

The outcomes of mainstream post-secondary education for young people with intellectual disability: investing in human capital or whiling away the time?

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Abstract: In Malta, as in other countries, the investment in post-secondary and tertiary education is based on human capital theory, whereby education is seen as important on an individual as well as an economic level. This paper analyses the outcomes of mainstream post-secondary education for people with intellectual disability within the framework of this theory. A qualitative study was carried out with eight former students of the Pathway Programme at MCAST and the Key Skills course at ITS, as well as an MCAST representative. The main findings show that education is viewed by the participants as a necessary step to finding employment. This is very much in line with human capital theory which considers education to be an investment in human capital that has economic returns in terms of increasing students' employability. However, the various issues raised by the research participants regarding difficulties with their current job or their job prospects may make it seem as if the post-secondary courses they attended have led to failure. This paper argues that the continued need for support experienced by people with intellectual disability may be seen as undermining their ability to join the labour market, even if the persons with intellectual disability interviewed do not see any contradiction between the two. For young people with intellectual disability to have equal opportunities in the workplace, it is essential for their voice to be heard, and for their perspectives to be understood. It is also essential for their support needs to be attended to, while appreciating that having support needs is not contradictory to being an employee.

Key words: Intellectual disability, mainstream post-secondary education, human capital, employment

Introduction

Education is a very important tool both for individual as well as for national development. It contributes to combatting social exclusion since it has a very high impact on personal development and the individual's employability. This contribution can in turn help promote economic development. The link between personal and economic development is the basis of human capital theory which, as Williams & Swail (2005) note, has had an enduring effect on the way we comprehend investment in people since it was first introduced in the eighteenth century. The principal idea underlying this theory is that people are part of the economic investment of their own society. Consequently, society can invest in human capital or resources in the same way as it invests in physical capital and the production of goods. On the other hand, this theory has also been criticised on various accounts. Fitzsimons (1999) states that "[h]uman capital theory, then, is an impoverished notion of capital. It is unable to understand human activity other than as the exchange of commodities and the notion of capital employed is purely a quantitative one." (p.2).

In Malta, as in other countries, the drive to invest in the education of young people through post-secondary and tertiary education takes its cue from human capital theory. Continuing education can have a positive effect on economic development through improving people's, especially young people's, employability skills and ensuring that the skills of current and future workers match the needs of industry and of the country's economy. The importance given to the continuation of education after the end of the compulsory school years is attested by the emphasis placed both by the Maltese government and the European Commission on tackling the issue of early-school leaving in the country (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

The commitment in Malta to investing in the human capital of young people extends to those who have a disability. The introduction of an inclusive education policy in 1994 (KNPD, 1993) in mainstream primary and secondary schools has led to an increase in young people with disabilities furthering their studies after the end of compulsory education (Mangiafico, 2016). However, the trajectory from compulsory education to post-secondary education and eventually to employment is very often fraught with difficulties for many disabled students, and these transitions can be even more challenging for people with intellectual disability. These challenges occur mainly because persons with intellectual disability, generally speaking, have low academic qualifications (Borg, 2005) which hinder them from continuing their education in mainstream post-secondary institutions or from finding employment in the open labour market. Additionally, since they have

difficulties in learning, they often need specialised programmes that enable them to further their education and to enhance their employability skills.

In the light of the link between post-secondary education and future employment prospects, the main research question of the research presented in this paper regards the outcomes of mainstream post-secondary education for people with intellectual disability. This research is based on a study carried out by Pleven (2015). Our paper focuses on three research questions:

1. What are the experiences of students in mainstream post-secondary education?
2. What impact do post-secondary education opportunities have on the future of students with intellectual disability after they leave full time education and especially in relation to employment?
3. What are the factors that impact on the opportunities for employment of students with intellectual disability?

Background

Stodden & Whelley (2004) identify three types of post-secondary options for people with intellectual disabilities. The first one is the 'Substantially separate model', which is a programme that is different from the curriculum that other students follow. These programmes are many a times held in a different building since the programme is different from the mainstream courses and is based on acquiring 'life skills', living in the community, vocational placements and so on. The 'Mixed program model' involves a combined approach of having students learning the skills mentioned above, which are in separate programmes, but also following some other courses with other students on campus. Finally, the 'Individualized support model' very often provides individual support to students and assistance that they need to follow college courses that they want.

Zafft, Hart & Zimbrich (2004) contend that "[p]articipation in post-secondary education is a known predictor of a successful employment outcome for youth without disabilities. There is research documenting that this is true for youth with disabilities as well." (p.45). For people with intellectual disability the link between post-secondary education and employment is clear. Most of the research carried out in this area has been conducted in the United States. A study by Grigal, Hart & Migliore (2011) notes that students with intellectual disability have less favorable post-school outcomes when compared to students who have other disabilities. Similarly, in a study carried out in Germany, Gebhardt, Tretter, Schwab & Gasteiger-Klicpera (2011) analysed the current German dual system combining apprenticeships with vocational education, and the efficacy of vocational training schemes in

the transition from schools to employment for persons with intellectual disability. Some of the results of this study indicate that there are not enough work placements for persons with intellectual disabilities following segregated vocational programmes funded by the state.

These work placements can be very important. In research about the outcomes for people with mild intellectual disability in the United States, Joshi, Bouck & Maeda (2012) conclude that there is a positive relationship between participating in a work placement and employment following school. On the other hand, a study carried out by Baer, Daviso, Flexer, McMahan & Meindl (2011), with 409 students with intellectual or multiple disabilities in the Great Lakes states found that while “inclusion was a significant predictor of postsecondary education, career and technical education and work study programs did not reach significance as predictors of post-school employment. For these students, gender and minority issues contributed to most of the variance” (p.133). Hence, there are still many challenges faced by students with intellectual disability to find employment following post-secondary education.

Not many studies have been identified which were focused on the experiences and perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary mainstream education. Corby, Cousins & Slevin (2012) conducted a review of the literature about people with intellectual disabilities who are in post-secondary education or higher education. They note that:

While research is available in this area it tends to be limited and focussed (sic) more on policy and institutional practices than the experiences of students, particularly students with intellectual disability. Research is needed to examine additional factors influencing both the availability of education at post-secondary and third levels and the experiences of students who are undertaking education at these levels. (Corby et al., 2012, pp. 82-83)

The research presented in this paper focuses on the experiences and perspectives of students in two mainstream post-secondary programmes for people with intellectual disability that were set up since the introduction of inclusive education in Malta. These are the *Pathway to Independent Living* Programme at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology, 2016), and the *Key Skills for Independent Living* course at the Institute of Tourism Studies (Institute of Tourism Studies, 2014). These two courses provide a sheltered environment to students with an intellectual disability, with a high staff-to-student ratio. The method used for carrying out the research is set out below.

Method

In order to address the research questions set out above, a qualitative methodology was used, where semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight former students of the *Pathway Programme* at MCAST, and the *Key Skills* course at ITS. Prior to these interviews, a pilot interview was carried out. Some participants also had a family member present for the interview and in some instances, they also provided some additional information. An interview was also held with an MCAST representative. The interview with the representative of the *Key Skills* course at ITS had to be cancelled, since the course was not open that year and, following changes in the management of the Institute, no one was available who was familiar with the course. Some information from the MCAST representative which is relevant to exploring the research questions is included in the findings below.

In line with the principles of emancipatory disability research (Stone and Priestley, 1996, as cited in Barnes, 2001), this study is based on the social model of disability, whereby the difficulties encountered by people with intellectual disability in post-secondary education are seen in terms of the socially-constructed barriers that they encounter. Furthermore, in line with these principles, it is the point of view of the persons with intellectual disability who were interviewed that is given primary importance.

Since the study involved human subjects, there are various ethical considerations that have been given utmost importance throughout the research process. Rubin and Babbie (2005) identify five main ethical considerations, namely: that participation is voluntary and there is informed consent; no harm is done to participants; ensuring anonymous participation and confidentiality; not deceiving participants; and being true in the analysis and reporting of data, also without making the participants easily identifiable. Before actually starting the research, clearance was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Malta and it was ensured that the above ethical issues were addressed during the whole research process.

The Participants

The table below provides a profile of the participants with intellectual disability who took part in the study, using pseudonyms.

	Fictitious Name	Age	Gender	Primary & Secondary Education	Post-Secondary Education Courses	Previous employment / work experiences	Occupation/ Status following MCAST/ITS	Other activities
1	Laura	22	F	Special School	ITS <i>Key skills for Independent Living</i> course	Voluntary job experience in a cafeteria	Current: ETC (Job Bridge) -	Special Olympics,

					<p><i>Other courses:</i></p> <p>INSPIRE course</p> <p>MCAST (<i>Pathway to Independent Living</i>)</p>	<p>Work placements (ITS/MCAST)</p>	<p>sheltered employment</p>	<p>travelling abroad</p>
2	Emma	34	F	Mainstream	<p>ITS <i>Key skills for Independent Living</i></p> <p><i>Other courses:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ETC Course - Getting Through (Independent Living Skills) • Me2 course • ETC + Inspire - Sheltered employment 	<p>Work placements (ITS)</p> <p>Sheltered employment</p> <p>Paid employment in a factory (left due to sickness)</p>	<p>Current: Sheltered Employment / Job-exposure scheme</p> <p>Voluntary work in a hotel</p>	<p>Computer courses</p>
3	Peter	26	M	Special School	<p>ITS <i>Key skills for Independent Living</i></p>	<p>-Work placements (ITS)</p> <p>-Work placements (Special School)</p>	<p>Current: Work exposure at INSPIRE</p> <p>Employed in a hotel (Bridging the gap scheme - ETC)</p>	
4	Keith	23	M	Mainstream	<p>ITS (<i>Key skills for Independent Living</i>)</p> <p><i>Previous courses:</i></p> <p>-ETC course</p> <p>-MCAST (other course not completed due to bullying)</p> <p>-MCAST <i>Pathway to Independent Living</i></p>	<p>-Work placements (ITS/MCAST)</p> <p>-Work found through MCAST in a factory for 3 years but had to stop due to other commitments</p>	<p>Current: Employed (part-time - contract based)</p>	
5	Tiziana	19	F	Mainstream	<p>MCAST (<i>Pathway to Independent Living</i>)</p> <p>ETC Course</p>	<p>Work placements (MCAST)</p>	<p>Unemployed (registering for work)</p>	

					(cleaner)			
6	Eman	22	M	Mainstream	MCAST (<i>Pathway to Independent Living</i>)	Work placements (MCAST)	Employed (full time)	
7	Julia	25	F	Mainstream	MCAST (<i>Pathway to Independent Living</i>) MCAST Level 1 MCAST Level 2 (not completed) Special School	Work placements (MCAST)	Current: Employed (part time)	
8	Josephine	26	F	Special School	MCAST <i>Pathway to Independent Living</i> MCAST Entry Level 1 MCAST Entry Level 2 (not completed)	Work placements (MCAST)	Current: Attends Day Centre/ unemployed	Drama, travel

Table 1: Profile of participants who took part in this study

Students' employment-related aspirations

The findings presented below show a mixture of positive and negative experiences and outcomes for the eight participants in this study. Needless to say, the responses of these participants cannot be assumed to be representative of other young people with intellectual disability who have attended post-secondary vocational education. However, the insights gained from an analysis of the perspectives of these participants can help us gain a better understanding of the context in which this education is offered. (For a more comprehensive analysis of the findings see Plevin (2015).

Education is viewed by the participants as a necessary step to their finding employment. For instance, Julia noted that she has learnt how to be independent, which is a necessary skill for employment. She explained that her teacher used to encourage her to call herself to make an appointment with the hairdresser: "she told me that when you are employed, you cannot ask others to do things for you, you have to do it yourself".

The research participants showed their awareness of the value of their continuing education, expressing a keen interest in learning more, especially to acquire skills that improve their employability. Two participants reported that they had completed both the MCAST *Pathway Programme* and the ITS *Key Skills* course. Although none of the four participants who completed the latter continued another course at ITS, two out of four participants who completed

the *Pathway Programme* followed other courses at MCAST, namely the ICT Entry Level 1 course and part of the Entry Level 2 course in the same subject. Furthermore, four out of eight participants noted that they have done other courses outside MCAST or ITS, including computer courses such as ECDL, a cleaner course, and a drama course.

With regards to work placements, all participants mentioned that they had had positive experiences with such placements within and outside MCAST and ITS whilst they were following the *Pathway Programme* and the *Key Skills* courses respectively. Seven out of eight participants agreed that both courses prepared them better for employment. In fact, they also directly related the courses they followed with their employment prospects, with Keith for example noting that “[y]ou do not really have many options at ITS, you either go in a kitchen, in a restaurant, things like that. You cannot for example, be a salesman, you know?”

The views expressed by these young people with intellectual disability are very much in line with human capital theory which considers education to be an investment in human capital that has economic returns in terms of increasing students’ employability. In the interviews, they presented themselves as able and competent learners and employees or prospective employees, with aspirations that are commensurate with the education they had received and the skills they had acquired. However, the outcome of that preparation was not necessarily in line with their ambitions.

In fact, all participants have the ambition of improving their circumstances vis a vis employment. As can be seen from Table 1, only Eman, Julia and Keith had a job at the time of conducting the research, with Eman being the only one to be employed on a full-time basis. Keith’s part-time contract is renewed yearly, while Julia’s is indefinite. Laura, Emma and Peter were employed part-time as part of a job-exposure scheme at the time the study took place. Tiziana and Josephine were unemployed and seeking work.

The wishes expressed by the eight research participants during their interviews are a strong indication that the outcomes for them at the time that the research took place were not satisfactory. Even those who are employed are not necessarily happy with their job situation. For example, Keith noted the various problems he was encountering at work:

I do something and it turns out worse. If I wash the floor, he tells me for example, it is not good... you do something well, and it’s like they do not appreciate what you do... Even for example, they are always wanting more... or otherwise you try to do your best, and he tells you... ‘you are not doing enough.’

Furthermore, Eman is the only participant who is in full-time employment but even he would like to do different work because his current job is quite repetitive.

The various points raised by these research participants regarding their current job or their job prospects may make it seem as if the post-secondary courses they attended have led to failure, especially since these are courses which are described as being “particularly designed to help them acquire the skills required to gain and maintain employment” (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology, 2016). This orientation towards employment is in line with similar post-secondary courses for people with intellectual disability in other countries (Corby, Cousins & Slevin, 2012).

The analysis of the findings presented focuses on those themes that emerged from the participants’ perspectives and that throw light on some of the reasons for this situation.

Students’ need for supportive and protective environments

At the same time as speaking of themselves as being competent learners and as being actively engaged in the labour market, either through being employed or through job seeking, the research participants also spoke about their support needs and even about their need for protection in certain instances. Expressing such needs may seem at odds with presenting oneself as a member (or potential member) of the labour force.

The research participants identified various needs that they experienced at different stages of their post-secondary education, starting from the admission process for the *Pathway* course which entailed taking a written test and sitting for an interview. Most participants needed support with filling in the forms. Tiziana also needed support for the interview: “I was afraid to go inside [the interview room] alone, I wanted my teacher to come with me.” In fact, her learning support assistant (LSA) and even her mother were called inside and stayed with her for the duration of the interview. However, like most of the other participants, she then found it easy to start and follow the course.

The lack of difficulty in following the *Pathways* and *Key Skills* courses may be at least partly attributed to the way they are set up. While both courses are located within a mainstream setting, they are provided within a relatively sheltered environment, on the lines of the ‘substantially separate model’ identified by Stodden & Whelley (2004). In fact, the MCAST representative noted that the *Pathway* course is tailor-made for the different needs of the

students, with small class sizes, and personal assistants when required and a learning support assistant in each class.

Significantly, difficulties were reported in less sheltered settings. As noted by the MCAST representative, “[t]he support provided is much less as students progress to higher level courses, it automatically drops.” Josephine stated that she found it easy to start and follow the Pathway course and Entry Level 1 course at MCAST, but she found it difficult to continue the Level 2 course since the content was very difficult for her.

Josephine’s comments about her experience of following the Level 2 course raises a very important issue – that of the relationship between the ex-*Pathway* students and their non-disabled classmates. In her interview, Josephine noted that:

Before, we used to be all together ... then Level 2, they started to not let us stay all together so that we will get used to it, but the normal students used to laugh at us.

Josephine also noted that the teacher used to stop the other students from laughing at her. What the research participants needed to get used to was being in a mainstream education environment learning alongside non-disabled students without one-to-one support from an LSA. This would have been the first time that they were learning in such conditions since, even if they had attended mainstream primary and secondary school, they would have been directly supported by an LSA in the classroom (MCIE 2000).

With reference to their experiences in less supported environments, it is on the relationships with their classmates that the research participants mostly focused. Some of the participants also noted that the course content was more difficult for them to comprehend as they moved to Level 1 and 2 courses.

It is pertinent to note that, on the whole, the participants reported good relationships with their classmates at the *Pathway Programme* and the *Key Skills* courses, with whom they made friends. With reference to students from other courses, five participants referred to friendships they had formed with these students. Julia said that the students from other courses, “were friendly, yes yes, they used to talk to me”. On a contrasting note, Keith said that he did not talk to other students:

[w]e did not go next to them and they did not come next to us, we always used to stay on our own and nobody else used to come near us. They did not come with us, they didn’t. If we used to mix, it was only with two of them.

When it came to these negative encounters with non-disabled students, Keith, who completed both the MCAST *Pathway Programme* and the ITS *Key skills* course, even mentioned how he had to stop following a mainstream course at MCAST due to bullying.

When it came to the research participants' relationship with their teachers and LSAs, only Julia noted that she did not like one of the staff members of the course, since she used to tell her off. Otherwise, the other participants reported positive relationships or did not comment on their relationship with their educators.

The pattern that emerges from what these eight research participants had to say about their relationships with educators and with their peers is that they enjoyed better relationships in the more sheltered environments of the *Pathway* and the *Key Skills* courses. Venturing outside the protection afforded by these environments led to problems, especially for those who referred to being isolated, being laughed at, and even being bullied.

Being in non-protective environments

Such negative experiences do not augur well for inclusion in the open labour market. Even if mainstream post-secondary education courses are not sheltered like the *Pathway* and the *Key Skills* courses, they still are comparatively more sheltered than most workplaces. Being able to cope in the less supportive structure of the workplace entails acquiring skills that enhance one's employability but are not necessarily directly related to a specific job.

Among the employability skills identified by Rosenberg, Heimler & Morote (2012), one finds interpersonal skills and within this category one can place the ability to travel to and from work independently. The research participants noted how they were encouraged to travel to and from MCAST and ITS by bus, since acquiring this skill would greatly enhance their ability to take advantage of employment opportunities. Seven out of the eight participants said that they did use the bus to go to their respective colleges, although at times they also used to get a lift from parents or friends. Some participants had support to learn how to use the bus. In the case of Tiziana, her mother explained how she accompanied her daughter for some time because she was afraid that she would be picked up on if she travelled on her own or be run over by a car. It was after the lecturers at *Pathways* emphasized the importance of fostering Tiziana's independence that the mother stopped accompanying her. Josephine is the only student who kept being accompanied by her parents to attend MCAST. Significantly, in the interview she remarked that one of the problems that she faced in finding employment

was “the bus, since I do not know how to catch a bus alone”. When asked if she would want someone to teach her how to use the bus, she said that she wanted to since this would enable her to travel to and from work on her own.

As can be seen from the findings presented in these two sections, the eight young people with intellectual disability who participated in this research share the aspirations of most other young people who continue their education after the compulsory schooling age with the aim of improving their employment prospects. At the same time, they also pointed to support needs which indicate that they were quite a long way away from attaining the autonomy and independence that is normally associated with employability and with adulthood in general. This lack of independence can be seen for instance in the way some students needed support with the selection process to start the MCAST course, with travelling independently by public transport, and with facing bullying or other unwanted behavior in unsheltered settings. At face value, the expression of such needs strikes a discordant note with the presentation of oneself as an able worker, especially because they are needs which are more usually associated with childhood and adolescence rather than with adulthood.

A prolonged adolescence in the world of work

Shepperdson (2000) is among those authors who note that for people with intellectual disability adolescence may be ‘a period which is prolonged well into the ages when adult life is usually taken for granted’ (p. 55). Given that employment is one of the markers of adulthood, and that the demands of the workplace require adult-like dispositions, having one’s adolescence protracted beyond what is considered to be typical can be detrimental to one’s employment prospects. Furthermore, as May (2000) states, people with intellectual disability are also denied other experiences which are markers of adulthood, such as intimate relationships, having a family and living independently. The lack of these experiences in turn reinforces the image of people with intellectual disability as eternal children (Gould and Dodd, 2012). By extension, it is a challenge for young people with intellectual disability to be viewed as adults who can make a valid contribution to the labour market through their human capital.

The possibility of people with intellectual disability being seen as inadequately prepared for the workplace, even after completing their post-secondary vocational education courses, is further reinforced by the sense of vulnerability that often surrounds them. Regardless of whether the vulnerability is perceived or actual, and regardless of whether or not it is created by the environment rather than being an innate characteristic of the person (Beckett, 2006), it undermines the effectiveness of presenting oneself as a competent worker.

People with intellectual disability following post-secondary vocational education courses can therefore find themselves in a paradoxical situation. While they are provided with the opportunity of continuing to develop their potential, especially in relation to employability skills, they do so in an environment which has a significant degree of support and protection built into it and which thus serves as a bridge to the more demanding mainstream. The responses of the research participants show that they did welcome this support and protection, even while they were preparing themselves to enter the much less supportive world of work. The looser, and therefore less protective, environment of the Level 2 ICT course was found to be challenging by those few students who continued (or tried to continue) their education at that level. This can be seen in the difficulties they reported with having to cope with learning with no direct support from an LSA and with building positive relationships with their new, non-disabled, fellow students.

The students' needs are also highlighted in the support they received to learn to travel independently by public transport, an activity that places them on their own in the mainstream of society. Tiziana and Josephine in particular experienced prolonged dependence on their parents to take them to college. It can be argued that these two students' continued dependence in this area was foisted upon them as a result of perceived rather than real vulnerability. After all, Tiziana did eventually start using the bus on her own. And Josephine identifies her inability to do so as being inimical to her employment opportunities. But there are also instances where the research participants themselves referred to their need for support and even protection in certain situations. It is significant, for instance, that Josephine was grateful for her teacher offering her protection by stopping her Foundation classmates' bullying behaviour, as mentioned above.

The sense of vulnerability and the need for protection and support is therefore perceived not only by educators and parents, but also sometimes by the students themselves. Catering for these needs can undermine the students' ability to become more autonomous and therefore more adult-like, and it certainly undermines their ability to be perceived as adults who are competent enough to enter the workforce. This is because, as May (2000) observes, adulthood requires 'control over one's life which is so often denied people with intellectual disability' (p. 76). This situation can create very significant obstacles on the path to employability and to becoming perceived as autonomous human beings capable of contributing towards the economy, as envisaged by human capital theory. However, the research participants do not necessarily see any contradiction between needing support and becoming an economically productive adult. Employers, on the other hand, may take a different view.

Dependence on the goodwill of employers

One important aspect that comes out of what the research participants said about their experiences in post-secondary education and beyond is their dependence on other people's goodwill, especially on the goodwill of employers to give them work opportunities. The students' inability to find fulfilling full-time employment has already been noted. For most of them, no paid job materialized from the unpaid work placements. Laura mentioned working in a cafeteria for a number of years, where she was only given pocket money. This suggests that the owner of the cafeteria was only letting her work out of his or her own goodwill, and was treating her like a child in the process by given her only some pocket money.

Similarly, there is evidence in the research literature that the work carried out by people with intellectual disabilities is not always valued or else is perceived as an act of charity by the employer towards the disabled person. For example, many of the people with intellectual disability who participated in the study carried out by Pearson, Wong and Pierini (2002) in their study in Gaungzhou, China, note that they are denied the right to work. 'They could not gain the respect of the community because most of those who had jobs were not carrying out meaningful tasks, but rather their employment was a token of charity or welfare' (Pearson et al., 2002, p. 381). As Camilleri (2015) argues, the continued perception of disabled people as objects of charity means that 'employment is still seen as an act of charity' (pg. 12).

To return then to the question posed in the title of our paper, are post-secondary courses for people with intellectual disability a sound investment in the human capital of these students or do they end up just another way for them to while away the day? It is to a discussion of possible answers to this question that we now turn.

The able and support-dependent worker

A pattern emerges from the foregoing discussion of the findings generated from the interviews with the eight participants of their being, on the whole, better understood, supported and have their abilities and potential recognised in contexts created with their needs in mind, than in wider mainstream social contexts. In the latter, their expressions of the need for support may strike a discordant note with their aspirations for finding employment or improving their current employment situation. There can therefore be said to be two discourses in operation here: the discourse of the 'able worker' and that of the 'support-dependent person'. For people with intellectual disability, and for those living or working closely with them, there may not be any contradiction between these two discourses. But the validity of this position is thrown into doubt in a society which places little if any

value on the moral worth of people with intellectual disability. Indeed, as Davy (2015) states in her discussion of this subject,

[p]eople with intellectual disability have too rarely been seen in philosophy or in wider society as persons of moral worth in their own right, in part because of the idealized conceptions of reason and autonomy that have informed liberal theory. (p. 135)

These idealized conceptions result in very negative and tangible consequences in various aspects of life for people with intellectual disability, not least the denial of their citizenship rights (Budge and Wels, 2016) and, in the case of fetuses diagnosed with cognitive impairments like Down syndrome, their right to life (Darrin and Dixon, 2008). Within the world of work, one consequence is discounting the validity of people with intellectual disability positioning themselves as both an 'able worker' and a 'support-dependent person', or to combine the two, a 'support-dependent worker'.

As a consequence, there is little space in mainstream workplaces for arrangements such as providing protection against bullying or other unwanted behaviour, supporting certain workers to travel to and from work, or ensuring that work-related tasks are taught in ways that address the learning needs of workers with intellectual disability. To some extent this lacuna is addressed through the provision of employment support services, such as the ones offered by Jobsplus (2016) through its Inclusive Employment Services. Together with relatively sheltered post-secondary education courses such as *Pathways* and *Key Skills*, such services do enhance the employment prospects of people with intellectual disability and do result in some of the latter finding jobs. These initiatives are a strong indicator of the potential that exists in the labour market, a potential that is not always readily perceived by employers. This may be because the success rate, purely in terms of the amount of jobs secured, is not necessarily proportionate to the amount of effort and resources that are dedicated to supporting people with intellectual disability to further their education and to find and retain employment.

But the limited success of these initiatives can also be attributed to their being equated with 'incentives [that] seem to be a compulsory *quid pro quo* for employing what are seen as basically non-productive, social cases' (Camilleri, 2015, p. 12). This is a far cry from considering the employment of people with intellectual disability as an investment in human capital. As Bouchard (2008) states, human capital belongs to individuals who can foster it and make it grow through education and then put it to profitable use in the economy through their employment. Consequently, whether or not post-secondary education opportunities for people with intellectual disability are seen as an investment depends not so much on the outcomes of their education but on

how they are perceived by employers and, by extension, by society in general. People with intellectual disability thus find themselves in a double bind in which their human capital is not invested in because they are not provided with satisfactory employment opportunities, and they are not provided with such opportunities because they are not perceived as holders of human capital.

This situation is rather ironic given that awareness of the potential of people with intellectual disability and knowledge of how to realize that potential have grown exponentially over the last decades. The direct and simple equation of intellectual disability with cognitive impairment and difficulties in learning adaptive behaviour has long given way to a more nuanced description that also takes into account the positive effect that an enabling environment has on the development of knowledge, skills and competencies of people with intellectual disability (Rapley, 2004; AAIDD 2016). But this more nuanced understanding of the nature of intellectual disability still seems to be mostly restricted to people with intellectual disability, those who live with them and those who work with them as educators or providers of disability-specific support-services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking (2014) has spoken of the 'attitudinal, physical and financial barriers' that disabled people around the world face, and has called upon '[g]overnments everywhere' to address these barriers so that disabled people can 'unlock their potential' and 'get a chance to shine' (unpaged). However, it can be clearly seen from the research presented in this article that it is not only governments that need to engage in barrier-removal. Employers, and the world of work more generally, also need to appreciate that Hawking's call applies for them as well as for governments. More importantly, they need to realise that his call applies not only for disabled people who possess the type of intelligence that is sought for in employees but also for those disabled people whose abilities and skills can only be realized in support environments that address their difficulties in learning. This realization also entails appreciating the fact that people with intellectual disability who have continued with their education at a post-secondary level have increased further in their human capital and are in a position to invest it fruitfully through employment.

In light of the findings that have emerged from this study, it is recommended that guidance is provided for employers in appreciating the skills and abilities of people with intellectual disability and in finding ways of enabling these skills and abilities to emerge through the necessary support in the workplace. Furthermore, young people with intellectual disability should be provided with more post-secondary education opportunities. The ITS *Key*

Skills course should be offered again. In addition, these young people should be offered individual support to be able to follow mainstream post-secondary courses.

Ultimately, the most significant finding to emerge from this study is the importance of listening to what people with intellectual disability have to say about their experiences in mainstream post-secondary education settings, and about the needs that they identify, and finding ways of addressing those needs to make it possible for them to develop their own human capital to its full potential.

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