An Australian Perspective On Quality
Outcomes of Inclusive Employment1

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Abstract

Work is an important activity in modern society. Most people
spend a considerable part of their daily lives in working or
training and preparing for work. Modern societies often put
considerable resources into creating jobs and educating and
training their citizens for paid employment. Changing
conceptualizations about disability, the influence of
normalization principles, advocacy, civil rights,
international and national legislative initiatives, and most
recently the self-determination movement have all recognized
the important role of employment in the lives of people with
disabilities. These have contributed significantly to the
movement towards integrated, supported employment for this
population. This paper will present the findings of two
Australian studies that have examined the roles that
employment play in the lives of people with disabilities.
Implications for future research and policy directions will
be indicated.

Geographical, historical and political background2

The vast Australian continent (7.7m square kilometres or
3.0m square miles) is home to a multi-cultural society populated
by approximately 19.5 million people with about 65% living in the
capital cities of the six states and two territories. The
majority of the population lives in two coastal regions, the
largest along the eastern and south eastern seaboard and the
smaller along the south western coast. Almost three quarters of
the Australian land mass is relatively uninhabited owing to its
barren nature. Sparse isolated populations, including many of its
indigenous aboriginal population, present governments and human
services organizations with immense difficulties in providing
adequate support to these isolated communities owing to the
tyranny of distance.
     Australia has a federal system of government with the six
states and two territories having their own legislatures, a
situation similar to Canada and the United States. However, the

Australian parliamentary structures are based upon the British Westminster system owing to its colonial history.

With the emergence of welfare programs conducted and/or financially supported by the Federal and State governments, the needs of people with disabilities and their families were recognized. As disability programs developed the Federal Government through its welfare departments took responsibility for a broad range of accommodation, employment and income support services. Respective State Governments, through their health departments, essentially provided institutional accommodation services to those with very high support needs, particularly those with psychiatric illness and severe to profound intellectual disabilities.

It is noteworthy that the Australian Federal Government enacted legislation in 1910 to provide the first invalid pension scheme for people with disabilities. The Social Services Act of 1947-1977 broadened the range of pensions, benefits and allowances. It also led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS) which provided a medically oriented rehabilitation program to people with physical or sensory impairments in a number of large hospital-like centres situated in the capital cities of each of the states. This period strongly reflected the "medical model" approach to the delivery of disability services.

The role non-government agencies could play in service provision was recognized in 1967 by Federal legislation which allocated funds to subsidize the establishment of education, residential, vocational and day activity programs. The combination of the medical and welfare/charity models of service saw a rapid increase in congregate residential and vocational programs throughout Australia in the post World Was II period, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. The Handicapped Persons Welfare Assistance Act of 1974 extended government subsidies to Activity Therapy Centres for people deemed to be unable to be placed in sheltered workshops. The activities in these centres, however, were essentially similar to those in the sheltered workshops. The major difference was the level of government support.

It is salutary to realise that both sheltered workshops and the activity therapy centres emerged as a place where people with disabilities could be involved in "gainful" activities. For the majority of families it was a place where their disabled sons and daughters with disabilities could fill their day participating in "busy" work and often social activities. In many ways it was an extension of the special school which a majority had attended. Owing to poor productivity wages were minimal with significant disincentives for regular employment options.

Despite one of the stated goals of sheltered employment being preparation for open employment, only a minuscule number of disabled workers ever transferred to regular community-based jobs. Very few "training" allowances offered by the Federal Government were ever taken up by the sheltered employment industry. For instance, in the period 1974/75, 123 training fees were paid, 54 in 1975/76, 44 in 1976/77 and 20 in 1977/78.

However, during the 1970s Australia was being influenced by a number of social, philosophical and political forces including the world-wide emergence of the independent living movement for

people with a physical disability and the growing acceptance of the normalization principle for people with intellectual disabilities. Research that demonstrated that people with severe intellectual disabilities could perform quite complex vocational skills also began to lay the ground for subsequent policy initiatives that would challenge the position of sheltered employment.

Winds of change

The election of a reformist Federal Government in 1972 provided a change in the essentially conservative climate that had permeated the welfare services in Australia. The proclamation of 1981 as the Year of Disabled Persons provided a further impetus for governments, service providers and the community generally to re-examine attitudes towards the way services were being provided to people with disabilities.

In 1973 the Federal Government established, through the CRS, two pilot Work Preparation Centres for school leavers who had a mild intellectual disability in response to community pressures that challenged the perception that this group could only cope in a sheltered environment. Over the next ten years a network of seven centres were established providing a model for intensive vocational training that led to open employment outcomes. These centres also trialed service delivery models that preceded the later adoption of a network of open and supported employment programs across Australia. During this development period the CRS supported a University Affiliated Program of active research through the Unit for Rehabilitation Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney.

In 1983 the Federal Government sponsored three initiatives that were to have a profound effect upon disability service provision in Australia. The first was the funding of an Australian chapter of Disabled People's International. The second was the establishment of the Disability Advisory Council of Australia that consisted of people with disabilities or their advocates, replacing earlier advisory panels that consisted of mainly service providers. And the third the setting up of the Handicapped Program Review, a landmark development in the Australian disability scene.

The Review which involved a nation-wide consultation with people with disabilities, their families and service providers culminated in the publication of New Directions Report of the Handicapped Programs Review (Grimes, 1985) and the enactment of the Disability Services Act (1986). One of the outcomes of the review was the promulgation of seven positive consumer outcomes as a basis for program development for people with disabilities. The key outcomes were: a place to live in the local community; paid employment; to be competent and self reliant; the opportunity to be involved in a range of community relationships and activities; security; and community respect and acceptance. The New Directions report concluded with a vision for the future of Australian disability policy.

This report provides a stimulus to the new directions of the Commonwealth Government's effort in the provision of services for people with disabilities. Some of the options and recommendations outlined will not be easy to implement, whether due to the

complexity of administrative issues to be resolved, budgeting constraints, attitudinal factors or resistance to change. It is appreciated that as new ground is broken mistakes will be made (Grimes, 1985, p.118).

The report was especially critical of sheltered workshops and activity therapy centres including the types of work performed, low wages, poor working conditions and their inherently segregated nature. In respect of their training role the review found that training appeared to be an end in itself, was not time limited, and rarely led to open employment. In this respect the review questioned the quality of training provided by inexperienced and unqualified staff.

A new paradigm

The Disability Services Act which replaced the Handicapped Persons Assistance Act signalled a significant paradigm shift in the operation and funding of government assisted programs. It basically attempted to take the initiative for the planning and execution of disability services away from the powerful service agencies and to shift them to consumer groups. However, the shift was essentially from the service sector to the bureaucratic machinery of government.

The Act which came into operation in June, 1987, introduced two new employment types designed to over-come the poor performance of workshops in placing and supporting people in the open labour market. The first, "Competitive employment training and placement services" (CETAP), was designed to assist people with disabilities to get, and keep, jobs in the open labour market which pay full award wages. The second, "Supported employment services" (SE), was restricted to people who could not be placed in the open labour market on full award wages and who, because of their disabilities, required substantial ongoing support to get and maintain employment.

The Act incorporated the principle of "least restrictive alternative" into its hierarchy of supported employment models ensuring that the level of, and type of support a person receives is appropriate to their level of need. Under this principle the traditional employment services, that in the main assisted people with low to moderate support needs, were given a five year transition period to restructure their operations to comply with the new service types.

Disappointingly, successive Federal governments, for a variety of reasons, not the least being the powerful lobby of the sheltered employment industry, have failed to reduce the relative size of the numbers of people with disabilities in sheltered workshops or "business services" as they are now called. Given the increased emphasis upon economic outcomes, pressure has been placed on both the integrated and segregated employment programs to become more productive and efficient. The net effect has been to reduce the opportunity for those with high support needs to access either type of employment. These people, and for those who are being prematurely "retired" from employment, are forced to seek "day activity" or "day option" programs that are funded by the State and Territory Governments under the terms of the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement (1993). This Agreement divided fiscal and management responsibility for specific

disability programs between the Commonwealth or Federal
Government and the State and Territory Governments. The
Commonwealth essentially funds employment programs and the
States/Territories accommodation, respite and day programs. Both
Governments contribute to Advocacy Programs.

Impact of economic and political change

The paradigm shift experienced in human services for people
with disabilities in the 1970s and 1980s was largely driven by
social factors, especially those related to human rights
movements and the subsequent emancipation of marginalized
minority groups. Economic and political factors have been the
predominant forces that have impacted upon human service delivery
in the 1990s and beyond. Neo-liberal philosophies including
economic rationalism, managerialism, and globalization that
emphasise individualism and competition have embraced the
policies of macro and micro-economic reform. The role of macro-
economic reform is to reduce dependence upon overseas capital and
hence reduce the current account deficit. The implication of
micro-economic reform is to enhance competition as a means to
efficiency and thus reduce the cost of production. Both these
processes have had a serious impact upon the provision and
outcomes of employment services for people with disabilities in
Australia and indeed other western economies as well.

Schalock (1999) has argued that human services organizations
are being increasingly challenged to provide quality services
within the context of two powerful, potentially conflicting
forces: person-centered values and economic-based restructured
services. One of the effects of government reforms has been the
pressure on service organizations to enhance performance
measurement and evaluation procedures to demonstrate the
effectiveness of their services in providing valued consumer
outcomes.

The free market economy approach has contributed to the
rising unemployment levels in western industrialized countries
and has in turn further reduced the employment options of people
with marginal skills, including those with disabilities. Just as
we were able to show in the 1960s that people with even very high
support needs could learn new skills and become productive and
contributing citizens, the challenge for the new millennium is to
redouble our efforts to increase the competitiveness of people
with disabilities. I suspect, however, that without a
complementary commitment to social justice principles, and a more
equitable distribution of a country's resources, there will
continue to be discrimination against this population

Measurement of outcomes of integrated employment,
Interestingly a defining characteristic of integrated employment,
was, from the outset, the measurement of employment outcomes in
terms of wages earned, hours worked per week, job maintenance,
employer and co-worker perceptions, and a favourable benefit-cost
ratio. More recently, however, attention has shifted to focus
upon social integration and social inclusion, friendship and
quality of life issues. The deinstitutionalization movement
emphasized living and working IN the community, as the desirable
norm, but helping people with disabilities become part OF a
community has been a much more formidable challenge.

Research has demonstrated that social relationships perform a critical role in successful employment outcomes affecting both the personal and work adjustment of employees with and without disabilities (Hagner, Rogan & Murphy, 1992). Individuals with disabilities have themselves reported that they value interactions with others as one of the most important aspects of their lives (Knox & Hickson, 2001; Knox & Parmenter, 1993; McVilly, 1995).

Presence alone does not equate with participation and social acceptance. True social integration within work settings therefore cannot be achieved by placement alone, but may be viewed as the product of two interacting factors. The first factor includes the vocational and social skills that are required for an individual to interact appropriately with other individuals in his or her environment (Riches, 1993). The second factor addresses the receptiveness and adequacy of the physical and social situations in which an individual is expected to interact. The setting variables themselves can make a significant contribution to the development of social relationships in the worksite. Environmental and setting variables that may contribute to successful employment include the physical setting of the worksite, the length of the job coach's involvement, co-worker and supervisor attitudes and experience with persons with disabilities, and the characteristics and culture of the environment. When a congruence exists between these two factors, there is an increased likelihood for the existence of positive social interactions. Indeed, Calkins & Walker (1990, p.3) suggested that:

> ...successful adjustment by a developmentally disabled worker to any employment setting depends less on assessed individual characteristics, per se, than on the match between the attributes of the person and the demands of the employment environment or the "person-environment" fit.

What is not fully understood is the relationship between social competence, specific social skills and other setting factors that are required for persons with disabilities to achieve full participation in the workplace. A functional distinction needs to be made between social and relational competence and social skills. Social competence requires the appropriate use of social skills and is best judged by significant others in the individual's setting. Factors such as acceptance, mutuality and reciprocity are involved. Social competence may also be dependent upon the particular social context (Yan, Mank, Sandow, Rhodes & Olsen, 1993) and competence in one setting may not necessarily generalize to other settings.

Important social skills may change according to the characteristics and social culture of the work environment, the individuals involved in the interaction, the particular social context of the interaction (e.g. break or work) and the personal aspirations and priorities of the individuals involved. However, the tacit rules for interaction may vary across settings so it is important that persons with disabilities know how to use appropriate social skills at the right time, with co-workers, supervisors and employers in the work setting and in specific social contexts such as on the job or at break times. Awareness

of the social conventions in a setting is also essential so
individuals can communicate and exchange culturally appropriate
signals to competently engage in conversation in that setting.

Types of social interactions

The demand for appropriate social interactions in the
workplace has grown rather than diminished in recent years as the
percentage of jobs in the service sector has burgeoned. This has
resulted in a distinction being made between social behaviours
that occur in the workforce that are classified as task-related
and those that are non-task related (Chadsey-Rusch, 1992).

Task-related behaviours are those interactions that are
required for participation in a given work task or that are
associated with job matters and require the ability to interact
with others regarding job tasks. They include behaviours such as
following directions, sharing work-related information, asking
for help and accepting criticism. Non-task related behaviours
occur in the work place, but are not connected to the job and are
engaged in solely for the purpose of fraternisation.

It has consistently been argued that task-related
interactions are more important in the workplace than non task-
related interactions. Certainly employers place a high priority
on work-related social skills and non task-related interactions
in the workplace have not been rated as crucial by employers.
Obviously interactions during work would be expected to be mainly
task related whereas those during breaks would be mainly non-task
related. Further investigation of the relationships between non
task-related interactions and successful employment would be
useful. It is suggested that these categories of interactions may
contribute to social support and friendships on the job and
beyond.

Two studies conducted in Australia that address these issues
will be presented.

1. A NATIONAL STUDY

A national study was undertaken to identify the essential
elements that contribute to successful placement and maintenance
of people with disabilities in employment and to gain information
on the best way to help people with a disability fit into the
workforce. In particular, social integration issues were
explored, including social interaction patterns, work related
behaviours and social behaviours in the workplace.

The aim of the research was to gain a more comprehensive
understanding of (a) the type and amount of support provided to
supported employees; (b) the social interactions of workers with
mild to severe intellectual disabilities in different supported
employment placements; (c) the importance of various work related
and social behaviours in the workplace; (d) specific attitudes to
employees with a disability; and (e) to determine those social
and interpersonal variables that assist in successful vocational
and social outcomes for people with disabilities.

Such findings, it was anticipated, could provide the
foundation for developing assessment and curriculum materials for
assisting persons with disabilities in the development of
friendships and social support networks in the work place.

Equally important, the findings could inform public policy directed towards persons with disabilities and the supported employment sector.

METHOD

A postal survey was selected as the most appropriate method of collecting the information required due to the large numbers of people involved, the geographic area to be covered, and the limited resources available. A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across states and rural and metropolitan areas.

An earlier phase of the project and consultations with people with disabilities and other research had provided various insights that informed the present study and enabled social validation procedures to be implemented. The following social validation tasks were undertaken: (a) design of the questionnaire; (b) trial testing and revision of the instrument; and (c) assessment of the instrument's internal consistency and stability of responses over time.

Design of the questionnaire

Questionnaires were constructed that addressed attributes and setting characteristics that were judged to contribute to successful placement and maintenance of people with disabilities in employment. The questionnaires addressed factors that could facilitate or interfere with the development of friendships and social support networks. As a prerequisite to designing the questionnaires, lists were developed of the kinds of variables to be measured against the goals of the research and a pool of items was constructed for the person-specific and setting characteristics from which the final item selection was made.

Items dealing with interactions in the workplace, work related behaviours, social behaviours in the workplace, and attitudes to employees with a disability were constructed using a five-point Likert scale that assessed the degree to which the respondents viewed the attribute or characteristic as either positive or negative. Opportunity was also given for respondents to rank behaviours in order of most important.

Several focus groups were conducted prior to the construction of the final draft of the questions. As a result, the design of the questionnaires changed considerably, and a total of four forms were designed.

The first survey form, to be completed by the Agency Manager, sought basic information regarding the type of supported employment service/s provided, type of clients for whom the agency was funded and general staffing positions and numbers in the agency. Three parallel forms were constructed to gain information about attitudes to people with a disability in the workplace. These were to be completed by three relevant personnel, namely a training officer, a work supervisor and a co-worker. All were asked to complete the survey in the context of a randomly nominated worker with a disability who had been in the work setting for at least three months. The majority of questions therefore would enable comparisons in attitudes to be made between training and placement officers, work supervisors and co-

workers. In addition, several questions were included that
related to the specific position of the person completing the
form, the type of business etc.

Survey participants

Information was gathered from managers of 120 employment
agencies, direct support staff in the field, as well as work
supervisors and co-workers in organizations employing people who
have a disability.

Training and placement officers were identified as persons
employed by the supported employment agency that provided support
to the person with a disability selected for the study. That
support was provided in the selected supported employee's place
of work.

Work supervisors were identified as employers or supervisors
in a business that employed the person with a disability selected
for the study and who provided supervision to that person.

Co-workers were identified as persons without disabilities
who were employed in the same community work site as the worker
with a disability selected for the study.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were computed for all questionnaire
items. A content analysis of these results was conducted to
detect differences and overlap among respondent groups in the
importance of ratings assigned by them to questionnaire items.
Chi square analyses and General Linear Model (GLM) univariate
analyses repeated measures design were run to test for
significant differences between the three respondent groups. GLM
analyses were used for complete data sets only (i.e., where
responses were available from all three respondent groups
regarding the same employee with a disability).

Physical integration
In terms of physical integration, workers with disabilities
worked along side or nearby other non-disabled workers. Very few
employees with a disability appeared to work in separate parts of
the work place where they were isolated from other workers
without disabilities. Those that did were employed under a group
model of support, either in an enclave or work crew. Only one
supervisor responded that this occurred for the nominated
employee with a disability while five employment specialists
responded that this was the case for their employee with a
disability (7.6%). Employment specialists were significantly more
likely than supervisors to indicate that employees with
disabilities worked side-by-side with other workers (p=.004).
However, the difference could reflect the use of multiple
responses by Employment Specialist showing that some employees
experienced both environments. There was close agreement,
however, on the number of employees with a disability who worked
alone with some brief contact with co-workers. In many cases this
location was not considered an issue as it was attributed to the
nature of the job.

Employees with a disability were regularly or occasionally
involved in using common areas such as lunch rooms and facilities

with other employees, according to employment specialists (96%), supervisors and co-workers (97%). Many employees with a disability also attended staff and other group meetings on a regular or an occasional basis. There were no statistically significant differences on these items given the overall range of responses although as many as 31% of co-workers responded that it was not applicable for the employee with a disability to attend staff and other meetings in contrast to 14% employment specialists and 16% supervisors.

Social integration

There was a general agreement that many of the supported employees socialized with co-workers at the completion of work and at shift changes on at least an occasional basis. Supervisors and co-workers both reported socialization occurred more regularly than did employment specialist for a number of employees with disabilities. There was a small number who never socialized according to several employment specialists (15%), supervisors (11%) and co-workers (18%).

The majority of employees with a disability also participated in some social activities such as birthdays, special events and lunches at least occasional during working hours, according to the employment specialists (82%), supervisors (72%), and co-workers (66%). Some attended functions organized by the company's social club where these were in operation.

A number of employees with disabilities also participated in social activities with co-workers outside of working hours. However, this was more likely to occur on an occasional rather than regular basis.

GLM multivariate analyses revealed no significant overall differences between the three respondent groups except on socialising with co-workers during working hours. On this variable, supervisors reported more frequent socialisation occurring in the workplace than the other two groups. Pairwise comparisons found supervisors reported significantly more socialisation with co-workers during working hours than did co-workers ($p=.02$) and more participation in social club gatherings than employment specialists ($p=.04$).

Joking and chatting

There was a high level of agreement that joking and chatting about non job related matters occurred between employees with disabilities and other workers on a regular or occasional basis, both during work and break times. There were a few cases where joking and chatting did not occur, but only in one case did a co-worker register it was inappropriate that the employee with a disability did not participate in joking and chatting about non job related matters. Employment specialists generally reported higher rates of joking and chatting than the other two groups both during work and during lunch and break times. Pairwise comparisons found significant differences between employment specialists and supervisors ($p=.04$) and employment specialists and co-workers ($p=.05$) regarding the amount of joking and chatting reported for lunch and break times, but not during work times.

Social behaviours

Respondents were asked about the extent to which nominated social behaviours were considered critical for successful integration into the work place. No items were considered unimportant as all mean scores were positive and above 3.4. Overall, the two social behaviours rated as most important were behaving in a manner appropriate to the workplace and dressing appropriately and being clean and tidy. These were followed by the non task-related behaviours using appropriate greetings and partings, participating in conversation, and being appropriate assertive. Although items concerning handling and returning teasing and joking were considered important, they were rated less highly than the other social behaviours.

Mean ratings did reveal some differences between employment specialists, supervisors and co-workers in the relative importance of some items. Employment specialists placed slightly less importance of some items. Employment specialists placed slightly less importance on greetings and partings than did either supervisors or co-workers while supervisors placed slightly greater emphasis on appropriate dress and assertiveness than did employment specialists and co-workers.

Significant differences were evident on the item sharing general topics with supervisors rating this more important than co-workers followed by employment specialists (p=.02). The greatest difference was between employment specialists and supervisors (p=.004). Only 29 full data sets were available on the item regarding assertiveness, but for those who did respond assertiveness was endorsed as a skill required in the workplace.

Respondents were asked to rank in order of importance the same list of social behaviours they had previously rated. Again, the items behaving in an appropriate manner and dressing appropriately and being clean and tidy were given top priority across all three groups. These were followed by participating in conversation and using appropriate greetings and partings.

Handling teasing and joking was also considered relatively important by all three groups although supervisors rated this behaviour as slightly less important than co-workers and employment specialists. It was ranked above sharing general topics and being assertive while returning teasing and joking was ranked last by all three groups. GLM multivariate analyses revealed there were no significant differences between the three respondent groups on the ranking given to any of these social behaviours.

Attitudes to employees with a disability

All respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with certain statements that reflected general attitudes towards the employment and acceptance of people with a disability. Of particular relevance to the present study was the social sub-scale that included questions about friendship formation at work and joining in social activities. Total mean ratings and standard deviations are presented for all respondents combined and for the three groups of respondents. While the general pattern of reactions was found

to be positive, with responses from the various groups very similar, some significant differences between the respondent groups were discernible.

There was strong overall agreement that employees with a disability should be physically and socially integrated into the work force and that friendships could occur. This was evidenced by support for such items as "employees with a disability can have close personal relationships just like everyone else" that gained a mean of 4.6 and agreement or strong agreement from 99% of employment specialists, 89% of supervisors and 81% of co-workers. Despite the positive response to this item, there was a significant difference between the groups, with co-workers less positive than employment specialists or supervisors. However, there were no real differences between the three groups on "employees with a disability should take breaks at the same time as co-workers" that gained an overall mean of 4.59 with agreement or strong agreement from 94% of employment specialists, 90% of co-workers and 85% of supervisors and "employees with a disability can make good friends in the work place". This also gained a total mean of 4.58 and agreement or strong agreement from 94% of both supervisors and co-workers, and 90% of employment specialists.

Conversely, there was considerable disagreement with the statement "employees with a disability are not considered as close work mates" that gained a Mean of 1.75 and disagreement or strong disagreement from 78% of both co-workers and supervisors and 75% employment specialists.

The statement "employees with a disability should join in social activities held in the work place" was also generally supported with a mean of 4.37 and agreement or strong agreement from 87% co-workers, 85% supervisors and 84% employment specialists.

Although the overall mean for the statement "employees with a disability are happier when they live and work with people like themselves" was negative at 2.0, there was a greater range of opinion between the respondent groups with 89% of employment specialists registering disagreement or strong disagreement in comparison to 70% supervisors and 57% coworkers (p=.006).

There was also general disagreement with the statement that employees with a disability were considered an embarrassment to some employees (Mean = 1.9). Supervisors registered the strongest disagreement with a mean rating of 1.7, and 59% strongly disagreeing and 15% disagreeing with this statement. Another 21% were unsure. Only 5% responded that they agreed but none strongly agreed. The co-workers mean rating was 1.9 with 53% strongly disagreeing and 21% disagreeing with the statement. Another 16% were unsure, 8% agreed, and 3% strongly agreed that employees with a disability were an embarrassment to some employees. Surprisingly, although employment specialists also disagreed with this statement, they were less positive than supervisors and coworkers. Their mean rating was 2.2 with 39% strongly disagreeing, 23% disagreeing, 24% unsure, 12% agreeing and 3% strongly agreeing (p=.009).

Employment specialist responses often reflected the most positive attitudes of all three groups although slightly more supervisors responded that employees with a disability make good friends and could be considered close mates in the work place.

DISCUSSION

　　Open, integrated employment has consistently been viewed as
an important and indeed essential forum through which people with
disabilities can gain greater status, acceptance and inclusion in
mainstream society. This Australian study compared the attitudes
of employment specialists, work supervisors and co-workers who
worked with or alongside nominated persons with disabilities in
employment settings, and sought to identify the extent of their
acceptance and social inclusion, and the importance and relevance
of various social behaviours in this regard.
　　Social integration in terms of social participation and
involvement with co-workers at the completion of work, at shift
changes and through involvement in social activities both during
work hours and outside of work appeared to be have been enjoyed
by many but not all supported employees. It is heartening to see
that many workers with disabilities were accepted and involved in
these social encounters and that supervisor and co-worker
attitudes about such inclusion were very positive.
　　However, supervisors were significantly more positive about
the level of participation in social activities that was
occurring with co-workers, particularly during working hours than
the co-workers themselves. As many as 30% of co-workers viewed
social interaction with the nominated employee with a disability
as not applicable. This was in terms of attendance at staff and
group meetings, attendance at company social club activities, and
participation in social activities both during work hours and
outside work. This poses the question as to why supervisors
differed so markedly from co-workers for this 30% of individuals
and whether the answer may related to perceived quality of
interaction rather than quantity.
　　All nominated task-related and non task-related social
interactions were found to be important in this study. It is
interesting that behaving and dressing appropriately were given
highest ratings and ranking by co-workers as well as supervisors
and employment specialists. One implication is that conventional
behaviour is expected for entry level jobs and acceptance cannot
be gained unless workers with disabilities blend into the
workplace in terms of behaviour and dress rather than standing
out in any way as different. Indeed, while many social movements
encourage the celebration of diversity and difference, workplaces
have a specific economic purpose to achieve. To accomplish this,
they clearly endorse convention and strict adherence to rules and
procedures.
　　However, non task-related behaviour such as participation in
conversations, using greetings and partings and handling teasing
and joking were also strongly affirmed by all three groups.
Interestingly, supervisors were more concerned about sharing
general topics of conversation than co-workers or employment
specialists. This was despite other findings that interactions
between workers and supervisors tend to be more limited and task
oriented while those with co-workers are often non task-related
(Chadsey-Rusch & Gonzales, 1988).
　　Although the ability to handle teasing and joking was
strongly endorsed, returning teasing and joking was consistently
placed last, in comparison to the other social behaviours,

suggesting workplaces require employees to be able to cope with teasing and joking although not necessarily to engage in this behaviour. The ability to assert oneself appropriately was endorsed as important by the 40% of the sample that responded, but since a large number failed to respond at all to this item it is unclear how important this really is.

Task-related skills concentrating upon job performance do not appear to be sufficient in their own right for successful employment. These results support the contention that non task-related social behaviours are important in entry level jobs across a range of work sites and work context and successful employment and integration at this level requires a combination of these competencies to be evident. Of course, all workers with and without disabilities vary in their ability to relate to others and no one is perfectly competent across all social skills and behaviours. However, as Gold (1975) proposed in his competence-deviance hypothesis, it would appear that there may be a minimum set of skills and/or a level of social competence required such that deviance or difference can only be tolerated or overlooked providing it is counterbalanced by competence in other important behaviours. A combination of both task-related and no task-related behaviours appear essential to meet the minimum level of competence required in entry level positions.

Based on direct experience with workers who had a disability, responding supervisors, co-workers and employment specialists generally agreed that workers with a disability fitted into the workplace, were productive members of the workforce and should have the same conditions as everyone else. Positive attitudes were evident towards social integration as the majority also agreed that workers with disabilities could make good friends in the workplace, have close personal friendships like everyone else, and should be included in the social activities of the workplace. It would appear from these results that having direct experience with employees with disabilities in open employment situations has had a positive effect on attitudes of supervisors and co-workers.

However, Knox & Hickson (2001) found that while work was critical for helping people with disabilities establish a valued identity, contrary to expectation they concluded work was not the forum in which to expand their social networks. Individuals with disabilities who participated in this study had become aware of the involuntary nature of work relationships, the importance of harmony, and very aware of the distinction between work friends and other friends. But not one of the work relationships had progressed to other friendships.

CONCLUSION

The results of this national survey confirmed the fact that a number of people with disabilities have gained entry level jobs across a range of industries and work places where they have been accepted as valid and valuable members of the work force.

Supervisors and co-workers demonstrated positive attitudes towards those with disabilities being productive members of the work place. Based on their experiences with a specific individual with a disability, the majority of supervisors and co-workers responded that these individuals not only performed their jobs,

but many also participated in the social life of the work place. They generally socialized at appropriate break times, engaged in chatting and joking, and some attended social functions both at work and after work. Most were seen as capable of making friends with other workers.

Overall, the results ratify the importance of a basic set of work related and social behaviours that are critical for entry level jobs across a range of industries and work sites. It is reasonable to hypothesise that there is a minimum level of competence required across these work and social behaviours with appropriate behaviour and dress most important followed by the ability to handle the common daily interactions of the workplace. The overriding message is that acceptance of people with disabilities in the work place, at least in entry level jobs, is governed by convention and the need to blend in and not draw attention to oneself.

It is encouraging to recognize that actual experiences working with people with disabilities appear to have enhanced the attitudes of supervisors and many co-workers towards these workers. The majority of supported employees were viewed as valuable workers and members of the work place who had a right to be in the work force and who had the ability to make friends and generally to blend into the work culture. Nevertheless the reality of achieving real friendships through work appears still a long way off.

2. RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE: A SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST APPROACH3

Increasingly, it is recognized that the quality of life of people with a disability is not simply concerned with the physical environment in which they might live or work. For all people, with or without a disability, it is their relationships with others in their social network that are a major contributor to the quality of their lives (Parmenter, 1992).

Thus it is not enough simply to look at the competence of a person with a disability to preform a job nor is it enough to consider only the economic benefits such a person obtains from working in competitive employment. Their relationships with others in their workplace must also be taken into account. As Nisbet and Callahan (1987, p. 185) warned some time ago, "...merely selecting an environment and a job without attention to social interactions and relationships may result in segregation of person with... disabilities from their non-handicapped peers."

However, when considering relationships in the workplace, it is important to remember that each workplace has its own culture – its customs, traditions and shared meanings that develop over time as workers work together and produce a collective product or deliver a service. It is therefore pivotal that workers with disability be, and indeed, see themselves as members of their work culture. In effect, they must be of the workplace, not merely in the workplace.

The purpose of the present study, as part of a wider study concerned with a theoretical approach to personal relationship management, was to present an analysis of the perceptions held by six people with an intellectual disability employed in integrated

employment settings regarding aspects of: (1) the boss relationship; (2) the co-worker relationship occurring within their respective workplaces; and (3) the job coach relationship. Specifically, its purpose was to explore the views held by the study informants on: (1) their view of these relationships; (2) the interaction strategies used to maintain these relationships in the workplace; and (3) the outcomes of these relationships.

It is argued that people attach meanings to their relationships and act according to these meanings. Indeed Duck (1995) pointed out that a relationship, rather than being a natural phenomenon, is a socially constructed idea. Human beings create meaning systems by construing, making choices between alternative perspectives, and imposing order on the world. Thus an examination of these meanings was considered crucial to an understanding of the person's relationships and, of more concern in this study, to his or her perception of the relationships occurring within the workplace and of membership of the workplace culture. A theoretical approach which emphasises meaning and interpretation as essential human processes is that of symbolic interactionism.

Human experiences such as personal relationships in the workplace and membership of the workplace culture are mediated by the individual's interpretations. That is to say, these phenomena do not produce their own meaning, but have meaning conferred upon them by the particular individuals concerned - meanings which emerge from, and are defined and redefined in interaction with other human beings, and meanings which direct the individual's actions or behaviour. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the complex world of lived experience from the viewpoint of those who "live it".

METHOD

Study Informants

The approach taken in the present study was premised on the garnering of the expertise of study informants. The concern was with the richness and diversity of information that informants are able to give, rather than the representativeness of informants of a wider population. Such a strategy is referred to as purposive sampling and its power lies in the acquisition of information-rich cases for in-depth study. Informants are selected purposefully rather than randomly.

Thus the task revolved around seeking experts who were both willing to participate in the research and who were willing to inform the researcher on the means by which they understood the relationships within their respective workplaces. To seek out such expertise, a number of Competitive Employment Training and Placement (CETP) agencies in the Sydney metropolitan area concerned with placing and training people with a mild intellectual disability in competitive employment were requested to contact those clients or ex-clients who: (a) were currently employed in a competitive employment setting; and (b) had been employed by their present employer for a minimum of three months.

Those people wishing to participate in the study (in effect willing to become study informants) were then asked to contact the researcher by mail on an enclosed acceptance form or by

telephone. This strategy, rather than direct contact being made with clients or ex-clients, was adopted to prevent privacy infringement.

RESULTS

(1) The boss relationship - "Whatever he tells me I should do I do"; View of The Boss Relationship - the boss as the legitimate power holder.

The boss relationship in the opinion of all informants was a relationship based on the boss's acknowledged power over themselves and other workers in the workplace. The essence of this power was the boss's control over the person keeping his or her job. Brian frequently referred to the fact that if he does not do his job "...properly, they could tell me to go". Likewise Julie said that she would "get the sack" for making mistakes in her job. Simon told of having to control his periodic anger towards a particular boss in order to keep his job. He said: "I mean at times I feel like turning round and hitting the person, but I keep telling myself, no, don't, because you need the job....That's the only reason I don't hit him." Nonetheless, this power was seen as part of the boss's role and in this respect was considered legitimate power. Thus the boss was seen as the legitimate power holder.

(2) The co-worker relationship - "He's the Same as Me" View of the Co-worker Relationship - an equal partnership.

The relationship with co-workers was seen by all informants as a symmetrical one, that is, informants saw the co-worker relationship as one of equality. Simon captured this sentiment when he said of his co-worker, Martin, "he's the same as me". This view of the co-worker relationship as a symmetrical relationship strongly influenced the informant's opinion of their co-workers. For example, Julie felt annoyed when her co-workers "make a lot of fuss" about the biscuits she served out as morning tea. She also felt angry with the co-worker who comes into her work domain "too much, when he's not supposed to". She considered him arrogant and that his manner to he as "bossy". He treated her, in effect, as a boss would, not as he should a co-worker. This use of power was not legitimate and therefore the rule of co-worker equality had been breached. Similarly John was annoyed when a co-worker, Michael, breached the co-worker equality rule. He described this infringement:

> Michael is not a team leader or a manager or anything....It is really getting under my skin. For example yesterday there were boxes that had to be moved from the storeroom to the kitchen. Michael just stood there and told me what to do, and did none of it himself... he's got no right to boss me.

The co-worker relationship was also seen to be an involuntary relationship. Informants were unable to choose the people with whom they were to work. Hence there was a heavy emphasis on developing and maintaining a harmonious relationship within such an involuntary context in order to perform the organizational tasks related to the workplace. In short, the focus is centred on becoming a member of the work group and participating harmoniously in an involuntary relationship.

Perhaps Brian expressed this viewpoint best when he described his co-workers as "people that you have to work with, and you have to get on with them".

For some informants, some co-workers were considered work friends rather than simply co-workers. That is, the relationship had changed from co-worker to friend at work. A friend at work was a co-worker whom the informant considered a friend, but a friend whom the informant saw and interacted with at work only. As Stewart said of his friends at work, "they're my work friends. My other friends are my home friends". Yet, as recognized by all informants, it was possible for the work-friend relationship to develop into a generalized friend relationship, that is a friend relationship occurring outside the work setting. However none of the informants' work-friend relationships had developed to this stage. Indeed, none wished the relationship to develop beyond that of work-friend. The primary reasons given by informants were that they saw enough of them at work and wished to have a change away from work and that they had sufficient friends outside work and that there was no need for them to extend the friendship.

Nonetheless, conditions for such a change to occur were outlined by some of the informants. These conditions included similarity of interests of both parties and the desire of both parties to change the relationship. John explained:

> I also think work friendships can extend outside of work too. But some of them are younger and they go to college. Like some of them ask these really stupid questions and you think just look around you.

Similarly Simon indicated the differences in his lifestyle compared to that of his co-workers and their perceived lack of interest in extending the work friendship. He said:

> I mean some of them see each other out of work, but I don't. See I don't think my lifestyle would be interesting to them, probably cause I'm married... They probably wouldn't be into just coming round and having a cup of tea or anything. They'd want to be out on the booze or something.

(3) The job coach relationship - A necessary anomaly in the workplace - View of Job Coach Relationship - "She doesn't work here, she just comes in to see me".

All informants strongly affirmed their need for the services of the job coach in order to both gain and maintain a position in competitive employment. The job coach was seen as a necessary means of entry into and maintenance of open employment. John described this when he speaks of his job coach, Maureen:

> Without the moral support of Maureen it would have made it more difficult... without Maureen. I knew what to do - but knowing that Maureen was there - in case anything should happen - I could ask her. There was somebody there.

Informants also saw the job as a source of affirmation of competence. Stewart encapsulated this view when he spoke of the coach coming to

...just look around. Just to make sure I'm not making any
mistakes...I feel good about it. She tells me I'm on track,
and it makes me feel I'm doing the job properly.

Yet at the same time, the job coach, unlike the boss and the
co-worker, was not considered a member of the work culture by any
informant. As Julie said, "she doesn't work there. She comes in
to see me". In effect, the job coach was regarded as a necessary
workplace anomaly.

A further distinguishing characteristic of this workplace
relationship is that it is a relationship destined for
termination. It is not intended that the job coach relationship
be maintained, but rather that it be terminated or at least
significantly diminished within a relatively short period of
time. Indeed each party in the relationship was working towards
this end. This contrasted markedly with the boss and co-worker
relationships where the concern was with relationship maintenance
rather than relationship termination or diminution. Brian
described this progression towards relationship termination, when
he said of his job coach:

... and he went with me every day, and then it dwindled
back. An every week it was less and less until now he
doesn't come in at all, every - well every so often, just to
check.

The dwindling back of the relationship was not regretted. In
fact there was a certain pride expressed by all informants in the
relationship lessening in frequency because such lessening was
associated with acknowledged competence.
(4) Outcomes of Workplace relationships - Perceived Positive
Outcomes.
A positive outcome indicated by all informants was the
satisfaction associated with carrying out their job to the boss's
satisfaction and thereby gaining the boss's approval. Perhaps
John's comment best summarises informants' opinion. He said:

It makes me feel really proud... It's really really nice. I
take on a job and can do it properly and the manager is
happy. I've got to work at keeping my job now and keeping
the manager happy.

Brian also pointed to the link between the boss's approval
and the security of job retention, when he said, "They must think
I do a good job...I don't think they want to get rid of me that
easy."
A second positive outcome was the provision of a meaningful
activity, as indicated by Joanne. She said:

I was working 5 days a week which was using up all my time
during the day...And of course then I wasn't sitting at home
as much, thinking Oh what am I going to do today. There's
nothing much to do.

Brian expressed a similar view when he talked of "Sitting
round at home doing nothing... Booored", before he was able to
obtain employment.

The provision of additional finances enabled financial independence, as explained by Joanne:

> ...and having money is a good thing, like I pay board here ... so like having, getting the pay from work is really good...I'm paying my way now with Mum and Dad.

As John indicated, the provision of extra finances also enabled the purchasing of luxury items:

> ...like what you sort of see here I think I could never be able to afford to buy a stereo, a tv, a fridge, a microwave and a washing machine.

Perceived Negative Outcomes

Jobs and the relationships in the work setting have a cost too, according to these informants. One cost is that of tiredness brought about by the increased demands of the competitive compared to the sheltered work setting. For example, Brian said that when he comes home from work "Sometimes I'm just so tired I'm pooped. I just have to lie down". John said "there are times when you have long hours and long days. It adds up, it really adds up".

Additionally, time constraints imposed by work restrict the opportunities available to both access existing relationships in informants' networks and to establish other relationships. All informants stressed the primacy of the boss relationship over all other relationships in their network. Therefore, the enactment of other relationships in the network is subordinate to the boss relationship. For example, Simon referred to his lack of time to meet other people when he said:

> Pam knows more of the neighbours than me, because I'm at work all day. I only get to say hi to them. And I don't get out as much as I used to.

(5) Informants' view of self as workers in ordinary jobs - A person who sees him or herself as valued, a competent person with a disability.

Working in an "ordinary job", engendered in all informants with a measure of personal worth and social status, substantiating Fine's (1986, p. 185) view that in our society "people derive much of their identity from their occupation". Work fulfilled the role of giving them a valued standing in the community. John said "People look at your differently. They say he's got a job and he's holding it down. He's responsible".

Being a taxpayer was also a desirable status indicated by both Brian and Simon. Perhaps Simon best expressed this view when he said:

> I earn my own money. I don't get a handout from the government...I'm a person. I'm a taxpayer, I'm a citizen now. I'm putting my bit in, instead of just going to the workshop and coming home. I'm on the records in the government, not just put away in a workshop.

Jobs and the relationships in the work setting have a cost too, as indicated above. But this was a small price to pay. The gaining of a valued identity, according to all informants, far outweighed the costs associated with gaining and maintaining work in competitive employment.

A person who is disabled but competent

This group of people made very little attempt to cover their disability. Rather there was a concern with proving that they were competent people despite having a disability. For some there was a concern to prove oneself to their former service. For example Simon told of the counsellor at Wangara Rehabilitation Centre who had informed him and his mother that he would never get job and would always work in a workshop. He had proved him wrong.

Thus, work in competitive employment was seen by this group of people to provide them with a valued identity. There was no attempt to hide their disability. They still saw themselves as a person with a disability, but as a competent person with a disability, having proved to significant others that they were able to carry out the requirements of an "ordinary" job.

These informants found that to gain and maintain a personally valued identity, it was necessary to become a member of the work culture. Membership of this culture was accomplished by firstly pleasing the boss and proving oneself as a capable worker and secondly by maintaining harmonious relationships with their co-workers. The termination or minimisation of the job coach relationship was the final indicator.

Implications from the findings

This study has described in some detail the perceptions of their workplace relationships held by six people with a mild intellectual disability employed in competitive employment settings. The utility of the symbolic interactionist approach underpinning the study was evident in the exploration of the relationship meanings and perceptions held by the informants themselves. Work in competitive employment for these people was shown to contribute significantly to the attainment of a personally valued identity.

It is interesting to note, however, that for this group of people, work was not seen as the forum in which to expand their social network. None was interested in pursuing friendships developed at work to settings outside of work. Work fulfilled a different role for these people. Rather it fulfilled the role of giving them a valued identity. Yet, at the same time, informants acknowledged that it was possible for work friendships to develop into more generalised friendships. Indeed, some informants suggested what they saw as necessary requirements for the extension of such friendships beyond the work setting. With this in mind, it is important, therefore, that people with disabilities working in competitive employment develop the requisite skills to enable them, should they desire, to extend these friendships.

The study also detailed the informants' perception of the job coach as a necessary anomaly in the workplace. Informants

found the support of the coach vital not only in developing job competence, but also as a source of ongoing support to guard against job termination. Yet, at the same time, because the coach was not a member of the workplace culture, some informants found difficulties in interacting with the coach in the work setting. It might be said that increasing the use of co-workers as natural supports (i.e., members of the work culture) might assist in obviating this dilemma.4 However, informants stressed very strongly the need for adherence to the rule of co-worker equality in the development and maintenance of harmonious co-worker relationships. Care must therefore be taken in the use of natural support systems to ensure that the co-worker equality rule is not breached.

Further, it is important to note, as Duck (1992) argued, that relationships do not operate in isolation. They are an integral part of a person's social network and both affect and are affected by other relationships within this network. Hence it is imperative that workplace relationships are also considered in the context of other relationships within the person's social network of personal relationships and that the interconnections among these relationships be explored.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study demonstrated the meaningful and valuable role that people with an intellectual disability should and must play in disability research efforts. The strategies used in this study demonstrated the competence and willingness of people with an intellectual disability to discuss seemingly complex issues in their lives such as personal relationships. The implications for collaborative research with people with an intellectual disability, rather than research on them, are patent.

Importance, value and role of integrated employment

Open, integrated employment has consistently been viewed as an important and indeed essential forum through which people with disabilities can gain greater status, acceptance and inclusion in mainstream society. Increasingly, such work has been assumed to provide numerous positive personal and financial outcomes, despite the rapid changes occurring the nature of work itself. Moreover, in recent years, work has been seen as an important vehicle through which social integration and friendships can be developed and extended for people with disabilities. Indeed, many have assumed that by increasing presence or physical integration in open employment settings, opportunities for real social inclusion would occur and friendships among people with and without disabilities could be fostered. One wonders to what extent available research supports such hopes and assumptions?

Certainly all six people with an intellectual disability who were involved in the participatory research study affirmed the importance of work for them in establishing a valued identity. They considered the benefits associated with increased personal worth and status that were gained from work far outweighed the cost of increased fatigue and less time at home or in the neighbourhood for self and for other relationships. These individuals appeared to be under a burden to prove themselves to self, to family, to community and to co-workers without disabilities and the vehicle by which they managed this was open

employment. Yet, contrary to expectation, work was not perceived as the forum in which to expand their social networks. These individuals had become aware of the involuntary nature of work relationships, the importance of harmony, and very aware of the distinction between work friends and other friends. But not one of the work relationships had progressed to other friendships at the time of the study. Indeed, our work has found that workers with disabilities were in the workforce, but not necessarily part of the workforce.

The national survey also identified that the majority of employees with a disability were performing low skill level jobs that would be classified as entry-level jobs. These mainly involved repetitive tasks of minimum skill level that required little initiative, decision making or additional responsibilities. Employees with a disability were generally under the direction and supervision of others. Although the low skill, low status and consequently low wages gained may be partly explained by the fact that as many as 44% were in their first year in employment, and only a small proportion had been employed for any length of time, the fact remains that jobs were substantially labour intensive and low in status and responsibility.

The extent to which people with disabilities, especially those who have an intellectual disability, can progress from typically low status, low paid jobs and experience career enhancement opportunities remains to be seen. The position may be analogous to women who initially remained in low level, low paid positions for many years after gaining access to the workforce before attitudes changed, competencies were recognized and opportunities for advancement were made available. Changes in status were accompanied by greater respect and inclusion in many facets of life. Given the current position, a major challenge for service providers is to now ensure that training and support provided to people with disabilities in integrated employment not only maximizes their employment opportunities, but addresses career growth and advancement goals.

Changing attitudes in the work place

Importantly, some attitudes towards people with disabilities in employment do appear to be changing. The national survey identified essential elements contributing to successful placement and maintenance of people with disabilities in employment with an emphasis on social integration issues. Respondents strongly endorsed positive attitudes towards integrated employment for employees with a disability and supported both physical and social integration practices. Based on direct experience with workers who had a disability, responding supervisors, co-workers and employment specialists generally agreed that workers with a disability fitted into the workplace, were productive members of the workforce and should have the same conditions as everyone else. They also agreed they could make good friends in the workplace, have close personal friendships like everyone else, and should be included in the social activities of the workplace.

Physical integration was evident as judged by employees with disabilities working along side workers without disabilities

using common areas and attending staff meetings and other relevant work meetings. However, physical location appeared to be a pragmatic consideration, more dependent on the actual nature of the job description and the work tasks rather than having anything to do with the philosophical debate over integration or segregation. There did appear to be facets of social integration in place, but factors affecting active participation in the social life of the workplace appeared to relate more to the personality, communication style and skill level of the individual rather than mere presence in an integrated setting.

However, most observed contact situations involved the targeted supported employees and the job supervisors (63%) and in these as in all other interactions targeted supported employees were for the most part "passive interactors" initiating far fewer interactions than they received. While supervisors were concerned almost exclusively with productivity and formal task demands, they tended to be highly directive in their interactions and conceived of integration as the opportunity for supported employees to work in the same work settings as non-disabled people. This did not necessarily allow supported employees to focus on increasing interactions or building relationships or to become fully part of the total work force. Instead, the supervisors in this study sought to help individuals with a disability to accept their disabilities and become productive members of the integrated work group. It appears that there are still attitudinal and pragmatic barriers towards integrating individuals who have high support needs and especially towards those who are more passive and experience difficulty in supplying the reciprocity in social relationships.

CONCLUSION

Strategies to support people with disabilities in open, integrated employment have resulted in increased numbers entering employment in the past decade. Despite these advances, it is now clear that most employment is being secured in entry level positions that are low in status, skill level and remuneration. These positions have provided physical integration opportunities that were assumed would result in greater social inclusion, but this, as yet, appears patchy.

Certainly supported employment has enabled individuals who have severe disabilities to enter into integrated work settings that were not previously available. Furthermore, the national study identified that a wide range of jobs was being accessed by people with disabilities although they were generally at the entry level point. Although the low status and skill level is an issue for concern, increasing knowledge about the task and non-task related skills and behaviours that are required across various work cultures provides a platform from which to advance. As employment specialists address career growth goals, it is hoped that significant changes in this position can occur.

Meanwhile, across all these settings, it is encouraging to recognize that actual experiences of working with people with disabilities appear to have enhanced the attitudes of supervisors and co-workers towards these workers. The majority of supported employees were viewed as valuable workers who had a right to be in the work force and who had the opportunity to make friends

and, generally, blend into the work culture.

Endnotes

1. The contribution of Dr Vivienne Riches to this paper is acknowledged.
2. See Parmenter (1999) for a detailed analysis of the policy changes in Australia in the area of employment for people with a disability in the period 1985-1999.
3. For a detailed report of this study see, Knox, M., Mok, M. & Parmenter, T.R. (2000).
4. See Farris & Stancliffe (2001).

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