



Passions & Pathways

Primary Schools & Workplaces in Partnership

Student Reflections

***"When I started Passions & Pathways in Year Six (2012)
it opened my eyes to so many possibilities career wise"***

- Year 12 student (2018)

Part 1: A brief scan of the literature

Introduction and Literature Review

Passions & Pathways aims to provide students with a range of experiences that allow them to explore the world of work and begin to understand the pathways that may be required to reach their work/career aspirations. Current research is providing a greater understanding of the factors that influence young people's future career and educational objectives and help maintain engagement with schooling. As an overview to Passions & Pathways and the following evaluation report, a brief overview of this material is provided below.

The changing world of work

Young people transitioning from education to the workplace face an increasingly uncertain future. Researchers describe the world economy as being in the grip of a fourth industrial revolution (Pastore 2018). In this scenario, the type and nature of jobs is seen to be shifting fundamentally due to the impact of technology and changes in employment models. While estimates of the impact of automation on the future of work vary considerably (Winick 2018), some researchers predict large scale job losses with others suggesting these losses will be offset, or even overtaken, by the creation of a range of new work opportunities. At the same time, the twin factors of casualisation and the rise of the gig-economy (a labour market characterised by short-term engagements or freelance work) are seen to be impacting on the stability of future work (De Stefano 2016). In this environment, uncertain and precarious employment is likely to be the norm where a single qualification or skill set will be unlikely to sustain an individual across their working life. Instead, generic skills, e.g. communication, problem-solving or teamwork skills, are becoming just as sought after requirements as job-specific skills (Polvere & Lim 2015).

Educational and occupational aspirations

Within this context of a rapidly changing world of work, the completion of secondary school remains a major predictor for engagement in post-secondary education and successful job outcomes for young people (Nguyen & Blomberg 2014; Polvere & Lim 2015). Educational and career aspirations follow a similar trajectory for students and form at an early age, often before school (Cahill & Furey 2017; Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network 2013). How a student perceives themselves in these formative years has a lasting impact on their self-perception, aspirations and performance in school (Chambers et al. 2018). Critically, by the age of 15 the educational aspirations of students do not change markedly in their remaining years of schooling (Nguyen & Blomberg 2014) and these aspirations impact year 12 completion rates (Homel et al. 2012). Sikora and Saha (2011) also note that students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds are more likely to lower their educational and aspirations between Years 10 and 12. Further, Gemici et al. (2014) found that parental expectations have a large effect on educational aspirations indicating that if parents do not expect a student to follow a university pathway they are four times less likely to aspire to university themselves.

Career aspirations run parallel to educational aspirations with research suggesting that children with higher career aspirations are less likely to present with behavioural problems at school (Flouri & Panourgia 2012). Both career and educational aspirations are strongly influenced by the social context of and experiences of the individual. Educators believe that children's aspirations for future roles are influenced by gender, knowledge of their parents' and immediate family members' careers, field experiences, travelling and extra-curricular activities (Cahill & Furey 2017). Another important influence on aspirations is the perceptions students hold on the futures available to them (Frigo et al. 2007). In general, children start with broad and ambitious career aspirations that are progressively narrowed as they grow and become more aware of their social boundaries, the hierarchies around them and perceptions of their own abilities (Gottfredson 1981).

Factors that can limit the career aspirations of young people include: socio-economic status, cultural background, who they know and gender. In particular, gender can play a key role in how children see themselves and their future careers. From kindergarten children start to develop gendered understandings of careers (Ford 2011) and by age seven boys, especially, tend to aspire to careers that are traditionally masculine (Gutman & Akerman 2008; Chambers et al. 2018). This process has long term implications for career paths that students pursue as they consciously and unconsciously classify careers as male or female (Flouri & Panourgia 2012). The impact of this appears to be greater for children from lower SES backgrounds (Ford 2011).

Providing career advice

Parents and guardians remain the number one provider of informal career information and influence on student career choice (Canadian Career Development Foundation 2015; Polvere & Lim, 2015). This is the case even though rapid changes in the labour market have lessened parents' confidence in providing information and support on career pathways (Canadian Career Development Foundation 2015). Parents from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to rely on the school for support in career advice for their children (Livingstone 2009 cited in Polvere & Lim 2015). As such, it is seen that where students are facing socio-economic disadvantage the development of formal and informal networks for these students is critical and suggests the important role schools can play in supporting student aspiration and career choice.

Research has identified several important features in career education programs that provide the most effective support for students to make successful transitions to the workplace. Critically, research indicates the career education should be integrated throughout schooling and not provided as an 'add-on' to the curriculum (Polvere & Lim 2015). Career education is also more effective when it starts early in schooling, during the primary years (McMahon & Carroll 2001) and early years education (Cahill & Furey 2017), and should involve exposure to the work environment through job shadowing, volunteering etc. (Bell & Bezanson 2006). Work experience programs should also be frequent throughout schooling, and should take place well before key transitions, such as finishing school (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2015). Career education should also focus on career management skills, equipping young people to face the dynamic and changing world of work (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2015).

In this research context the value of Passions & Pathways is evident for those Year Six students involved. This early engagement provides exposure to the world-of-work at an early age and supports these students to broaden their career horizons through engagement with different working environments and the exploration of different career options. Importantly, involvement in Passions & Pathways potentially encourages students to think more clearly about their future working life, to form career aspirations and develop a greater understanding of the requirements needed to reach these goals. These experiences may also assist students from different backgrounds to look beyond their own social experience, to expand their sense of possibilities and aspirations, and to begin to develop the networks required to support their pathway and career attainment in the future.

Part 2: Interviews with BSSC students from the initial 2012 Passions & Pathways cohort

This study looks the views of students from the first 2012 Passions & Pathways cohort to build a qualitative understanding of the impact of their involvement with Passions & Pathways activities. Given the scope of this project, the interviews focussed on those students now in Year 12 at Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC).

Passions & Pathways 2012

In 2012, Passions & Pathways involved Lightning Reef Primary School (LRPS) and Eaglehawk Primary School (EPS) and included workplace visits, classroom presentations by guest presenters and Young Industry Ambassadors, completion of a six-week applied project and participation in the Passions & Pathways Expo. These activities were delivered in the schools one day a week in six-week blocks over two terms to 52 Year Six students.

The broad objectives of Passions & Pathways included building an understanding of the work place, exposing students to a range of career/job opportunities, and emphasising the value of staying connected to school and completing Year 12 or its equivalent.

Overview of the 2012 cohort's destinations

To provide some context for the Passions & Pathways students' directions since this time, the destinations of those students who enrolled to start at BSSC have been followed. The scope of this study did not provide an opportunity to follow-up on those students not enrolled at BSSC.

Details of the student destinations based on data provided by BSSC to 1 June 2018 are provided in Table 1 below. Of the 34 students enrolled at BSSC for the start of Year 11, 24 remain in education or training at either BSSC or Bendigo TAFE with one student in an apprenticeship. Of the students who had exited BSSC, one was employed part-time, six were seeking employment, and for three students, their destinations were unknown. Of the 19 students continuing at BSSC in Year 12, 14 were undertaking VCE programs and 5 VCAL programs.

Table 1: 2012 Passions & Pathways cohort destinations (June 2018)

Passion & Pathways Cohort (Year Six 2012) N=52	Not at BSSC	Enrolled at BSSC			
		Never commenced in 2017	Exited during Year 11 (2017)	Exited during Year 12 (2018)	Attending BSSC (June 2018)
Status					
Students	18 (35%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	8 (15%)	19 (37%)
Destinations	Destinations unknown	1 TAFE 3 unknown destinations	2 TAFE 1 seeking employment	1 TAFE 1 apprenticeship 1 employment 5 seeking employment	7 VCE 7 VCE with VET 4 VCAL 1 VCAL/SBAT

The BSSC Year 12 interviews



BSSC student cohort

Nineteen students from the 2012 Passions & Pathways cohort were identified as still attending BSSC in June 2018. Of this group, 17 students were invited to participate in the interview with six students agreeing to the interview with a further seven indicating their willingness to participate if they could respond to the questions in writing. Those students not provided with an invitation were unavailable to participate at this time.

The interviews were held in early June 2018 and supported by the BSSC MIPS team. The interviews followed a semi-structure interview format with considerations made to ensure a relaxed and safe environment for the students.

One student was unable to attend the interview on the day and four students completed a written response – providing for a total of nine participating students.

The participating students were composed of:

- Seven females and two males.
- Five from Eaglehawk Primary School and four from Lightning Reef Primary School.
- Five undertaking VCE/VET, two VCE, one VCAL and one VCAL/SBAT.
- Two from an Indigenous background.

The interviews focussed on three main areas:

1. The Passions & Pathways program and the students' memories of this time as well as their contemporary career/work aspirations.
2. Their thoughts on the workplace and what it means to be a participant in the world of work.
3. Their reflections on the decision-making process they have used in establishing their career/work goals and the resources that supported this.

Limitations: Given the small number of students participating and their specific position as Year 12 BSSC students, the following summary provides a qualitative description of the experience of these of these students only.

What were the reflections of these students?

1. Passions & Pathways

For most students there were clear and often vivid memories of their involvement with Passions & Pathways activities in 2012. For the majority, the applied project made a clear impact providing the opportunity for 'hands-on experience' and to take part in a range of activities related to the workplace. Students indicated a high level of engagement particularly when the project was based in an area of personal interest.

Also valued were the workplace visits with this exposure providing new insights with one student revealing that prior to their experience, 'I didn't really know what a workplace was'. These visits also provided the opportunity to see 'different workplaces' and provided an indication of the range of work options. As the students indicated: 'I remember learning about a lot of stuff I never really thought of doing before'; that 'there was a wider variety of jobs [than I expected]'; and, 'It opened my eyes to so many possibilities, career-wise'.

These visits also provided a broader understanding of the world of work for some. For one student it gave 'insights on what to expect' when in the workforce while another reflected, 'before I went to a work place, I didn't know how many jobs it actually takes to run a business'. There was also an indication of the development of an understanding of the value of work for their future lives with one student noting the visits allowed them to see 'work was very rewarding and kind of exciting'.

It was interesting to note that a number of students retained physical evidence of their Passions & Pathways experience suggesting a strong and meaningful connection. One student had photos on their phone while others indicated that had had kept their applied project with one bringing this in to show at the interview.

When asked about their career/work aspirations at Year Six, nearly all students indicated they had established ideas and aspirations at this time. Some of these were more general such as 'hair and beauty', 'hospitality' and 'interior design' while other work roles were more specific including becoming a vet, following dad as a plumber/mechanic, becoming a teacher and joining the police force. For all students, these initial considerations changed over time, often based on realisations that their initial choice was no longer appropriate for them. For some, this change was based on the need to adjust their aspirations due to concerns about meeting educational/entry requirements. For others, these changes seemed based on establishing work/career choices that provided for greater intrinsic satisfaction e.g. moving from an initial focus on hair and beauty to a concern for looking after the health of others or the understanding of the need to 'have a career that I love'.

2. The world of work

In responding to this question, the students focussed more on their current experience of moving into the workplace with only a small number of students sharing their views on their view of the benefits of being in the workplace. The perceived advantages included gaining independence (financial and from study and home) and time to do hobbies.

A number of participants also reiterated the significance of having 'hands-on' experience in both helping to provide options and to help establish an understanding of what to expect once you are in the workplace. One of the students suggested, '[having hands-on experience] helps you know what you might expect and to be less nervous'. While another noted, 'from work experience I learnt [work] was not always fun'.

For some, moving into the workplace was an opportunity to turn a passion or skill into a worthwhile career that could support them:

'I guess it sort of good to turn the thing that you enjoy doing the most into an actual living. I want to turn my passion for making films and producing them into a career that I can actually live off'.

'I like drawing and kind of wanted to do something in drawing and design. I knew [being a tattoo designer] was a job but I didn't know that I could do it so well'.

One student spoke of the intrinsic rewards of working (including the building of self-confidence) indicating that, for her, the importance of work:

'[Is] being able to provide knowledge to a person and having them take me seriously. It would feel just great to help others when I've spent so much time studying, learning to get where I [want to] be'.

The students also discussed their ideas of the requirements to successfully engage in the workplace or in establishing a clear pathway towards participation. The importance of having motivation, understanding what is required in the work role or to reach this position, and having options in terms of pathways and work roles were highlighted. For one student, 'knowing what you excel in' was also important in making your pathway 'easier to travel through'.

Generally, there was a clear understanding by the students of the pathway needed to enter into their chosen career. These were diverse and included further education such as TAFE and university, building a portfolio of work or trying to move directly into an industry while doing further training.

In discussing the challenge to moving into the workplace, a number of students saw maintaining motivation and their focus on schoolwork as the biggest hurdles. For others, there was the concern of not passing or obtaining the appropriate [ATAR] score to move into the courses they wanted. For some, there were more personal challenges such as being a carer, building language skills, or developing self-confidence, however, there was a degree of optimism in being able to meet these challenges.

'I tell myself that I can do anything if I put my mind to it and focus on it. Like you will get there and of course there will be obstacles, You've just got to learn to get over them because that is what life is about – it isn't smooth'.

3. Work goal decision-making

While their decision-making processes on moving into specific careers/jobs was not always articulated by the students, some suggested the iterative nature of this process and outlined the different influences on their decisions. As one student outlined:

'It's like a slow realisation from one thing to another and things will spark [this process]. Passions & Pathways sparked my want to do design but there were also other things surrounding [this choice] like my dad was a graphic designer, work experience and different classes in school. Everything builds up and you go through transition stages where you say, 'Oh, I could do that', then you look into it and then it becomes what you want to do'.

Other influences supporting decision-making were also suggested including building an understanding of the requirements of the job, role models including family and others, and building self-confidence in your capacity to meet the differing skill requirements for the role. Support from teachers and school was seen as critical by some in providing the necessary information but also the emotional support and guidance needed to keep them motivated and confident in their chosen pathway.

Interestingly, these students generally saw themselves as having stronger career aspirations than their peers and were able to separate their decision-making from the influence of their social friends. In one student's reflection on their peers she commented. 'I think the majority of them don't really know what they want to do'. Often for these students, support for their aspirations was often sought outside the sphere of influence of their social peers.

Students were more confident in indicating how they sourced information on jobs and educational requirements. Most used the internet (university, TAFE, industry and business websites) to research the availability of different courses, prerequisites, and the requirements of different work roles and indicated they considered these a trusted source of information. Some found that talking to individuals was also important, particularly those with first hand experience in the career/job that you were interested in.

Conclusion

The group of Year 12 students providing input into this evaluation represents only a specific group of students who were part of Passions & Pathways cohort in 2012. These students were clearly able to recall their participation in Passions & Pathways in Year Six. Their reflections showed they valued the experience and each student was able to reflect on the influence this involvement had on their understanding of the workplace, their knowledge of workplace opportunities, and on the continuing process of their career decision-making. The experiential nature of the program appeared to have a high level of impact creating strong and vivid memories for these students and in providing a base of understanding to support future decision-making.

The experience of these students also indicates the broad support provided by parents and family members (provision of advice, motivation and as role models) for many of these students. Other support such as teachers and school-based programs were also highly valued. However, it may suggest that this group of students is not wholly representative of the intended target group for Passions & Pathways. Further engagement with a more inclusive sample of students in any new study may be useful in allowing a deeper understanding of Passion & Pathways and its impact.

Recommendations

To support a continuous and comprehensive process for data collection on the Passions & Pathways cohorts it is recommended that:

1. A regular process (yearly) is established for tracking and monitoring student pathways from participating schools at:
 - a. Year 10
 - b. Year 12
2. A broader evaluation be undertaken every three years to review the impact of Passions & Pathways and the effectiveness of its processes.

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