

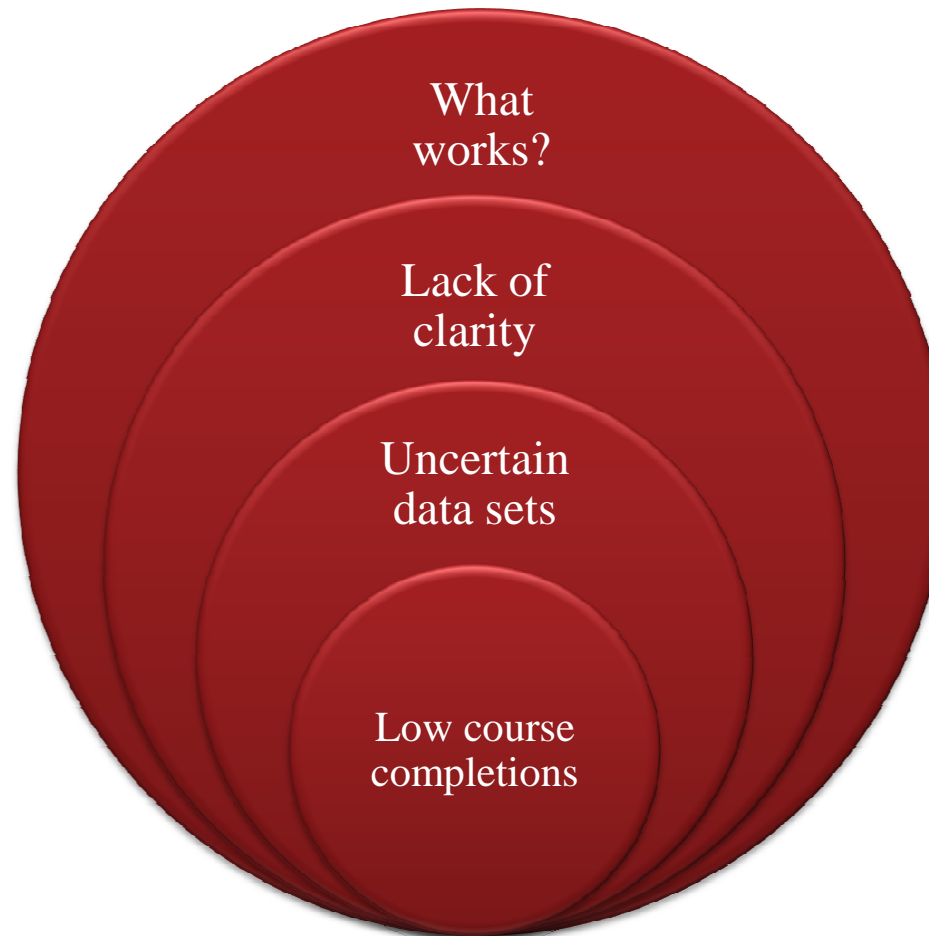
## **Good intentions are not enough: supporting post-secondary students with diverse learning needs.**

Annie Venville

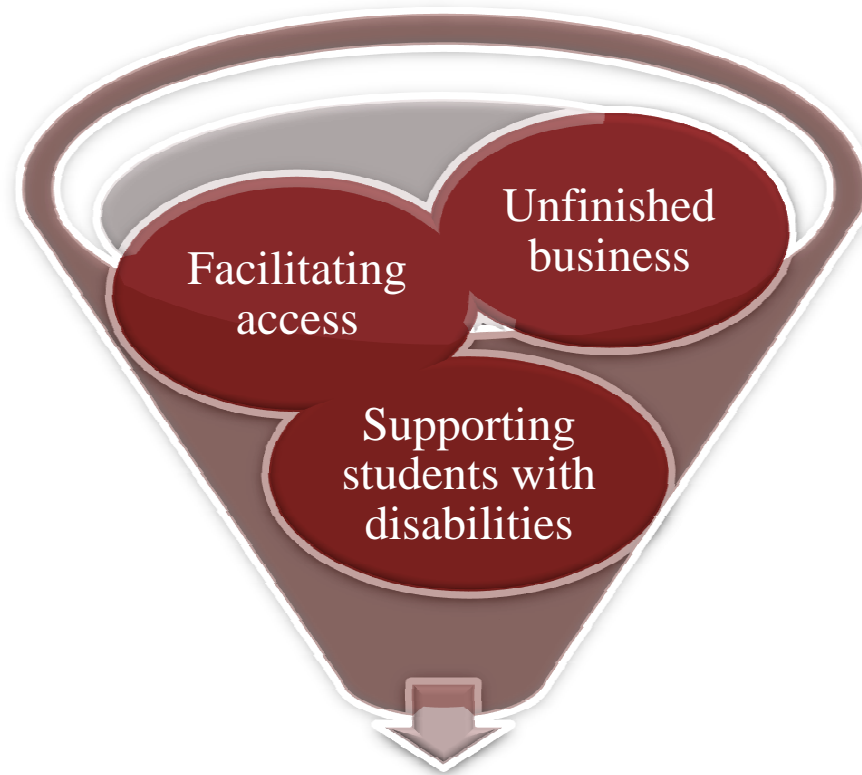
Social Work and Social Policy / Faculty of Health Science

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# The State of Play



## Current Research



Good intentions are  
not enough

# Unfinished Business

Qualitative and interpretive case study

Research sites

- Site 1: Private VET inner-city
- Site 2: Public VET remote /rural
- Site 3: Public VET regional
- Site 4: Public VET outer-metropolitan

Participants – inclusion criteria

- Students : 20
- Staff : 20 (11 and 9)

Publicly available information related to access, equity, disability

# Method

Recruitment was site specific including in class presentations, posters, email invitations, student intranet

Barriers: trust-staff and students, time, flying in and out

## Data sources

Two semi structured interviews (20 and 16)

One semi structured interview with staff (20)

Staff feedback on student recommendations

Publicly available documentation from research sites

## Data analysis

Concurrent with data collection

Theme and pattern identification

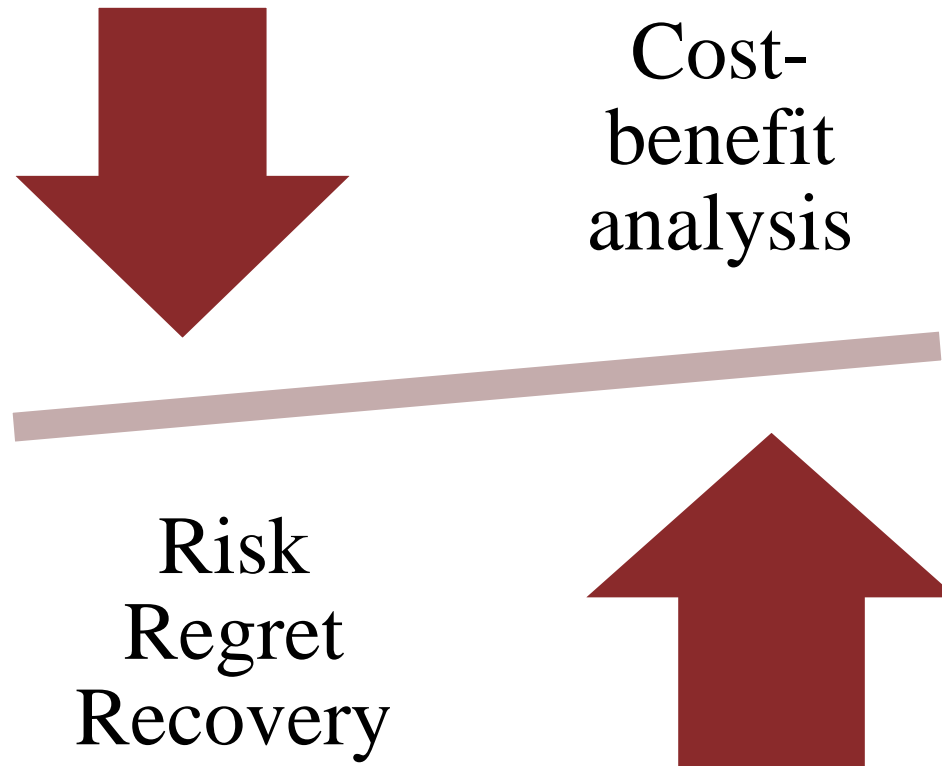
## Factors for Success- Student and Staff Perspectives



## Disclosure as the Start Button

- Support mechanisms are predicated on disclosure
- Previous research has focused on ways to increase rates of disclosure
- But.....students have different understandings of disclosure than do staff and organisations

## The Disclosure Dilemma





## A Balancing Act

### Risk

- 'I definitely think that you'd either be looked at like down upon or not, not, trustworthy or not responsible enough. I don't feel that you could get ahead'. (SJ Site 1)

### Regret

'When you speak your words are not yours any more. They're everybody else's and they can do whatever they want... when they hear them' (K Site 4)

### Recovery

'I feel good about myself achieving without special consideration. Looking back it has been worth it' (C Site 1)

## The Student Perspective: a campaign for the presentation of a better self

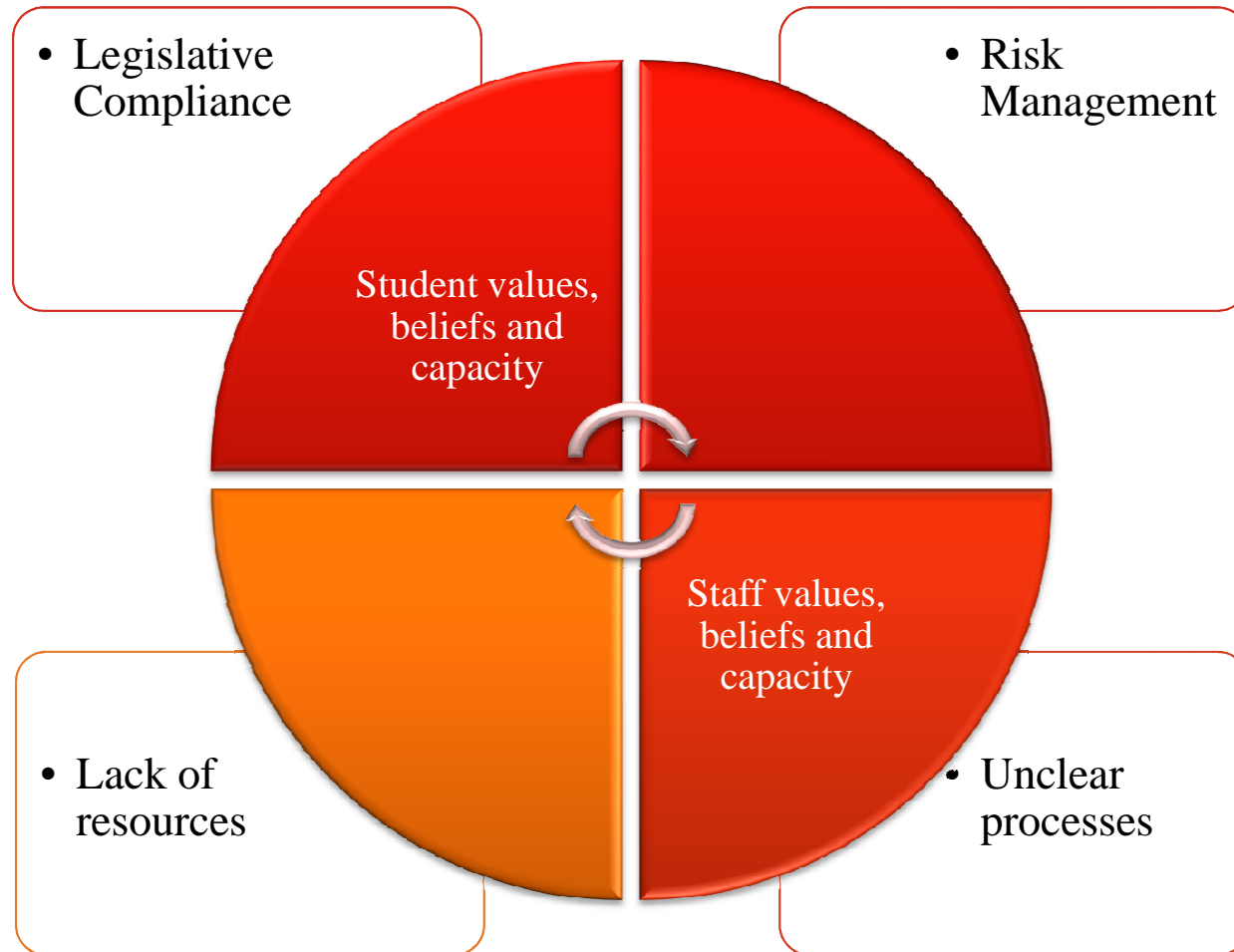
*Well if I, ah... say talk openly with my teachers about depression, or anything like that, you know, because they are in the industry I just fear that you know they...if one day they are to interview me for a job and you know....or to take part in a project, they will think, 'Oh A, that's the guy who was depressed ...you know, he didn't cope with his previous job, so he quit' ... I just fear that kind of information, you know might escape. I know that this depression I'm going through is just a phase and not something that is going to last forever so, umm, I just want to keep it to myself... I just don't want to be perceived as depressed, as a depressed person, a sad person, you know (Alain Site 1)*

## The Staff Perspective

*“I think it is a student’s right not to disclose, but I think it would be good for them to. It sets up the framework I think, for success in some ways” (Counsellor 1).*

- Student disclosure was seen as a means of opening the way for access to support services.
- Despite staff participants expecting students to disclose, they expressed an unwillingness to risk the social stigma potentially created by disclosure of mental illness for themselves.
- Moll, Eakin, Franche, and Strike (2013) hypothesise that staff disclosure decisions are unconsciously embedded in and “shaped by an institutional discourse on what it means to be a ‘good worker’” (p. 175), so workers take up the belief of professional competence and conceal signs of illness.

## Context Matters



# Facilitating post-secondary education for students experiencing mental illness or acquired brain injury: a scoping review

Scoping reviews provide a systematic method for mapping the breadth of existing research literature on an emerging topic of interest where high quality evidence is limited (McKinstry, Brown, & Gustafsson, 2013).

## The research questions:

- (1) What interventions have been used to facilitate participation in postsecondary education for individuals experiencing mental illness or ABI?
- (2) What types of outcome variables have been used to evaluate the impact of interventions?

## The Method

- Systematic search of 18 databases was conducted.
- Studies were included if they were published in English between 1990 and 2012 in peer-reviewed journals, with participants aged from 16 to 65 years
- A total of 669 abstracts were identified, (mental illness = 398, acquired brain injury = 250, both mental illness and ABI = 21).
- These abstracts were then read for relevancy by two researchers who specialise in these respective fields, resulting in 41 being retained for the review.
- The 41 papers were characterised by wide variations in methodological approaches, participant characteristics, types of interventions provided and outcome measures. A diverse range of supports, programs and approaches to intervention were described across the reviewed papers.

## Findings

- Seven primary categories of intervention were identified.
- Most reported interventions focus at the level of the individual and aim to support people to build skills, grow confidence through transitional supports, or compensate for challenges through academic adjustments.
- Interventions designed to address individual deficits are usually dependent upon student disclosure (Kiuvara & Huefner, 2008).
- Eight of the 41 scoped studies did not report any outcomes at all
- Ten distinct outcome domains were categorised from the remaining 33 studies: student views of themselves was the most common

# Supporting students with disabilities: exploring individual and system-level approaches

- This qualitative study is designed to explore the nature and perceived usefulness of both individualised reasonable adjustments provided to tertiary students disclosing disability or ill-health, and the kinds of inclusively designed learning supports that are perceived as useful for these students without the need for disclosure.
- Fossey, Venville, Ennals, Douglas, Bigby & Tideman



## Research Questions

- What individualised educational adjustments are being offered to students with disabilities or ongoing health conditions in the Victorian tertiary education system (VET and university sectors)?
- What system level inclusively-designed learning supports are being implemented (e.g. course, curriculum, institution) to enhance participation and successful learning for tertiary students?
- What are perceived to be the most effective and useful individual and system-level educational supports being implemented within VET and university programs?

## A Qualitative Inquiry

Participants are tertiary students, teaching and specialist support staff from a Victorian University and VET Institute in northern metropolitan Melbourne.

- 20 staff from specialist support staff and teaching staff with curriculum or course leadership roles at each educational institution are being purposively recruited
- Up to 30 students purposively recruited from across the university and VET campuses, at least half whom have disclosed disability or ongoing health conditions

Phase One – Individual interviews with students with disability or ongoing health conditions and disability support staff focusing on educational adjustments offered and accessed, their impact and perceived usefulness.

Phase Two – Individual interviews with curriculum/course leaders will ascertain their views about the inclusively-designed learning supports also being implemented within courses/programs or across the institution. Follow-up group discussions with students with disability or ongoing health conditions and disability support staff to identify effective educational supports without the necessity to disclose

## Data collection

- To date, eight interviews have been conducted with students. Of these, two were telephone interviews, and six took place face-to-face. The interviews ranged in duration from thirty-seven minutes to three hours. Two students chose not to have their interviews recorded, so detailed field notes were taken by the researcher. The other six interviews were audiotaped.
- Four audiotaped interviews have been conducted with disability support staff. All were face-to-face interviews, and ranged in duration from 37 to 57 minutes.
- All recordings have been transcribed, with the transcriptions checked for accuracy by the research team.

## Preliminary data analysis

- Both participant groups described the selection of reasonable adjustments as largely student-driven.
- In negotiating the implementation of reasonable adjustments, disability support staff often relied on the rapport they had built with faculties and teaching staff.
- Interpersonal support is a commonly used reasonable adjustment reported by both participant groups, although this is not always reflected in students' support plans.
- The disability support staff believe further training in the impact of disability and inclusive design for teaching staff would increase the uptake of recommendations for reasonable adjustments.

## Good intentions are not enough

Staff preference for student disclosure of mental illness is influenced by the policy and practice constraints within which they work, their professional background, and personal experience of mental illness. While ostensibly well intentioned, it does not take sufficient account of the social complexities of student disclosure decisions. The need to be defined by a category of difference (Kiuvara & Huefner 2008) in order to receive the mandated adjustments can create a 'separate but equal' mentality (Evans 2008) placing the onus on the individual student to adjust to the learning environment.

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**Thank you**