



Title: The effectiveness of self-advocacy videos to inform enablers about the support needs of students with vision impairment

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The effectiveness of self-advocacy videos to inform enablers about the support needs of students with vision impairment

Abstract

The aim of this project was to understand how enablers (e.g. teaching assistants, paraprofessionals, support workers, etc.) access and use information about students with vision impairment (VI) to support them in specialist education. The one-page profile is used widely as a tool for learner-centred planning and information, and is generally seen to be effective and accessible. However more recent studies have demonstrated that video is an extremely effective medium for training and support in a range of settings. We investigated whether student self-

advocacy video clips would be an effective and accessible medium for presenting information about students' support needs.

This study took the form of a pre- and post-questionnaire. The aim of the pre-questionnaire was to gauge current levels of enabler confidence and assess the effectiveness of existing methods of accessing learner information. 15 enablers were given this questionnaire to complete. Six students (aged 11-17) with VI and additional complex support needs were then each supported to develop a short video in which they expressed their support needs in an education setting. The enablers were asked to watch the video clips, and complete the post-questionnaire to assess the impact these videos had on their confidence and understanding. 12 out of the 15 enablers returned the second questionnaire.

The questionnaire results demonstrated that current methods for accessing learner information were not wholly effective. Enablers found video to be a desirable and accessible format for presenting learner information. Participants found the medium of video to significantly aid retention and recollection of student information. From the findings it emerged that one-page profiles remained the preferred single method of accessing student information. However, overall, we found that enablers favoured a multi-method approach to presenting and accessing learner information that was dependent on time and context.

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate whether self-advocacy video clips created by students can act as a useful training aid to increase the confidence of enablers to provide more effective support. Whilst self-advocacy is a life-long skill needed and used by all people, it is even more necessary for people with visual impairment (Douglas, Hewett & McLinden, 2018; Hewett, Douglas & Keil, 2016a; Bailey, 2009). The lack of specific instruction of these skills can become a barrier to participation later on in life, as identified in the Transition to Adulthood report (Hewett, Douglas & Keil 2016b). Even those children and young people (CYP) with VI who had a good understanding of their needs could not necessarily articulate it to others. A further barrier for CYP with VI in developing self-advocacy skills, is an over-reliance on adults. Roe and Preisler (cited in Webster & Roe, 1998) highlighted the risk of CYP with VI spending too much time with adults. Many theorists have warned of the dangers of an adult driven environment in which the child is passive and the adult over-prompts (e.g. Webster & Roe, 1998; Davis & Hopwood, 2002; Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2013). Camborne (cited

in Allman & Lewis, 2014) highlighted the importance of the student's responsibility and self-determination in order to effectively learn and succeed.

The main concern in this study is understanding the most effective methods for enablers (staff supporting students under the guidance of a teacher, e.g. teaching assistants, paraprofessionals, support workers, etc.) to access and use student information to provide effective support. Effective enablers can raise the achievement of CYP with VI, enable inclusion, and encourage independence (Hewett, Douglas & Keil, 2016b). However, there can be multiple barriers to providing this support including: ineffective deployment that negatively impacts on the student learning, a lack of consistent training, regular changes to staffing leading to inconsistent support, and limited opportunities to discuss student needs with the teacher (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell & Howes, 2009; Carroll et al., 2017, Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2013). Comments made by practitioners in the 2017 Special Educational Needs report (Carroll et al., 2017) reflect the experience of the authors within their own educational setting:

“...keeping the same staff in the class is most helpful”

“Knowing the pupil is key”.

A significant barrier to effective support is knowing the needs of the student, and how enablers access and use this information is important. There are many different potential media for presenting this information. One-page profiles are mentioned in the Special Education Needs and Disability code of practice in England (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2015), promoting person-centred planning in an accessible way. A good one-page profile is a powerful tool in school settings and beyond, particularly if profiles are constantly evolving and shared with staff, families and professionals.

More recently, video has emerged as an alternative method for sharing information and for staff training. Khan (2011) described the benefits of using video for training including allowing learners to digest information at their own pace and explore content more deeply, especially when learning something new (Galbraith: 2004). Research suggests there is a connection between visual clues and memory process and recall (cited in The University of Queensland, 2013). Allam (cited in Bijmens, Vanbuel, Vestegen & Young, 2006) and Willmot, Bramhall and Radley (2012) showed strong evidence that using moving images and sound to present a topic is engaging and inspiring. The effectiveness of educational videos as a training aid has been trialled in different settings to much success. A study in the Undergraduate College of Nursing at Turin University (Salina et al., 2012) found that students who had seen a nursing technique on video were better able to apply the technique, resulting in better performance. The trial reinforced Galbraith's (2004) and Willmot, Bramhall and Radley's (2012) findings that they could more easily remember what they had seen. The report also recommends that videos are no longer than 15 minutes to aid retention. Crucially, the study concludes that video does not replace other sources of learning but acts as a valuable addition. This is supported by a study (Kemp & Grieve, 2014) of Psychology students which found that, whilst face-to-face training was preferable, videos could become a useful and routine instrument for student training.

Methods

This project was based at a VI specialist residential school and college, and focused on six students aged 11-18 years (average: 14 years, 7 months). All six students had multiple disabilities with a principal disability of VI. Multiple disabilities included but were not limited

to: moderate to severe learning disability, physical impairments, speech or language impairments, hearing impairment, autism, and emotional disturbances. Four students were male and two were female; all six were of White British ethnicity. The students had attended the school on average for 4 years 8 months (range: 1-9 years).

We recruited 15 enablers as participants from the specialist residential school and college. Six of those participants had frequent (daily-weekly) and direct experience of working with the six students; the other nine participants had infrequent and/or indirect experience of working with the six students. All 15 enablers had or were working towards a British National Vocational Qualification at level 3 (equivalent to completion of secondary education) in Health and Social Care, and two enablers had previously completed teaching assistant courses. Eleven enablers were female and four were male; all fifteen were of White British ethnicity. One enabler was aged between 20-29 years, five enablers were aged between 30-39 years, four were aged between 40-49 years, and five were aged between 50-59 years. Six enablers had 2-5 years length of service, three had 6-10 years length of service, and six had 11-20 years length of service. Ethical approval was agreed at the beginning of the project by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee and all enablers who participated gave informed consent.

We conducted a short thematic analysis (cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) with enablers to identify 6 themes for the video clips. The six themes were: interests and aspirations, access to reading and writing, access technology and specialist equipment, communication, additional VI needs, and 'how I learn best'. We used these themes to structure the content for the student scripts.

All six students embarked on a 6-week project as part of their English language studies to develop self-advocacy scripts for the videos. During the first two weeks the students developed

their understanding of the term and concept of self-advocacy supported by their teacher, and used a range of access technology to research the meaning. The students accessed a short video blog of a young person discussing their most important items for maintaining daily independence (their ‘VI essentials’), such as a liquid level indicator and their personally customised cane. Once the students had learned the meaning of self-advocacy and had this modelled via the video blog, they were given the six themes to consider for their own ‘VI essentials’ and approaches that would enable them to learn.

During the next four weeks students discussed and noted (using their preferred method of communication) the items and approaches that were essential for them to live a more independent life. As a class they developed their scripts for the video clips, practising their responses to each of the six themes as role play activities. When able, students practised brief demonstrations of their essential tools (e.g. spectacles, canes, liquid level indicators, braille, switches, objects of reference, etc.) to later support enablers’ understanding of how to use the students’ specialist equipment.

Five of the six students were verbal and able to practice and record their own presentation. For the student with limited verbal skills, their key enabler acted as their advocate during filming and supported the student to describe their ‘VI essentials’. After several practice attempts the students’ presentations were filmed on a tablet device. The recorded video clips were no longer than six minutes to ensure information was succinct, and to aid retention.

We designed a pre- and post-questionnaire (see supplemental files) including closed and open questions using both rating scales as well as textbox questions for more free input. The questionnaires focussed on four key themes: enabler confidence, ease of access to information, preferred formats, and ease of recollection. Using two questionnaires allowed us to compare

enabler's current levels of confidence with their level after watching the video clips. We followed a multimethod research approach commonly used in learning and teaching research, collecting both qualitative and semi-quantitative data through the questionnaire (cited in Niglas, 2000; cited in Maguire, 2017). Semi-quantitative (ordinal) data allowed for simpler comparative analysis, whilst qualitative data allowed us to capture richer responses, potentially highlighting missing issues, ambiguities, or contradictions to gain a more accurate reflection of social reality.

As it is commonly understood that questionnaires should not be too long to aid accurate and full completion (Adams & Cox, 2008), we limited the total number of questions to nine in the post-questionnaire and seven in the pre-questionnaire. The questions were short and simple to ensure understanding and encourage a higher response accuracy. We considered ways of avoiding bias and leading questions e.g. we used a Likert-type attitude/opinion rating scale for the semi-quantitative questions; the multiple-choice answers allowed for degrees of opinion rather than a simple yes or no, providing a more detailed picture; offering enablers the option of anonymity potentially reduced the bias towards social desirability (cited in Adams & Cox, 2008).

15 enablers completed the pre-questionnaire before the students had created their self-advocacy video clips. Questionnaires were offered electronically and paper-based, to ensure preference for different formats were accommodated and to improve compliance (Adams & Cox, 2008; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). After the students had created their self-advocacy video clips we asked those 15 enablers to watch them and complete the post-questionnaire. 12 participants out of the original 15 responded (80% return).

Results

This was a two-stage study. The stage 1 questionnaire focussed on understanding current enabler confidence and knowledge prior to watching the self-advocacy video clips. The stage 2 questionnaire focussed on assessing the impact of the self-advocacy clips on their confidence to support students and knowledge of information about students.

Pre-questionnaire results

Theme 1. Enabler confidence

It emerged that 13 out of 15 participants were either confident or very confident to provide effective support. The remaining 2 were unconfident or very unconfident. 3 of the participants added comments stating that their confidence levels were lower when working with students they don't know (see Table 1).

Table 1. [After watching the self-advocacy video clips,] how confident do you feel in providing effective support to learners in the classroom environment?

	Pre	Post
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Very confident	8 (53%)	4 (26%)
Confident	5 (33%)	8 (53%)
Unconfident	1 (7%)	0 (0%)
Very unconfident	1 (7%)	0 (0%)

Theme 2. Ease of access to information

The majority of participants (9 out of 15) found it difficult to access student information (see Table 2). One participant stated: *“The shared drive can be fairly cluttered with half completed documents. Sometimes I feel I have to dig for the information I need.”*

Participants knew where to find the student information. The two most popular sources of information were the learner folders on the shared network drive (15 out of 15 respondents utilised this) and the online data management system (9 out of 15). Less popular methods were speaking to the tutor, reading classroom printouts and speaking to students.

Table 2. How challenging [do you find it to access the information you need] or [would you find it to access the self-advocacy videos] to support a student with their learning during classroom activities?

	Pre	Post
Very easy	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Easy	6 (40%)	9 (75%)
Difficult	9 (60%)	3 (25%)
Very difficult	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Two common themes emerged as barriers to accessing the information: lack of time and limited computer access and training. One participant highlighted the need for “*easier access to computers*” whilst another stated there was “*no time to research information on a student on computers if given a new student.*”

Theme 3. Retention of data

Both retaining and recollecting student information during sessions is difficult. 11 out of 15 participants found it difficult or very difficult to recall information whilst classroom activities were in progress (see Table 3).

Table 3. How challenging would you find it to recall [this information] or [the information provided in the self-advocacy videos] and use it practically during classroom activities?

	Pre	Post
Very easy	1 (7%)	1 (8%)
Easy	3 (20%)	10 (83%)
Difficult	10 (67%)	1 (8%)
Very difficult	1 (7%)	0 (0%)

Theme 4. Preferred formats

Enablers did not like using the current system of accessing full documentation on the shared network drive. The most popular format is one-page profiles (14/15). Participants felt that one-

page profiles were particularly useful when working with new students: *“Whilst full documentation covers everything, one-page profiles give a quick run through for new enablers.”*

An emerging theme with one-page profiles was the preference for accessing these in a paper, rather than electronic format, as they can be referred to during class: *“Printed copies in a folder are useful for those not confident with computers.”*

The majority of participants favoured a reflective discussion with tutors (9/15). As one participant states: *“Talking to staff who know the young person is what I find best.”*

However, many participants indicated that they did not have enough time to access information prior to working with new students. One participant said they would want: *“advance information when working with a new student.”*

Others also claimed there was little in the way of guidance with new students and suggested they would like: *“guidelines from the teacher”*, or to be: *“given information about the student up front.”*

The full documentation was far less popular, with only a small number of respondents (3 favouring electronic and 4 paper) claiming this was their preferred medium. Only one participant said they would prefer having information presented in the format of a video summary (see Table 4).

Table 4. In which format(s) would you prefer to have the information about supporting students specifically with their learning during classroom activities?

	Pre	Post
Full documentation on network	1 (7%)	3 (25%)
Full printed documentation	3 (20%)	3 (25%)
Printed one-page profile	11 (73%)	10 (83%)
Video summary	1 (7%)	7 (58%)
Discussion with tutor/staff	7 (47%)	8 (67%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Post-questionnaire results

Theme 1. Enabler confidence

After watching the video clips 100% of respondents felt that they would be confident or very confident to effectively support students in the classroom. The two enablers who had previously categorised themselves as unconfident had moved into the confident or above category (see Table 1). However, some enablers who had previously categorised themselves as very confident had moved into the confident category. The results of a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that enabler confidence was not significantly different after watching the self-advocacy video clips ($Z=-0.30$, $p=0.76$).

Theme 2. Ease of access to information

The majority of participants found it easy to access the video clips (9 out of 12). One of those respondents stated: *“I found them easy to find on the O Drive and it wasn’t time consuming to watch them.”*

Of the 3 that found it difficult, one suggested: *“[it would be useful] having them before being left with a student, in a specified folder which can be accessed quickly and simply ... two steps would be ideal.”*

The results also indicated that enablers would like to access the information in advance, prior to working with new students, and that video clips should be in a prominent place. Time still remained a concern amongst some enablers. One participant said they: *“[would access them] in the morning before I started to work with the student. Hopefully there would be time for that.”* Whilst another specified *“at the end of the day if we know who we are supporting in advance.”*

In comparing the results of theme 2 between the pre- and post-questionnaire there was a modest improvement in ease of access to information using video clips (see Table 2). In the pre-questionnaire, 60% of participants found accessing student information difficult whereas in the post-questionnaire, 75% of participants found accessing information easy using the clips. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the difference was not statistically significant ($Z=-1.89$, $p=0.059$).

Theme 3. Retention of data

Feedback from the sample alone would suggest use of video self-advocacy clips has the potential to significantly aid retention and recollection of information. Prior to watching the clips, the majority of participants found it difficult to retain information. However, after watching them, an overwhelming 11 out of 12 believed that they found it easy or very easy to recall the information contained within them and perceived they would readily use it in future. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated this difference was statistically significant ($Z=-2.35$, $p=0.019$). One participant said: *“I found the video clips useful to watch. I think watching the information in the video form helped me to retain the information more than perhaps just reading them.”*

This supports the findings of the nursing report (Salina et al., 2012) as well as those that promote the use of video in staff training to aid recall and memory (Galbraith, 2004; Willmot, Bramhall & Radley, 2012).

Theme 4. Preferred formats

Prior to watching the video clips, only 1 participant considered this format preferable but having seen them, the majority (7 out of 12) cited this as a desirable format for the intake of student information. However, across both the pre- and post-questionnaires, one-page profiles remain the most preferred format (see Table 4). The majority of participants ticked more than one format box indicating that no one method alone was sufficient but rather a combination of formats was preferred. One participant said they: *“[would like] a video first and then a one-page profile and then a reflective discussion with the tutor after the lesson.”*

Many participants felt the preferred method of access would be influenced by time and dependent on the situation. One enabler said: *“If there is time [then] talking to staff who work with the student and watching the video. If no time a paper summary with the key points.”*

Another participant said: *“Video is useful but the one-page profile is more useful as it can be referred to in class”*

Overall, the study indicated that respondents feel accessing information in a video format is useful and that the medium is effective and impactful compared to other formats. When asked if, having seen the clips, it would be worthwhile creating clips for all students as a training aid 11 out of 12 respondents said yes. One participant stated that the clips were: *“an invaluable piece to aid training”*

The study suggests that using a visual medium improves enabler knowledge, and can be more accessible than other formats. One participant added: *“Video helps to understand students’ communication abilities and equipment”*, and another commented: *“Visual reference that*

shows learners personality gives more useful information than just a few lines on a piece of paper.”

Significantly, some enablers found that the video clips being student lead added to their impact, supporting Hewett, Douglas and Keil’s (2016) notion of the importance of self-advocacy. As one enabler wrote: *“It’s really helpful to hear from the students themselves about how they can be helped and their likes and dislikes’.*

Discussion

This study has demonstrated that video clips are a desirable medium for accessing learner information and significantly aid retention and recollection. However, it emerged that enablers would prefer a range of formats dependent on time and situation. It was significant that paper-based one-page profiles still remained the most preferred format as it can be quickly and immediately accessible at any time, including during lessons. Video clips are a relatively novel media for presenting student information in a school setting but have been proven to be an effective training aid in other settings (Kemp & Grieve, 2014; Khan, 2011; Selena et al., 2012). Video clips stored on a shared network area allow staff to access and refresh their knowledge on an ongoing basis, at their own pace negating the need for specific training sessions in an environment with ever increasing time constraints.

Potential limitations of the study include bias from recruiting a convenience sample of participants, as they may not represent fully the views of all enablers at the school. The sample size of participants was also small, making it difficult to investigate the contribution of enabler

demographics (e.g. years of service, previous experience working with the students) to their perception of the videos and the outcomes of the survey. Some participants may have answered questions more positively due to social desirability. Future research in this area would benefit from a wider stratified sample from a more proportionate group to ensure greater representation of sub groups and less bias.

Self-advocacy video clips could be created and used as part of a multi-method approach to enabler training and support. Schools could employ an approach that involves a one-page profile in each room, a video clip for each learner, in conjunction with regular reflective discussion with the tutor. If all classes follow the same approach then even when staff are redeployed and are working in new classes, they know where and how to access student information.

School policies and systems typically allow opportunities for staff training and ongoing development. Self-advocacy video clips could be used as part of enabler staff induction. Enablers should be given time to watch the video clip of any new student they are supporting prior to entering the classroom. Potentially, a dedicated computer with a more accessible interface (i.e. tablet) could be used specifically for accessing the self-advocacy video clips. One outcome of this study is a change in policy at the study setting, in which timetables have incorporated a 30-minute reflection and discussion session at the end of each day including tutors, enablers, and students.

Future research could focus on the impact of creating the self-advocacy clips on student confidence to self-advocate in a range of settings. It seems likely that this project would have significant and positive impacts on students' confidence, communication, self-advocacy, and independence. Additionally, this project created a mutual learning experience between the

students and enablers. As students learned to develop their own self-advocacy skills, enablers simultaneously learned to reduce support, promoting independence.

In conclusion, the use of self-advocacy video clips significantly improves and aids retention and recollection of information. The immediacy of using video as a medium allows for incidental learning of student abilities that would not be possible from a written summary and gives the student their own voice.

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