

NCSEHE Research Fellowship

TEN INSIGHTS FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION IMPACT

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Insight #1

Perceptions of functional and future work risk can predict if a low SES secondary student intends to go to university directly after school or at some time in the future (for example, after a gap year).



Translating insights into impact

WP practitioners and schools may help low SES secondary school students to objectively assess functional and future work risk such as in-class tasks exploring jobsoutlook.com projected employment rates or helping students to use critical thinking skills to identify credible sources of information about future work.



Insight #2

Perceptions of social risk can predict if a low SES secondary student intends to go to university directly after school or at some time in the future (for example, after a gap year).



Translating insights into impact

WP practitioners and schools may help low SES secondary school students to find ways to solve social risk such as student ambassadors discussing their concerns about not fitting in, and how clubs or Indigenous centres helped; or schools collating alumni profiles of past students who have gone to various universities and potentially finding ways for them to be an initial contact point for others from their school (for example, a “You’re not alone” school alumni program).



Insight #3

Perceptions of overall risk can predict if a low SES secondary student intends to go to university directly after school or at some time in the future (for example, after a gap year).



Translating insights into impact

WP practitioners and schools may help low SES secondary school students by acknowledging that going to university can be scary and encouraging an open dialogue about concerns to give voice to their fears in the first instance. This may lead to a subsequent activity whereby students to come up with an action plan to address their fears (for example, engaging with the mycourses.com.au site, the QTAC My Path planning site, university websites or YouTube channels; visiting a campus or going to an open day; and/or talking with their parents, school teachers or careers advisors).

Furthermore, explaining that all human endeavours have some level of risk and that people handle risk differently (for example, risk averse, risk neutral, risk seekers) may help students understand themselves and help them develop a personal action plan to address their concerns.

The intention is to empower and not insinuate that going to university directly after secondary school is the right path for all people. Giving young people tools and resources so that if and when they decide to go to university, they know there are key touchpoints to help guide them. For example, the school may have a designated contact teacher whom they can approach up to five years after graduation to help them navigate and connect them to others who can illuminate that pathway into university.



Insight #4

Low SES secondary school students are more likely to be risk averse than their peers from Other SES (OSES) backgrounds.



Translating insights into impact

People interpret risk in different ways. For risk averse low SES secondary school students, going to university is perceived as a threat. One way that WP could address Insight #4 may be to provide a risk-remedy resource. For example, a table that lists the 10 types of risk in one column and in a corresponding column list the possible remedies (perhaps with evidence to demonstrate response efficacy) could be developed for students.

To illustrate,

Common concerns low SES students have.	Solutions that have worked for others.
“I can’t afford to go to university.” (financial and resource risk)	Messaging: “Scholarships and bursaries provide you with money so that you can study. You can apply for these online. Let’s look some up.”
“What if I can’t get a job at the end of university?” (functional and future work risk)	Messaging: “Joboutlook.gov.au is a great site that can tell you the projected number of jobs there will be in specific occupations in the future and what the average pay will be. Take a look for yourself.”



Insight #5

Low SES secondary school students who are risk seekers leapfrog steps faster than their OSES peers.



Translating insights into impact

For risk seeking low SES students, some types of WP may not seem relevant. These low SES risk seekers may need tools to help them with the satisficing stage of decision making. WP might focus on activities like finding out about:

- employment and income trends in their preferred occupation
- employers in their local area or where they want to live
- information about universities, their campuses and the degrees that they could enrol in that will help them gain entry to their preferred occupation
- accommodation options and transport options (for example, Will they need to catch public transport?; Do they know how?)
- degree delivery options such as part-time study, online study or studying at a nearby campus in their first year before relocating.



Insight #6

Low SES secondary school students who are risk neutral are more careful in their decision process than their OSES peers.



Translating insights into impact

Checklists, workbooks or self-evaluation questions that can guide low SES students with satisficing decisions would be advantageous. The suggestions for Insight #5 would work equally well for Insight #6. Also, WP messages that normalise a more careful process would be beneficial. For example, statements such as “people who are the first in their family to go to university often take a little longer to consider their options—don’t feel you need to rush”.



Insight #7

Low SES secondary school students are slower to progress to the exploration of occupations than their OSES peers.



Translating insights into impact

WP practitioners and schools could design a range of scaffolded activities that focus on this step. These could include in-class, personalised activities where, in the first instance, low SES students talk about what they are good at and what they like, using the seven job clusters developed by the Foundation for Young Australians (2017) as the central framework. The seven job clusters framework is a simple stepping stone that can help secondary school students conceptualise their occupational options. From this point, more activities could be narrowed to occupations falling within each cluster, with secondary school students selecting their “top 3” possibilities and embarking on a deeper exploration of each. A scaffolded approach prevents information overload or hyperchoice responses which typically overwhelm, stifling or paralysing progress to the exploration of occupations. Potentially, low SES secondary school students could

be streamed according to interest in job cluster and targeted WP could ensue to deliver cluster-relevant messages. Similar programs could be developed for parents or parent-and-child programs.



Insight #8

Low SES secondary school students who perceive going to university as risky are less likely than their OSES peers to postpone making a decision about whether to go (or not to go) to university.



Translating insights into impact

Insight #8 suggests that there is still an opportunity for WP practitioners to intervene and address low SES secondary school student's concerns (risks). An option here might be to return them to the "exploration of occupations" phase to consider the job cluster and explore other types of occupations that fit within that job cluster. Other resources such as QTAC My Path may be helpful to consider longer journeys to their occupational destination via non-university tertiary qualifications.



Insight #9

Low SES secondary school students are slower to progress to decision shortcutting than their OSES peers.



Translating insights into impact

There may be many good reasons as to why low SES secondary school students do not progress as fast. Low SES secondary school students are typically the first in their families to have the opportunity to go to university, and they do not have the social capital (including role models) to draw from. Hence, they are more measured and careful in progressing to the next step. WP online video resources along the lines of "I came from a background like you and look at me now," would be advantageous as a type of simulated role model experience.



Insight #10

The parents of risk averse low SES secondary school students underestimate how much their child is concerned about going to university.



Translating insights into impact

WP practitioners and schools may encourage or facilitate parent-child discussions about a range of concerns (for example, functional and future work risk, financial and resource risk) that secondary school children have. Parent events, for example, could help parents understand the degree and spectrum of concerns their risk averse children have. Similar to Insight #4, explaining to secondary school students and their parents that all human endeavours have some level of risk and how people handle risk differently may help them to understand themselves, which will help them to develop a personal action plan to address their concerns.