braille (Englebretson et al., 2023; Holbrook, 2009; Rose et al., 2024; Wormsley, 2011). Rose et al. (2024) found through their scoping review that researchers have used a variety of teacher created assessments, print literacy assessments, observation, and questionnaires to measure individual components of braille literacy including writing and spelling, reading rate, reading skills, and comprehension. Much of the research compares print readers to braille readers using assessments originally designed for print users, produced in braille, and with outcomes measured against print reading standardisation.

The following table provides further details:

Table 1: Assessment and validation details for braille literacy assessments

Assessment Title (in alphabetic order) Author and date of conception	**Validation information**	**Assessment details**	**Forwarding citations Google Scholar (GS) or Scopus (S)**
ABLS **The Assessment of Braille Literacy Skills** (Region 4 Hub & Region 4 Education Service Center, 2021)	Not indicated although described as an informal, criterion-referenced tool that addresses both braille code skills and broader literacy skills.	Emergent Literacy, Academic Literacy, Functional Literacy and Digital Literacy	8 (S)
Braille Brain UEB Foundation Assessments (US Department of Education, n.d.)	The assessment is currently not standardised or validated	Reading speed and accuracy, comprehension, dictation of contracted braille	0(GS) 0 (S)
Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS)	Yes (2012)	Basic literacy skills, adult life and work skills reading test	12 (GS) 0 (S)

Assessment Title (in alphabetic order) Author and date of conception	Validation information	Assessment details	Forwarding citations Google Scholar (GS) or Scopus (S)
Braille Reading Assessment (Posey & Henderson, 2012)			
Lorimer Braille Recognition Test (Lorimer, 1962)	Yes	Braille contractions	0(GS) 7 (S)
MN Read (Legge et al., 1999)	Yes	Reading speed	128(GS) 61(S)
Neale Analysis (Greaney et al., 1994)	Yes	Reading accuracy, comprehension and speed	12 (GS) 2(S)
Queensland Braille Learning Progression and Assessment Tool (Queensland Department of Education, 2021)	Compiled using insights from key writings of national and international braille experts, professional conversations with interstate colleagues, expert Queensland teachers, and Statewide Vision Impairment Services team.	Observable indicators of increasing sophistication in the use of braille for accessing literacy and fostering self-reliance. It documents the general stages of braille-related skill development	1 (GS)
Tooze Braille Speed Test (Tooze, 1962)	Unknown	Speed test of three letter words that do not contain Braille contractions.	22 (GS) 5 (S)

Discussion

Eight braille literacy assessments were uncovered from this search. The first assessments were designed in 1962 with the most recent assessment published in

2021. Across nearly 60 years, a mere eight braille literacy assessments could be located. These assessments are alphabetically ordered and detailed below.

The *Assessment of Braille Literacy Skills (Region 4 Hub & Region 4 Education Service Center, 2021)* was first written in 1994 by Alan J. Koenig and Carol Farrenkopf in collaboration with the Region 4 Education Service Centre in Houston, Texas and included three sections: emergent literacy, academic literacy and functional literacy. There have been four editions since the original document including adjustments for the introduction of Unified English Braille (UEB), but validation processes could not be located through this search. The purpose of the document was to "promote meaningful assessment of braille literacy skills" (Region 4 Hub & Region 4 Education Service Center, 2021, p. 3). The most recent edition (2021) includes a fourth section: digital literacy. The assessment tracks individual student achievement but remains unvalidated and does not provide an opportunity to compare results with other students with BLV. The original assessment was available in an article format only, whereas the latest edition can be located online (https://r4hub.esc4.net/ABLS/). A follow up document titled Assessment of Braille Literacy Skills (Koenig & Farrenkopf, 1995) could not be located via online searches, yet, this document has been cited eight times according to Scopus searches. An adapted version of the assessment was used to track students' braille skill development in the Alphabetic Braille Contracted (ABC) Braille Study (Emerson et al., 2009; Holbrook, 2009; Wright et al., 2009). This study has resulted in a high number of publications, with the assessment mentioned in each article.

The Braille Brain UEB Foundation Assessments (US Department of Education, n.d.) was located via a Google search and was a joint project with the US Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration and the American Printing House for the Blind. The braille assessments are organised by developmental reading level using a variety of programs mostly designed for sighted print readers. The website reports that the assessment is "based on research and created using a systematic process" but it is not standardised or validated (US Department of Education, n.d.). No original research articles or reports referring to this assessment could be located using online searches and there were no forward citations in other works. It is not known whether this assessment is being utilised in educational settings.

The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) Braille Reading Assessment: an exploratory study (Posey & Henderson, 2012) was based on the US Workforce Investment Act that ensures measurable improvements in reading, writing and speaking the English language, and other literacy skills. CASAS is a private research and development organisation who collaborates with workforce organisations to design assessments that measure practical, functional life and work skills. The reading assessments are from the Life Skills, Employability Competency System, and Life and Work series and include four levels of difficulty: beginning literacy, basic skills (beginning and intermediate), advanced basic skills and adult

secondary. Adapted test items from the Life and Work series formed the CASAS Braille Reading Assessment. The purpose of this study was to “determine if transcribing functional test items on an adult life and work skills reading test using a braille format could maintain the same approximate scale score range and maintain fitness within the item response theory measurement model” (Posey & Henderson, 2012, p. 490). Twenty-five questions were deemed appropriate for inclusion in the braille assessment following verification from expert panels and field testing with 65 braille readers with the overall results indicating valuable information about developing functional reading tests in braille. Although the original article was cited in 12 additional articles found via Google Scholar, no other researcher appears to have used the assessment to conduct their own research. The assessment itself could not be found despite the current author conducting internet searches and contacting colleagues across Australia and Canada to locate the tool. The assessment is available to purchase via the CASAS website for $60USD.

The *Lorimer Braille Recognition Test* (Lorimer, 1962) was designed in the UK to assess a student’s recognition of words containing braille contractions. This was a standardised test based on a population of 332 children of primary school age. Lorimer (1997) describes the assessment as a set of 174 carefully selected, unrelated words, each containing a contraction. To ensure genuine recognition of contractions, less familiar words were chosen to prevent overfamiliarity from influencing results. The test concludes after ten consecutive errors, with normative data available for each six-month age interval from 7.0 to 12.6 years. Designed as a diagnostic tool, the test identifies common errors in braille reading and offers insights for developing instructional materials and providing remedial support. The original assessment was produced as a printed document and the current author was unable to locate it in this internet search. Scopus search indicates that seven articles have cited the original article, most often providing a description of the test. A critique made in more recent articles is the age of this test, the population it was standardised on being quite different to today’s students, especially regarding style of education and the limited nature of the assessment in only measuring knowledge of contracts in a list of words and no other components of literacy (Fellenius, 1999; Tobin & Hill, 2011). Greaney et al. (1994) asserts that this is a relatively quick test to administer but does not measure higher order literacy skills such as comprehension.

The MNRead Assessment (Legge et al., 1999) is an adaptation of the original MNREAD Acuity Chart (Lighthouse Low Vision Products, Inc., Long Island City, New York) which was developed as a standardised method for measuring visual reading speed at varying print sizes to determine optimal print size requirements for individuals (Loh et al., 2023). The adaptation considered factors including the number of characters on the print assessment and how this compared to characters on the braille assessment in both contracted and uncontracted braille. Due to the simplicity of the sentence structure and the minimal use of contractions, contracted

braille was used (Legge et al., 1999). Forty-four experienced braillists took part in the study with the slowest readers reading 24 words per minute (wpm) and the fastest readers read 232 wpm. The mean reading speed for this group was 124 wpm compared to 251 wpm for normally sighted participants. This article yielded the highest number of forward citations (128-Google Scholar and 61-Scopus). A significant reason for this could be the availability of the original article on the internet making it particularly easy to access. Read and cite. Legge provided a thorough explanation of the methods undertaken and discussion of results and it is these figures that have been cited since (Hailianto & Purwita, 2023). Some authors have replicated the study with their own cohorts having both similar and differing results depending on context, the age at which braille was introduced and length of time using braille, tactile sensitivity, and contracted or uncontracted braille. (Erickson & Hatton, 2007; Martiniello et al., 2022; Silson et al., 2022; Thomas & Prabhakar, 2023).

The *Neale Analysis of Reading Ability* (NARA) was originally written in 1958 for use with sighted students and was first adapted for use with students with BLV in 1977 (Lorimer, 1977). In 1994 the assessment was updated to address some outdated language and standardised in the UK. There is no online evidence of the adapted 1977 version of NARA, however, the updated and standardised version written by Greaney et al. (1994) is available. The updated version of NARA measures reading speed, reading accuracy and reading comprehension. A challenge during this adaptation was the impact of using contracted or uncontracted braille as the lack of knowledge of contractions may impact reading speed but not be related to literacy, more so not knowing a particular contraction. This article was cited 12 times according to Google Scholar and twice in Scopus. Greaney and Reason (1999) used the updated NARA with 317 braillists aged 5-18 years from 46 schools. The results indicate that these 317 readers are reading at a level expected of braille readers of their age, however, compared to norms for print readers, braillists have lower average reading scores. d'Apice (2016) argues that students with BLV do not learn concepts as sighted children do, requiring explicit teaching of unfamiliar concepts. As this assessment was developed in the UK, some concepts may be unknown to students with BLV in other countries potentially influencing their performance results.

The Queensland Braille Learning Progression and Assessment Tool (Queensland Department of Education, 2021) was the only assessment written in Australia located through this search. The assessment has not yet been standardised and the authors state that it was “compiled using insights from key writings of national and international braille experts, professional conversations with interstate colleagues, expert Queensland teachers, and the department’s Statewide Vision Impairment Services team” (Queensland Department of Education, 2021). The assessment was only published in 2021 and has been cited once by Croake et al. (2024) who identified it as a framework for measuring braille skills. If and how this document is

being used, and its impact for students learning braille is yet undocumented in academic literature.

The Tooze Braille Speed Test (Tooze, 1962) was developed in the UK and assesses the time it takes to read a list of uncontracted three letter words. As this assessment was developed in the same year as the Lorimer Braille Recognition Test (Lorimer, 1962), these two measures are often conducted together. Both are critiqued as word recognition tests that do not test continuous reading skills (Tobin & Hill, 2015) and Greaney et al. (1994) comment on the age of the assessment. The Tooze Assessment is not available online which may be a reason for only a few citations in the last 6 decades. The original Tooze assessment was not located by the author and there were no online indicators of standardisation or reliability, however, the assessment does provide a chart to compare raw data (the number of correct words read in a minute) and chronological age to provide a reading age.

Strengths and limitations

Overall, these assessments are far from perfect. They are either outdated, not yet standardised, no longer valid for students learning in mainstream classrooms, contain inappropriate content, or are not easily accessible by educators. Further, this suite of assessments does not cover all of the aspects considered important for literacy in contemporary times. As part of the next study in this PhD an international expert panel will be recruited to comment on this compilation of braille literacy assessment and agree upon an ‘ideal’ or gold standard measure of braille literacy- that is an assessment suite that involves a teacher assessing a student across all components of literacy. A newly developed braille literacy assessment should be practical, comprehensive, and aligned with the needs of educators and students.

This article highlights the global lack of a comprehensive braille literacy assessment. The article outlines clear next steps, including the recruitment of an expert panel, demonstrating a commitment to practical application and further research. By actively seeking input from teachers and experts, the researcher is ensuring that the eventual assessment tool is both research-driven and practitioner-informed.

One limitation of this study is that it relies on internet and database searches, which may have overlooked unpublished or region-specific assessments. The study did not test the effectiveness of the identified assessments in real-world educational settings. The next phase involving an expert panel may reflect subjective preferences rather than purely evidence-based criteria for an ideal braille literacy assessment. Developing a universally accepted assessment may be difficult due to variations in braille instruction, languages, and educational policies across countries.

Overall, while this article makes a valuable contribution by identifying the need for a standardised braille literacy assessment, its findings should be complemented by empirical testing and broader stakeholder engagement to ensure practical implementation.

Concluding remarks

This initial identification of braille literacy assessments has been conducted by a PhD student with support from PhD supervisors. It reveals that a tool to measure braille literacy was not located, therefore one needs to be developed. A panel of global experts is required to take this next step. Feedback from braille users, family members, teachers, researchers and experts in the field is highly valued. Their insights will be crucial in shaping the development of an assessment suite that is both effective and widely applicable, ensuring it supports braille literacy instruction and accurately measures student progress. The author welcomes contributions and discussions on this topic to refine and enhance the assessment framework.

Conflicts of interest, sources of funding and acknowledgements

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

I wish to acknowledge PhD supervisors Associate Professor Melissa Fanshawe, Professor Georgina Barton, and Associate Professor Melissa Cain for their ongoing guidance, mentorship, and support of this PhD.

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Comparing International Frameworks for Educating Children with Vision Impairment: An Examination and Discussion of the ECC and CFVI for Australian Practice - Lily Gower

Introduction

This discussion paper explores the relevance and applicability of two curriculum frameworks designed to support children and young people who are blind or have low vision (BLV): the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), widely used in the United States and Australia, and the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI), developed in the United Kingdom (Hatlen & Spungin, 2014; Hewett et al., 2022).

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Examine the reasons behind the development of the CFVI in the UK and identify the gaps it was designed to address.
- Compare the structure and content of the ECC and CFVI, highlighting areas of alignment and divergence.
- Explore the relevance of the CFVI to the Australian context, particularly in light of Australia's commitment to inclusive education.
- Consider whether Australia should adopt, adapt, or remain with the ECC, and explore the possibility of developing a unique, locally informed framework.

This discussion is based primarily on desktop research, drawing from current academic literature, policy documents, and resources developed by professional organisations such as SPEVI, RNIB, and ICEVI.

Background

Guiding Frameworks for Vision Impairment Education in Australia

In Australia, the education of children and young people who are blind or have a vision impairment is guided by the South Pacific Educators of Vision Impairment (SPEVI) Principles and Practice Guidelines for Quality Education of Learners with Vision Impairment, originally released in 2004 and reviewed in 2016 (SPEVI, 2004; SPEVI, 2016a). These guidelines endorse the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), a "disability-specific curriculum" developed in the United States to meet the unique learning needs of students who are blind or have low vision (BLV), supporting both their access to education and their broader life skills (Hatlen & Spungin, 2014, p. viii).

Role of Specialist Teachers of Vision Impairment (STVI)

In Australia, Specialist Teachers of Vision Impairment (STVIs)—also known as QTVIs, itinerant teachers, or advisory teachers—support students who are blind or have low vision (BLV) by providing direct instruction in the Expanded Core

Curriculum (ECC), consulting with mainstream educators to ensure equal curriculum access, and facilitating access to resources and technology (Gale & d'Apice, 2018; SPEVI, 2016b). Their practice is guided by the nationally recognised SPEVI Professional Standards Elaborations for Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) (SPEVI, 2016c), endorsed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL).

Legal and Policy Context

In Australia teachers and education departments are bound by national and international laws and policies including:

- Disability Standards in Education (2005, reviewed 2020)
- Disability Discrimination Act (1992, reviewed 2023)
- United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (2006)
- 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' (1989)

These laws play a pivotal role in guiding teaching practice concerning all children and young people, as they establish standards for education quality, safeguard students' rights, promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment for every learner (Bruin et al., 2023). In Australia, the ECC is a vehicle through which the Disability Standards in Education can be met (Hemphill, 2015).

The Importance of a Framework

Pagliano (2012) reminds us that for a typically sighted child, 80% of learning occurs via the visual sense. Without visual information the BLV child's ability to receive and process visual information and ability to integrate into the community is significantly impacted compared to their sighted counterparts (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). All students access a 'core curriculum' which intends to impart a 'common body of knowledge' (Allman & Lewis, 2014). Frameworks such as the ECC and CFVI are vital for BLV students to access education, facilitating both academic and life skill development (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010).

The ECC and CFVI both provide a standard of best practice, against which teachers and other BLV specialists such as orientation and mobility instructors, and allied health professionals (i.e. occupational therapists, physiotherapists) can be held accountable (SPEVI 2016a; Utah School for the Blind, n.d.). Parents and families can refer to these frameworks to access information about recommended best practice for their BLV child within an educational context (RNIB, 2024a; SPEVI 2016a).

The Expanded Core Curriculum for Students with Visual Impairments (ECC)

The ECC emerged in response to growing recognition among vision impairment professionals of the need to explicitly teach the additional skills required by BLV

students to access learning. The ECC was developed during a period of transition, as students moved from large, specialised institutions into mainstream schooling environments. In 1988, Curry and Hatlen (cited in Hatlen & Spungin, 2014) introduced the concept of a “dual curriculum”—a disability-specific curriculum taught alongside the standard academic curriculum—to ensure students with vision impairment (including blindness, low vision, deafblindness, and/or multiple disabilities) could succeed academically and lead independent, fulfilling lives. The ECC was formalised in 1996 by Dr. Phillip Hatlen (Hatlen, 1996) and identifies nine key skill areas essential for the full participation of BLV students in both school and life (Lewis et al., 2014).

1. Compensatory Access – skills essential to access, acquire, share, and process information.
2. Sensory Efficiency –sensory skills including visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory.
3. Assistive/Access Technology – using both mainstream and specialised technology to access information, communicate and for personal productivity.
4. Orientation and Mobility (O&M) – bodily, spatial and environmental concepts and skills including how to move safely through space.
5. Independent Living Skills (ILS) – daily living skills including personal care, cooking, cleaning, time management, money management, and general self-organisational skills.
6. Social Interaction Skills – appropriate social behaviours and participation including body language, conversation patterns, social etiquette, relationship development, and cooperation skills.
7. Recreation and Leisure – development of skills and interests in play, physical activity, fitness and sports, hobbies.
8. Career Education – skills and behaviours necessary for successful employment, career education, career exploration, career preparation, and career placement.
9. Self-Determination – awareness of self, ability to advocate for one’s own needs, awareness of rights and responsibilities, capacity to make informed choices, problem solving, goal setting, and assertiveness

(Allman & Lewis, 2014; Perkins School for the Blind, 2024a; Perkins School for the Blind, 2024b).

The ECC is internationally recognised by many organisations including the International Council for the Education of People who are Vision Impaired (ICEVI) (Fast & Allen, 2018) and is adopted by many countries worldwide including the US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Turkey and India (Blind & Low Vision Education

Network NZ (BLENNZ)2017; İşlek, 2017; Miyauchi, & Matsuda, 2024). It is the law in Australia to ensure BLV students have equal access to education (Ruddock, 2005) however the use of the ECC specifically is not legally mandated.

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI)

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) is a specialist framework developed specifically for the United Kingdom. Launched on March 15, 2022, it was created in response to a need for a UK-specific curriculum to support vision impairment education (Hewett et al., 2022). Developed through collaboration between the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Vision Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR), The Professional Association for the Vision Impairment Education Workforce (VIEW), and the Thomas Pocklington Trust (TPP), the CFVI was informed by a comprehensive two-year study involving specialists, families, and other stakeholders across the UK (Hewett et al., 2022; RNIB, 2024a).

The CFVI framework aligns with the ‘dual-access model,’ which focuses on two key outcomes: ‘access to learning’ and ‘learning to access’ (McLinden et al., 2016). ‘Access to learning’ ensures individuals can engage with educational content by removing barriers, while ‘learning to access’ teaches students the skills necessary to independently navigate and use learning tools and resources. This dual approach promotes both participation and independence, supporting inclusive education. In the UK, specialist teachers of visually impaired (STVIs) provide direct instruction in the CFVI and offer consultation and support to children, young people, their families, and educators (Hewett et al., 2022; RNIB, 2024a).

The CFVI has eleven key learning areas:

1. Facilitating an Inclusive World – Recognising the role of educators and parents as facilitators and advocates for BLV children and young people.
2. Sensory Development – Use and development of the senses.
3. Communication – Social communication skills.
4. Literacy – Literacy skills.
5. Habilitation: Orientation and Mobility – Ability to move safely through the world as independently as possible.
6. Habilitation: Independent Living Skills – day to day skills required to live as independently as possible.
7. Accessing information – Ability to access, produce and manage information as independently as possible.

8. Technology – Developing skills in using technology as independently as possible.
9. Health: Social, Emotional, Mental and Physical Wellbeing – Explicit teaching to facilitate the development of wellbeing of children and young people.
10. Social, Sports and Leisure – Supporting opportunities to participate in social, sports and leisure.
11. Preparing for Adulthood – Preparation for live following compulsory education and decision making for the future

(Hewett et al., 2022, p. 6).

The CFVI is not yet embedded within government policies across the UK (View, 2023; RNIB, 2024a). The RNIB and partners have released a policy position statement recommending that the CFVI be formally recognised in England's Special Education Needs and Disabilities policies, local authority frameworks, educational settings, and quality standards for educators and specialists, as outlined in key legislation and national standards (RNIB, 2024b).

Pre-service and Post-graduate Training

In Australia, STVIs are not required to hold specialist qualifications beyond standard teacher registration. Only one postgraduate course exists nationally, offered by Macquarie University and Next Sense Institute (Macquarie University, 2024).

Mainstream teachers typically complete one unit on inclusive education during pre-service training, which broadly covers all disabilities as well as students with complex health needs and those identified as gifted and talented (University of South Australia, 2024).

Given that only 24% of BLV Australians are in full time employment (Vision Australia, 2024), improving educator qualifications and understanding of frameworks such at the ECC and CFVI could enhance outcomes.

Comparing the ECC and CFVI

Why did the UK feel the need to develop their own specialised curriculum framework? Hewett et al. (2024) report that prior to the development of the CFVI, educators in the UK were guided both by the ECC and by the UK-focussed NatSIP Outcomes Framework (National Sensory Impairment Partnership). Whilst the ECC was recognised it held no statutory status. Professionals working in the field felt that a UK specific framework, with the goal of embedding it into government frameworks, might help to "overcome inconsistency in service delivery" (Hewett et al. 2024. p. 5 & p. 10). Like in the UK, the ECC is not mandated in Australia. However, Australia does have consistency in service delivery as the ECC is embedded in the SPEVI 'Principles and Practice Guidelines' and the AITSL endorsed 'SPEVI Professional Standards Elaborations' (SPEVI, 2016a, 2016c).

When comparing the two frameworks, the similarities far outweigh the differences. Whilst the ECC has nine skills areas and the CFVI has eleven, there are obvious overlaps, and they align in many ways. Both frameworks highlight the importance of information access, independent living skills, orientation and mobility, technology, sport and leisure, social skills, and career education/preparing for adulthood. In many ways the CFVI is the ECC rearranged. In fact, when visiting the CFVI Resource Hub you will find many links to ECC specific resources (RNIB, 2024a). Both frameworks also have the aim of providing educators, families, children, and young people with a common language/vocabulary to aid communication, understanding, and consistency in practice (Allman & Lewis, 2014; Hewett et al., 2022).

However, some key differences exist. CFVI's Learning Area 1, *Facilitating an Inclusive World,* uniquely emphasises the role of key adults and institutions in creating accessible environments—shifting the responsibility away from the child alone. While this theme is echoed in Australia's SPEVI guidelines and position statements, it's not directly addressed in the ECC (SPEVI, 2016a; (SPEVI, 2016b).

Another distinction is CFVI's underpinning 'access to learning-learning to access' model (Hewett et al., 2022). This model focusses on the role of STVIs to reduce barriers to access for BLV children and young people (McLinden et al., 2016). This dual-access model takes into consideration the complex task STVIs face when supporting BLV students across a wide variety of sectors including government, private, and independent schools. The CFVI was designed with inclusive education in mind, reflecting the UK and Australia's shift toward mainstream schooling for BLV students. In contrast, the ECC was developed when specialized settings were more common – a model still prevalent in the US.

Given that the ECC was formalised in 1996, is it becoming outdated? The CFVI, developed recently through expert consultation, may offer a more contemporary approach. While the ECC is globally recognised, with extensive resources and endorsement from bodies like ICEVI, the CFVI is still in early stages and not yet formally recognised by government agencies. Nonetheless, the RNIB's growing CFVI Resource Hub provides promising support tools (RNIB, 2024a).

With the ECC already embedded in Australian practice, is a full overhaul necessary? Perhaps not immediately. However, as the CFVI outcomes emerge, they may offer valuable insights. If the framework proves effective in the UK, Australia could consider adopting a similar model.

A balanced approach may lie in New Zealand's example – using the ECC or CFVI as a foundation to develop a local, disability-specific curriculum that aligns to the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Framework (BLENNZ, 2017).

Summary

In Australia, the education of children and young people who are blind or have low vision (BLV) is supported by the South Pacific Educators of Vision Impairment (SPEVI) guidelines, including the Principles and Practice Guidelines for Quality Education of Learners with Vision Impairment (SPEVI, 2004; 2016). These guidelines endorse the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)—a disability-specific curriculum developed in the United States and now implemented internationally—to be taught alongside the mainstream Australian Curriculum. The ECC outlines nine key skill areas essential for BLV students to access learning and participate in life as independently as possible.

More recently, the United Kingdom introduced its own framework: the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI). Developed in collaboration with leading organisations and professionals, the CFVI provides an updated, UK-specific model that incorporates similar concepts to the ECC, while placing additional emphasis on inclusive practice and systemic responsibility. Despite structural differences, both frameworks share a common goal: to equip BLV students with the skills needed to access education, participate fully in their communities, and prepare for adulthood.

Rather than debating which framework is superior, perhaps the more urgent questions for the Australian context are: Why is the use of a specialised framework for BLV education not embedded in national legislation? And why is specialist training for teachers of students with vision impairment not mandatory? As Australia continues to pursue inclusive education, these issues deserve serious attention—alongside a consideration of whether a locally developed, contemporary framework could better meet the needs of BLV students in Australian schools.

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Comparing The Expanded Core Curriculum and the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairments - Karina Farrell

Introduction

Students who are blind or have low vision require additional support compared to their typically sighted peers, due to the inability to use their sight for incidental learning (Allman & Lewis, 2014). To bridge this gap, additional curricula and frameworks have been developed and implemented to improve the outcomes for these students. This includes explicit instruction and teaching of skills to develop concepts about the world in which they live (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.).

This essay focusses on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI) in the context of mainstream schools. The relevance and usefulness of the ECC and the CFVI will be analysed and discussed, with particular attention to how they support students, classroom teachers, and specialist teachers.

Both frameworks share the same goal of improving outcomes for students who are blind or have low vision (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.). The similarities and differences between the two frameworks will be explored, as well as the benefits and the limitations of each framework in mainstream schools.

About the ECC and the CFVI

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) was outlined by Dr Phil Hatlen in for the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including those with Multiple Disabilities (Hatlen, 1996; American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.). The creation of the ECC was a response to the noticeable differences in outcomes for students in the United States who are blind or have low vision compared to their typically sighted peers (Michigan Department of Education, 2023). The framework later became Goal 8 of the National Agenda, addressing the educational goals of students who are blind or have low vision (American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.).

The standard school curriculum was not addressing the needs of these students, contributing to the gap between groups (Sapp & Hatlen, 2019). Eight areas were originally identified for explicit instruction to students who are blind or have low vision, to compensate for missed incidental learning (Lewis et al., 2014). These areas include compensatory or functional academics (later changed to compensatory access skills), assistive technology, orientation and mobility, career education, independent living, recreation and leisure, sensory efficiency, and social skills (Lewis et al.,2014; Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.). In 2003, a ninth

area, self-determination was added as the areas evolved and additional areas were identified (Lewis et al., 2014).

The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI was published in 2022 after being developed by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), the University of Birmingham, the Professional Association for the Vision Impairment Workforce (VIEW), and Thomas Pocklington Trust (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The framework was developed using the Delphi consultation process with 48 participants, including children and young people, parents, school professionals and representatives from major sector networks and organisations (Hewett et al., 2024). The CFVI was proposed as a framework to be used widely in the United Kingdom (UK) (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). Like the ECC, the CFVI addresses the gap between typically sighted students and those who are blind or have low vision. It aims to clarify and define the skills, best practice support, and interventions for children and young people (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The CFVI contains 11 areas: facilitating an inclusive world; sensory development; communication; literacy; habilitation: orientation and mobility; habilitation: independent living skills; accessing information; technology; health: social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing; social, sports and leisure; and preparing for adulthood (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The framework guides the teaching of specialised skills and the development of independent access to the school environment and the community (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022).

The usefulness and relevance of the ECC and the CFVI

According to Morris and Sharma (2011), an Australian specialist teacher's role is to support the school and the classroom teachers in making reasonable adjustments to the curriculum for students who are blind or have low vision. Specialist teachers use the ECC to inform their practice, as research shows that outcomes for students improve when the nine areas are embedded in their learning (Hemphill, 2015). Although educators and schools are responsible for providing quality education to students with disabilities, instruction in the ECC is often left to the specialist teacher (Australian Government, 2005; Morris & Sharma, 2011).

The ECC is not mandated in Australian schools (A. Jones, personal communication, May 16, 2024). This leaves schools unclear as to who is responsible for delivering explicit skills to the student (Fanshawe, 2021). Classroom teachers often have limited time, knowledge and experience working with students who are blind or have low vision (Foreman & Kelly, 2017; Sapp & Hatlen, 2019). As a result, ECC skills are often overlooked and not intentionally taught because the ECC is not considered mandatory (Keil & Cobb, 2019; Sapp & Hatlen, 2019). The ECC may only be considered relevant to the students and specialist teachers who have the relevant knowledge and training (Morris & Sharma, 2011).

Students with disabilities have the right to quality education (United Nations, 2006). When implemented, the CFVI enables students who are blind or have low vision to access learning on the same basis as their peers (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). RNIB notes that teaching the learning areas should be led by specialist teachers alongside the schoolteachers (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). However, like the ECC, the CFVI is not mandatory in the UK, so the responsibility of delivering these skills may fall to the specialist teacher (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024).

Efforts have been made to mandate and allocate funding to the framework within the UK (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). This is intended to address issues of inconsistencies in blindness and low vision education frameworks across schools, the need for space within the general curriculum, and the lack of training for classroom teachers (Keil and Cobb, 2019). The CFVI is highly relevant to the students and specialist teachers in the UK; however, until it is mandated, it is difficult to consistently implement the CFVI in the school setting (Keil, & Cobb, 2019).

Differences between the ECC and the CFVI

The most obvious difference between the frameworks is the ECC outlines nine areas and the CFVI identifies 11. Although most of the areas are similar and overlap, the CFVI expands on the ECC and introduces a unique new area: facilitating an inclusive world.

Facilitating an inclusive world emphasises inclusion through universal practices to ensure the student can access the learning environment (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). Schools should work towards creating an inclusive environment and take ownership of adaptations to enable student participation (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). This is particularly useful when working with school teams regarding reasonable adjustments for students (Keil & Cobb, 2019). In comparison, the ECC focusses on the skills required by the individual to adapt to the world (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.), which can be limiting if students' needs for inclusion are not met.

Students who are blind or have low vision are diverse in needs and abilities (Keil & Cobb, 2019). The CFVI expands on several areas of the ECC to reflect this diversity. For example, compensatory access from the ECC has been divided into two areas in the CFVI; communication and literacy, based on feedback during the CFVI refinement (Hewett et al., 2024). With this separation, appropriate emphasis can be placed on each area. Although communication is recognised in the ECC, its designation as a separate area in the CFVI highlights the importance of addressing individual communication needs (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). Similarly, literacy as a distinct area acknowledges the specialised skills required for implementing braille in both student learning and classroom practice (Keil & Cobb, 2019).

Career education from the ECC is addressed in the CFVI area of preparing for adulthood, which is inclusive of students entering adulthood with varying needs and abilities (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The ECC heavily focuses on career education and workplace skills (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.), while the CFVI expands on these to include skills for further and higher education and assisted living (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022).

Similarities between the ECC and the CFVI

The ECC and the CFVI share many similarities and links between the learning areas. Notably, several areas align closely:

- Sensory efficiency from the ECC aligns with sensory development from the CFVI. Both focus on building students' skills and maximising their abilities to use other senses to make sense of the world (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.).
- Orientation and mobility is a shared learning area in both frameworks, supporting students in developing skills to travel independently and safely (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.).
- Independent living skills are reflected in both the ECC and the CFVI focussing on enabling students to live as independently as possible and contribute to their households (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.).
- Recreation and leisure from the ECC align with the CFVI area of social, sport and leisure. Students are encouraged to participate in sports, leisure, and social activities (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.), with the CFVI expanding to include social groups and clubs (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022).
- The ECC area of self-determination is reflected in the CFVI as health: social emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. Both emphasise self-advocacy and problem-solving skills, with the CFVI also including access to mental help support (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022).
- Assistive technology is labelled as such in the ECC and as technology in the CFVI. Both frameworks highlight the need for access to technology to develop independence and support skills such as communication, learning, and accessing the world (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Texas School for the Blind, n.d.).

Benefits of the ECC and the CFVI

The ECC has been shown to support positive outcomes of students post compulsory schooling, such as workforce participation and societal engagement (Hemphill, 2015). The framework recognises the need for students who are blind or have low vision to learn and develop understanding in ways other than through vision (Sapp & Hatlen, 2019). It guides specialist teachers in identifying and addressing gaps in student knowledge (Allman & Lewis, 2014). When embedded successfully into the general curriculum, the ECC develops students' skills to overcome barriers and independently access the world (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.).

The CFVI is evidence-based and modelled around inclusion and universal design (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2023). It supports learning in inclusive environments, enabling students to reach their full potential (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). Inclusive environments reduce barriers and improve student engagement (NSW Government, 2024). Like the ECC, the CFVI identifies additional areas of learning for students who are blind or have low vision, benefiting both specialist teacher practice and student outcomes (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The CFVI outlines the skills students need to be successful in their lives.

Limitations of the ECC and the CFVI.

The school environment can present significant limitations to the successful implementation of the ECC or CFVI (Allman & Lewis, 2014; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). The ECC identifies gaps in learning and skills for students who are blind or have low vision, building their ability to adapt and develop independence (Allman & Lewis, 2014). However, this relies on targeted and explicit instruction in ECC learning (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, n.d.). In contrast, the CFVI reflects a universal design approach, advocating for the world to adapt to the individual (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). Relying on accessible environments can be problematic, as students may find themselves in settings that do not adapt to their needs (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). This can limit access to learning and increase students' increased reliance on others if adjustments are not in place (Allman & Lewis, 2014).

While inclusion is prioritised, barriers remain in shifting attitudes toward students who are blind or have low vision (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). The attitude of those around the student can be a challenge, and specialist teaches may find it difficult to change school team perspectives (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017).

Australian teachers are overworked, and curriculum demands are high (Fanshawe, 2021). Neither the ECC nor the CFVI is mandated by law or policy (Fanshawe, 2021; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). As a result, these frameworks may be seen as ‘extra’ to an already demanding curriculum, potentially limiting student access and making it difficult to embed either framework into the school curriculum

(Fanshawe, 2021). The lack of training and understanding among classroom teachers can also be a barrier (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). Both frameworks require the development of specialised skills (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). For many teachers, this may be their first experience instructing a student who is blind or has low vision due to the low incidence rate (Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). As a result, specialised skills may not be intentionally embedded into learning due to lack of awareness (Keil and Cobb, 2019).

In Australia, specialised teachers support the classroom teachers, but due to caseload and travel distances, support may not always be readily available (Morris & Sharma, 2011). Classroom teachers may feel unsupported due to the limited availability of specialist staff.

Conclusion

Although the CFVI is more recent and embraces universal design, the ECC remains the most used framework globally (Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ, n.d.). Both the ECC and the CFVI, through research and practice, are essential in the education of students who are blind or have low vision (Hemphill, 2015; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). The frameworks are useful when compensating for missed incidental learning through vision (Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, n.d.). However, neither framework is mandated or embedded into the mainstream curriculum, making it difficult to enforce their use in everyday school routines (Fanshawe, 2021; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2024). Teacher training and understanding are critical to successful implementation, which is currently driven primarily by specialist teachers (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). The ECC and the CFVI share the goal of improving outcomes and independence for students who are blind or have low vision. When either curriculum is embedded, student outcomes improve (Hemphill, 2015; Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2022). However, specialist teachers must be mindful of limitations such as lack of training, busy curricula, and attitudes when implementing the ECC or CFVI in schools (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2017).

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Individual Education Plans: Considerations for Mathematics - Sarah Hayman

Abstract

A case scenario of creating an IEP for a Year 8 student with a recent diagnosis of cone-rod dystrophy is discussed. A particular focus on the student's inclusion in mathematics is considered. Alternative learning media options are examined, along with instructional suggestions for the student to continue accessing maths. The perspectives of all those involved in the IEP are reviewed.

Background

The following discussion is based on a case scenario. The purpose is to consider mathematics access within the wider development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a student at a secondary school. Names have been used for clarity and do not identify real people.

Henry is a 14-year-old boy, in Year 8 at his local Victorian government secondary school, with a recent diagnosis of cone-rod dystrophy. He has experienced progressive central loss over the last couple of years and was suspected to have Stargardt's Disease. Peripheral vision loss has been observed in the last few months, and genetic testing has confirmed Henry has cone-rod dystrophy. So far, Henry has generally been managing his work with digital text enlargement when required, but his visual acuity has dropped recently to 6/48 with both eyes open. His required print size has now reached N40. Henry uses eccentric viewing and has been experiencing increasing visual fatigue when reading. He can now only sustain reading for short periods, usually less than 15 minutes in one sitting.

Individual Education Plans

Henry does not meet the criteria for which an IEP is a requirement as he is not currently supported under Disability Inclusion funding (State Government of Victoria, 2023a). However, an IEP is highly recommended for students with additional needs at school. Given Henry's progressive vision loss and growing need for adjustments at school, an IEP will be developed for Henry as part of Student Support Group (SSG) meetings.

In Victoria, "an IEP is a written statement that describes the adjustments, goals and strategies to meet a student's individual educational needs so they can reach their full potential. An IEP is essential as it helps you plan and monitor a student's unique learning needs" (State Government of Victoria, 2023a, para. 5). The student, their parents and education staff are all involved in the development of an IEP. Learning media considerations, planning for inclusion, instructional considerations as well as the perspectives of all those involved will all contribute to Henry's IEP for Mathematics.

Learning media considerations

For students with a vision impairment, learning media are the formats through which the students access the curriculum (Cushman, 2012). In most mainstream classrooms, print is the primary learning medium. For a student with a vision impairment, their learning media could include “braille, print, auditory strategies, objects, and pictures” (Cushman, 2012).

A learning media assessment provides a tool to determine what the appropriate learning media is for a student (Cushman, 2012). A learning media assessment (d’Apice & Silveira, 2021) has been conducted to confirm that print is no longer sustainable for Henry to use as his primary medium in maths. He has been accessing his textbooks by using enlargement of a digital copy, however this is becoming untenable due to the font size Henry requires to read, and his visual fatigue. Although it is possible to access the maths curriculum via audio only, it requires intensive support and a capable reader-scribe (Gulley et al., 2017). As such, it is likely that a combination of braille, tactile and audio mediums will provide the best option for Henry’s access to maths.

As Henry is already literate in print, changing learning media will involve training Henry to be able to efficiently grasp information using touch and hearing rather than his vision. He will need to develop skills including sensitivity in his fingertips and understanding tactile graphics with supporting sonification (data turned into sound).

Planning for inclusion and achievement in maths at secondary level

Henry will need to explore and test out a variety of alternative formats he could use to access maths in secondary school. These may include typing maths equations using Word Equation Editor. Listening back to maths equations that have been typed in Word’s Equation Editor. Reading and producing braille maths and tactile graphics accompanied by sonification. Each of these alternative formats should be explored in context, independently and together. Precedence should be given to understanding high frequency graphics that are content heavy (Emerson & Anderson, 2018).

Transcription of resources in a timely manner will be important for Henry's inclusion in the curriculum. Whether this is through the Statewide Vision Resource Centre (Statewide Vision Resource Centre, 2024), or staff at school, planning ahead so that transcription requests have enough time to be completed will be key.

Henry will need an alternate scientific calculator for use in secondary school. This may be a stand-alone device or software. As Henry approaches VCE, he will need to trial alternative calculator access, as Computer Algebra System (CAS) Calculators are used for General maths, Mathematical Methods and Specialist maths subjects in Victoria (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2024).

Adjustments to assessment should be discussed as Henry moves through secondary school. Efforts should be made to ensure that assessments are

evaluating the intended maths content or skills, and not Henry's ability to access the assessment. Adjustments may include additional time to complete tests and exams and the use of assistive technology (AT) in assessments (ADCET, 2024).

Instructional considerations

If braille is chosen as a format for Henry to use in maths, sufficient time will initially need to be allotted during the school day for him to be explicitly taught braille (Swenson, 2015). A key discussion point in the IEP may be what subject could be replaced in Henry's timetable in order to provide time for learning braille, along with other Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) skills.

Instruction within the classroom context will also need to be adapted. Henry may benefit from his teacher using MathSpeak to describe what they are writing on the whiteboard (SeeWriteHear, 2020). The concepts behind Process-Driven maths (Gulley et al., 2017) could also provide a new approach for all students when solving maths problems, whilst being particularly helpful for Henry.

Access to AT will support Henry's transition to alternate formats (Swenson, 2018). Braille displays connected to a computer can enable Henry to utilise typing, a skill he has learnt already as a print user, along with braille. Braille notetakers can provide audio along with braille output, so Henry can confirm what he is writing.

Student perspective

Henry enjoys maths and is likely to do a maths subject for VCE. Decisions regarding his access need to be made that will provide him with the best opportunity to succeed. His preferred medium for accessing and completing work, and the one that allows him to perform at his best, may not be the same (Argyropoulos et al., 2019).

The IEP process provides an opportunity for Henry to practice self-determination and take ownership of his learning, a key contributor to long-term success for students with disabilities (Davies, 2022). Initially, Henry may show some resistance to changing the format he uses to access the curriculum as he may not accept there is currently a need (Swenson, 2018). Henry is likely still dealing with grief over the reality of his diagnosis and the challenges of adapting to the progressive loss of his vision (Prem Senthil et al., 2017). Adjustments will be needed over time as Henry comes to terms with having a vision impairment and chooses how he will access the curriculum.

Parent perspectives

Henry's parents are likely experiencing a range of emotions and changes in their sense of identity in response to Henry's diagnosis. Feelings of grief, frustration and guilt are common for parents in this context (Cao et al., 2023). Henry moving away from print as his primary medium may exacerbate these emotions initially, and his parents may find the idea of Henry starting to learn braille uncomfortable, as he can still see (Swenson, 2015). The discussion of what media Henry should use to access

maths will need to be handled with care and tact, and may need to be re-approached over time, as Henry's parents come to terms with his vision impairment.

Henry's parents can provide valuable insights into the changes needed for him to access the curriculum. They likely have a good sense of his functional vision as they have observed the changes first hand, and are aware of areas where Henry now needs support (Tadić et al., 2016). His parents may start taking on the role of advocate for Henry, supporting his independence while raising concerns about his safety (Cao et al., 2023).

Educational team perspectives

In the busy environment of a mainstream secondary school, teachers may find it difficult to have the time to create additional resources. Henry's maths teacher, Lauren, is eager to support him, but as she has never taught a student with a vision impairment before she is unsure of the adjustments required for Henry to use formats other than print.

Lauren uses rich problem-solving tasks alongside textbook work to engage her students, while providing opportunities to practice key skills. She aims to be adaptable and makes changes when required to meet students at their points of need. She regularly uses the whiteboard to work through questions with the class. Lauren may use ideas from Universal Design for Learning to make maths more accessible for Henry, which could also benefit the whole class (Davies, 2022). However, time and staffing will be required to make these adjustments, and consideration needs to be given to this when creating the IEP.

An Education Support (ES) staff member may be needed to support Henry's access to the curriculum in maths classes. They could be involved in making the adjustments, but it is ultimately Lauren's role, as the classroom teacher, to decide on what those adjustments will be (Leonard & Conway, 2022).

Henry already has a Visiting Teacher, Ben, a specialist teacher of students with a vision impairment who regularly visits Henry's school. Ben will provide support to Lauren and the school. This can include helping Lauren to "make adjustments to the curriculum and learning environment", "create individual plans and recognise the unique needs of each student" and "monitor and report on student progress" (State Government of Victoria, 2023b). Ben has already conducted a Learning Media Assessment which suggested it was time for Henry to utilise different formats to access maths. If braille is chosen as a medium for Henry, Ben will likely need to visit at least twice a week for effective learning to occur (Swenson, 2018).

Whichever formats Henry uses to access maths, he will likely heavily rely on assistive technology (Ketema Dabi & Negassa Golga, 2024). Staff training and confidence in using AT will be a key factor in its successful use in the classroom (Argyropoulos et al., 2019). This includes the classroom teacher, any ES staff, and

Visiting Teacher as they will all be supporting Henry to access the curriculum using AT.

Future transitions

Henry's vision and learning media choices will need to be monitored as he continues through his secondary schooling. His vision condition is progressive, so his acuity will likely further decline during the rest of his time at school. Monitoring Henry's speed, fluency and comprehension in each medium will be important so that he knows which medium is the best choice for a particular task, even if it is not his preference (Argyropoulos et al., 2019).

Any maths teachers who have Henry in their class will need to be trained in the pedagogy and assistive technology that is needed to support Henry in maths. If a maths teacher picks up these skills and works well with Henry in one year, consideration should be given to that teacher continuing with Henry in the next year. This can reduce the workload on the teaching staff and also the number of transitions Henry has to make with different teachers each year.

Henry is academically minded and enjoys a range of subjects including maths, Science and History. Henry’s parents are both university-educated and assume that Henry will follow in their footsteps. Before his vision started to deteriorate, Henry had mentioned wanting to be an astronaut. Whatever formats are chosen for Henry to utilise at school should also be appropriate for him to use after he has finished secondary schooling, including in tertiary education and the workplace.

Conclusion

The development of an IEP will provide the adjustments, strategies and goals to support Henry’s inclusion in maths. It is imperative that the perspectives and needs of all those involved are considered during the planning phase so that the plan can be implemented effectively.

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The Importance of collaboration when creating and implementing Individualised Education Plans with a student-centred approach: A case study - David Ellacott

Abstract

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) serve as essential tools for supporting students with special education needs by outlining tailored learning goals, instructional strategies, and necessary accommodations. This paper examines the significance of IEPs in fostering inclusive education, with a particular focus on students with blindness and low vision. Through the case study of Aria Smith, a Year 10 student experiencing a transition to braille literacy due to worsening vision impairment, the study explores the collaborative nature of IEP development involving educators, parents, and the student herself. Aria's active participation in the planning process enhances her sense of agency, ensuring that her learning goals align with her aspirations. The study highlights the importance of individualized support, adaptive teaching strategies, and continuous assessment to facilitate a smooth transition to new learning modalities. Additionally, it underscores the challenges associated with IEP implementation, including resource constraints, administrative demands, and the necessity for professional training. Ultimately, this case emphasizes the critical role of dynamic, student-centred IEPs in empowering learners with disabilities and promoting an inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: Individual Education Plan, vision impairment, braille literacy, inclusive education, student agency, adaptive learning

Introduction

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a customised document designed specifically to support children with special education needs or disabilities. In some countries (such as US, Canada, and China), IEPs are a legal requirement for all students, while in others (such as Australia), they are not mandatory in all states, but recommended as best practice (King, 2019). IEPs differ from Personalised Learning Plans (PLP), which cater to the individual learning preferences and goals of any student, regardless of their abilities. IEPs specifically support students with disabilities, ensuring they receive an inclusive and individualized education (Auer et al., 2023). They outline specific goals, support strategies and adjustments tailored to meet the needs of individual students. This ensures a holistic view of the student, and their education journey is captured in the document. An effective IEP is a written curriculum-based pedagogical document, designed to support an individual student's learning process and promote personal growth (Koßmann, 2022).

IEPs are personalised in nature and are specific to the individual students for whom they are designed, ensuring that necessary modifications and accommodations are made to support their unique learning needs. This is crucial as it allows students with

disabilities or learning challenges to access the curriculum on an equal footing with their peers, promoting inclusivity and enabling them to achieve their full academic potential. It is particularly important to understand that these documents should always be considered as “working documents”, this means that these documents should regularly be updated, changed and adapted to suit the individual students changing educational experiences and context.

IEPs are wide ranging documents and there are many different formats. However, all these documents have some consistent components. Each IEP should detail the student’s current academic and functional performance levels, outline annual goals to guide special education interventions, include a plan for tracking progress towards these goals, provide comprehensive information on the services and supports available to the student, and describe the extent of the student’s participation in the classroom (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014).

Individual Education Plans are only effective documents if they are being used effectively. Unfortunately, many IEP documents are completed as an administrative necessity and are forgotten about after having been constructed (Auer et al., 2023). Additionally, IEPs are often completed in a rushed manner and are not effectively implemented in the teaching and learning process, mainly due to time constraints and a lack of training or lack of initial assessment data (Mohd Rashid & Wong, 2022).

Successful IEPs are developed through a collaborative approach that brings together a diverse team of professionals, caregivers, and the student to ensure a comprehensive and individualized learning experience. This collaborative effort ensures that the IEP is meaningful and effective in promoting ongoing social skills, academic achievement and increased independence.

According to the NSW Department of Education Inclusive Education Statement, parents are entitled to have access to information about support that is available for their child, receive effective communications and resources and that teachers and schools collaborate with and seek the views of parents and carers to determine the most appropriate education program for students (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

It is particularly essential that students with blindness and low vision are collaborators in the development of their own IEPs as they can set their own goals, better understand their targets and expectations, and engage more fully in the process of managing their learning journey. When students participate in creating their IEPs, they may gain a sense of ownership and empowerment over their education, which can lead to increased motivation and improved outcomes. They can also ensure that their IEPs match their learning preferences and personal goals (Freeman & Kirksey, 2022). It is equally important that teachers are supported to prepare effective, comprehensive IEPs to be implemented in the classroom for these

students to maximise student achievement (Alili & Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2024). This is where the role of Itinerant Support Teachers, medical practitioners and other specialists, such as Orientation and Mobility Specialists can provide expertise to all support classroom teachers and schools (Jačova, et al., 2018).

Case Study: Aria Smith

Aria is a Year 10 student in a small rural public school. Aria is a confident student who enjoys academics, is proactive in her learning and particularly enjoys reading and writing. Aria was diagnosed with Leber Congenital Amaurosis (LCA) and has lived with a mild vision impairment throughout all her schooling. Unfortunately, as a reaction to her condition, her vision has acutely worsened in the last 3 months and her vision impairment is now considered severe according to the World Health Organization scale of severity (World Health Organization, 2019). Throughout her schooling she has been supported with additional classroom modifications, such as enlarged text on learning resources, the use of screen magnification technology and occasionally the use of screen readers. Aria prefers to read herself rather than use screen reading technology.

Aria's condition always had the possibility of worsening, and she has been aware that this transition may be necessary in the future. Whilst she has never been hesitant to learn braille, she did not consider it necessary unless her vision deteriorated to a point which made it essential.

Student Perspectives

Due to her deteriorating eye condition, Aria is required to transition to learning braille in conjunction with using her screen magnification support technology.

When developing an IEP, Aria is a strong-willed, independent student and therefore wanted to ensure that she was empowered to make contributions, which is crucial for her to ensure she advocates for herself (Pounds & Cuevas, 2019). During the process Aria advocated for herself, and when discussing what accommodations she required, talked about how she loves reading but does not like using screen reading technology because it sounded boring, and she loses interest. This led discussions to ensuring that braille education was prioritised for her. She understood that her strengths were reading and writing. Since she wanted to become a writer or journalist in the future, she felt that these skills would be essential.

Aria's interests and preferences helped to develop her personalised learning goals, making them more meaningful and potentially more achievable. Similar to the research of Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger (2009), by being an active participant in the decision-making process, she felt more motivated to achieve the goals set out in her IEP as she believes they are her goals and not goals developed by others and forced upon her.

Aria was initially concerned about having to use extra equipment in the classroom and worried about how her adjustments would appear to other students. As part of the discussions the possible modifications were explained to her, so she had a clearer understanding of the reason educational adjustments are being put into place for her in the classroom. Like the findings in research by Ishtiaq et al. (2016), Aria being a high school student, expressed a sense of alienation or “feeling different”, when educational adjustments are put into place for her. However, understanding the necessity of the adjustment makes it easier for her to accept her individualised learning environment.

Parent/carer perspectives

Aria’s parents have always been aware that her eye condition could deteriorate and have always been strong advocates for Aria to be involved in all decisions regarding her learning since she started high school. It is vital that parents are involved in Individual Education Plan construction, not just because it concerns their child but also because of their knowledge of the child, their diagnostic history and condition as well as their link to external health and service providers (İlik & Er, 2019).

Aria’s parents have a deep understanding of Aria as a whole, understanding her strengths, weaknesses, challenges and needs. Parents have comprehensive insights about their children and not only are they experts on their child, they are also knowledgeable about their health conditions. Aria’s parents are well versed in her vision impairment and provided insights on not just how it impacts upon her learning but also how it affects her home life and social life. Research has shown that parent involvement is often initiated by schools, rather than parents, and that parents often become involved only due to a perceived shortcoming on the part of the school (Underwood, 2010).

Observations of home and social life can identify patterns and unique needs that may not be evident in the school context. When Aria’s vision impairment started deteriorating, she initially tried to hide the fact that her vision was getting worse. It was her parents’ observations of Aria bumping into furniture and becoming less independent at home that alerted them to the deterioration of her condition.

Aria’s parents regularly engage with external services, such as ophthalmologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, paediatricians and doctors. The information and observations gathered by the parents from all these stakeholders can assist to create a more personalised IEP (Scepanovic, 2018) .

In the past Aria’s parents have had a negative experience with a prior teacher withholding information from them about situations in the classroom of bullying and teasing, resulting in Aria coming home feeling upset and anxious. This made Aria’s parents consider withdrawing her from her school, however they felt that the school did have strong practices and policies in place and the parents had a close relationship with the itinerant support teacher and Student Learning Support Officer

attached to Aria in the classroom and felt it best to leave her at the school but demanded that the situation be appropriately dealt with. Since this situation Aria's parents have been amazing supporters of the school and teaching staff.

They regularly attend school functions where they provide parent support for Aria in activities that may present specific difficulties for Aria, such as sports carnivals and excursions. This is included in Aria's IEP to assist the school in ensuring that all school events are inclusive and that she can participate on an equal level to her peers. Whilst, ideally, the school should be able to cater for Aria's needs, her parents are more than happy to assist for these extracurricular activities.

Educational team perspectives

Developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) involves a collaborative effort from a diverse educational team, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise to ensure the student's needs are comprehensively addressed (Roy, 2023).

While developing Aria's IEP, her teachers provided insights into her academic performance, learning styles and classroom behaviours (Isa & Toran, 2024). Multiple perspectives created difficulties (Pearce et al., 2010), however, Aria's English teacher collated the information supplied by the other teachers. They assisted to ensure that her IEP not only supported her transition to braille in English lessons but made sure she was supported across all subjects. Her teachers noted Aria's positive approach to learning, high reading fluency and strong comprehension skills, and her creative and personal writing style. Her IEP reflects these learning styles and supports Aria to maintain her natural writing style while transitioning to braille literacy media.

Aria's Itinerant Support Teacher is involved in the IEP development and specifically is supporting the school in the change of teaching styles, pedagogical approaches and introduction of braille literacy media and technology in the classroom (Stephenson et al., 2022). It is essential that the school staff are also supported in implementing the changes influenced by Aria's IEP. The Itinerant Support Teacher also has a fantastic relationship with Aria's parents and is assisting her parents with implementing changes at home to support her transition to braille media by using things such as braille labels and introducing braille readers to practice at home.

Administrative support staff at the school have been involved in ensuring the correct funding and documentation has been kept for Aria according to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) guidelines (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2024), as well as conforming to New South Wales Department of Education policy and guidelines. The school has applied for additional funding to support Aria's transition to braille media, this includes funding for staff training and additional resources and braille technology. After consultation with parents and the Itinerant Support Teacher, the school has also applied to purchase a Mountbatten braille machine and a Humanware Brailliant.

Learning Media Transition

The transition from print media to braille is significant for anyone, particularly for Aria who has always relied on print media for life and learning. The transition itself will involve multiple steps and require substantial support from everyone involved. She will not only be learning a new way to read but also be adapting to a new way of interacting with the world.

The initial introduction to braille can be daunting. While Aria has not expressed any apprehension about learning braille, the difficulty in learning a new medium may become overwhelming. To ease this transition, as recommended by Herzber et al., (2017) Aria's teachers will use dual media strategies, where Aria continues to use print while gradually incorporating braille into her daily routine. This approach will help to build her confidence and proficiency in braille without having Aria feel overwhelmed.

While Aria is beginning to struggle with visual fatigue and vision deterioration while reading print media and using her screen magnification resources, they are still usable and will be important in assisting Aria with her transition. Her teachers are preparing to ensure that learning braille is enjoyable for Aria as well, by including braille games and technology into class lessons. She understands the importance of learning braille and her teachers are committed to ensuring that the learning environment remains a positive environment for her, allowing her to still have her independence and promoting social inclusion in the transition to braille literacy (Jessup, 2020). Aria has close friends in most of her classes that have also expressed an interest in learning braille to support and encourage Aria.

Aria's parents have committed to support Aria practice braille at home and have already begun learning the braille alphabet and basic wordsigns in preparation for her transition (Fanshawe, 2017). Her parents have also ensured open communication with teachers and support staff to relay any information that may impact upon her IEP. This is not just about communicating potential challenges, changes in mood or motivation, but also to ensure that successes are celebrated, and that Aria feels supported through her transition.

In consultation with specialist teachers it was decided that the school would begin with the Mangold Basic Braille program as the platform for Aria's braille literacy learning program (Mangold, 2012). Not all lessons will initially involve braille literacy, specific braille lessons will occur first. As she begins to make progress in her braille literacy braille will slowly be integrated into her classwork and this process will be open and flexible with input from Aria. This is to reduce the cognitive overload for Aria and to give her rest periods during the beginning of her transition. It is important that she begins to use braille in a wider context only when she is ready to do so and to not have it forced upon her.

After speaking to her friends, Aria suggested that a “Braille Club” may be started and open to typically sighted peers, this allows Aria to learn braille in a relaxed environment with her peers in a positive social context. This could prove important for Aria’s confidence and self-esteem. Previous studies (cf Manitsa & Doikou, 2022) have identified peer support as important or confidence and self-esteem with implementing braille. This has the potential to assist her in understanding that braille literacy is not a quick process and that it will take her time to learn and understand, and by seeing others slowly developing their skills may provide her with comfort and support.

Aria’s transition to braille will be an ongoing process that requires continuous support and adaptation from parents and educators. As she progresses, her educational needs and goals may evolve, necessitating adjustments to her learning strategies, resources and this should be reflected in her IEP. Regular assessments and feedback from teachers, parents, and the student herself ensure that the support provided remains relevant and effective. Her ongoing progress will be tracked and monitored using the Queensland Braille Learning Progression and Assessment Tool which is a structured framework designed to support educators in assessing and tracking braille literacy development (Queensland Department of Education, 2021).

Conclusion

Implementing Individualised Education Plans can be a challenge due to many factors, including limited funding, limited resources, insufficient funding and lack of access to specialised materials and support staff. All these factors are enhanced when implementing IEPs in rural and low socio-economic communities, as found by the Disability Royal Commission (Wark, 2024).

Effective IEPs must remain living documents, evolving alongside the student, ensuring access to necessary supports for academic and personal success. Srivatava (2024) determined that IEPs can improve students’ academic performance when the plans are collaborative, individualised and faithfully implemented. Aria's story serves as a testament to the power of collaboration and individualized support in fostering an inclusive educational environment.

In conclusion, Aria's journey highlights the critical role of a well-implemented Individual Education Plan (IEP) tailored to her unique needs as a student with a vision impairment. The collaborative efforts of her teachers, parents, and support staff have created a dynamic framework that fosters her independence and engagement in learning. By actively participating in her IEP development, Aria not only sets meaningful goals but also enhances her motivation and sense of ownership over her education.

The transition to braille, while challenging, is supported through thoughtful strategies that prioritize her comfort and confidence. This case underscores the necessity of

continual communication and flexibility in adapting educational approaches to meet the needs of students with blindness and low vision.

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Navigating the Transition: Developing an Individualised Education Plan for a Secondary Student with a Deteriorating Eye Condition - Nadia Ramtoola

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the process of developing an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) to support a secondary student with a deteriorating eye condition, necessitating a transition from standard print to alternative literacy formats. Using a qualitative case study approach, the paper reviews research on the impact of progressive vision loss on students' education, well-being, and social interactions. Key findings highlight the importance of a collaborative approach in developing a flexible Individualised Education Plan (IEP) involving key stakeholders—students, caregivers, and educators—to address both academic and emotional challenges. The research also emphasises the importance of continuous evaluation and adjustment, ensuring the IEP effectively supports the student's transition to alternative literacy formats, such as braille and adaptive technology.

Introduction

The formulation of an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for literacy development is explored, focusing on a secondary student with a deteriorating eye condition who requires a transition from standard print to alternative literacy formats. It provides an overview of the student's circumstances, incorporating the perspectives of both the student and their caregivers regarding the impact of progressive vision loss on the student's education, emotional well-being, social interactions, and future aspirations. The importance of a well-structured IEP in addressing the specific challenges and strategies associated with literacy development is discussed. The paper details the cyclical process of creating the IEP, which comprises four core stages: gathering information, collaborating and strategizing, developing and implementing, and evaluating and adjusting. By exploring these stages, the paper underscores how the IEP is continually re-evaluated and updated to provide inclusive and comprehensive support, focusing on both immediate adaptations and long-term strategies for continued academic success.

Student Overview

The student is currently enrolled in secondary school and has a progressive eye condition that is gradually worsening. As a result, there has been a significant decline in visual acuity, making it increasingly difficult for the student to rely on print for academic tasks. A comprehensive functional vision and learning media assessment indicated that reading print has become slow, exhausting, and inefficient, hindering the student's ability to keep up with coursework demands and maintain engagement in learning (Swenson, 2024). Consequently, the decision has been made to introduce braille instruction and adaptive tools into the student's Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for literacy development. This transition not only addresses the

student's current learning needs but also establishes a forward-thinking strategy to ensure ongoing access to literacy as their vision continues to deteriorate (Corn & Erin, 2010). By implementing these adjustments, the student will gain access to essential resources and tools that support their literacy development amid changing visual capabilities.

The following sections will outline the detailed process of developing the IEP for this student, highlighting essential considerations and the collaborative efforts involved in identifying appropriate strategies and supports. Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of both the student and their caregivers, as their insights play a vital role in shaping the IEP and ensuring it meets the student's unique needs (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

Student and Caregiver Perspectives

The perspectives of both students and caregivers are crucial when developing an Individualised Education Plan (IEP) that effectively addresses the student's individual needs, supports their academic growth, and promotes their overall wellbeing. During adolescence, secondary school students undergo significant physical, social, and psychological changes alongside cognitive development (Davies, 2014). The combined effects of these changes, along with the challenges of progressive vision loss, profoundly impact the student and their family, creating numerous educational, emotional, and social barriers (Davies, 2014). Research suggests that students with progressive vision loss, and their caregivers, often experience grief, frustration, and anxiety over their changing abilities, navigating stages of denial, acceptance and adaptation (Hayeems et al., 2005). Adjusting to vision loss can be a long and difficult process as individuals seek to establish and rebuild their personal identity, often exhibiting reluctance to utilising assistive devices and implementing essential changes in their education and lifestyle (Corn & Erin, 2010).

Another significant concern is the exclusion from social groups, which is common among secondary students with vision impairment and is frequently accompanied by feelings of helplessness (DeCarlo et al., 2012). The changeover from primary to secondary school is already a challenging period; however, it becomes even more complex due to the implications of a deteriorating eye condition, which can hinder participation in age-appropriate social activities both now and in the future. Moreover, the anxiety experienced by students with vision loss during early adolescence regarding milestone activities, such as driving, further exacerbate feelings of exclusion (Bowen, 2010). During secondary school, adolescents typically seek greater independence. However, due to the student's progressive vision loss, both the student and their caregivers may resist experiences involving independent travel or socialising, resulting in increased time spent alone engaged in passive activities (Sacks & Rosenblum, 2006). These challenges will not only influence the student's goals for independence and lifestyle choices but will also play a vital role in shaping

their IEP, ensuring it addresses the specific needs for skill development, emotional support, and strategies to overcome barriers to social inclusion and academic participation.

Individualised Education Planning (IEP)

Individualised Education Planning is a collaborative and ongoing process aimed at identifying and addressing the specific learning and developmental needs of students who require additional support (NSW Department of Education, 2024). This process is carried out by a dedicated educational team, including caregivers, teachers, relevant professionals, and the student themselves, all of whom bring valuable insights and understanding of the student. Secondary education represents an important phase in a student's academic path, where building key knowledge and skills is crucial for future academic success, career readiness, and personal development (Davies, 2014). To ensure that learning experiences are both relevant and supportive, it is important to carefully consider various factors influencing the student's development, including their strengths, challenges, emotional well-being, and social environment (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). This holistic approach facilitates the creation of targeted interventions and adjustments, enabling the student to achieve their full potential while managing the difficulties associated with their deteriorating eye condition in conjunction with the demands of secondary education. The core stages of the IEP process provide a framework for developing a personalised plan that addresses the student's current needs and anticipates future challenges as their vision continues to decline (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

The Process

Four core stages will guide the planning process: gathering information, collaborating and strategising, developing and implementing, and evaluating and adjusting (NSW Department of Education, 2024). Each stage is outlined in detail and underpins the development of the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for literacy for the secondary student with a deteriorating eye condition.

Stage One: Gather Information

Given the student's eye condition, it is essential to collect comprehensive background information regarding their vision impairment, evaluate how they utilise their senses, and observe their visual and tactile exploration of materials (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). Initial steps in this stage include conducting learning media and functional vision assessments, which are critical for gathering relevant information and re-evaluating the student's needs. These assessments provide valuable insights into the student's current abilities and efficiency, as well as how effectively they can use instructional materials related to reading and writing (Guerette, 2014). This information is instrumental in guiding and determining the necessary adjustments to support the student's literacy development.

Through these comprehensive evaluations, the educational team can make informed decisions regarding the student's preferred literacy medium and develop an accurate understanding of their needs (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). The learning media assessment is essential for determining the student's effectiveness and requirements in literacy, and this evaluation will continue to adapt as the student's vision changes and educational expectations evolve (Guerette, 2014). Additionally, these thorough assessments help identify the most effective communication mediums for the students, including an assistive technology evaluation that emphasised the importance of tactile and auditory approaches. Conducting this assessment alongside the learning media evaluation is crucial for pinpointing the specific literacy tools the student needs for various purposes (Guerette, 2014).

Stage Two: Collaborate and Strategise

Once the information has been gathered, it is crucial for the entire educational team – including educators, specialists, the student, and their caregivers - to come together for constructive and open discussions centred around the student's objectives, strengths, and evolving needs (NSW Department of Education, 2024). This phase involves analysing the collected data to foster a shared understanding of the student's abilities and identify the necessary modifications, strategies, and adjustments for effective support. A key finding from the assessments revealed that reading print had become inefficient, underscoring the need to explore alternative literacy formats, such as braille and assistive technology tools. The decision to implement a braille reading and writing program is primarily informed by the results of the comprehensive learning media assessment. Once the student's specific needs are identified, the team can determine whether braille will effectively meet those needs (Herzberg, Rosenblum, & Robbins, 2017).

A significant component for the educational team when developing the plan is how to effectively navigate the literacy transition, particularly as the student's vision continues to deteriorate. This stage involves several key discussions to ensure that all team members' perspectives are acknowledged and respected, fostering positive relationships and ongoing communication (NSW Department of Education, 2024). Essential points for discussion include the role of braille in promoting literacy development, the necessity of incorporating braille alongside any potential future use of print, the time required for instruction, and the preferences of the student and their caregivers (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). Additionally, Herzberg et al. (2017) highlight the importance of student motivation and confidence as key considerations when developing and implementing braille literacy instruction. Taking all these factors into account, the educational team must collaborate on specific approaches and strategies to enhance literacy development. This also includes methods for introducing and facilitating braille learning for students who have a foundation in print literacy as well as those who have minimal experience in tactile discrimination (Swenson, 2024; Toussaint & Tiger, 2010).

Another critical factor to consider during this process is the language used to convey information, especially regarding the transition from print to braille and other alternative learning media. For students with progressive vision loss and their families, this transition can be particularly daunting (Bowen, 2010). Research indicates that the language used when discussing the implications and outlook of progressive vision loss significantly influences an individual's perception, motivation and emotional response (Hayeems et al., 2005). Therefore, employing sensitive and compassionate communication is essential for developing a supportive learning plan. By thoughtfully addressing these aspects, the educational team can develop inclusive and effective strategies that promote literacy growth while addressing the unique challenges faced by the student and their family.

Stage Three: Develop and Implement

To ensure meaningful inclusion and achievement in literacy for this student at the secondary level, it is essential to develop and implement a comprehensive learning plan that addresses their unique learning needs while leveraging their strengths. This stage of the process involves the educational team collaborating to identify and confirm tailored learning objectives and support strategies that will effectively meet the student's current educational and accessibility needs (NSW Department of Education, 2024). During this phase, the IEP will serve as a key tool to record the decisions reached during discussions. It will outline the agreed-upon adjustments, goals, resources, interventions, assessment strategies, and supplementary supports tailored to address the student's specific needs (Gale, Archbold, & d'Apice, 2018)

A central focus of this phase is planning and implementing an effective literacy instructional program based on earlier discussions and assessments. Since the student has already developed print literacy skills, it is important to incorporate braille learning programs, which are specifically designed for individuals transitioning from print to braille (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). Swenson (2024) also outlines additional strategies and ideas for integrating braille learning into the secondary curriculum that will benefit students with existing print literacy skills. Swenson's (2024) suggestions include offering braille as an elective subject to maximise instructional time, integrating braille instruction into other subject areas, and ensuring the lessons are engaging and relevant to the student. For example, teachers could transcribe song lyrics and articles from popular teen magazines into braille, use braille for everyday tasks like creating shopping lists, read familiar texts in braille, and familiarise the student with technologies such as screen readers (Swenson, 2024).

To further support the student's literacy development and promote an inclusive learning environment, various social strategies can be employed. One effective approach, as suggested by Swenson (2024), is to establish a braille club that includes both typically sighted peers as well as students with vision loss. This initiative would provide opportunities for the student to learn collaboratively with their

classmates and engage in co-instruction. Such strategies can be implemented to ensure the student receives the necessary support while continuing to build on their existing literacy skills, thereby promoting both academic and social inclusion.

Stage Four: Evaluate and Adjust

An effective Individual Education Plan (IEP) requires ongoing evaluation and adjustment to ensure it aligns with the student's evolving needs, thereby supporting both their learning and developmental growth. As the literacy-focused IEP is implemented and monitored, new teaching strategies and more specific goals will naturally emerge (NSW Department of Education, 2024). Ongoing assessments of reading media will help track progress and guide decisions regarding the potential expansion of the student's literacy toolkit (Koenig & Holbrook, 2010). Documented evaluations provide a valuable record of the student's learning, complementing other forms of evidence such as observations, work samples, videos, and feedback (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

Given the student's deteriorating eye condition, it is essential that the IEP is continually re-evaluated to confirm that the chosen literacy medium and tools, instructional materials, braille learning programs, and allocated time for instruction remain appropriate and effective (Herzberg et al., 2017). This evaluation phase of the IEP brings the planning process full circle, returning to the initial phase and offering valuable insights and information for future planning for the educational team and all stakeholders involved (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

Conclusion

Supporting a student with a deteriorating eye condition necessitates a thoughtful, individualised approach that addresses both the practical and emotional challenges of transitioning to alternative literacy formats, including braille and adaptive technology tools. The collaboration between the student, caregivers, and educators is essential in navigating this journey, ensuring that the student's unique needs and learning goals remain at the centre of the planning process. The Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for literacy development provides a structured yet flexible framework that enables the educational team to gather critical information, strategise collectively, and implement targeted intervention and adjustments. Through ongoing evaluation and adjustment, the IEP remains responsive to the student's progress, adapting to their evolving abilities and the implications of their condition. By approaching the development of the IEP with a focus on adaptability, inclusion, collaboration, and continuous support, the educational team can effectively facilitate the student's transition to alternative literacy formats. Furthermore, this process highlights the importance of a comprehensive, holistic approach to individualised planning that values the perspectives of all stakeholders, fostering an inclusive environment where the student with progressive vision loss can thrive academically and socially.

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Advocacy for Braille Literacy: The Development and Impact of the SPEVI Position Statement - Jo Minniss

Introduction

The development of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) Position Statement on Braille Literacy marks a critical step toward addressing gaps in the provision of braille literacy education across Australia. This initiative highlights the challenges faced by students with vision impairment in accessing quality braille instruction and advocates for systemic change. This article explores the origins of the Position Statement, the objectives it aims to achieve, the insights that emerged during its development, and the future actions that it hopes to inspire.

Origins of the Position Statement

The need for a dedicated Position Statement on braille literacy emerged from ongoing concerns regarding the inadequacy of braille instruction for students across Australia. These concerns were first raised during an annual meeting with leaders in vision impairment, where it became apparent that the limited time available for braille instruction, coupled with increasing caseloads for specialist teachers, was contributing to a concerning lack of quality braille education.

Furthermore, braille instruction is often provided by School Support Officers or Teacher Aides, who may lack adequate training for this specialized role. The lack of focus on braille literacy and its integration into the broader curriculum of mainstream schools compounds these challenges. Discussions with educators across Australia revealed that these concerns are a national issue, not confined to one state.

In response to this, the SPEVI Inc. Committee of Management formed a working group, which I had the privilege of leading. The group included key contributors, in the field of vision impairment from across Australia. Contributors included: Christine James, Head of Department Braille Advisory Service, Education Queensland. Dr.

Emily White, President of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (Pacific Region). Tricia d'Apice, Lead Consultant at Next Sense. Dr. Frances Gentle, Vision Impairment Specialist at Next Sense. Dr. Melissa Fanshawe, Co-President of SPEVI and lecturer at The University of Southern Queensland. Dame Phia Damsma, Co-President of SPEVI and Creative Director of Sonokids Australia. Jo Minniss, SPEVI Committee of Management member and Manager of South Australian School and Services for Vision Impaired (SASSVI) Statewide Support Service. Skye Jones, SASSVI Literacy Coach. Aasha Rose, PhD Candidate, University of Southern Queensland.

This collaborative team worked tirelessly over several months, engaging in extensive consultation to draft the SPEVI Position Statement on Braille Literacy, which is now publicly available on the SPEVI website. Aim of the Position Statement

The Position Statement aims to make explicit the fundamental right of quality instruction in braille literacy and numeracy for all pre-school and school-aged students with blindness and low vision throughout Australia, as a means of ensuring equity and excellence in education.

1. Make explicit the importance of quality instruction in braille literacy and numeracy for preschool and school-aged students with vision impairment, as a means of ensuring their equitable inclusion in education, employment and society
2. Advocate for improved student access to and support for braille education by Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) as per UNCRPD Article 24.4
3. Present a Call to Action to Australian state and territory governments, and government and non-government education sectors to:
    i. support professional learning in braille literacy and numeracy for classroom teachers of students with vision impairment,
    ii. recruit and adequately remunerate Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) who are qualified in braille literacy and numeracy to provide direct teaching to students who are learning braille, and
    iii. ensure student-to-teacher caseloads for students learning braille are aligned with the time allocated for literacy and numeracy instruction as mandated by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2016). (SPEVI Inc., 2024).

Insights from the Development Process

The development of the Position Statement identified several key insights, shedding light on the challenges faced by braille literacy education in Australia. One of the most significant findings was the variability in the quantity and quality of braille instruction across different regions and sectors. This variability was influenced by factors such as:

- Insufficient Training and Recruitment of Qualified Teachers*:* There is a clear shortage of qualified braille teachers which impacts the consistency and quality of instruction provided to students.
- Educational Policies and Teacher Workloads: Policies and practices regarding the education of students with vision impairment, including workloads of Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) who provide braille literacy and numeracy instruction for preschool and school-aged children learning braille.; and
- Geographical Barriers*:* The ‘tyranny of distance’ means that students in remote areas often face challenges in accessing braille instruction, further exacerbating inequities in service provision.

These findings highlight the critical need for systemic reform to guarantee that students with vision impairments receive the braille instruction to which they are entitled.

Advocacy and Future Impact

The Position Statement is a powerful advocacy tool that creates tangible change. It equips parents, teachers, and education leaders with a comprehensive document to support their advocacy efforts for improved braille literacy instruction. The Statement draws on a range of legal frameworks and international conventions, including the Australian Disability Act, the UNCRPD, and the World Blind Union, to highlight the importance of braille education as a fundamental right for students with vision impairment.

How the Position Statement Can Be Used

Parents can use the Position Statement to advocate for their child's right to receive braille instruction from qualified teachers whilst ensuring access to appropriate educational materials and resources.

Teachers can leverage the Position Statement to secure funding for braille instruction and support for dual media learners, and to advocate for professional development in braille teaching methodologies.

Site Leaders and Department Heads can use the Position Statement to petition for increased funding, time allocation, and resources dedicated to braille instruction, ensuring that students with vision impairment have equal access to educational opportunities.

Future Actions and Goals

The Position Statement has already made noteworthy progress, with Dr Melissa Fanshawe successfully petitioning the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to feature it on their website, which validates its importance. In 2025, efforts will focus on prioritising braille literacy instruction and addressing service inequities across Australia.

A working group plans to continue advocating for changes to policies and practices that will close the gap between the instructional time allocated to students learning braille and the instructional time allocated to sighted students for print literacy and numeracy instruction.

Conclusion

The SPEVI Position Statement on Braille Literacy in Australia is a critical document that calls for systemic change to ensure that students with vision impairment receive the braille literacy instruction they need to thrive in education and beyond. By using the Position Statement as an advocacy tool, educators, parents, and leaders can

work together to create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for students with vision impairment in Australia.

As we move forward, it is essential to keep pushing for the recognition of braille as a fundamental right, ensuring that all students have the resources and support they need to succeed.

Download a copy of the Position Statement of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment Inc. on Braille Literacy in Australia at https://www.spevi.net/wp-ontent/uploads/2024/08/SPEVI-Braille-Literacy-Position-Statement-2024.docx

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ICEVI Report

Report by Frances Gentle, President (global) and Emily White, Pacific President

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) is a global non-profit membership network. ICEVI shares with SPEVI the goal of promoting equitable access to quality education for children and young people with blindness, low vision, deafblindness, and multiple disability.

ICEVI World Conference and General Assembly

The highlight for 2024 was the ICEVI World Conference and General Assembly, held in Ahmedabad, India, from 14th to 16th November 2024. This was the first world conference of ICEVI since 2006. During the intervening years, ICEVI joined forces with the World Blind Union (WBU) to hold joint general assemblies in Bangkok, Thailand (2012), Florida, USA (2016), and virtually due to COVID (2021).

The 2024 Conference theme was *Inclusion in diversity: Equity and accessibility for All,* and over 400 presenters and participants from 62 countries were in attendance.

The ICEVI General Assembly was held on the final day of the conference. The General Assembly takes place at the conclusion of each quadrennium, in accordance with the Constitution. The General Assembly features election of the Principal Officers for the following four-year term, approval of any amendments to the Constitution, resolutions for adoption, and welcoming of the incoming presidents for the seven world regions of ICEVI. Frances Gentle concluded her 8th year (two terms) as President of ICEVI (global). She will continue to serve as a Principal Officer and Board Member during the 2025-2028 quadrennium. Emily White was welcomed as the incoming President of ICEVI Pacific, with acknowledgment of Joanne Mosen's departure from the position.

Joint ICEVI and WBU position statements

ICEVI has a tradition of producing joint position statements with World Blind Union on topics of shared interest. In 2024, the following statements were released:

- Digital classrooms: Which was forward in the digital world?
- Education in situations of emergency
- Early childhood development

Conclusion of higher education initiative in East Asia region

ICEVI has partnered with The Nippon Foundation since 2006 in supporting young people with blindness and low vision to access higher education studies in Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Mongolia. Between 2006 and the end of 2023, a total of 3016 young people with vision impairment were successfully enrolled in higher education institutions in their home countries. With thanks to their training in technology and provision of devices, many continued their studies online during the COVID lockdowns that were taking place in their universities.

In 2015, the higher education initiative was expanded to include transition to employment, with training provided in job seeking and soft skills. As a result, 556 higher education graduates successfully transitioned to employment in their home countries between 2015 and 2023.

Technology in Education Task Group

The ICEVI Technology in Education Task Group was established in 2023, in recognition of the growing importance of accessible digital technologies and ICT in the field of education of children with visual disability. In November 2024, the Task Group released their mission, vision and focus for 2030, to take forward the work of the group in the 2025-28 ICEVI quadrennium.

ICEVI Pacific Report

Report submitted by Emily White, Pacific President

Representing one of seven global regions of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), the Pacific Region includes: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand (Aotearoa), Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

The board comprises members from many of these countries and is actively growing, with organisational memberships under development so organisations to benefit from our rich network.

ICEVI World Conference and General Assembly

At the 2024 ICEVI World Conference and General Assembly in Ahmedabad, India, ICEVI Pacific was proudly represented by delegates Mereoni Daveta (Fiji), Masa Simo (Vanuatu) and Presilla Simo (Vanuatu) as well as Emily White (Australia). Together, they presented '*An overview of the State of Educational inclusion for children who are blind, or vision impaired in the Pacific* to an audience of leaders in vision impairment education across the world'. Masa and Presilla's story of resilience and the power of his mother's dedication to his educational success as a young man with albinism brought many to tears. Emily also presented '*A new way for braille*

teachers to access expertise and benefit from research' on her research at the University of Melbourne to map how braille literacy develops in school-aged children using expert teacher knowledge.

The connections with colleagues new and old across the world at the conference made the long journey to Ahmedabad worthwhile. As an example, a vision specialist teacher from Costa Rica undertaking her PhD in vision sciences in Spain will now be undertaking a joint placement at the University of Melbourne in early 2026 thanks to conversations initiated at the conference.

Increasing awareness and raising ICEVI Pacific's profile

At the 2025 South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment, Inc. (SPEVI) Conference in Brisbane, Australia in January, Emily ran an impromptu information session about the work and mission of ICEVI Pacific and ICEVI Global. This work includes supporting educational initiatives across the Pacific and advocating for the right of children with vision impairment to receive an equitable, high quality, and inclusive education. As a result, nearly 20 people have indicated their interest in joining ICEVI Pacific to help exchange their knowledge and skills with colleagues across the Pacific. We have recently welcomed several new members to the Board, including Sonali Marathe from Round Table for Information Access for People with Print Disability, Masa Simo as a Youth Representative, and Presilla Simo as a Family Representative. We also farewelled Mereoni Daveta, who has stepped down after an extraordinary contribution to ICEVI Pacific over many years to focus on developing a new non-profit organisation in the US.

As part of building ICEVI Pacific's profile and reputational reach, we are developing a stronger social media presence, with a new LinkedIn organisational page, a new webpage on the ICEVI Global site to come, and regular engagement with LinkedIn posts. We are proud to report over 160 new members of our LinkedIn site since it opened two months ago.

Grants and other funding opportunities

Through partnering with other passionate individuals and organisations like Dr Meredith Prain (Vice-President, Deafblind International) and Martine Abel-Williamson (CEO, World Blind Union), and with exceptional support from Dr Shawn Piantoni (Secretary General, ICEVI Global), Emily recently submitted three grant applications on behalf of ICEVI Pacific to the Blind Travel Foundation (https://www.flightforsight.net/about/). These applications include proposals for projects to use social media to advocate for the needs of children with vision impairment to the travel industry to foster fundraising efforts, improving the identification of children with vision impairment in remote Pacific areas, and developing a needs analysis for educational services and reform through collaboration with local educational leaders in vision impairment. We are hopeful to make it to the second round of the application process.

Report: NextSense

Report by: Frances Gentle, Sue Silveira, Sonali Marathe and Trudy Smith

Launch of UEB Online Foundations of Braille Literacy

NextSense is excited to announce the launch of its latest UEB Online training program, “Foundations of Braille Literacy.” This program aims to equip professionals and parents/caregivers with essential knowledge and skills in braille literacy development. The program consists of a sequential series of instructional videos and short quizzes. The content addresses research-based approaches to braille literacy development, braille assessment and programming, teaching and learning strategies, and the developmental steps involved in achieving fluency and comprehension in braille reading and writing.

Building on the existing NextSense UEB Online training modules and competency exams in Unified English Braille (literary and mathematics), the Foundations of Braille Literacy program recognises that teachers, parents and others supporting touch learners require foundational knowledge of how tactile perception is developed and the skills required to read, write and interpret braille texts and tactile graphics.

The Foundations of Braille Literacy program is offered free of charge and can be accessed via the NextSense UEB Online website, uebonline.org. There is an optional administration fee of AUD 50.00 for a formal Certificate upon completion of the program.

Master of Disability Studies

The course is suited to qualified teachers wishing to obtain a specialist qualification to teach students who have vision impairment and allied health and other professionals seeking to complete studies in disability. The course is delivered online and on demand with a 16-day practicum. Commonwealth supported places and scholarships are available, and students can access all services and benefits offered by both NextSense and Macquarie University.

Within the Blindness Low Vision specialisation, students’ complete units that address inclusion and collaboration, educational adjustments, literacy and technology, foundational studies in vision impairment, research in sensory disability, orientation and mobility, and professional experience.

Within the Sensory Disability specialisation, students' complete units that address inclusion and collaboration, perspectives in disability, foundational studies in vision impairment and deafness/hard of hearing, orientation and mobility, research in sensory disability and professional experience.

Accessible Information Service

Accessible Information Service team have developed a range of resources and kits to support early years' literacy for children with vision impairment. These kits are tailored to meet the varying needs of students across preschool, primary school, and school support services, providing structured learning materials that cater to different literacy stages. The resources are created in contracted and uncontracted braille ensuring accessibility to materials that meet the literacy level of each student.

Continuing Professional Education 2025

We have a range of exciting events coming up that may be of interest to you all:

1. **Orientation and Mobility for Individuals with Cognitive Disabilities**

This series of modules will focus on information about O&M teaching strategies for individuals who have intellectual or cognitive disabilities. ***Event information***

2. **Development of a Curriculum-Based Functional Assessment Checklist for Students with Deafblindness**

This masterclass series will provide an overview of DeafBlindness and an introduction to the Curriculum-Based Functional Assessment Checklist. **Event information**

3. **5th Childhood Vision Forum 2025**

The Childhood Vision Forum represents a day where paediatric eye and vision care professionals will come together to exchange information on specialised areas within childhood eye and vision care. **Event information**

4. **VISCON 2025**

This two-day event is always a great opportunity to come together to learn, network and engage with the field! **Event information.**

Missed one of our great programs over the last 2 years? Follow up on our **On-Demand page** to catch up!

Frances Gentle Award for Innovations in Professional Learning (Early Career and Established Career)

Report by: Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe

The new Frances Gentle Award for Innovations in Professional Learning recognises SPEVI's belief that children with vision impairment (VI) have the right to be taught and supported by qualified teachers who possess the disability-specific knowledge and skills to enable each child to reach their optimum potential. One of SPEVI's aims is to encourage the highest standards in education for students with vision impairment by promoting research and professional training for general and specialist teachers. This aim is reflected in Standard 6, "Engage in professional learning", of the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers and the SPEVI Professional Standards Elaborations for Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment).

At the SPEVI Inc Special General Meeting on the 1st of February 2023, Dr Frances Gentle officially stepped down from the position of co-president of SPEVI, and Dr Melissa Fanshawe was elected into the role. For her tremendous service Frances has previously been awarded a SPEVI Honorary Life Membership.

To perpetually honour Frances' enormous contribution and longstanding service to SPEVI, as well as her lifetime of work towards education of people with vision impairment in our and other organisations, the Committee of Management of SPEVI Inc proposed the instalment of the 'Frances Gentle Award'. At the February 2023 AGM the instalment of this award in Frances' name was confirmed by the SPEVI members.

In 2024 Frances was involved in developing the criteria for nominations for this award and the details were posted on the SPEVI website. Then the call went out for nominations for the inaugural award. The winners were selected from five nominations that were received.

The Frances Gentle Award will be awarded every two years to professionals working in the field of Vision Impairment education. Details on the nomination process can be found on the SPEVI website at https://www.spevi.net/awards/frances-gentle-award/

The proud and deserving winners of the inaugural 2025 Frances Gentle Award were celebrated during the SPEVI 2025 Conference. They are:

Lily Gower, Frances Gentle Award for Innovations in Professional Learning (Early Career) and Bill Sakoulas, Frances Gentle Award for Innovations in Professional Learning (Established Career).

Lily and Bill also each received a bursary of $250 to be spent on Professional Development. We look forward to their reports of how the bursary supported their learning in due course.

SPEVI 2025 Conference

Report by: Phia Damsma and Melissa Fanshawe

The highly successful SPEVI 2025 conference was held at the Brisbane CBD campus of the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ Brisbane), 293 Queen Street, Brisbane QLD 4000, from 13-15 January 2025. The theme of the Conference was: **SPEVI 2025: Em*POWER*ment through connection, inclusion and education**. The word empowerment was purposely semi-capitalised and italicised to emphasise the word ‘power’ to refer to the position of conference delegates to have power to make positive change. This theme was assembled starting with the ultimate goal to empower: our students, parents, educators and other members of the SPEVI community.

We expanded upon this through the various activities we scheduled to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Braille and the 70th year of formal gatherings of teachers of students with vision impairment leading to the formation of the robust SPEVI organisation that exists today.

The conference saw many firsts and built on many commitments and activities of SPEVI, including all keynote presenters, Chantelle Griffiths, Michael Sheppard, and Ben Clare, having lived experience with vision impairment. We had increased involvement across our SPEVI community focusing on youth and parents.
This conference was a hybrid event, meaning delegates could attend in person or online with dynamic programs planned for both platforms. A rush on in-person tickets saw these sell out well before the end of the Early Bird fee period! In the end, the conference was attended by 205 delegates which included students, parents, educators, practitioners and other members of the SPEVI community; 130 delegates attended in person,10 delegates participated from a hub in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

The conference was supported by 18 sponsors, including Brisbane City Council, 6 exhibitors (Pentronics, Quantum RLV, NV Access, HumanWare, NextSense, and Guide Dogs Queensland) and 7 youth volunteers. We presented 66 sessions, including 3 keynotes, 2 panels, numerous presentations, workshops and discussions as well as many more informal meetings and networking. Presenters were from 11 countries, New Zealand, the USA, the UK, Canada, France, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tuvalu, Denmark, and Australia.

SPEVI Conference Organising Committee

Ben Clare was the competent Chair of the SPEVI Conference Organising Committee (SCOC). Ben was supported by Lara Anderson, Shiree Arrian, Stephen Belbin, Melissa Cain, Skye de Vent, Frances Gentle, Debra Goodsir, Laura Peronace-Garcia, Sue Silveira, Leanne Smith, Kerri Weaver, SPEVI NZ President Lynda Williams, and Melissa Fanshawe and Phia Damsma, SPEVI Inc. co-presidents.

We are so appreciative to Ben for his work in envisaging the conference and all of the conference organising committee for the roles they played in making this conference student centred and empowering for the delegates, in person and online, including our South Pacific Hubs. So much work behind the scenes!

This was the first time that SPEVI Inc. organised the conference without the support of a third party. As co-presidents, this meant that a lot of the operational organisation came down to us to ensure smooth running of the conference events. We worked with countless people and organisations. To mention a few: presenters, schools, partner organisations, alternate formatting teams, University of Southern Queensland, conference venue, sponsors, exhibitors, caterers, local retailers, local accommodation providers Visit Brisbane, Brisbane City Council, Deputy Lord-Mayor, the Brisbane City Accessibility Team, Brisbane Park Lands, Brisbane Economic Development, Elizabeth Picture Theatre, AFB, Koala Cruises, local musicians, film makers, press and the media, Lions Clubs. Our interactions were exciting as the conference came together.

In this context we would also like to express our gratitude and appreciation for all the hard work and assistance from Carla Silveira who we contracted as conference administrative support.

We thank Associate Professor Melissa Cain for fighting through an injury to be our excellent Conference MC, and all those who volunteered their time to be session Chairs. The expert and friendly team from University of Southern Queensland provided the essential IT support in each room. Special thanks also go to Peter Wilkes of Lions Club of Brisbane, who supported us during the conference as the go-to person for questions. His invaluable support ensured everyone had everything they needed during the conference. Peter also organised for two SPEVI banners to be created by Officeworks, which were placed at the conference venue.

As a result of organising the conference ourselves, we saved SPEVI Inc approximately $30,000 which was used to make conference fees lower.

Conference website and communications

Conference updates were being shared through the SPEVI Inc members list, the SPEVI News List, and on the dedicated SPEVI 2025 Conference website, at https://www.speviconference.net. On social media, we used the hashtag #spevi2025# To show our appreciation for the many in-kind and financial sponsors and exhibitors', their logos were added to the SPEVI 2025 Conference website. It grew to be a long list, evidencing a great show of partnership and collaboration in the field of vision education, nationally and internationally.

Organising the conference without the support of a third party also lead to the development and implementation of an in-house SPEVI Inc online registration and payment system on the conference website http://www.speviconference.net. This

was developed by Phia Damsma and Craig Cashmore of Peppacode, and we thank Craig for his ongoing support. We like to thank Lena Karam for her assistance with the initial set-up, Carla Silveira for managing the system before and during the hectic times of the conference, and Marjorie Hawkins and Sonali Marathe, Round Table, for generously sharing information around the organisation and registration system of the annual conference of the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities.

Conference content

There were presenters from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, France, England, United States of America, Denmark. The conference included presentations, workshops and forum discussions, as well as excellent keynote presentations at the start of each day.

All sessions were recorded, edited, and made available to the conference participants after the conference. A program with a link to approx. 100 presentations was created and sent to all delegates. What amazing professional development!

A high percentage of conference participants completed the evaluation survey after the conference. This valuable feedback will be used in the planning for the SPEVI 2027 Conference.

Conference events

As local to the area, we also organised the in-person events, such as the exhibitors, the RNIB Possibilities welcome function, Brisbane River cruise, BEDA BBQ and the Braille Awareness Event, sponsored by City Parklands.

Conference Opening

Welcome to Country by Turrbal people, and the Formal opening speech was delivered by Councillor Vicki Howard, Civic Cabinet Chair for Community and the Arts and Councillor for Central representing Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner.

Special Biennial General meeting

On Tuesday, 14 January 2025, during the SPEVI 2025 Conference, we held the SPEVI Inc Special Biennial General meeting. Highlight of this meeting was the presentation of an Honorary SPEVI Life Membership to a delighted Marg Griffin who attended the meeting via Zoom. Marg was nominated by two current members of SPEVI Inc., and this nomination was approved by the SPEVI Committee of Management and the members at this AGM. The nomination submission is copied below.

“Long time SPEVI Member and leader in the field of vision impairment, Marg Griffin retired from her position as State Coordinator, Vision Services in 2023. Marg’s role involved overseeing education and professional support for Tasmanian children and young people who are blind or have low vision. This included leading a team of

educators to strive for excellence in professional knowledge, service delivery and family partnerships capabilities. Marg's career reflects that of a true public servant in her commitment to the quality of life of children and families from all backgrounds and all capabilities. Marg was instrumental in developing the state-wide, multidisciplinary Paediatric Low Vision Clinic to ensure that families living in regional and remote areas were able to receive quality information and develop trusting relationships with eyecare providers. She collaborated with service providers to improve communication networks and outcomes for children with vision impairment. Blindness and low vision is a very low incidence disability in Tasmania and Marg advocated for children and their families to be able to come together to reduce feelings of isolation and improve wellbeing. When COVID-19 and other barriers prevented face-to-face meetings, Marg initiated the Braille Simultaneous Story Online Project to allow children to maintain contact with other Braille-using peers. Marg also helped to facilitate blind sports in Tasmania (eg Blind Football and Cricket) with an understanding that these opportunities foster friendships and may even lead to future career pathways. Marg continues to be driven by kindness, empathy, and a strong belief in the capabilities of students with vision impairment."

Congratulations Marg!

Movie night

On Monday night 13 January registered in-person participants enjoyed the Welcome Drinks, and Premier movie screening of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) production 'Possibilities' at the Elizabeth Picture Theatre in the heart of the Brisbane City., sponsored by AFB This beautiful venue is not far from the conference venue. Guests were welcomed with instrumental background piano music in the foyer, by Tom Goldsworthy and Richard Brider. The music, impactful movie, accompanying drinks, popcorn and ice cream, and beautiful ambiance, were very well received.

Brisbane River Dinner Cruise

On Tuesday night,14 January a large group of delegates gathered at the pier for the optional Brisbane River Dinner Cruise, sponsored by Vision Australia. The cruise offered a relaxed atmosphere. A buffet style serve of food did away with the need to sit down at tables, so everyone was moving around and mingling, enjoying the gorgeous sunset and beautiful weather the city had gifted us on the night. Biggest draw card was the music on the boat, performed by the fabulous 5-piece band Clear Vision under the expert supervision of Lee Strickland. Musicians who are BLV were Cody Butler: Vocals/Percussion, Issy Stanfield: Vocals/Keys, Sebastian Curtis: Bass/Backing Vocals, Sean Kendrick: Drums/Backing Vocals and William Martinelli: Guitar/Backing Vocals. It was a really great evening!

Post Conference Networking Event

On the last night of the conference, Wednesday night 15 January, Brisbane Economic Development Agency provided in-person delegates and their guests a delightful food, beer, wine and soft drink event at the Brisbane Hub Business Centre, Level 4, 260 Queen St Brisbane, a beautiful venue on the fifth-floor veranda overlooking Post Office Square. This was a wonderful evening to celebrate the success of the conference, debrief, and connect with colleagues and friends.

Braille Awareness Community event

A special highlight was the Braille Awareness Community event, which was held in Post Office Square, right in the heart of the city, the day after the conference to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Braille and the 70th year of SPEVI's first iteration.

Following the SPEVI Conference we wanted our SPEVI community to celebrate with the people of Brisbane using our theme of em*POWER*ment to make positive change in a Braille Awareness Community Event in Post Office Square. With the help of our conference participants, volunteers, sponsors and exhibitors, SPEVI aimed to engage the local, Brisbane community and em*POWER* community awareness of the continued relevance of braille and new braille technologies.

This event was sponsored by City Parklands.

We were excited by the lead up to this event, where signs through the Brisbane City parklands advertised our event. As Co-presidents Melissa and Phia did the Council’s required induction.

A big drawcard for the event was Dotted Beats’ music, 9 musicians from 8 years old with blindness or low vision were in the spotlight singing and playing to the Brisbane City community, followed by a great solo performance by Jack Murphy. We also had 10 exhibitors who showed braille related products, and many SPEVI colleagues who attended and supported this event on the day. Despite the extreme heat, we estimate approximately 100 people attended. This presence helped community members by explaining the braille code, emPOWERing community members to create braille and ultimately raise their understanding of the relevance of braille literacy in education, work and the community. Representatives of ACARA and a delegation from the Brisbane City Council also attended our event. We are hoping that this could become an annual event in Queensland Capital City, especially leading up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This was certainly a great start!

SPEVI Anniversary

We are also grateful to Sue Silveira and Carla Silveira who created a “History of SPEVI” video which was played at the conference and now available on the website. The Voices of SPEVI video features voices of members past and present sharing their memories of SPEVI.

Pacific Conference Hub Participation

At the 2023 online SPEVI Conference, hosted by SPEVI New Zealand with support from Australian and Pacific Island members a pilot project led to so-called ‘Conference Hubs’, to support attendance, presenter opportunities and engagement with the Conference from across the Pacific. These inaugural Hubs, an initiative from Dr Joanne Mosen and funded by SPEVI and ICEVI, were located in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Kiribati, and proved a great success, providing increased access for members in Pacific Countries and strengthening participation from our very important and highly valued Pacific islands based members who impart unique and exceptionally useful knowledge and experience to the SPEVI organisation and beyond but often face challenges when working to attend our biennial event.

Building on this successful pilot project, benefitting from the evaluation report put together by Jo Mosen, and as a result of tireless efforts from Ben Clare for the SPEVI 2025 Conference a similar Pacific Hub was successfully established in the Solomon Islands. This was made possible by a donation of funds from SPEVI New Zealand and the leadership of host organisation Solomon Islands Blind Association.

The Honiara Hub, which took place from Monday, January 13 to Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) in Honiara, Solomon Islands, was a collaborative and inclusive event. It was led by Mr. Eddie Babanisi, a member of the Blind and Visually Impaired Team, with key assistance from Mrs. Roselyn Tangoia, Office Manager at the Blind and Visually Impaired Persons Service (BVIPSI) organization, which is part of CESI (Community Empowerment Support Initiative). Other notable contributors included Miss Joycelyn Lia, Social Inclusion Officer of YWCA, and Mrs. Georgina, a staff member of YWCA. The theme, “Cultivating New Futures Together: Growth for Life”, truly encapsulated the spirit of this gathering. The Hub aimed to create an opportunity to share knowledge, build connections, and work collaboratively to enhance the future of vision impairment education across the Pacific. The Hub served as an inclusive space for individuals from various backgrounds to come together, discuss important issues, and participate in activities designed to foster social inclusion. Throughout the three-day event, the focus was on creating greater awareness around the challenges faced by visually impaired and disabled individuals in the community and how to better integrate them into everyday life.

Ten institutions and organizations participated, with a total of 10 delegates representing different schools and institutions. This was a diverse group of educators

and stakeholders who are deeply committed to improving outcomes for students with vision impairments in the region.

Additionally, we received a generous sponsorship contribution from Massey University which helped enable the in-person participation of an inclusive education adviser and teacher from Tuvalu. As well as sharing her extensive knowledge and skills through her attendance at the conference, she also presented a session outlining her important work in the provision of inclusive education to Tuvaluan students with disabilities, a wonderful presentation which the audience enjoyed.

The SPEVI organisation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific truly appreciates the opportunity to partner with The Solomon Islands Blind Association and Massey University which has contributed greatly to the success of our conference, and we would like to express our great thanks to all involved.

Youth Volunteers

Another ‘first’: the 2025 Conference offered an opportunity for Queensland youth with lived experience of blindness or low vision to be volunteers at the SPEVI 2025 conference, help facilitate and enrich the Conference experience for all, and in the process gain important work experience.

We thank Debra Goodsir for initiating this project and leading it with support from Kerri Weaver and Skye de Vent. Having young people with blindness and low vision to support our delegates, ensured the conference not only focused on students with blindness and low vision, but that young people were actively involved in the conference and their voices were heard. This first pilot project aimed to show this was a feasible initiative and we are excited that the Youth Volunteer Program at SPEVI Conference 2025 Empowerment can be claimed a success.

9 youth volunteers attended the SPEVI 2025 Conference in Brisbane. They enjoyed being invited to join some of the sessions. A workshop where participants were asked to share their experiences was very suitable for youth volunteers to attend. Youth volunteers developed new skills and gained confidence. They also learnt self-advocacy and pushed themselves outside their comfort zone. Worked well as a group too, supporting each other and learning from each other. Conference delegates enjoyed engaging with them. They also had opportunities to talk to keynote speakers and attend conference sessions.

Importantly, youth volunteers received a certificate of appreciation and written documentation of their accomplishments. This certificate was provided in braille by the Queensland Department of Education Alternate Format Library and can add value to their resume and when applying for a job.

We are so excited by this initiative and thankful for receiving the comprehensive ‘Reflections’ document created by Debra. We are confident that Youth Volunteers will become a fixed component of future SPEVI Conferences. Following interested

inquiries, we hope that we can start building an online list for youth to be able to sign up for SPEVI 2027 soon.

OMAA Endorsement

The SPEVI 2025 conference was endorsed by the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) and offered PD credits towards COMS recertification addressing the Core Domains of the OMAA O&M Framework.

Thank you to Leanne Smith for her assistance in mapping the different presentations to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

SPEVI Bear

A traditional presence at each SPEVI Conference, SPEVI Bear had to jump on a plane from New Zealand and safely arrived in August 2024. He then had a domestic flight to Melbourne to find Lara at Vision Australia. A big thankyou goes to Lara for not only looking after the bear so tenderly, but also to prepare his stellar appearance at the conference in January by creating a fantastic exhibitors quiz around jobs that bears may do! We are also grateful for our sponsors and exhibitors who generously donated fantastic prizes for the winners. What a hit and an important way to remember the end goal of employment. Thank you, Lara.

SPEVI Conference Papers Archive

The SPEVI Committee of Management continues to offer an open access repository on the SPEVI website of past conference presentations and papers. This repository is a valuable contribution to researchers and educators in VI Education in Australia, New Zealand and internationally. Previous SPEVI Conference materials are made available for free download and viewing in the repository, including recorded keynote presentations, paper and poster presentations and handout materials. Our international colleagues have written to show their appreciation for this wonderful collection of resources. Conference papers and content from SPEVI 2025 will be made available in due course.

Learnings for Future Conference

Between the two of us as co- presidents, members of the Committee of Management, members of the SPEVI Conference Organising Committee and others who supported the SPEVI 2025 Conference, we have put together a valuable information package for future reference. This includes reports on specific initiatives, templates, guidelines, reflections from key stakeholders, opportunities, and general learnings that we wanted to pass on to future conference organisers.

SPEVI 2027 Conference

Time and location to be announced in due course.

South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment Inc. Privacy Policy 2023

SPEVI Inc is an Association incorporated under the laws of NSW, Australia – Registration number INC9889733.

Australian business number (ABN) 44 545 374 588.

Your privacy is important to us. SPEVI is committed to upholding the spirit of the New Zealand Privacy Act 2020, Australian Privacy Act 1988 and Australian Privacy Principles 2012.

Collecting and keeping your information safe

SPEVI maintains a register of members as required by the NSW Government Fair Trading. The registered information is drawn from the SPEVI Membership Form, and consists of member names, email addresses, SPEVI membership numbers, join date, and the optional member information of country, state, role, and organisation/affiliation. SPEVI does not retain bank account details or qualification details, such as academic transcripts (Membership Category 2).

SPEVI retains member information for the following specific purposes:

- To comply with the Australian and New Zealand Privacy Acts and Privacy Principles. These laws regulate the handling of personal information about individuals, including the collection, use, storage and disclosure of personal information, and access to and correction of that information.
- To enable SPEVI to maintain effective business and accounting standards.
- SPEVI does not supply information about members to marketing organisations or third parties without your consent, unless required by law.

How SPEVI uses your personal information

- To facilitate communication between the SPEVI Committee of Management, SPEVI Councillors, and SPEVI members,
- To manage email distribution of information to members,
- To inform members about the activities of the Association, and
- To provide information to government and regulatory authorities, as required or authorised by law.

How can you access your personal information?

- SPEVI members have the right to access their personal information, free of charge, subject to some exceptions allowed by the law.

- For privacy and security reasons, requests for information must be submitted in writing to the SPEVI Membership Secretary (contact details below). Written requests must include the member's name and current email address.

Help us ensure we hold accurate information

SPEVI takes all reasonable precautions to ensure that the personal information we collect is accurate, complete and up to date. However, the accuracy of information depends to a large extent on the information you provide. For this reason, **please inform the SPEVI Secretary of any changes or corrections in your personal information, such as your name and email address.** Email: spevisecretary@gmail.com

About SPEVI

The South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. SPEVI acts as the professional body in matters pertaining to the education and support of persons who are blind, have low vision, deaf-blindness, or additional disabilities. SPEVI membership is open to educators, professionals and parent groups who support and promote education for persons with vision impairment.

SPEVI Inc. is an Association incorporated under the laws of NSW, Australia – Registration number INC9889733.

SPEVI Vision

To promote educational systems in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific in which diversity is valued, and disability is not viewed as a characteristic by which to judge a person's worth.

SPEVI Mission

To stimulate professional and public debate and action on vision impairment issues and change which affect or have the potential to affect the daily lives of persons who are vision impaired, while emphasising concepts of inclusive, responsive educational communities and interdependence between learners and families within those communities where all people are valued.

SPEVI Aims

- To be recognised as the professional body of educators whose specialty is in matters pertaining to the education of persons with vision impairment in Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Countries.
- To advocate on behalf of members, persons with vision impairment and parents/carers for equitable education access and participation, in accordance with international and national disability anti-discrimination legislation.

- To encourage the highest standards in the educators of persons with vision impairment by promoting research and professional training for general and specialist teachers.
- To promote and facilitate the interchange of information and collaboration among educators, professionals, parent groups and the broader community concerning education and equal opportunity for persons with vision impairment.
- To encourage the use of appropriate mainstream and assistive technologies, resources and optical and non-optical aids, in the education of persons with vision impairment, and to promote teacher education programs in the use and care of existing and new techniques and technology.

SPEVI Structure

SPEVI operates at two levels:

- National level, by means of the Committee of Management.
- Local level (state/territory), by means of a Branch comprising SPEVI Councillors and members who reside in the location.

SPEVI Code of Ethics

- All members of SPEVI will:
- Work for the good of SPEVI and actively support and promote its Aims as defined in the SPEVI Constitution.
- Act honestly and with respect and integrity at all times.
- Provide leadership for all members of SPEVI to foster high ethical standards.
- Act to enhance public awareness of SPEVI's objects; and
- Maintain transparency of decision-making within SPEVI.

Committees of Management

SPEVI is managed at the national level in Australia and New Zealand by a Committee of Management. The national Committees, subject to SPEVI's Constitution and to any resolution passed by SPEVI in general meeting, are responsible for the governance and management of the activities of the Association and its members. The Australian Committee manages and supports Australian and the Pacific Island members.

Australia Committee of Management, 2023-2025

Co-Presidents: Phia Damsma and Dr Melissa Fanshawe

Vice-President: Ben Clare

Immediate Past President: Dr Frances Gentle

JSPEVI Editor: Dr Bronwen Scott: editorjspevi@gmail.com

Secretary: Ben Clare: spevisecretary@gmail.com

Treasurer: David Rice: spevi.treasurer@gmail.com

Public Officer: Dr Sue Silveira

Members: Jo Minniss and Pranitha Moodley

Representative, International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment: Dr Emily White

Representative Australian Braille Authority: Dr Melissa Fanshawe and Ben Clare

Administrator and editor, SPEVI Facebook page: Ben Clare

SPEVI Web and List Administrator: Phia Damsma

Representative, Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities: Ben Clare

Co-facilitator, EIVI CoP **Community of Practice**: Bronwen Scott (with Sharon Duncan and Lara Anderson).

Facilitator, Parents **Community of Practice and PhD Mentoring Group**: Dr Melissa Fanshawe

Moderators, SPEVI Mathematics Facebook group: Pranitha Moodley and Dr Melissa Fanshawe.

Lead, working group SPEVI Braille Literacy Statement: Jo Minniss

Chair 2025 SPEVI Conference Organising Committee: Ben Clare

Chair, SPEVI VI-NDIS Working Group: vacant

New Zealand Committee of Management, 2025

All communications to Email: **spevinz@gmail.com** and Attention - President, Treasurer or Secretary.

President: Lynda Williams

Treasurer: Jude Shelley

Secretary: Jude Shelley and Sue Spooner

Executive Committee Member: Shiree Arrian, Yin Yin Htay, Chantelle Griffiths

Journal of the South Pacific Educators In Vision Impairment Volume 17, Number 1, 2025