AN INVESTIGATION OF SELF-CONCEPT, TEST ANXIETY AND SUPPORT SERVICES AMONG STUDENTS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT AND STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

There is an absence of research in Australia on self-concept and test anxiety in students with disabilities although testing is taken for granted among students without disabilities. This study investigated the self-concept and test anxiety of the students in each of two disability groups, those with vision impairment and those with intellectual disability who were placed in specialist and mainstream educational settings in South Australia. The qualitative study aimed to gain insights into what students with vision impairment and those with intellectual disability felt about themselves and their achievements across the different dimensions of self-concept and to understand the nature and extent of their anxiety in test situations. In addition, it sought to examine how far the support services provided in schools proved helpful to students with vision impairment and those with intellectual disability.

This research was divided into two stages of execution. In Stage 1, the 'Tennessee Self-Concept Scale: Second Edition' and the 'Test Anxiety Inventory' were administered to 25 students with vision impairment and 20 students with intellectual disability. In Stage 2, interviews were conducted with 14 students with vision impairment and nine students with intellectual disability, as well as a total of ten parents and eight teachers. These data reflected a range of viewpoints from which to examine the research questions.

Although the majority of the students with vision impairment and those with intellectual disability obtained low scores on all dimensions of self-concept- physical, moral, personal, family, social and academic, some students in both categories obtained normal scores in relation to family and academic self-concepts. Among both groups of students, most had high scores in worry, emotionality and total test anxiety. However, students with vision impairment had slightly higher physically fearful symptoms (emotionality)

in comparison to cognitive fears (worry) in a testing situation, while exactly the reverse was found for students with intellectual disability. Some of the factors responsible for the low self-concept scores were identified through the interviews. Similarly, those interviewed explained the sorts of specific factors which explained the respondents' high test anxiety. The interviews were particularly useful in evaluating the support services that students with vision impairment and those with intellectual disability received. Although there was agreement that the support services had a positive influence on problem solving skills, social behaviour and academic learning of students with vision impairment, there were conflicting views about their effect on family life. Moreover, for students with intellectual disability, students and parents were more negative in their evaluation of support services, although teachers tended to be more positive. In relation to test anxiety, support services were seen as a positive influence for students with vision impairment, but appeared to help students with intellectual disability to a much smaller extent. These findings have implications for teachers, special educators, policy makers and a range of professionals in the education and special education sector in enabling greater understanding of the problems experienced by these students and pointing to modifications and improvements in the support services for these students.

Key words: Self-concept, Test anxiety, Support services, Students with vision impairment, Students with intellectual disability

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Poulomee Datta and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due references has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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