



MONASH University

**The Effect of Rurality on the Aspirations of Students in Rural Government
Secondary Schools in Victoria, Australia: The Perspectives of Students**

Robert John Stephens, PSM

*B.Sc. (Hons) (Monash University), B. Ed. (Monash University),
Grad. Dip. Engl. (Monash University), Grad. Cert. Ed. Res. (Monash University)*

A thesis submitted for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* at
Monash University in 2020.
Faculty of Education

Copyright notice

© Robert John Stephens (2020).

I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.

Abstract

The outcomes and aspirations of rural students in Victoria, Australia, have fallen behind the outcomes and aspirations of metropolitan students, as found in the Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education (Halsey, 2018), and this situation has continued for decades.

This research provides a different way of looking at the situation, namely through the eyes of the students themselves. Consequently, this research is based on student voice to find new and insightful reasons for the differences in aspirations between rural and metropolitan students and possible solutions to the issues involved.

This thesis explores the thoughts and perceptions of rural secondary school students in government secondary schools in eastern Victoria, and uses the perceptions of metropolitan students as a point of contrast. The perceptions of the students were obtained from a 64-item student survey, developed as a part of this research, and from fourteen focus groups, seven in Melbourne and seven in rural Victoria. The survey was completed by 227 rural students and 136 metropolitan students, and the focus groups heard the voices of 55 rural students and 51 metropolitan students. The focus group questions were devised after an initial analysis of the student surveys. The students in the research were from year 10 and 12 and included an approximately equal mix of males and females.

The framework for the analysis of the results was developed as a part of this research. It was adapted from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), and named Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT). It focused on the key factors that provided enablers and barriers to the aspirations of the students, including rurality, family, friends and schools, as well as student self-efficacy and identity.

The findings of the research showed that there were similarities between the aspirations of rural and metropolitan students, but there was a significant difference between their outcome expectations. Differences were found to relate to parent and teacher expectations and encouragement, school-based issues, student connection to their community, family characteristics and student behaviours related to their aspirations. The research also showed that rural students faced many obstacles if they wished to continue with education after secondary school, and this resulted in many students choosing not to do so.

Author Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

Print Name: Robert John Stephens

Date: 28 December 2020

Acknowledgements

There are many people deserving of acknowledgement for this research project.

I thank the students who agreed to be involved in this research. The students were a real source of inspiration, and their frankness and wisdom was greatly appreciated as they completed the student survey and participated in focus group discussions. They gave freely of their time, describing their thoughts about education at their school, their aspirations for the future and the enablers and barriers that they met along their journey.

I thank the principals of the schools involved in the project. Without their permission and support, this research could not have occurred. I also thank the staff members of the schools, who assisted in the arrangements that needed to be made to ensure that the survey and the focus groups were conducted smoothly and efficiently. I also acknowledge the Department of Education and Training (Victoria), for giving me their permission to carry out this research in Victorian government schools.

A major thank-you goes to my very patient and wonderful supervisors from Monash University, Professor Deborah Corrigan and Doctor John Pardy, who assisted me throughout the journey. They provided advice, challenge and encouragement throughout the research. They encouraged me to think like a researcher. Without their assistance, this final thesis would not have been completed.

I thank Jeremy, a teacher at Marlin Bay Rural College, for agreeing to allow me to interview him about his journey from his early years at school in rural Victoria, through his final years of secondary schooling in Melbourne, to his university days and finally, about his teaching career and his return to Marlin Bay, his place.

Most importantly, I thank my wonderful wife, Laraine, for her encouragement and patience throughout the process. Laraine assisted with the data entry, and shared the driving to several rural towns in Victoria. She checked out the local coffee shops whilst I conducted surveys and focus groups at the schools. She was my proof reader, ensuring that what I wrote made sense. Apart from that, she was my real support, the love of my life. I also thank my family: Trevor, Angela, Sam and new grand-daughter Eloise, for their constant support, interest and encouragement.

Table of Contents

Copyright Notice	ii
Abstract	iii
Author Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures and Graphs	xiii
List of Tables	xv
List of Appendices	xvi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 A Case Study: Meet Jeremy	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	3
1.3 Student Voice	6
1.4 Rural Victoria	7
1.5 The Research Topic	7
1.6 Research Questions	8
1.7 The Research Locations	8
1.8 Significance of the Study	10
1.9 Background and Role of the Researcher	10
1.10 Limitations of the Study	12
1.11 Organisation of the Study	13
1.12 Summary	14
Chapter 2 Literature Review	15
2.1 Student Aspirations Defined	15
2.2 Social Cognitive Theory	18
2.3 Identity	20
2.4 Place and Rurality	23
2.4.1 The Concept of Place	23

2.4.2	Place and Mobility	24
2.4.3	Changes in Rurality and the Effect on Community Life	25
2.4.4	The Effect of Globalisation and Digital Technologies on Rural Communities	27
2.4.5	Education in Rural Areas	29
2.4.6	Curriculum in Rural Schools	31
2.5	Student Aspirations	34
2.5.1	Student Aspirations in Victoria and Australia	34
2.5.2	Student Aspirations around the Globe	35
2.6	Careers and Pathways Counselling in Rural Schools	37
2.7	Student Aspirations and Connection to Place	39
2.8	Rural Student Outcomes	42
2.9	Student Voice	45
2.10	Summary	47
Chapter 3	Methodology	48
3.1	Introduction	48
3.2	Mixed Methods Methodology	49
3.3	The Theoretical Framework	51
3.4	Selection of Sample Schools	55
3.5	Selection of the Students in the Sample	59
3.5.1	Student Sample for the Survey	60
3.5.2	Student Sample for the Focus Groups	61
3.6	The Student Survey	61
3.7	The Student Focus Groups	64
3.8	Focus Group Questions	66
3.9	Analysis of Data	67
3.9.1	Student Survey Data	68
3.9.2	Student Focus Group Data	71
3.10	Ethical Issues	71

3.11	Role of the Researcher: Insider or Outsider?	72
3.12	Summary	73
Chapter 4	Student Survey Results	74
4.1	Introduction	74
4.2	The Survey Respondents	74
4.3	The Aspirations of the Students	75
4.4	The Effect of Environmental Determinants on Student Aspirations	77
4.4.1	Place and Rurality	78
4.4.1.1	Place and Rurality – Connection to Place	78
4.4.1.2	Place and Rurality – Staying or Leaving	80
4.4.1.3	Place and Rurality – Rural Isolation	81
4.4.2	Family and Friends	82
4.4.2.1	Family and Friends – Family Support and Encouragement ...	82
4.4.2.2	Family and Friends – Family Characteristics	84
4.4.2.3	Family Characteristics – Number of Parents Living in the Home	85
4.4.2.4	Family Characteristics – Parent Tertiary Education Levels ...	86
4.4.2.5	Family Characteristics – Socio-Economic Status	88
4.4.2.6	Family Characteristics – Number of Children	89
4.4.2.7	Family and Friends – Friends and Peers	91
4.4.3	Schools	92
4.4.3.1	Schools – Student Perceptions of Their School	93
4.4.3.2	Schools – Teacher Support and Encouragement	94
4.4.3.3	Schools – Curriculum	95
4.4.3.4	Schools – Careers and Pathways	96
4.4.3.5	Schools – Student Perceptions of Rural and Metropolitan Schools	97
4.5	The Effect of Behavioural Determinants on Student Aspirations	99
4.5.1	Future Focused Behaviours – Planning for the Future.....	100

4.5.2	Student Behaviours – Aspiration to Continue Education	101
4.5.3	Student Behaviours – Behaviours In Relation to School	103
4.6	The Effect of Personal Determinants on Student Aspirations	106
4.6.1	Identity – Part-Time Work and Sport.....	106
4.6.2	Identity and Self-Efficacy – Goal Setting and Success.....	108
4.6.3	Self-Efficacy – Capacity to Continue with Education.....	111
4.7	Correlations between the Survey Items and Student Aspirations.	112
4.8	Summary	117
Chapter 5	Results from Student Focus Groups	118
5.1	Introduction	118
5.2	How Environmental Determinants Affect Student Aspirations	119
5.2.1	Place and Rurality – Connection to Place	119
5.2.2	Place and Rurality – Rural Isolation	124
5.2.3	Family and Friends – Family	127
5.2.4	Friends and Family – Friends	131
5.2.5	Schools and Teachers – Support and Encouragement	132
5.2.6	Schools and Teachers – Careers and Pathways	137
5.3	How Personal and Behavioural Determinants Affect Student Aspirations.....	140
5.3.1	Decisions About the Future	140
5.3.2	Goal Setting and Success	144
5.3.3	Part-time Work and Sport	147
5.4	Summary	149
Chapter 6	Discussion – Part 1.....	150
6.1	Introduction	150
6.2	Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT)	151
6.3	The Research Sites	153
6.4	The Aspirations of the Students	154
6.5	The Effect of Personal Determinants on Student Aspirations	156
6.5.1	Identity and Student Aspiration	156

6.5.2	Self-Efficacy – Success, Goal Setting and Student Aspirations	158
6.5.3	Capacity to Continue Education and Student Aspirations	160
6.6	The Effect of Behavioural Determinants on Student Aspirations	161
6.6.1	Student Behaviours	161
6.6.2	Future Focused Behaviours	162
6.7	The Effect of Environmental Determinants on Student Aspirations	163
6.7.1	Family and Student Aspirations	163
6.7.1.1	Parent and Family Support and Encouragement	163
6.7.1.2	Family Characteristics	166
6.7.2	Friends and Student Aspirations	167
6.7.3	Schools and Student Aspirations	168
6.7.3.1	School and Teacher Support	169
6.7.3.2	School and Teacher Encouragement	170
6.7.3.3	Curriculum, Careers and Pathways.....	172
6.7.4	Rurality and Student Aspirations	174
6.7.4.1	Connection to Community	174
6.7.4.2	Rural Isolation	175
6.7.4.3	Staying or Leaving	177
6.8	Correlation with Continuing Education	179
6.9	Summary	181
Chapter 7	Discussion – Part 2	182
7.1	Introduction	182
7.2	Research Question 1: Place and Rurality	185
7.3	Research Question 2: Family.....	190
7.4	Research Question 3: Friends	194
7.5	Research Question 4: School.....	195
7.6	Research Question 5: Identity and Self-Efficacy.....	198
7.7	Summary	200
Chapter 8	Conclusion	202

8.1	Introduction	202
8.2	Key Findings from the Research	202
8.2.1	The SCAT Framework	202
8.2.2	Student Aspirations	202
8.2.3	Environmental Determinants	203
8.2.4	Behavioural Determinants	205
8.2.5	Personal Determinants	205
8.2.6	Factors Affecting Rural Student Aspirations to Continue Education...	206
8.3	Suggestions for Future Action	207
8.3.1	Student Voice	207
8.3.2	Schools – Fit for Purpose?	208
8.3.3	Communities of Practice	208
8.3.4	Technology	210
8.3.5	Teachers	211
8.3.6	Careers and Pathways.....	212
8.3.7	Rural Infrastructure	213
8.3.8	Summary	215
8.4	Suggestions for Future Research	216
8.5	Case Study: Jeremy’s Story	216
8.6	Afterword	218
	References	219
	Appendices	249
A1	Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in this Thesis	249
A2	Ethics Approval for the Research	250
A3	Explanatory Statement	254
A4	Student Consent Form	256
A5	Student Surveys	257
A6	Classification of Occupations	263
A7	Additional Graphs Related to the Student Survey	264

A7.1	The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations – Year Levels	264
A7.2	Comparison Between Rural and Metropolitan Schools – Year Levels	265
A7.3	Enablers for Studying at Home	266
A7.4	Parent and Teacher Encouragement to Continue Education – Aspiration Groups	267
A8	Correlation Coefficient Results	269

List of Figures and Graphs

Figure 1.1	Maps showing Australia, Victoria, Melbourne, the Research Area and the Remoteness Categories	9
Figure 2.1	Bandura's SCT	18
Figure 3.1	Explanatory Sequential Model	50
Figure 3.2	Key Factors Affecting Student Aspirations and Outcomes	52
Figure 3.3	Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT) – Factors Influencing Aspirations	53
Figure 3.4	Map Showing Victoria, the Research Area and the Approximate Position of the Rural Research Schools	56
Figure 4.1	Student Perceptions of Future Career Aspirations	76
Figure 4.2	SCAT – Environmental Determinants and Key Factors	78
Figure 4.3	Student Perceptions of Their Community	79
Figure 4.4	Connection to Community – Staying or Leaving	80
Figure 4.5	Student Perceptions of the Cost of University and TAFE	81
Figure 4.6	Family Support and Encouragement	83
Figure 4.7	Student Living Arrangements – Two Parents, One Parent, Other	85
Figure 4.8	The Influence of Living Arrangements on Student Aspirations	86
Figure 4.9	Parent Tertiary Educational Background	87
Figure 4.10	The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations	87
Figure 4.11	The Effect of Socio-Economic Status on Student Aspirations	89
Figure 4.12	Number of Children in the Family	90
Figure 4.13	The Effect of the Number of Children in the Family on Student Aspirations	90
Figure 4.14	The Effect of Friends on Student Aspirations	92
Figure 4.15	Student Perceptions of their School	93
Figure 4.16	The Effect of Teacher Support and Encouragement on Student Aspirations	94
Figure 4.17	Student Perceptions of Learning about the Local Community	95
Figure 4.18	Student Perceptions of Careers Education	96

Figure 4.19	Comparison of Rural and Metropolitan Schools	98
Figure 4.20	SCAT – Behavioural Determinants and Key Factors	99
Figure 4.21	Source of Advice Regarding Aspirations	100
Figure 4.22	Completing Year 12 and Continuing Education	101
Figure 4.23	Comparison between Wanting and Needing to Continue Education	102
Figure 4.24	Student Behaviours in Relation to School	104
Figure 4.25	Barriers to Studying at Home	105
Figure 4.26	Percentage of Students Who Miss Homework Due to Other Activities	105
Figure 4.27	SCAT – Personal Determinants and Key Factors	106
Figure 4.28	Student Part-Time Employment Hours	107
Figure 4.29	Goal Setting for the Future	109
Figure 4.30	Success in Life and at School	110
Figure 4.31	Capacity to Continue with Education	111
Figure 5.1	SCAT – Environmental Determinants – Key Elements	119
Figure 5.2	SCAT – Personal and Behavioural Determinants – Key Elements ...	140
Figure 6.1	SCAT Theoretical Framework	150
Figure A7.1	The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations – Year Levels	264
Figure A7.2	Comparison of Rural and Metropolitan Schools – Year Level Comparison	266
Figure A7.3	Enablers for Studying at Home	266
Figure A7.4	Parent Encouragement to Continue Education vs Career Aspiration .	267
Figure A7.5	Teacher Encouragement to Continue Education vs Career Aspiration	268

List of Tables

Table 2.1	PISA Results for Australian Schools 2000 – 2018	43
Table 3.1	Bandura’s SCT – Factors Related to this Research	53
Table 3.2	Description of Factors related to Student Aspirations	54
Table 3.3	Metropolitan and Rural Schools Included in the Research	57
Table 3.4	Student Survey Section Details	62
Table 3.5	Colour-coding of Focus Group Responses	71
Table 4.1	Key Data from the Data Collection	75
Table 4.2	Effect of Part-time Employment and Sporting Commitments on Study	108
Table 4.3	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with 13 Survey Items – Rural Students	113
Table 4.4	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with 6 Survey Items – Metropolitan Students ...	114
Table 4.5	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with Family Characteristics – Rural Students ...	116
Table 4.6	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with Family Characteristics – Metropolitan Students	116
Table 6.1	Survey Items with Medium or High Spearman Correlation with the Item “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” ..	179
Table A1.1	Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Thesis	249
Table A6.1	Australian and New Zealand Classification of Occupations	263
Table A8.1	Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Items Listed and Student Perception of Wanting to Continue Education after Leaving School	269

List of Appendices

Appendix A1	Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in this Thesis	249
Appendix A2	Ethics Approval for the Research	250
Appendix A3	Explanatory Statement	254
Appendix A4	Student Consent Form	256
Appendix A5	Student Surveys	257
Appendix A6	Classification of Occupations	263
Appendix A7	Additional Graphs Related to the Student Survey	264
Appendix A8	Correlation Coefficient Results	269

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 A Case Study: Meet Jeremy

Jeremy was born in a small country town in Victoria, Australia. His parents, who were both school teachers, had a farm where the family lived.

When Jeremy was two years old, his father was appointed to a teaching position in the small Victorian beachside town of Marlin Bay. The family built a house on several acres of land, on the edge of the town. When Jeremy was old enough for school, he attended Marlin Bay Primary School. He liked his teachers and enjoyed learning about the local area. He enjoyed living in the country, and he appreciated the natural environment. He relished going to the beach with his family and friends. It was a great place to grow up. After primary school, Jeremy was enrolled at Marlin Bay High School. He was a good student and worked hard at his studies, both in class and at home. However, many other students at the school spent more time surfing than they did studying.

Jeremy had two sisters, one older and one younger. Both sisters completed their final year of secondary school at Marlin Bay High School, and then continued their education at Melbourne University, located more than 500 kilometres away. During his years at the school, Jeremy noticed that some students from Marlin Bay went to university after finishing secondary school, but some students left school early to take up a job in the local area, usually related to fishing or tourism, both of which were important industries in the town.

For Jeremy, there was no impediment to doing well at school. His teachers developed positive relationships with their students. His parents were supportive, and both his parents and teachers had high expectations of him. As Jeremy put it, students did well at school if their parents valued education.

In Form 4 (the third last year of high school), Jeremy received a scholarship to complete his final two years of high school at a private school in Melbourne. In Form 4 at Marlin Bay High School, there were only five students in Jeremy's class, and three of those students were planning to leave school, meaning that there would be only two students studying in Forms 5 and 6. The opportunities at the school would be limited. Jeremy's mother strongly encouraged him to take the scholarship, which he did, and for two years, he lived with family friends and enjoyed his new school in Melbourne, making new friends and

understanding the competition between students, something that he believed would not have happened had he stayed at Marlin Bay High School. At school, Jeremy aspired to be a scientist and he planned to complete a Bachelor of Science degree after he finished secondary school.

After his final year of secondary school, Jeremy took a year off from his studies and travelled, but also spent time at home with his parents in Marlin Bay. He enjoyed his old home town, but did not think he could spend the rest of his life there. He enrolled at Melbourne University, and to everyone's surprise, he followed the Arts rather than the Sciences. Throughout his time at university, during which he completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Diploma in Education and a Masters of Philosophy, Jeremy's parents were supportive and regularly provided him with spending money.

After leaving university, Jeremy married a journalist and worked as a teacher in Melbourne's western suburbs for six months. On a visit to Marlin Bay to see his parents, Jeremy went to his old high school, which was now called Marlin Bay Rural College. He asked if there was a teaching job available. The answer was "yes", and Jeremy received a six-month contract, which later became an on-going position. Shortly afterwards, Jeremy and his wife decided that they would be happy to stay in Marlin Bay and make a life there, despite employment opportunities for Jeremy's wife being limited.

Today, Jeremy still teaches at Marlin Bay. He is a member of the college's leadership team and he is enjoying a successful career, a career balanced by family life with his wife and three children. He still enjoys the surf and socialising with the locals in Marlin Bay.

What forces pulled Jeremy back to Marlin Bay? His parents still lived in Marlin Bay and hence, he and his wife were able to live with them when they first returned. Jeremy's two best friends, one a jeweller and one a journalist, had moved away but had also returned. He loved the area, the surf, the beaches and the environment. He enjoyed bumping into people he knew in the street, something that did not happen as much in Melbourne. He loved the great mix of cultures and the history of the town. He loved the fact that he felt part of the community, part of the place called Marlin Bay. It was a rural community with which he shared beliefs and values. It represented his sense of himself: his identity. In the pub recently, Jeremy watched an over-intoxicated local stand on the bar and call out "I am Marlin Bay". I am sure that Jeremy believes that he is too.

In rural Victoria, as in rural places around the globe, there are many people like Jeremy. There are many stories of those who live in a rural community, leave to obtain a tertiary qualification and return to the community of which they feel a part. There are many other stories too, stories of people who leave the community and never return, whilst others simply stay in their rural community and never leave, often because they feel the attraction of place, of community, of friends and family. There are also many not so successful stories.

Many ask the question, what is success? Was Jeremy's success based on leaving Marlin Bay, or was it that he successfully applied for and obtained a scholarship to a private school? Or, did the fact that he performed well at his studies and returned to continue life as part of the community make him a success?

How does the sense of place and community affect education and aspirations? In Jeremy's case, it worked out in ways that he regarded as successful. After an accomplished academic journey in Melbourne, Jeremy returned to Marlin Bay, his place, the place where he felt that he belonged and a place with which he identified¹.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In 2010, the Parliament of Victoria, Rural and Regional Committee, in an inquiry into the extent and nature of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, stated that:

“If country people are not, as the statistics indicate, as healthy or as educated as city people, if their children don't have access to the same opportunities and if country people don't have the same access to services that are taken for granted in the city, then solutions must be found and implemented” (Rural and Regional Committee, 2010, p. xiv).

The desire to improve the educational opportunities for rural young people was the impetus of the inquiry. The need was there. But over the next four years, little changed.

In 2014, the Victorian Auditor General, John Doyle, stated that:

“The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is aware of the barriers to rural students' participation and achievement in

¹ Note: Jeremy is not his real name. His story though, is true.

education. However, it does not understand the effectiveness of its activities to support and encourage rural students and their families to better engage in education and achieve better educational outcomes” (Victorian Auditor General, 2014, p. 21).

The Auditor General identified that the barriers to rural students achieving outcomes similar to those of their metropolitan counterparts continued to exist, and he noted that any strategies to improve the situation were not sufficient to redress the disparity that existed between rural and metropolitan students. Rural students continued to be disadvantaged and affected by barriers related to quality of teaching, proximity to tertiary institutions, lack of educational aspirations and financial issues (Victorian Auditor General, 2014).

A 2014 study of secondary school data in Victoria (Lamb, Glover & Walstab, 2014), described differences between rural and metropolitan students, and painted a bleak picture. The data of Lamb et al. showed that rural students were absent from school for at least four extra days per year, scored 20 points below their metropolitan counterparts in National Literacy and Numeracy tests, were less likely to complete secondary school, and those who did complete secondary school achieved results significantly lower than their metropolitan peers. According to Lamb et al., when students reached year 12, the percentage who went on to university was 54% in metropolitan areas and 36% in rural areas, a difference of 18%.

The 2015 On-Track survey, a survey which was designed to track the destinations of students after they left school (Department of Education and Training, 2017a), showed that 63.7% of rural students progressed to further education and training (university or a technical/vocational college). This contrasted with the 81.5% of their metropolitan counterparts who did so. Further, the percentage of rural students progressing to further education had declined by almost 3% over the previous three years.

Over the years, many studies have compared rural and metropolitan secondary school outcomes. Fyfield (1970) focused on the key issues affecting rural students, which related to:

- (a) cultural differences between metropolitan and rural areas;
- (b) issues related to teacher supply and retention;
- (c) difficulties in accessing professional learning for rural teachers due to rural isolation;
- (d) a lack of motivation of rural students;
- (e) parental negativity about education;
- (f) the difficulty in accessing tertiary education in rural areas.

Fifty years later these inequities persist. In Victoria, and indeed Australia, the situation has not improved. Rural students remain disadvantaged in their outcomes and their future career choices. It is not a level playing field.

In 2014, a Victorian daily newspaper, *The Age*, printed an article with the headline:

“Country students falling behind”.

The article focused on student outcomes at all year levels, particularly those related to secondary schooling. In the article, it was reported that 40% of country secondary students did not continue with education after finishing year 12, compared with 20% of metropolitan students. The article noted that the Minister for Education at the time, Martin Dixon, had stated that ‘a plan to improve rural and regional education was “well under way”’ (Topsfield, 2014, p. 13).

The problem, of course, was that the plan, and so many plans before and since, have not been implemented, or have been only partially implemented, and rural students continue to feel neglected, forgotten and overlooked. In fact, in 2018, in the ‘Independent Review into Rural, Regional and Remote Education’, a national review, John Halsey noted that “the achievements of rural, regional and remote students have in the main lagged behind urban students for decades” (Halsey, 2018, p. 4). Further, in 2019, a review of rural and regional education in Victoria, as its first recommendation, stated that there was a need to:

“Develop a comprehensive five year strategic plan for rural and regional education that recognises and addresses the specific opportunities and challenges of rural and regional education, and establish both a Rural Education Consultative Group and a Regional Education Consultative Group to support the effective implementation of the strategic plan” (Department of Education and Training, 2019b, p. 2).

Another plan, another report, another committee. It sounds positive, but history has shown that little has changed over many years. There is a need for a new way of looking at the problem. For years, research has focused on the insights from researchers, teachers, principals and bureaucrats. Attention needs to be paid to what the students think and say about their experiences of school education.

1.3 Student Voice

This research focuses on the voice of the students. Surveys and focus groups were conducted to capture the perspectives of the students regarding the effects of rurality on the aspirations of rural students, and to inquire into why differences between rural and metropolitan students exist to the degree that they do. The students are the ones who experience schooling in rural settings, and listening to their voices provides a unique insight into the relationships between rurality and student aspirations. This research pushes beyond policy understanding of the issues, to better come to grips with the lived experiences, including the barriers and enablers, from the point of view of the students. By considering the evidence provided by the students, this research explores and imagines possible strategies for improvement that have not yet been considered.

Using student voice, the research seeks answers to many questions. What do students think about education? What do they want from the school that they attend? What do they want to do when they leave school? Are there differences between rural and metropolitan students' thoughts about the purpose of schooling, about staying at school to complete year 12, and about how students perceive their destinations beyond school? What role do rurality, community and connection to place play in the aspirations that a student has for their future? What are the barriers and enablers for rural students realising their aspirations?

Further, the research focuses on the question of success as seen by the students themselves. What constitutes success for each student? For some, like Jeremy, accessing a university education equates to success (indeed, for some it is the only measure of success), whilst for others it is related to staying in their local community and finding a position which suits their needs. For others it is finding the balance between work and recreational activities. What does success look like for rural students in contrast with that of metropolitan students?

This research examines the perceptions of different groups of students in a range of rural and metropolitan settings. Rural and metropolitan students' experiences and thinking are compared and contrasted. Differences between male and female students are captured. The perspectives of year 10 and year 12 students and their plans about school completion, further study and their aspirations are given voice in this research.

1.4 Rural Victoria

Differences between rural and metropolitan Victoria have been well documented and occur in many aspects of life. Major differences exist in many areas, including health, education, transport, employment and wellbeing.

For example, the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), 2013 report, ‘A Snapshot of Poverty in Rural and Regional Australia’, indicated that whilst levels of poverty were higher in rural Australia than in metropolitan areas, it was not regarded as an area for government policy development. The report stated that rural Australians were subjected to:

“... reduced access to health services, transport difficulties, inadequate local infrastructure and vulnerability to drought and other natural hazards” (NRHA, 2013, p. 4).

Into the future, significant changes will occur in Victoria as the population increases from 6.5 million in 2018, to a predicted 11.2 million in 2056, a 72% increase, as reported in the ‘Victoria in Future 2019’ report of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) (2019). During that time, it is projected that the population of rural Victoria will increase from 1.5 million to 2.2 million, a 47% increase. The increased rural population will require increased levels of infrastructure in order to ensure that rural people in Victoria have the services that they need and deserve.

1.5 The Research Topic

The topic for this research is:

“The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students.”

The research aims to conduct an analysis of the effect of rurality on secondary school students. The data used in the research comes from the students themselves, through their completion of student surveys and their responses in student focus groups. The data relates to student aspirations and the enablers which assist and the barriers which hinder them. The research focuses on students in government secondary schools in Victoria, and, in particular, students in rural secondary schools. It contrasts the perceptions and perspectives of rural students with those of their metropolitan counterparts.

1.6 Research Questions

To ascertain the effect of rurality on the aspirations of rural students, the research focuses on the students themselves, and the level of support that they receive from their families, friends, schools and communities to assist and support them to determine and realise their aspirations for the future. By contrasting rural and metropolitan students, the strength of the effect of rurality will be observed.

The research questions for this study are:

1. To what extent does living in a rural community affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
2. To what extent do factors related to a student's family affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
3. To what extent do friends and peers influence the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
4. To what extent do schools and teachers affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
5. To what extent do identity and self-efficacy affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

Whilst each of the research questions focuses on the “extent” to which the element or factor in the question affects student aspirations, implicit in each question is the determination of how and why student aspirations are affected.

1.7 The Research Locations

The definition of rural varies widely. Rural has been defined by population, population density, or distance from major cities (Sher and Sher, 1994; Lockie, 2000). For some, rural is simply defined as ‘non-metro’ (Looker & Dwyer, 1998, p. 9), or “where metropolitan Australia isn’t” (Lockie, 2000, p. 16). In this research, the definition of rural in Victoria, Australia, is that used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), namely all areas outside the Melbourne Metropolitan Area. The ABS designates rural areas as Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote (ABS, 2020), as shown in Figure 1.1.

Whilst the research aimed to incorporate rural schools from each of the four categories of rurality, as Figure 1.1 indicates, there are no areas of Victoria designated as Very Remote. The majority of the State of Victoria is either Inner Regional or Outer Regional, with two areas, one in the south eastern tip and another in north western Victoria designated as remote. This research therefore included schools that were designated as Inner Regional, Outer Regional and Remote.

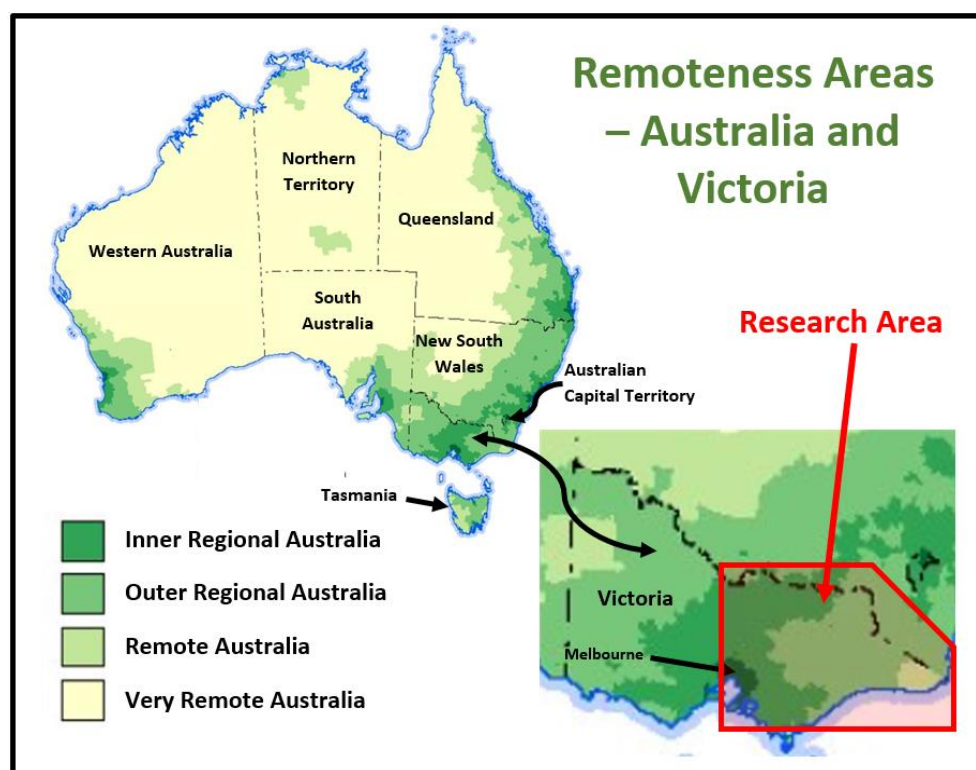


Figure 1.1: Maps showing Australia, Victoria, Melbourne, the Research Area and the Remoteness Categories. Maps adapted from ABS (2020) and used with permission.

The research took place in sixteen government secondary schools, all of which were located in the eastern regions of Victoria, Australia. The schools included eleven schools in rural Victoria, and five in metropolitan Melbourne. Figure 1.1 shows the location of the research area, the area within which all of the sixteen research schools were situated.

The schools where the research was undertaken were as different as the places where they existed. The sample of rural schools included schools close to, and schools very distant from, Melbourne. It included schools in high, medium and low socio-economic areas. Further, large schools (including a school with more than 1000 students), and small schools (including a school of less than 50 students) were included in the sample. The rural schools were located in a range of small, medium and large country towns.

The metropolitan schools, included in the research to provide a baseline, comprised schools from the inner suburbs, beachside suburbs and the outer growth corridor of Melbourne. They ranged in distance from the centre of Melbourne, and included schools from a mix of high, medium and low socio-economic areas. The metropolitan schools ranged in size from less than 500 students to greater than 2000 students.

1.8 Significance of the Study

There is an explicit need for this research project in Victoria. Principals, teachers and schools are constantly looking at ways to improve student outcomes, but they are aware that many barriers exist. Some of these barriers were, in the past, considered to be beyond the control of schools but, in more recent times, it has been recognised, in both rural and metropolitan areas, that school, family and community partnerships are an essential element in the improvement of student outcomes and the realisation of student aspirations, as noted by Frederico and Whiteside (2016) and Sheridan and Wheeler (2017).

This research considers the enablers and barriers to student aspirations, focusing on the influence of where the students live, their family and friends, their school, and factors related to their own behaviours and their sense of themselves. The research also considers differences between the aspirational behaviours of male and female students, and students in different year levels. Importantly, the research uses the strengths of, and the issues associated with, living in a rural place, to determine strategies for improvement in the educational experiences provided to rural students, and hence, to increase their chances of realising their aspirations for the future.

This research provides a new perspective on the issues affecting rural students in Victoria and their aspirations. In considering the voices of students from a wide range of schools, the research takes notice of their perceptions, both from a survey and from the direct voices of students in focus groups. Student voice takes centre stage and provides new insights not usually heard.

1.9 Background and Role of the Researcher

I have had a lifetime career in education in Victoria. Having taught in five government secondary schools, one in rural Victoria, I was promoted to the principal class and served for four years as a Deputy Principal and twelve years as a Principal in large

government secondary colleges in Melbourne. This was followed by thirteen years as Deputy Regional Director and Executive Director – School Improvement, in metropolitan and rural regions, culminating, in 2015, with the award of a Public Service Medal (PSM) for my contribution to education in Victoria.

It was in North Eastern Victoria Region, a region with a mix of rural and metropolitan schools, that my true passion for rural education was realised. I know rural government secondary schools, how they operate and their struggles to improve student outcomes. In my role as Deputy Regional Director, I observed principals focusing on improving outcomes, but having significant difficulty in moving outcomes from a lower base than that which existed for their metropolitan counterparts. I observed first-hand many of the barriers that existed for rural secondary schools and their students, and I worked with principals to attempt to counter those barriers, often in under-resourced circumstances. This research is a culmination of the passion and drive that I have displayed over many years: a passion for rural schools, teachers and most importantly, students. Now, as a student and not employed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, I have the freedom to fully explore these ideas and make suggestions, without the oversight of a government department.

My expertise in government school education has assisted me to conduct this research. In recent times, as part of my work in schools, I have conducted many focus groups of students, teachers, principals and parents and I have found that, often, very accurate information about student outcomes, and schools in general, is derived from the students themselves. I have championed student voice in schools, encouraging the use of focus groups, provision of feedback to teachers, and students setting their own learning goals, as a way to empower students to become active participants in the education process and to take more control of their own learning.

In this research, I have focused on students and their voices, to provide new and different ways of looking at secondary education in Victoria. I have constructed a student survey, based on my own understandings of the school system, and informed by several researchers, including Bandura (1997), Petrin, Schafft and Meece (2014), Watson et al. (2016), and Chen and Starobin (2018). The survey was implemented in sixteen rural and metropolitan government secondary colleges, after being trialled in four rural Victorian schools. Building on the survey data, I have conducted focus groups in six of the schools,

three in rural Victoria and three in Melbourne, and I have analysed the results of both the surveys and the focus groups.

This research explored the personal, behavioural and environmental factors that influence student aspirations for the future, and examined who or what has assisted, or has been a barrier, in the development of those aspirations. The research has uncovered the factors that have correlated strongly with continuing with education after secondary school. In addition, the research has identified potential strategies, many provided by the students themselves, which could make a difference in rural secondary schools.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the research is the use of a relatively small sample of 363 students. A larger sample could allow for more fine-grained analysis of the student surveys and focus group outcomes. However, this was counteracted by the broad range of schools, in terms of size, distance from Melbourne and socio-economic levels and, by ensuring that, as much as possible, the sample of students in each school was representative of the whole school population. This was accomplished by including proportions of male and female students that matched the percentage of male and female students within the whole school. Also, the percentage of students in year 12, who studied the Victorian Certificate of Education (the traditional academic course available to students in Victorian schools) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (the vocational course available to students in Victorian schools), matched the overall percentage of students completing these courses within the whole school.

A second limitation is that students were able to participate in the research only if they had a correctly signed consent form. This process may have skewed the results to some degree. This limitation was addressed through all students in a mixed ability class group being provided with a consent form, and the school principal being requested to ensure that the cohort of students from their school, who took part in the research, was representative of the total population of students in the whole school.

A third limitation is that the research considered only students in government secondary schools in Victoria. Students from Catholic or Independent schools were not included in the sample of students.

1.11 Organisation of the Study

The research focuses on the effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in government secondary schools in Victoria, from the perspective of the students themselves. This thesis includes eight chapters, eight appendices and a list of the references used to inform the research. An outline of each of the chapters in the thesis is detailed below.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research. It begins with a short case study of a rural student named Jeremy, outlining his journey through school to university and ultimately to his position as a teacher in the government secondary school that he attended as a boy. The chapter also outlines the area within which the research was carried out, and the use of student voice as the vehicle for determining enablers and barriers to student aspirations.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, focusing on rurality and differences between rural and metropolitan student outcomes and aspirations, both in Australia and internationally. This chapter also reviews literature related to place, identity and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the basis of the theoretical framework used in this research.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in the research, where the use of student voice was incorporated as a central platform. The chapter outlines the theoretical framework used in the research, the construction, piloting and implementation of the surveys and focus groups, the data analysis techniques, both for the quantitative and the qualitative elements of the research, and how they work together to strengthen the research.

Chapter 4 outlines the data from the student surveys, analysed using IBM SPSS, and presented as a sequence of graphs and correlation statistics, which provide insights into the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants which shape student aspirations.

Chapter 5 outlines the student focus group data and the real voice of the students. This chapter provides evidence regarding student aspirations and the factors that influence them. The chapter is presented as a sequence of student comments and statements from the focus groups, related to the theoretical framework.

Chapter 6 is a discussion of the results from the student survey and the focus groups. The determinants of the theoretical framework are used as an analytical platform on which to examine and explore the data from the previous two chapters, to align the results with the literature review and to draw out key new themes.

Chapter 7 considers a response to each of the five research questions focusing on the research topic and the theoretical framework. The chapter also includes how this research has added to the knowledge in the area of rural education.

Chapter 8 provides ideas, based on the comments of the students in the research, that reference how rural student aspirations and outcome expectations can be improved. The chapter also includes the key findings from the research, suggestions for future research and reflects back on the case study of Jeremy who was introduced in Chapter 1.

Additional sections of the thesis include:

(a) The references used in the research;

(b) Eight appendices:

Appendix 1 Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in this Thesis;

Appendix 2 Ethics Approval for the Research;

Appendix 3 Explanatory Statement;

Appendix 4 Student Consent Form;

Appendix 5 Student Surveys;

Appendix 6 Classification of Occupations;

Appendix 7 Additional Graphs Related to the Student Survey;

Appendix 8 Correlation Coefficient Results.

1.12 Summary

In this chapter, Jeremy's case study set the scene for the research. The research topic and research questions were presented, along with the rationale for carrying out the research. The focus on student voice as a platform for the data collection and analysis was explained.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review, focusing on the academic literature and government documents that provide the background and rationale for this research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the aspirations of rural secondary school students and the factors that influence them. Academic literature and government policy documents, related to the effects of rurality and, in particular, the influence of family, friends, schools and communities on student aspirations, are considered. Bandura's ideas and paradigm of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) is introduced, because of its focus on self-efficacy, identity and place and also because Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) has been deployed in this research to provide a framework for the generation and analysis of the data. The use of student voice, which was central to this research, also features in this literature review.

2.1 Student Aspirations Defined

The focus of this research is the aspirations of rural secondary school students in Victoria, Australia. Firstly, the concept of aspirations is examined.

The Collins English Dictionary refers to an aspiration as being a “strong desire to achieve something, such as success” (Collins Dictionaries, 2020). Aspirations are often transient and, as stated by Gemici, Bednarz, Karmel and Lim (2014), young people often change their career aspirations many times as they mature into adulthood, usually in response to greater research into possible future careers, or the opportunity to enter a career that previously had not existed. Aspirations are generally thought about and imagined early in life, even as young as primary school age, a time when children aspire to jobs that they think they would like. By the secondary school years, students focus more on jobs that incorporate areas where they enjoyed success and achievement at school, as found by Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate and Albright (2015), who researched Australian primary and secondary school students.

Aspirations have been conceptualised as “the student's ability to set goals for the future whilst being inspired in the present to work towards those goals” (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996, p. 130). Quaglia and Cobb found that aspirations related to the needs of the individual, in areas such as education, employment, careers and lifestyle choices. Archer, De Witt and Wong (2014) found that student background issues, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender, played a significant role in aspiration development. Hoskins and Barker (2017) followed the lifestyle thought of Quaglia and Cobb, finding that aspirations focused on five key areas, namely “happiness, personal satisfaction, making a difference, status and wealth”

(Hoskins & Barker, 2017, p. 47), and that the aspirations of students were generally influenced by family background and parental influence. Yaeger, Bundick and Johnson (2012) found that schools had a role in helping students form their aspirations, and encouraged schools to allow students to explore and imagine possible future aspirations, a theme central to this research.

In researching Australian rural students, Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert and Muspratt (2004) referred to aspirations as a way for young people to escape the community in which they lived. They found that aspirations were formed over time, based on the student's sense of self and aptitude, and the support they received from parents, teachers and friends (Alloway et al., 2004, p. 12).

When Ball, Macrae and Maguire (1999) studied the aspirations of a group of 16-year-old students in the United Kingdom, they found that their aspirations reflected their life experiences and their family background. Availability of jobs in their local areas was also a factor. They stated that:

“They enter with very different learning identities, aspirations and motivations, and their ‘educational inheritances’ prepare them differently for participation. Some young people simply want a job and a wage and ‘no more learning’, others come with a long-term commitment to gaining higher qualifications” (Ball et al., 1999, p. 195).

Ball et al. stated that each student's aspirations were constructed through their ability to create an “imagined future” (Ball et al., 1999, p. 210), and were influenced by family, friends, where they lived, their school experiences and exposure to a range of future possibilities. University is not the desired aspiration of everyone and, as Ball et al. suggested, some young people just want to get a job and not be involved in further education, whilst others saw a university education as their measure of success. Whilst the research of Ball et al. related to students in an urban area, it informed this research through the factors that influenced the aspirations of young people.

According to Spohrer (2016), a common view of success in aspirations was related to accessing a university education. In her research, Spohrer stated:

“One teacher conceded: ‘not that university is the only way of assessing how aspirational the school is’ – a statement which indicates a contestation, but, at

the same time, confirms that university is the ‘gold standard’” (Spohrer, 2016, p. 414).

The view, presented by Spohrer, of university being the ‘gold standard’ for success, was reasonable for some students, but not for all. As Ball et al. (1999) found, for many students, success related to finding a job that suits their needs.

It has been said that the capacity to aspire is a concept that is not spread equally across different levels of society and that the more well-off members of society usually have more life experiences and opportunities to draw on in developing their aspirations (Appadurai, 2004). This resonates with the earlier research by Edgar (1975), who found that the aspirations of rural students in Australia were affected by their family’s socio-economic status, and that they had a lower sense of self-belief and a lack of experiences that could contribute towards the development of their future aspirations. Edgar’s conclusion undervalued rural life and, as noted by Burnell (2003) and Petrin et al. (2014), rural students are generally proud of their rurality and live a life full of social interactions, problem solving and real-life experiences. As a consequence, according to Burnell and Petrin et al., rural students have a highly developed self-belief and high aspirations for their future.

In the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008), it was found that many students in secondary school did not aspire to continue education beyond secondary school, partly due to their lack of understanding of the benefits of a tertiary education. This policy report also identified several groups of Australian students, including students from rural areas, who missed out on a tertiary education as they had not been provided with the resources needed to understand the benefits of continuing their education, and who were also discouraged by the costs involved, which were the result of the lack of local tertiary institutions in rural areas and rural isolation. Perry (2014) found that scholarships for rural students to attend university were ineffective as they did not provide the level of funding needed for a rural student to live in a metropolitan environment.

The research literature about aspirations identifies an interplay of many factors which affect the aspirations of rural students. These factors include rurality, family, schools, availability of jobs and the student’s personal circumstances, including their self-efficacy and identity. In this research, with its focus on rural students and their aspirations, student aspirations focused on three main areas, namely: further education, their choice of career, and the development of a specifically desired lifestyle.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997, 2001) highlights the centrality of self-efficacy in human behaviour. Hence, self-efficacy is very relevant to the understanding of the factors that shape the future aspirations of students. As Bandura and Locke (2003) stated:

“Efficacy beliefs predict occupational choices and level of mastery of educational requirements for those careers ...” (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p. 90).

In the next section, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), as it relates to student aspirations, is examined.

2.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997, 2001), outlines how human behaviour is developed through, and arises from, a combination of influences related to personal, behavioural and environmental forces. SCT focuses on the forces that act on the individual and how each individual interacts with their environment. It describes how individuals develop strategies, and use them to influence their own outcomes, and that, if an individual has the self-belief that they can obtain a specific outcome, the likelihood of success is greater. Bandura’s conceptualisation of the individual is useful in researching the effects of rurality on student aspirations because, as Bandura understands it:

“Human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity in which behaviour, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other” (Bandura, 1986, p. 18).

Bandura’s SCT is shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.1.

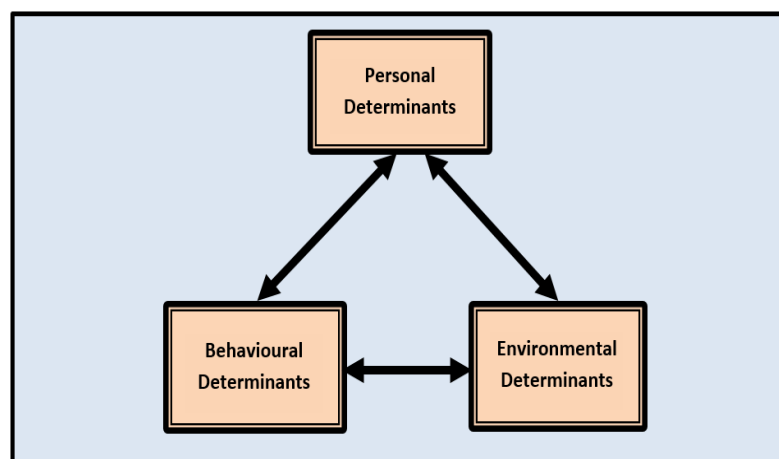


Figure 2.1: Bandura’s SCT. Adapted from Bandura (2012).

Inherent in SCT is the concept of self-efficacy and belief in one's capacity to carry out certain tasks or to have high level aspirations. Bandura (1997) stated that:

“People who doubt their capabilities in particular domains of activity shy away from difficult tasks in those domains. They find it hard to motivate themselves, and they slacken their efforts or give up quickly in the face of obstacles. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue” (Bandura, 1997, p. 39).

Further, Bandura elaborated on this notion of self-efficacy by defining perceived self-efficacy as being the judgement by a person of their ability to achieve a required performance (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). If a person believes that they are capable of achieving an outcome, there is a higher likelihood that they will achieve that outcome.

Adding to the concept of perceived self-efficacy is the notion of outcome expectations, which Bandura defined as a “judgement of the likely consequence ... behaviour will produce” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Considering outcome expectations, Bandura (1997) found that many people rejected career choices because they believed that they were not capable of carrying out the tasks required, or that they were unlikely to be successful in the role. In these situations, their outcome expectations overrode the possibility that they could be successful, based on their lack of self-efficacy related to their aspirations. Bandura (1997) noted that, where self-efficacy is low, and where people do not feel that they have the capacity, through setting goals and doing the necessary work, they will not be successful.

Basing their research on SCT, Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994, 2000) developed a model which incorporated an understanding of barriers to career aspirations. They considered barriers, such as financial issues, emotional deterrents and lack of support, alongside disapproval by significant people, as affecting aspirations. Similarly, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001) considered other factors, such as gender, socio-economic status, family structures and friends, as being significant in the determination of career directions. Rogers and Creed (2011) used SCT and the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) model, developed by Lent et al. (1994), to incorporate the effects of social relationships and the influence, both positive and negative, of schools and families on career aspirations of students.

Farmer (1985, p. 363) also used an adapted version of SCT to focus on career and achievement motivation. Her version adjusted SCT to incorporate the background of people (including gender, ethnicity and ability), as well as their personal characteristics (such as attitudes and beliefs) and environmental factors. Farmer's research assisted in the development of the framework used in this research.

An adaptation of SCT was used in this research. It provided an excellent model for analysis of the factors that affected student aspirations. The model allowed for a focus on personal attributes such as the students' self-efficacy and identity, their behaviours related to schooling and to their future determination, and the influence of environmental determinants such as family, friends, school and rurality. Further detail, regarding the adaptation of SCT used in this research, is included in Chapter 3.

A key element, in the adaptation of SCT for this research, was the identity of the students involved. The concept of identity is explored in the next section.

2.3 Identity

In researching the aspirations of rural students, self-efficacy is a central theme which is connected to their identity. Developing one's aspirations requires an understanding of one's self and a determination to make decisions. The identity of a person allows them to understand themselves, and to make their own way in the world by making decisions about their future. The link between identity and self-efficacy is tangible. There are, however, different ways of considering identity, depending on whether the view-point is based on social theory, psychology or sociology.

John Stuart Mill (1859), a social theorist, in his works on identity, stated that:

“He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision” (Mill, 1859, p. 110).

In this quote, Mill focused on the self-direction of a person. For many, this trait is a part of their identity and their understanding of themselves. A measure of identity relates to having the capacity to choose one's own plan for the future and to develop one's own aspirations.

Erikson (1968), a developmental psychologist, focused on the psychosocial aspects of identity. Erikson noted that young people identify with understanding themselves and finding their own way in the world. He stated:

“Youth, therefore, is sensitive to any suggestion that it may be hopelessly determined by what went before in life histories or in history. Psychosocially speaking, this would mean that irreversible childhood identifications would deprive an individual of an identity of his own; historically, that vested power would prevent a group from realizing its composite historical identity. For these reasons, youth often rejects parents and authorities and wishes to belittle them as inconsequential ...” (Erikson, 1968, p. 247).

Giddens (1991), a sociologist, brought together the ideas of Mill and Erikson, in a way that related to student aspirations. Giddens believed that a person needed to create their own identity, based on past events and future aspirations. He stated:

“Life-planning presupposes a specific mode of organising time because the reflexive construction of self-identity depends as much on preparing for the future as on interpreting the past, although the ‘reworking’ of past events is certainly always important in this process” (Giddens, 1991, p. 73).

Côté (1997) found that identity was related to behaviours and personality. Attributes for determination of one's identity are “ego strength, an internal locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, social perspective taking, critical thinking abilities, and moral reasoning abilities” (Côté, 1997, p. 578). Here, Côté illustrates how identity is connected with self-efficacy. To have a strong self-efficacy implies ego strength, control of one's destiny and purpose in one's existence. A strong self-efficacy implies an understanding of one's self and one's identity.

Identity reflects current and previous social circles within which a young person mixes. In this way, identity can be affected by social class, significant others and the interactions with society (Stokes, Aaltonen & Coffey, 2015). In the same way, Côté (1997) commented that identity related to the interactions that one had with other people, whilst

Sampson and Goodrich (2009) included the importance of the local landscape and community in identity development, stating:

“Place, as setting, has the potential to contribute to the manner in which individuals develop and maintain a sense of place, belonging, and identity” (Sampson & Goodrich, 2009, p. 902).

Sport and part-time employment also contribute significantly to the self-efficacy and identity of many students, particularly those in rural areas. Sport is a central feature of many country towns and it provides an activity where young people can display their skills and abilities, thus enhancing their identity (Tonts & Atherley, 2010; Croft-Piggin, 2015). Part-time work, for students, allows them to show greater independence and self-confidence and hence, it develops their identity, as described by Marsh and Kleitman (2005) and Maslen (2009). Success in sport and part-time employment provides a belief that a young person can be successful in other areas of life and, as such, encourages the development of higher aspirations for the future (Patton & Smith, 2010).

Howley (2006) found that the aspirations of rural students were similar to those of their metropolitan counterparts, but acknowledged that connection to place, through community activities, friendship groups, family ties and the love of the local landscape, affected the identity of rural young people and this, at times, resulted in them wanting to stay in their community and possibly rejecting opportunities for education or employment that required them to leave. Howley stated:

“Evidence indicates that connection to place, for example, provides youth with a significant sense of identity, commitment, and social connection” (Howley, 2006, p. 63).

Geldens and Bourke (2008) provided a somewhat different view of the relationship between place and identity for rural students. They found that:

“While most did not appear to be concerned about being constrained by, or limited to, a prescribed suite of identity formations, some of these young people revealed, often very candidly, that they did not enjoy complete freedom in the formation of identity due to lack of opportunity and/or being observed locally” (Geldens & Bourke, 2008, p. 286).

The thoughts of Geldens and Bourke, and Howley are particularly relevant in the current research. Geldens and Bourke (2008) referred to the identity of students in rural areas being constrained by the lack of opportunities and the responsibility that they have to the people in the community, whilst Howley (2006) focused on identity being affected by connection to place, a factor relevant to this research.

Having examined the literature related to SCT and identity, the next section considers the concepts of place and rurality and how they influence student aspirations.

2.4 Place and Rurality

In this section, the literature related to place, rurality, the effects of globalisation and digital technology on rural life, and education in rural areas, will be examined. Firstly, the concept of place is explored.

2.4.1 The Concept of Place

For most people, their place is where they were brought up. Place becomes a part of a person's identity and lives are often affected by place (Tuan, 1977). Similarly, Relph (1976) noted that many aspects of people's lives are governed or affected by the things that happen in their place. Faulstich (1990) summed up the concept of place, stating that:

“Places are fundamental expressions of human involvement with the world. They provide foundations for human existence, imparting not only context to activity, but security and identity as well” (Faulstich, 1990, p. 96).

Like Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976) before him, Faulstich (1990) focused on place and how it matters. Faulstich found that place contributes to a framework for the lives of people, often providing a safe community in which to live. Place allows people to develop their identity, one which is often, but not always, influenced by the place where they live.

Rose (1995), in her article related to the connection that people have to places and the part that place plays in their lives, explicitly related belonging in a rural place to a sense of self and a sense of identity. She found that:

“One way in which identity is connected to a particular place is by the feeling that you belong to that place. It's a place in which you feel comfortable, or at

home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolised by certain qualities of that place” (Rose, 1995, p. 89).

Whilst many rural people feel the connection to place described by Rose (1995), others want to leave the community for reasons related to education, employment or lifestyle. Mobility from place is considered in the next section.

2.4.2 Place and Mobility

John Urry (2007) wrote about the mobility of people and referred to the fact that places “draw or repel particular types of residents or visitors” (Urry, 2007, p. 253). Urry questioned whether it was the landscape, the people, the community, or some force of attraction that connected a person to a place or, for some, encouraged them to leave. Urry’s thinking is relevant to this research, focusing on the effect of connection to place on student aspirations.

For many people, place is a permanent element of their lives. For others, it is transient, it is where they live for a short time and then move elsewhere. In “Out of Place”, Edward Said (1999) discussed the time in his life when he became dislocated from his place. It was a time when he felt isolated, culturally remote, excluded and had feelings of discomfort. McConaghey (2006) reflected on the thoughts of Said (1999) and Urry (2000, 2007). She noted that mobility was a part of living in modern times, and that being mobile can allow a person to re-establish or develop their identity elsewhere, but that it can also create feelings of disconnection with place.

Many young people are connected to their community, because it is the place that they know. They are locals in their place. As Geertz (1993) stated, to have knowledge of how to exist within a place as a local, it is essential to understand local customs and beliefs. Knowing these local customs often brings acceptance in a community, as found by Radford (2017), who described rural communities as being places where identity is created through both positive and negative interactions with other people and aspects of the community. This was previously described by Urry (2000) as “a local social system in which there is a localised, relatively bounded set of interrelationships and social groups in local institutions” (Urry, 2000, p. 133).

In “The Locals”, Garbutt (2011) discussed the fact that being a “local” in a rural setting meant creating an identity, through connectedness with people, and that this was a

consequential source of strength. Garbutt's "locals" were those whose primary focus was on their local town as the centre of their world. Related to this, Merton (1957) noted that "locals" were social beings, keen to be involved in local activities and wanting to know others in the community. Hannerz (1996) found that, in any community or city, many people were locals but there were also many who had moved into the community from elsewhere, having moved for lifestyle, employment or educational reasons. Hannerz also found that, whilst many people existed within multiple local, interstate or global places, depending on the needs of the person, they would retain their feelings of belonging to their original place, just as they would retain a part of their previous identity (Hannerz, 1996, p. 138).

Place matters to people and to communities. But rural places have changed over time and, in many ways, they are not the places that they used to be. How rural places have changed is considered in the next section.

2.4.3 Changes in Rurality and the Effect on Community Life

Bessant (1978) referred to the Australian rural dweller as traditionally being a bushman, shearer or farmer, and called this stereotype "the rural myth". The rural farmer was seen as the "salt of the earth" and the provider of food for the country. Rural people were the true Australians, but were also seen as being "different from city people" (Bessant, 1978, pp. 121-122). Rural places have been, and still are, seen as destinations for tourists, an escape from urban commercialism and industrialisation, and an ideal in terms of safety and a quiet lifestyle (Halfacree, 1995). But the "rural idyll", mentioned by Halfacree, is undergoing change. That change has resulted in people, who would previously have stayed, leaving their rural community.

Rurality, in Australia and around the world, has been in a state of flux for many years. Rural communities have seen a decrease of rural populations, and a consequential decline in infrastructure (Geldens, 2007). For example, many rural towns in Australia have seen the closure of banks, hospitals, schools, shops, businesses and post-offices as a result of population decline (Tonts & Larsen, 2002), a situation that impacts on the wellbeing of rural places, as found by Burns & Willis (2011).

Cuervo (2016) stated that "there is a tension between youth needs and aspirations and the sustainability of rural communities" (Cuervo, 2016, p. 150). His research found that rural towns were not providing the level of education and employment opportunities needed by

young people and, at the same time, were not attractive to new people. As a result, many rural towns in Australia have been in decline for many years, resulting in increased social disadvantage and diminishing infrastructure as found by Pretty, Bramston, Patrick and Pannach (2006).

Irwin et al. (2009), in considering changes to rural places, observed that urban areas were changing as well, growing larger and penetrating into once rural parts of Australia, encouraged by affordable land and decreasing transport costs. In this way, some rural towns, particularly those in peri-rural areas, were becoming more urbanised. In the United States, Brown and Schafft (2011, p. 162-163) found that traditional rural jobs were declining, small farms were being replaced by larger operations and rural economies were declining as a result of globalisation.

Whilst rural communities were declining, Petrin et al. (2014) found that rural people were generally more connected to their community, through community activities and values, than were urban people, where the comparative anonymity of urban life existed. Further, Tonts (2005) also saw elements of rural life that continued to provide community strength. These elements involved community activities such as sport, clubs and community activities, which connected local people to their place, through the social interaction that occurred in these activities. Sport, according to Tonts, fostered a connection to place, resulting in a commitment to the community. It has been suggested that sport created “a visual impression of a tightly bonded community” and that this has connected young people, particularly males, to the community (Tonts & Atherley, 2010, p. 389). Croft-Piggin (2015, p. 111) also found that sport “provides valued social ‘glue’ in many cultures”, and enhanced connection to place.

Although sport and community activities are important in connecting people to their community, many young people are leaving. This suggests that for many young people, there are other parts of their lives, such as education and employment, which necessitate them leaving their community, an issue that is central to this research.

Whilst Corbett (2015) found that rural communities were changing, he questioned whether the difference between rural and urban lifestyles was decreasing, stating that “the relationship between the rural and the urban is becoming increasingly integrated and overlapping” (Corbett, 2015, p. 14). Bæck (2004), focusing on Norwegian young people, made similar comments, stating that rural communities often had an urban ethos due to the

fact that “modern” people, particularly young people, believed that the city culture was the dominant one in modern times, and that the city equated to “the good life” (Bæck, 2004, p. 113). Corbett and Bæck’s point was that the traditional view of the “country town” was changing, and whilst young people were still connected to their community, the connection was different to what had traditionally been the case. In modern times, the connection was more transient than it was in previous generations, and the search for employment and educational prospects was providing reasons for young people to relocate to major cities.

Two major forces that have impacted on rural communities are the effects of globalisation, and the proliferation of communication technologies. These areas are considered in the next section.

2.4.4 The Effect of Globalisation and Digital Technologies on Rural Communities

Globalisation has had an effect on rural Australia, as it has elsewhere in the world. The opening of new world markets was seen as a positive (Kelly, 1994; Pritchard & McManus, 2000), creating new opportunities for the marketing of Australian agricultural commodities. However, low tariffs and an influx of overseas produce reduced the positive effects of the policies. Economic rationalism drove policy development that focused on the lowering of tariffs which, in turn, has left many rural industries in difficult circumstances (Kelly, 1994).

Restructuring of agricultural industries in Australia led to the decline of small family farms, many of which were taken over by big businesses, creating larger land holdings (Wheeler, Bjornlund, Zuo & Edwards, 2012). Many families gave up the farming life and moved to rural cities or metropolitan areas in search of employment (Anderson, Giesecke and Valenzuela, 2008), and the previous relative abundance of jobs started to decline. As Brett (2007) described the situation:

“The decline in the economic importance of agriculture has been accompanied by a demographic decline in rural districts” (Brett, 2007, p. 8).

As stated by Brett (2007), globalisation resulted in a rural decline and a decrease in the rural population. Agriculture became re-structured, and contributed a lower percentage to Australian exports. As Corbett and Vibert (2010) found, “ways of understanding rural space

are no longer adequate as ruralities are transformed, sometimes radically, by globalization, and the spread of mobile communication technologies” (Corbett & Vibert, 2010, p. 9).

Massey (1995) noted that globalisation had affected many places, particularly in terms of in-migration, out-migration and changing cultures. Massey questioned whether the changes in rural communities affected the connection between people and their place. Added to this, drought, climate change and bushfires have led to financial and economic difficulties, population decline and the breakdown of community structures in rural Australia (Edwards, Gray & Hunter, 2009; Kiem & Austin, 2013). The face of rural Australia has changed and the aspirations and the futures of young people have reflected these changes.

Another factor, noted by Corbett and Vibert (2010), that has affected rural communities, has been the ease of access to technology, computers and the internet. The view of urban life, seen on television and via the internet, has affected the way in which young people see their rural community and its place in the world. Young people have used social media and the internet to enhance their understanding of urban-rural differences. Many have developed a more global view of the world, which often resulted in young people aspiring to careers that were previously unknown to them, as found by Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison (2014).

The use of electronic media has allowed rural students to consider aspirations which are local, interstate or international. The internet has provided knowledge, global understanding and, in turn, encouraged a motivation for young people to escape rurality (Appadurai, 1996, p. 10). As suggested by Sellar (2013), electronic media became a tool which allowed young people to explore their identity and to imagine possible new futures for themselves. For many rural young people, the internet provided a view of the world outside their community, and this often translated into aspirations which embraced mobility beyond their local area and, at times, to interstate or international destinations (Skrbis, Woodward & Bean, 2014).

Leyshon (2008, 2011) also found that the use of electronic media in rural places exacerbated the downturn of rural life. This, Leyshon found, made the connections of young people to their rural place tenuous, resulting in young people often expressing that the lifestyles of their parents lacked interest for them and that rural communities were not providing the modern opportunities experienced by metropolitan students. This was a further impetus for rural young people to leave their home town for larger centres or metropolitan

areas. Digital technologies have allowed rural young people, particularly those who were bored with rural life, to change their aspirations for the future and to dream of living their lives away from their rural community.

As rural areas change, the role of schools becomes more important. Education in rural areas is considered in the next section.

2.4.5 Education in Rural Areas

In a study of education in Zimbabwe, a school principal, when discussing education, stated that “where the child lives greatly affects the type and quality of education she or he will receive” (Ncube, 2013, p. 3). In Norway, Bæck (2016) makes a clear link between rural location and educational outcomes whilst, at the same time, stressing that the term “rural” was not a homogeneous term, and that there was a great deal of variation between the educational opportunities provided in different rural locations. In the United States, Showalter, Hartman, Johnson and Klein (2019) found that:

“the challenges facing many children and families in rural America still aren’t getting the attention they deserve. While some rural schools and places thrive, others continue to face nothing less than an emergency in the education and well-being of children” (Showalter et al., 2019, p. 1).

In Victoria, Australia, this is also true of the school education received by students in rural areas. In Victoria, not all rural schools are the same, and the quality of education varies greatly, depending on the school. Looker and Dwyer (1998), who researched students in urban and rural Victoria, found, along similar lines to Ncube (2013), Bæck (2016) and Showalter et al. (2019), that “rurality is not a constant – it means different things in different social and historical contexts” (Looker & Dwyer, 1998, p. 10).

Whilst several researchers (for example, Lamb et al., 2014; McConaghy, Maxwell & Foskey, 2008) researched data that provided evidence that rural students achieved lower outcomes and had less opportunities than metropolitan students, Jones (2002) suggested that place was not a significant factor in the quality of education, or the aspirations of young people to continue education after secondary school. Jones indicated that the family situation and socio-economic disadvantage were more significant than place, stating that:

“Analyses of entry to university and participation in other forms of post-secondary education show no evidence, after taking account of differences in the

other background characteristics of students, that home location has a significant effect on levels of participation” (Jones, 2002, p. 27).

Jones did not take into account the fact that rurality affects the socio-economic disadvantage felt by many families through demographic decline, a lack of employment opportunities, and through the effects of globalisation, as found by Cuervo (2016, p. 36).

In their research into Australian rural schools, Alloway et al. (2004) outlined a range of issues which affected rural students, many of which related to schools, and which depicted the inequities that existed between rural and metropolitan students. These issues included behavioural issues in classes, lack of student motivation and resultant academic failure, difficulties related to teacher recruitment and retention, narrow curriculum offerings, lack of employment opportunities and the travel needed to access a university education.

James et al. (1999) found that rurality often created a “cumulative effect of a social and economic environment that makes higher education seem less attractive, less relevant and less attainable” (James et al., 1999, p. 108), a statement that reinforced the notion that educational opportunities are not equally shared by metropolitan and rural students. Further, the ‘State of Victoria’s Children Report 2016’ (Department of Education and Training, 2017b) stated that place is important to the development, progress and aspirations of young people, and that the aspirations of students living in rural and regional areas in Victoria were adversely affected by distance, travel and the inability to find sustainable work in the local community, areas that had been broached by Alloway et al. (2004), more than ten years earlier.

Cuervo (2016) found that place was important in the social justice afforded to rural students, and that “in regards to social justice issues, rural schooling is still situated in the periphery of the government educational agenda” (Cuervo, 2016, p. 119). With the majority of Australians living in capital cities, that is where the influence lies. Education in rural areas attracts less attention by government.

Place continues to have an effect on schools and student aspirations. Inequities continue to exist and rural students continue to be served by an education system that is not equitable and which includes rural students amongst the disadvantaged in Victoria, as evidenced by the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Australian Governments Education Council, 2019, p. 17). The key question, asked by Sher and Sher (1994) and

Roberts and Cuervo (2015), relates to whether rural people matter in Australia and whether, through education, we can learn to value rural people, communities, landscape and culture.

One key element of schools and education is the curriculum offered to the students. The literature related to curriculum in rural schools is examined in the next section.

2.4.6 Curriculum in Rural Schools

In “Why Rural Schools Matter”, Tieken (2014) found that rural populations were connected to place and, in order to engage students, rural schools needed to reflect the local area and to provide for the needs of local students. Tieken questioned whom rural schools served, commenting that governments often believed that schools served the state and the country, whereas, in fact, schools should serve their local community and, more importantly, the students. In Tieken’s research, many rural schools provided a curriculum that did not reflect the needs of the students.

John Dewey, the education theorist, identified the importance of adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of students. He stated that:

“From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school. Its isolation from life” (Dewey in Dworkin, 1959, p.76).

Dewey’s point, made long ago, still resonates with what happens in many schools today. In Australia, as found by Bessant (1978), the aims of rural schools were often determined by the aims of a centralised system, and did not take into account the rural lifestyle and the needs of rural students, thus echoing the thoughts of Dewey. The report of the Australian Schools Commission (1973) had earlier stressed this point, stating that education in rural communities was affected by the fact that:

“The curriculum offered in the schools is seen as having less relevance to country children” (Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p.19).

Whilst Beach, Johansson, Öhrn, Rönnlund and Per-Åke (2019) found that, in Sweden, there were rural schools where the curriculum was focused on local landscapes, environment, history and people, there were also rural schools that provided only an urban

view of the world. Beach et al. (2019) found this dichotomy to be particularly problematical in rural areas, stating that:

“the dominance in education policy of (global) metrocentric values and middle-class educational codes and ideologies is a problem for sparsely populated areas and the pupils there” (Beach et al., 2019, p. 30).

Shamah and MacTavish (2009) found that, in the United States, the curriculum did not engage rural students as it failed to engage with the local context, and that any place-based learning had been replaced with centrally prescribed academic skills, thus depriving students of a connection between their learning and their daily lives. Further, Bauch (2001) found that, in the United States, many rural schools tried to imitate urban schools and that this was problematic, because the best education for rural young people was developed through joining the school with its community and creating a setting that was relevant to rural students in that community. Bartholomaeus (2013), commenting on the Australian situation, agreed, stating that linking learning to the place where the student lived, added reality and relevance to their educational experiences.

Despite acknowledgement of the importance of connecting student learning to their locality and their cultural background, Gruenewald (2003) found that, in Australia, learning experiences in many schools were based on centrally prescribed curriculum documents, standardized testing requirements, alongside teaching resources that failed to take into account place-based approaches to student learning. Brown and Schafft (2011, p. 67), along similar lines, stated that the strong community linkages in rural schools were being lost, suggesting that, in the United States, rural schools had become disconnected from their community. Corbett (2014) agreed that rural people suffered from reduced local curriculum content, commenting that “many teachers feel like they are dancing a dance choreographed in an office in the city” (Corbett, 2014, p. 8).

Schafft (2016), commenting on the importance of school-community links, however, found that rural schools often connect with their community, but that prescribed testing strategies often meant that community connection was neglected. Schafft stated:

“Educators and educational leaders may be hesitant to take on local development roles to ensure the broader economic, environmental, and social well-being of their rural communities, if they believe that these efforts may interfere with or detract from student preparation and testing outcomes” (Schafft, 2016, p. 140).

Henry (1989) found that the Education Departments in Australia did not take into account metropolitan and rural differences, and Guenther (2013) stated that an Australia-wide curriculum, as it is taught in schools, did not suit rural students, suggesting that urbanising rural schools was detrimental to student success. Guenther stated that it was essential that a rural curriculum, based on the rich local culture, history and environment, needed to be developed and implemented, taking advantage of what Sher and Sher called “a hands-on real world laboratory” (Sher & Sher, 1994, p. 24). However, McKenzie, Harrold and Sturman (1996) suggested that governments have little sympathy with the argument of a rural focus for education, stating that such a curriculum would be narrow and not be acceptable to parents.

Importantly, Halsey (2018) noted that Australian schools have permission to differentiate the curriculum to suit their student cohort, and that the Australian Curriculum recognised that a locally based curriculum would be beneficial to students. Halsey stated that:

“Increasing opportunities for students to learn about the historical, economic, social, political and environmental importance of rural, regional and remote contexts and communities in Australia is an important body of work to be undertaken” (Halsey, 2018, p. 6).

Drummond (2012), six years earlier, stated that whilst schools and teachers wanted a locally based curriculum, they did not have the time allocated to develop such a curriculum and, in many cases, teachers came from metropolitan areas and did not understand the local context well enough. Roberts (2017) implored “curriculum writers and those implementing the curriculum in their schools to consider the relationship between what is valued in official documents and the interests of the communities they serve” (Roberts, 2017, p. 57). This consideration would allow students to identify with the school’s curriculum and, consequently, would increase the motivation of students to want to continue with education.

Problematically, in many Victorian schools, as found by Dinham (2013), the curriculum is narrow and teaching is aimed at students obtaining the best possible test scores and the highest Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), which would allow access to university studies. This mitigates against local content in curriculum, despite the fact that, as found by Chesters (2015), less than 50% of Australian students access an ATAR score.

Tieken (2014) was insightful: rurality matters, and aligning the curriculum with the local rural context would enhance student motivation and, in turn, the aspirations of rural students.

2.5 Student Aspirations

Having surveyed literature about student aspirations more generally in section 2.1, attention is now turned to the aspirations of rural students and what influences those aspirations.

2.5.1 Student Aspirations in Victoria and Australia

In the ‘Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education – Discussion Paper’ (Halsey, 2017), it was stated, in relation to student aspirations for education after secondary school, that:

“While there has been growth in the number of people from regional and remote areas undertaking an undergraduate degree over the last decade, they remain *underrepresented* in higher education” (Halsey, 2017).

Rural students in Victoria fall well behind their metropolitan peers when it comes to university enrolment with almost 20% less rural students enrolling in university after secondary school than metropolitan students (Lamb et al., 2014). Kirby, in the ‘Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria’ (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2000), noted that, for its future prosperity, Victoria needed increased numbers of students to access further education beyond secondary school. The ‘Review of Australian Higher Education’ (Bradley et al., 2008), concurred with this policy finding, stating that students from rural and regional areas formed one of the under-represented student groups in terms of accessing education beyond secondary school.

The Victorian Auditor General’s Report (Victorian Auditor General, 2012) stated that metropolitan students in Victoria were more than 25% more likely to continue to university or TAFE than their rural counterparts, whilst 18% more rural students than metropolitan students, after they left school, were not involved in any education or training at all. As stated by Bandaranayake (2016, p. 601), “inequality and polarisation are already deeply rooted and enduring in Victoria”. This inequity is based on societal structures, one of which is where the student lives, namely, in the city or the country.

Edgar (1979) referred to the lack of equity in the education provided to rural students, but also found that “the restricted social and cultural horizons of rural children condemn them to self-concepts narrowly defined in terms of limited competence and capacity to cope with a

complex modern environment” (Edgar, 1979, p. 89). Edgar’s comment does not reflect rurality today and does not take into account the failure of government to develop policies and practices that provide access, for rural students, to the positive futures to which they aspire.

Dalley-Trim and Alloway (2010) found that rural students often have high educational aspirations, but also have the need to mix their educational, work and social lives, whilst Alloway et al. (2004) found that rural students’ aspirations for higher education were often not supported by their parents and teachers. Chesters (2015), who researched rural and metropolitan students in the Australian Capital Territory, found that students whose parents had not attended university were more likely to attend a vocational tertiary program than students whose parents had attended university. Fleming and Grace (2017, p. 361) agreed that family factors affected rural students, but further found that issues, related to lack of finances and the need to travel, made university and higher education for rural students less accessible. Fleming and Grace’s key point was that rural students were aspirational and wanted to access further education after secondary school, but the range of barriers was significant, and that these barriers related to the quality of schools, the influence of family and friends, and the prohibitive costs involved in having to move away from home. These barriers affected the aspirations of rural young people in pursuing further and higher education.

Research from Charles Sturt University (2009), an Australian regional university that has rural campuses, identified the difficulties faced by rural students, related to finding appropriate accommodation in a capital city, and noted that whilst completion of higher education programs was important, issues related to distance, travel, accommodation and finances often prevented rural students from participating.

Australia is not alone in the inequality of aspirations of young people. Similar inequalities occur in many other countries as well, as outlined in the next section.

2.5.2 Student Aspirations around the Globe

Barriers to the aspirations of rural students, similar to those found in Australia, are found in many countries. A selection of the literature related to aspirations of students in different countries is presented here.

The effect of the socio-economic status of families has been found to influence aspirations to varying degrees, often depending on the quality of education received by the

students. Scanlon, Jenkinson, Leahy, Powell and Byrne (2019) found that, in Ireland, students from low socio-economic rural families were less likely to continue with further education due to the costs involved, their lack of confidence in their own ability, the possibility of losing their friends and a lack of understanding of tertiary education systems. Archer and Hutchings (2000), in the United Kingdom, found that students from low socio-economic families would rather look for a job and become financially independent, rather than consider university studies.

Several researchers also considered other family factors. In Canada, Krahn and Taylor (2005) found that migrant families had higher aspirations for both their male and female children, wanting their children to go to university and enter a professional career, and that this often out-weighed the effects of socio-economic disadvantage. Discussing single-parent or two-parent families, Garg, Melanson and Levin (2007) found that, in Canada, higher aspirations generally came from students from two-parent families rather than single-parent families, a difference attributed to relative lack of parental involvement in the school where there was only one parent in the family, and the likelihood of single parent families having a lower socio-economic status than two-parent families. In the Netherlands, De Boer and Van der Werf (2015) found that students were more likely to continue education beyond school if their parents had done so, based on the positive modelling that came from their parents.

A factor, related to families, found by Gándara, Gutierrez and O'Hara (2002), was that rural parents were often more traditional in their aspirations for their children and were likely to encourage students to discontinue their aspirations, as a result of parental expectations that they would take over the running of the family farm, business or trade. Gándara et al.'s point was that, whilst rural students' aspirations might be high, they were commonly moderated by the expectations of their parents.

Many barriers to aspirations are derived from the experiences of a student at school. In the United Kingdom, schools in rural areas have been found to have stifled aspirations of students through the provision of below standard teaching (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011), a finding also found by Kreuz (2005), who further found that many teachers in the rural schools in the United States of America, were inexperienced and teaching out of their subject areas, attributable to the inability of rural schools to attract experienced and qualified teachers, as found by Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer and Hutchins (2012). In the rural, northern areas of Norway, high drop-out rates, poor quality of teaching and the number of unmotivated,

underperforming students in classes, created an educational crisis, where most rural students did not aspire to higher education (Ottosen, Goll and Sørli, 2017).

Even when rural students in the United States had aspirations to enrol in tertiary education, many questioned the cost effectiveness of having to pay for accommodation and higher education fees, when compared with the future gain, and this created a significant barrier (Calzaferri, 2011). Distance was also an issue in the United States, as it is in Australia. Rural students were more likely to attend a 2-year higher education course close to home, than a 4-year course which was further away (Koricich, Chen and Hughes, 2018), partly as a result of the difficulty of balancing studies and living away from home, and partly as a result of the strength of the ties to the local community and family (Hlinka, Mobelini and Giltner, 2015).

In a recent study, Sharp, Seaman, Tucker, Van Gundy and Rebellon (2020) found that, in the United States, low college aspirations were prevalent in rural students, particularly males, citing issues related to “parental expectations, school performance and belonging, and community attachment” (Sharp et al., 2020, p. 545).

The barriers found throughout this section of the literature review informed the directions of this current research. Another key area, related to student aspirations, is careers and pathways counselling, which is covered in the next section.

2.6 Careers and Pathways Counselling in Rural Schools

Fuqua (2019), in her research regarding careers teachers in rural Victoria, found that careers education in rural schools was essential in the development of student aspirations, stating that there is:

“a demonstrated need for careers education that is better suited to reality of rural economies, as schools ... have the potential to influence student aspirations”
(Fuqua, 2019, p. 18).

Fuqua’s point was that if students are to aspire to positive careers that will provide them with a high level of motivation and satisfaction, whether those careers include education beyond year 12 or not, the advice of an effective careers counsellor provides opportunities for students to make better, more informed, choices. As Lapan, Tucker, Kim and Kosciulek (2003) found, in rural areas, sound careers advice is essential, because rural students often

faced greater barriers, often related to the decision of whether to leave their community, where the range of education and employment opportunities was often narrow. Further, Tieken (2016, p. 205) found that the loss of traditional jobs in rural areas, through globalisation and rural downturn, also required flexibility of thought and, for many students, a focus on further education, thus enhancing the need for quality careers counselling.

Many students rely on their parents for much of their careers advice and, in particular, they appreciate the support and encouragement of parents as a part of the career aspiration process (Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan & Davis, 2006). Rowan-Kenyon, Bell and Perna (2008) stated that where parents became the careers counsellors of the student, rather than the teachers, the onus was on schools to empower and upskill the parents to provide useful and accurate careers advice to their children.

As Halpern (2012) found, students were often attracted to careers that they thought they would enjoy, or jobs that their parents did, and often lacked the capacity to research and imagine new career directions. Without quality careers counselling, many rural students, (and metropolitan students as well), have been restricted to careers that they know about and those that arise from conversations with friends and family.

Related to the inability to imagine possible futures, Irvin et al. (2012) found that, in many rural communities, the jobs in which many adults were employed, did not require post-secondary education. At the same time, careers education failed to encourage students to explore new and innovative careers, beyond what they knew in their community or family. The lack of full-time qualified careers counsellors compounded this situation. But solutions were possible, and Irvin et al. (2012) suggested that schools work together to provide careers support programs for students, incorporating the expertise of college students through mentoring programs.

St Clair, Kintrea and Houston (2013) found that aspirations were important, but teaching students how they can imagine the future, and how they can reach their aspirations, was more important. They stated that:

“The implication for teachers is that they have a role in ensuring that young people know not only the ‘what’ of their aspirations but also the ‘how’” (St Clair et al., 2013, p. 735).

Whilst families and schools are important elements in the determination of student aspirations, rurality and the connection of rural students to their local community, also affect aspirations. This is covered in the next section.

2.7 Student Aspirations and Connection to Place

Corbett (2005, 2007), in a study of young people living in a coastal community in Nova Scotia, found that there were two types of young people, namely, those who wanted to leave and those who wanted to stay. Corbett observed that the rural community did not provide enough opportunities for many young people, and that those who aspired to higher education often decided to leave, despite the associated costs. At the same time, there were many young people, usually those with less education, who decided to stay and work in the community, assuming that they could find a job.

In Nova Scotia and in many other parts of the world, students and young people face making the decision about staying in their community or leaving. Haukanes (2013) found that, in the Czech Republic, since the opening of European borders, young people felt they were better off leaving rural areas and travelling throughout Europe in search of their future educational and employment opportunities. Similarly, Bæck (2004) found that, in Norway, young people would leave their community to find satisfying employment, particularly from an area without good job possibilities, but that where employment possibilities were available, young people were more likely to stay. Jamieson (2000) focused on the Borders area of the United Kingdom, an area where, to find a “good job” usually meant leaving the area. Jamieson (2000) found that young people, who stayed in the area for employment, often failed to reach their aspirations, whilst those who left, for education or employment reasons, often felt superior to those who stayed.

Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) found that, in Iceland and in many rural areas of the world, girls were more likely to want to leave their community for education and employment, and that boys were more likely to be able to find work in local industries, but such roles were not attractive to girls. Similarly, recreational activities tended to favour boys rather than girls, and this also contributed to girls having less connection to rural communities than boys and, as a result, deciding to leave (Dahlström, 1996).

A recent study, by Agger, Meece and Byun (2018), in the United States, focused on the connection of students to their community and the effect that this had on aspirations. They

found that there were differences between males and females, inasmuch as females tended to aspire to continuing education whilst males were less likely to do so if there were suitable jobs for them in the local area. The problem here is that whilst, as mentioned by Agger et al. (2018), some careers and jobs do not require further education, the number of such roles is diminishing, as industry and business expect higher levels of education and different skills and attributes, as found by Helyer (2011) in her study of educational requirements for jobs in the United Kingdom.

In the United States, Von Reichert, Cromartie and Arthun (2014) found that in some states, young people were leaving rural communities, particularly if the community was not well resourced, whilst in other states, especially the higher socio-economic states, more people moved into the rural areas than moved out of them. This was based on:

“the complex interplay of economic circumstances, family incentives, and social and place settings that are a hallmark of life course perspectives” (Von Reichart et al., 2014, p. 59).

In some areas, students who left their rural community expected to return, or made the later decision to return. In Ireland, Ní Laoire (2007) found that migration between rural and urban centres was changing, and that in recent times, those who left rural areas were returning for family reasons and factors related to the enjoyment of rural life. Wright (2012), in her study of students in Kentucky, found that amongst those who wanted to leave, there were many who were committed to their community and who, on graduating with a degree, returned to their community, with the anticipation to strengthen ties and to hopefully be agents of change in the community.

In Australia, research has recognised that out-migration from rural communities is important for some young people but there are issues as well. Drummond, Halsey and Van Breda (2011) recognised that many rural young people were connected to their community, and suggested the need for a greater presence of universities in rural Australia, thus reducing the necessity for young people to access further education without needing to leave their community. Cuervo (2014) recognised this as well, stating that rural young people often felt culturally and socially isolated when they had to move away from their community, into a metropolitan environment which was alien to them, and where they felt, to use Said's words, “out of place” (Said, 1999). Drummond et al. (2011) also discussed the fact that many rural students would not aspire to go to university, unless it was situated within or close to their

home town, and that this was in response to the costs of accommodation and the isolation of being away from their family and friends. Cuervo (2016) maintained that the high cost of moving away from home to study, or not taking up a university offer because of the costs involved, was a social justice issue, which reinforced the inequities faced by rural students in Australia and elsewhere.

For rural Australian students, leaving their home was often the only option available to them. Eacott and Sonn (2006), who studied a small group of rural Victorian students who had attended university in Melbourne, found that a lack of local employment and higher educational opportunities had forced the students to leave their home town, even if they were connected to their community. Added to this, some of the students in Eacott and Sonn's research wanted to escape the rural isolation of their community, in search of something different, but many held a desire to return to their community at some time in the future. Geldens (2007) also believed that young people might eventually return to their community, most likely after they completed a university education although, for those who left for employment reasons, the feeling of failure if they returned often meant that they did not return. Without the availability of appropriate employment opportunities, many of those who left would never return, as noted by Cuervo (2016).

Fleming and Grace (2014) found that girls were more likely to continue with education beyond secondary school than boys, but noted that there were other reasons, rather than simply having aspirations to do so. They found that further education was a means of escape from their rural community where there were few work opportunities for them. They commented that:

“... girls' higher educational aspirations in rural areas is not a result of greater valuing of education. Rather, they claim that fewer work opportunities for females, along with the masculine (or 'macho') nature of rural Australia, leads to rural girls' aspirations to escape this environment” (Fleming & Grace, 2014, p. 485).

Pedersen and Gram (2018) found that the more capable students from rural areas had positive feelings about their community, but also had a strong need to continue their education, which generally meant moving away. They also found that some young people considered themselves to have “failed” if they did not leave their rural community. Cuervo and Wyn (2017), in their study of rural young people who left rural Victorian schools in

1991, found that some young people felt “stuck” in their rural community and felt the need to stay, even if they felt that they did not belong. The research of Pedersen and Gram (2018) and Cuervo and Wyn (2017) reinforced the complexity of the situation facing rural students.

Whilst many students from rural areas needed to leave their community for reasons related to education or employment, student outcomes at school also affected the aspirations of students. Student outcomes are considered in the next section.

2.8 Rural Student Outcomes

In 2014, the Victorian Auditor General stated that Victorian rural student outcomes were below those of their metropolitan counterparts. He stated:

“Students in rural areas have, for a long time, not performed as well as their metropolitan peers. They face barriers to accessing education ... and there is no sign that the gap in performance is likely to narrow. Indeed, in some areas of performance, the gap is getting wider” (Victorian Auditor General, 2014).

Australian data from Lamb, Jackson, Walstab and Huo (2015) reinforced this message and aligned lower outcomes with lower aspirations for rural students, stating:

“Young people missing out and not acquiring essential skills decreases the quality of their experiences and integration in society, leading to outcomes such as a lack of interest in lifelong learning, low aspirations, poor transition to work” (Lamb et al., 2015, p.2).

Comparing rural and metropolitan student outcomes, Fyfield (1970) found that rural students in Victoria had lower outcomes than their metropolitan counterparts, and that their parents often had negative attitudes to education, based on their own negative educational experiences, and that these outcomes and attitudes affected the aspirations of rural students. The Australian Schools Commission (1973) report, ‘Schools in Australia’, acknowledged the disadvantage experienced by rural students in terms of outcomes and, in turn, aspirations, and stated that rural students should have the same opportunities as metropolitan students. Further, Edgar (1979) stated that:

“Country kids are less literate, they do less well academically, they win fewer scholarships, leave school earlier, go to college or university less often ... (and)

have virtually no access to technical and trade education and face reduced work opportunities” (Edgar, 1979, p. 89).

Since 1979, much has changed in rural Victorian schools, but academic results continue to show deficiencies, as shown by Lamb et al. (2015), and as international testing has shown. Exemplifying this, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results show that rural student outcomes in Australia consistently fall behind those of metropolitan students in Reading and Mathematics, and the gap has continued to increase, as shown in Table 2.1 (Thomson, De Bortoli, Underwood & Schmid, 2019).

PISA Results in Australia – 2000, 2006, 2012 and 2018								
PISA Area	Reading				Mathematics			
Year	2000	2006	2012	2018	2000	2006	2012	2018
Metropolitan Schools	534	519	520	508	528	520	502	497
Provincial Schools	518	499	490	487	515	499	473	476
Remote Schools	472	472	452	449	493	465	460	440

Table 2.1 – PISA Results for Australian Schools 2000 - 2018 Grey shading = At or Below OECD Average
 Note: PISA OECD Averages 2018: Reading – 487, Mathematics – 489
 Data obtained from Thomson et al. (2019)

As shown in Table 2.1, the Australian rural (provincial and remote) PISA results for Reading and Mathematics have declined consistently and, in 2018, were below the OECD average. Rural students in Australia are disadvantaged in their outcomes, in comparison with their metropolitan counterparts. This affects their aspirations for the future.

Many reasons have been expressed as to why rural student outcomes are falling behind those of metropolitan students. Marks (2007, 2017) researched rural student drop-out rates from school, and found that they were attributable to issues such as parental expectations, parent education levels, academic performance and, to a lesser degree, socio-economic status. Pegg and Pannizon (2007) focused on differences in literacy levels between rural and metropolitan students, and found that rural students were significantly behind, as a result of the inability of rural schools to attract quality teachers.

When rural outcomes in other countries are considered, there are similarities with the Australian situation. Several researchers, for example, Amini and Nivorozhkin (2015) in Russia and Best and Cohen (2014) in the United States, reported that rural outcomes were declining, and the key issues were related to the quality of teaching, lack of family support, low expectations of rural students by their teachers and parents, and lack of support services.

The result was lower educational or career aspirations, based on the belief of the students that, as a result of their lower school academic outcomes, they were not capable of completing a university course or gaining a highly skilled job (Amini & Nivorozhkin, 2015). This creates a circular situation. Students with low achievement, have low aspirations as a result of this, but students who have high aspirations often perform better academically as a consequence. The common factor is that academic outcomes have an effect on student aspirations.

As Bandura (1997, 2009) found, there is a link between academic self-efficacy, aspirations and academic performance. The link relates to a student's belief as to whether they can be successful. Academic self-efficacy leads to an outcome expectation that the student can be successful in areas including the realisation of their aspirations. If a student does not believe that they can be successful in academic studies, then:

“Such beliefs affect children's aspirations, academic motivation, level of interest in intellectual pursuits ... and academic accomplishments” (Bandura, 2009, p. xi).

Henry (1989) stated that, in Australia, governments had ignored the rural perspective, and that rurality was not taken seriously, resulting in rural student disadvantage. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) stressed that action was needed and that the international world, including Australia, had an obligation to ensure equality of opportunity for young people, whether they were from rural or metropolitan areas. As Chris Sidoti, the Human Rights Commissioner stated, in ‘Remote and Rural Education’ (Stokes, Stafford & Holdsworth, 2000, p. 4):

“Children who live outside the major population centres in Australia should not have to settle for a second rate education.”

There is no doubt that improvement is needed and a new perspective is required. This research considers the voices of the students themselves, in looking for barriers and enablers to student aspirations and outcome expectations. The literature related to student voice is considered in the next section.

2.9 Student Voice

The voice of the students was integral to this research. Fielding (2004) stressed the need for student voice, recognising that students and teachers needed to work and learn together. Giroux (1989) had previously found that students had been kept silent when it came to discussions about their own education for too long. Giroux (1989) also focused on the need to allow students to be involved in decision-making when it affects their school and their learning, and not be the least listened-to members of a school community.

Oldfather (1995) stated that, if the voices and ideas of students were taken seriously and ownership of a student's education was shared, the result would be positive for student learning. Oldfather also found that teachers believed that student voice was challenging, however, there was a need to move away from times when, as noted by Goodlad (1984), teachers controlled everything that happened in the classroom. Oldfather challenged teachers to become involved in the change needed to shift power from the teacher to the student.

Researchers have acknowledged the positive aspects related to students having a more influential voice in schools. For example, Graham (2012) found that listening to students would provide many different, sometimes less sophisticated views, and that teachers needed to consider the diversity of opinions from all students before developing teaching strategies. Cook-Sather (2006) agreed, but stated that whilst students may not provide a consistent view, and that at times, researchers and teachers would hear views that they did not really want to hear, it was critical to take notice of what students said. Cook-Sather (2002) further stated that students had a right to influence their education, and should have a role in planning in schools, stating:

“Authorising student perspectives introduces into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing policies-in-practice” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3).

There have been a number of key works which focused on the perceptions of students. For example, Archer (2013), in the Aspire project in the United Kingdom, used student voice to elicit student ideas about what affected their levels of success in Science classes. She found that there were differences in the Science aspirations of girls and boys and that students had high aspirations, which were diluted when it came to Science, as their aspirations were affected by the thoughts of their parents.

In Australia, Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009) conducted focus groups of students in rural locations, to determine the barriers to their aspirations. They found the obstacles to aspirations, which included limited educational opportunities in rural schools and the loss of connection to family and friends that students who leave often experience, to be many and varied, and required complex and well thought-out solutions. Bowden and Doughney (2010) used survey results of students from years 9 to 12 from the western suburbs of Victoria's capital city, Melbourne, and found that parental and teacher views, the possible loss of friends, ethnicity, gender and the type of school attended, affected whether a student wanted to attend university or not.

In 2013, research in Central Queensland, by Gale et al. (2013), used surveys to show that two-thirds of students had aspirations to attend university, although many of those aspirations were not realised. They also found that there was a need to give opportunities for students to explore career possibilities. In 2016, Watson et al. based a study in rural and regional Tasmania on the responses to a survey of 3000 primary and secondary school students, with a view to determining student perceptions about schooling and school completion. Their research found several obstacles to aspirations, including teacher support, low expectation of student aspirations, academic ability and the effect of peers.

Also, in 2016, Cuervo studied two schools in north-western Victoria, conducting focus groups and interviews involving students, teachers and parents. Cuervo's study focused on social justice and the importance of giving a voice to students in relation to their education. The research considered the importance of place, alignment of curriculum with aspirations, out-migration and the competing needs of young people and the community, all of which are relevant to this research.

More recently, Cuervo, Chesters and Aberdeen (2019) focused on the aspirations of students in Shepparton, a low socio-economic town in rural Victoria, and explored the relationship between student aspirations and social capital. Their research incorporated student voice through a survey administered to more than 400 students. They considered the effects of socio-economic status, parent employment and parent education on the aspirations of rural young people. Also, in New South Wales, Carrillo-Higueras and Walton (2020) conducted more than 600 surveys of rural secondary students and found that many rural students did not aspire to continue education at university as a result of their negative attitudes towards university, their lack of social capital, their lack of life-time goals that

included university and their lack of knowledge about university and the jobs that required a university degree.

In these studies, the researchers conducted surveys or interviews to obtain the perceptions of students. The similarities with the methodology of this research are evident, although this research provides quantitative data as well as qualitative data, related to student perceptions, within the one study. The strength of this research, in comparison with each of those mentioned above, is the use of **both** surveys and focus groups to elevate student voice, and the consideration of the wide range of factors which have an effect on the aspirations of the students.

2.10 Summary

The literature related to the effect of rurality on student aspirations is extensive, and shows evidence that the aspirations of rural students, in many countries of the world, differ from those of metropolitan students (Lamb, et al., 2014; Best and Cohen, 2014; Amini & Nivorozhkin, 2015; Tieken, 2016). Much research relating to the aspirations of rural students has been carried out, with key findings including the effect of family background, the quality of schooling, student self-efficacy and identity, and the strength of the connection that a student has to their local community. However, much of the research focuses on the assumption that most students aspire to complete a university course.

In Victoria, an analysis of data, relating to the differences in achievement and aspirations amongst rural and metropolitan students, has shown that the gap between rural students and their metropolitan counterparts is increasing (Lamb et al., 2014).

The current research will enhance the literature related to rurality and rural students. Most similar studies address student surveys or focus groups, but not both and, as a result, do not elicit the depth of quantitative and qualitative data obtained in this research. The focus of this research on Victoria, will allow an understanding of the influence of rurality on student aspirations in the Victorian context, as well as examining the factors that affect the student aspirations of rural students, from the perspective of the students themselves.

Most importantly, this research relies fully on the voice of the students. It is their education and their aspirations. Their voices need to be heard.

In Chapter 3, the methodology used in this research will be presented.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research, into the effects of rurality on the aspirations of students from government secondary schools in rural Victoria, collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The research approach commenced with a student survey, followed by a number of student focus groups. The focus groups were designed to gather further detailed data and insights relating to the issues arising from the results of the student survey.

The research aimed to contribute to knowledge about rural schooling and the aspirations of students in rural schools, and was guided by the following key research questions:

1. To what extent does living in a rural community affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
2. To what extent do factors related to a student's family affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
3. To what extent do friends and peers influence the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
4. To what extent do schools and teachers affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?
5. To what extent do identity and self-efficacy affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

The research was designed around examining student perceptions about their own educational experiences and aspirations, through surveys and focus groups. Through the data collected, the research questions were answered, producing knowledge that furthers the understandings and explanations of the way that students think about their education, their life in their community, and the people and actions that affect, either as barriers or enablers, their education and their life and career aspirations.

This research goes beyond previous research, such as that of Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009), Lamb et al. (2014) and Watson et al. (2016), by starting from the points of view of the students. It considers areas covered in each of these studies, but does so from the point of view of student voice and student perspectives. It gathers their insights and perceptions

through the surveys and focus groups, which involved students in years 10 and 12, in eleven rural and five metropolitan government secondary schools.

The research considers the perceptions of students regarding the wide range of issues affecting the aspirations of rural students, including:

- (a) The effect of the local community (including student connection to the community, preparedness to leave the community and rural isolation);
- (b) The effect of the family (including socio-economic status (SES), family characteristics, family support and encouragement and parent education levels);
- (c) The effect of friends and peers (including support to continue education);
- (d) The effect of their school (including the effectiveness of the school, careers counselling, teacher quality and teacher support and encouragement);
- (e) The effect of the students themselves (including their self-efficacy, identity, understanding of career possibilities, and the student behaviours that affect school results and aspirations for the future).

This research explores and examines the aspirations of rural students, and uses the perceptions of metropolitan students about their own aspirations, to gauge and contrast the extent to which rurality provides a positive, negative or neutral influence on the aspirations of rural students.

This chapter discusses many elements of the research in detail. Sections relate to:

- (a) The research methodology and theoretical framework;
- (b) Selection of the sample schools and the students in the sample;
- (c) The student survey and focus groups;
- (d) Analysis of the data;
- (e) Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher.

3.2 Mixed Methods Methodology

The research utilises a mixed methods design, employing methodological eclecticism, which Teddlie and Tashakkori (2012) defined as bringing together the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative research methods. In this research, the mixed methods design entails integrating numerical data with dialogue from the students themselves.

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) defined mixed methods research as:

“research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123).

Mixed methods research enables a deeper insight into the understanding of the enablers and barriers, than if an individual methodology was used alone (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). It allows triangulation of results, further exploration of issues and enhancement of the results, as discussed by Day, Sammons and Gu (2008), and Torrance (2012).

Combining data, from surveys and student focus groups, allowed exploration of the effect of place and the barriers and enablers to student aspirations in much greater detail, than if only the student surveys were used. The focus groups were designed to enhance the student survey data and, using open-ended questions, to allow the discovery of ideas and points of view that would otherwise not have been considered.

In this mixed methods research, an explanatory sequential design (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006) was used. Focus group questions were developed using the results of the student survey. This required the surveys to be completed by the students and analysed to a significant level, in order to determine areas where further detail could be elicited through focus groups. This allowed the quantitative data, from the surveys and the qualitative elements generated through the focus groups, to complement each other, and to be interpreted holistically, rather than being considered as two separate data sets. The student survey data informed the content of the focus group questions. It was decided to use the survey prior to the focus groups, rather than conducting the focus groups first, as the survey provided responses to a broad cross-section of critical areas, thus informing the focus group questions.

The explanatory sequential design is shown diagrammatically in Figure 3.1.

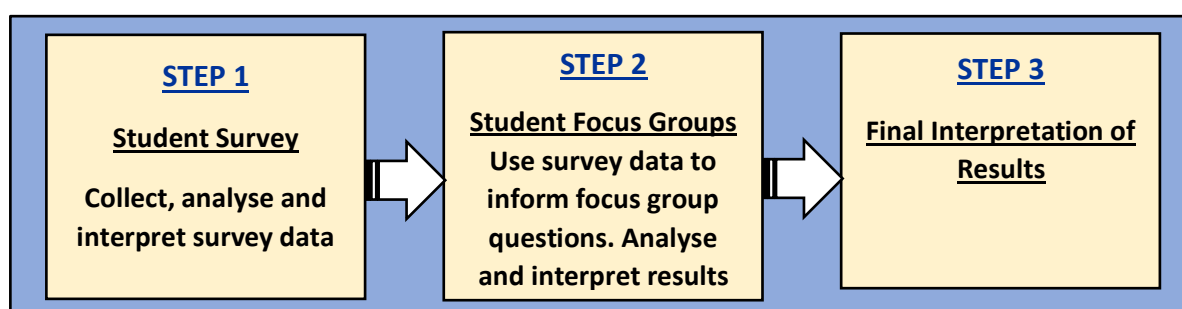


Figure 3.1: Explanatory Sequential Model. Adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clark, (2007)

Whilst the research follows a mixed methods approach, it is also defined by its theoretical framework, which is explained in the next section.

3.3 The Theoretical Framework

In considering rural students in Victoria, it is recognised that whilst Victoria has 25% of Australia's population (ABS, 2019), it has only 3% of Australia's land area (Geoscience Australia, 2020). Distances are relatively short in comparison with, for example, Western Australia and Queensland. Edgar (1979), in 'Defining Rural Schools Disadvantage 2', commented that:

"So while isolation is, in part, a state of mind, and while folk in Western Australia laugh at the puny distances we in Victoria complain about, distance is a real physical problem for many Victorian children, and the communities they live in" (Edgar, 1979, p. 89).

In this research, several key terms are used. The definitions of these terms, as used in this research, are:

- (a) **Aspirations** – The ambitions of a person for the future in terms of their education, career and life in general and the ability of a person to set goals for their future and to work towards realising those goals (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996).
- (b) **Self-efficacy** – The degree to which a person has the motivation, resilience and understanding of themselves, and the belief in themselves, to achieve future goals successfully, overcoming barriers that they confront (Bandura, 2012).
- (c) **Outcome Expectations** – A person's estimate that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes (Bandura, 1977, p. 193).
- (d) **Identity** – The collection of attributes of a person, such as "ego strength, an internal locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, social perspective taking, critical thinking abilities, and moral reasoning abilities" (Côté, 1997, p. 578).
- (e) **Rurality** – All areas in Victoria, outside the Melbourne Metropolitan Area, as used by the ABS (2020), with the understanding that rural places differ (Looker and Dwyer, 1998).

In order to determine the effect of rurality on student aspirations in the State of Victoria, several questions needed to be asked. These included: How do students in rural schools in Victoria regard their educational experience? Are the aspirations of rural male and female students in Victoria different? How connected are rural students to their community?

The student survey was designed to elucidate similarities and differences that existed between the responses of metropolitan and rural students, between males and females and between students from different year levels. It was decided that more fine-grained detail would be provided in focus groups, conducted in both rural and metropolitan schools. The focus groups would give students the opportunity to have their voices heard. Through questions that were determined after the analysis of the surveys, students would provide much contextual information, allowing for a richer understanding of the situation in Victoria.

As highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2), rural students' aspirations were affected by a range of enablers and barriers related to place and rurality, identity and self-efficacy, the influence of family and friends, family circumstances and characteristics, as well as school and teacher effectiveness, support and expectations. The literature review also showed that male and female students were affected differently by some of these factors.

Figure 3.2 shows key factors that previous research had found to affect student aspirations.

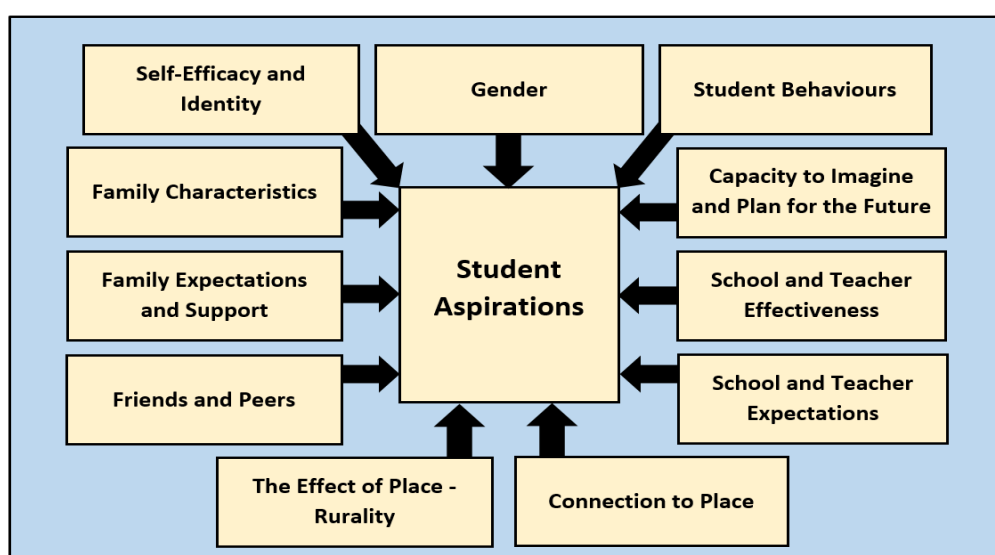


Figure 3.2: Key Factors Affecting Student Aspirations and Outcomes

It was decided that the areas in Figure 3.2 provided a useful framework to explore the voices and perspectives of students, and that Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2012) would provide a useful basis from which to design the theoretical model to be used in this research. This was determined because the areas in Figure 3.2 could be aligned with the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants from SCT.

The factors in Figure 3.2 were mapped against the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants of SCT, as shown in Table 3.1.

Bandura's SCT – Determinants Related to this Research	
Determinant	Elements from Figure 3.2
Personal Determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-efficacy and Identity
Behavioural Determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Behaviours • Capacity to Imagine and Plan for the Future
Environmental Determinants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Effect of Place - Rurality • Connection to Place • Family Characteristics • Family Expectations and Support • Friends and Peers • School and Teacher Effectiveness • School and Teacher Expectations

Table 3.1: Bandura's SCT – Factors Related to this Research

In order to incorporate the elements from Figure 3.2 and Table 3.1 into the theoretical framework for this research, the following construct was developed, using Bandura's SCT as a basis and incorporating student aspirations as the central focus. The framework, named Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT), shown in Figure 3.3, was developed in, and used throughout the research.

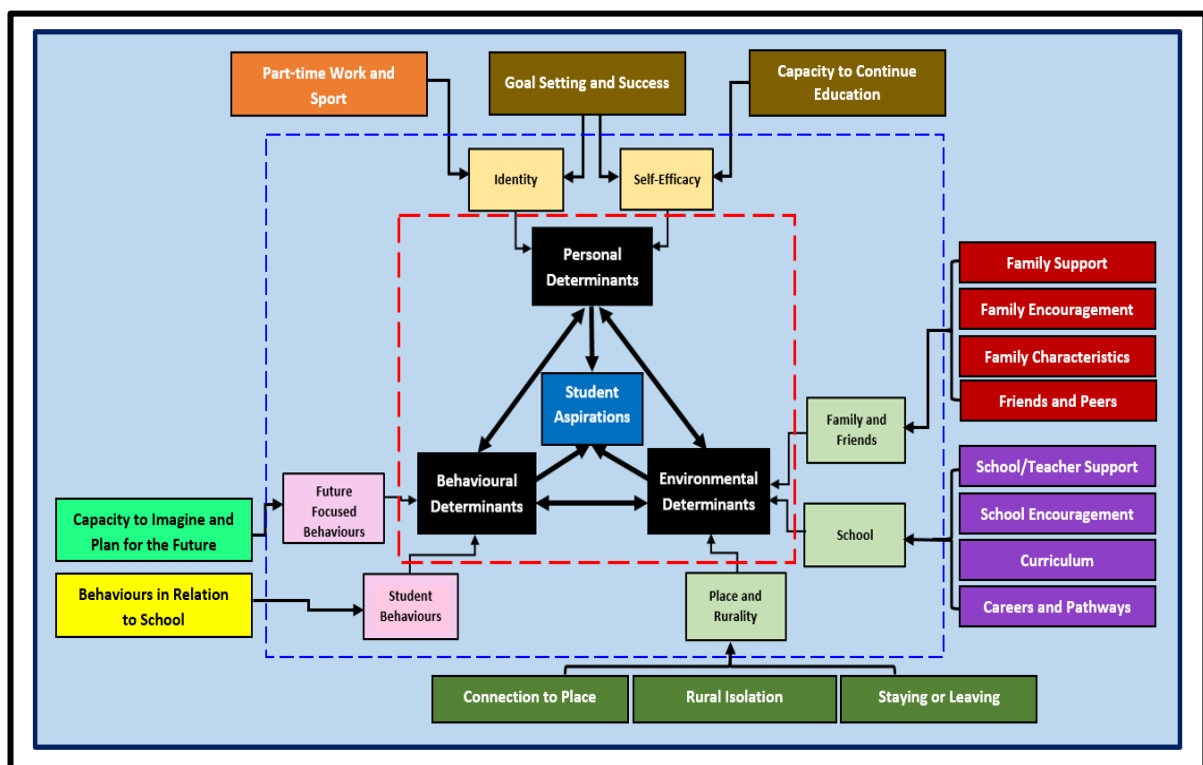


Figure 3.3: Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT) – Factors Influencing Aspirations (Based on SCT, (Bandura, 1997))

Figure 3.3 shows the theoretical framework, SCAT, used in this research. The framework has three layers. In the red dashed area, Bandura's SCT (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2012), showing the connections between personal, behavioural and environmental determinants, is shown, linked to student aspirations at the centre of the framework. Outside the red dashed area and inside the blue dashed area are the key elements that make up the determinants in this research, namely identity, self-efficacy, future focused behaviours, student behaviours, family and friends, school and place and rurality. Outside the blue dashed section, the factors which contribute to each of the elements are included. Each of these factors was derived from the literature review, which is in Chapter 2.

In order to follow the SCAT framework, the following example is provided.

Student Aspirations are influenced by **Environmental Determinants**, one of which is **Place and Rurality**. A factor related to **Place and Rurality** is **Connection to Place**, shown in the left hand dark green rectangle at the bottom of Figure 3.3.

The factors, associated with the elements in Figure 3.3, are defined briefly in Table 3.2.

Description of Factors Related to Student Aspirations			
Determinant	Element	Factor	Description of Factor
Personal	Identity	Part-time Work and Sport	The importance of part-time employment and sport in the creation of the student's identity.
	Self-efficacy and Identity	Goal Setting and Success	The capacity of students to set goals for the future and to understand what success means for themselves.
	Self-efficacy	Capacity to Continue Education	Whether the student wants or needs to continue with education beyond Year 12 and their understanding of their own capacity to do so.
Behavioural	Student Behaviours	Behaviours in Relation to School	The capacity to try hard and to get the outcomes and results that will allow the student's aspirations to be realised.
	Future Focused Behaviours	Capacity to Imagine and Plan for the Future	The capacity of the student to imagine possible future careers and to obtain information related to achieving their aspirations.
Environmental	Family and Friends	Family Support	The support of family members in the development and realisation of the student's aspirations.
		Family Encouragement	The encouragement of family members in relation to the student's aspirations.
		Family Characteristics	The family structure, parental educational background and socio-economic status, of the student's family and the effect on the student's aspirations.
		Friends and Peers	The ability and willingness of friends and peers to support the aspirations of the student.
	Place and Rurality	Connection to Place	Whether the student is connected to place, and the effect that this has on the student's aspirations.
		Staying or Leaving	Whether the student wants to stay in their community or to leave and the effect of this on aspirations.
		Rural Isolation	The issues related to the distance and travel required to access services such as university, TAFE or employment.

	School	School/Teacher Support	The support of the school and its teachers in the development and realisation of the student's aspirations.
		School/Teacher Encouragement	The encouragement of the school and its teachers in relation to the student's aspirations.
		Curriculum	Whether the curriculum of the school supports the aspirational needs of the student.
		Careers and Pathways	The provision of careers and pathways counselling to allow the student to imagine possible careers for the future.

Table 3.2: Description of Factors related to Student Aspirations

One area that was included in Figure 3.2, but not in SCAT, was “gender”. In this research, it was determined that gender was important in many of the elements and factors of SCAT. It was therefore considered that gender and, in the same way, the year level of the student, should be used as an over-arching element rather than in isolation. In this way, the gender and the year level of the student were considered throughout the research, as they related to many of the aspects of the research.

In the SCAT framework, each factor in the third column in Table 3.2 is connected to one of the elements (in the second column), which is connected to one of the determinants (in the first column). In some cases, this selection is somewhat tenuous, as some of the factors could be connected to more than one of the elements. For example, Goal Setting and Success is connected here to both Self-efficacy and to Identity.

Rurality pervades all areas of this research, affecting family, friends, school, as well as student behaviours, identity and self-efficacy. This is the beauty of Bandura's SCT and of SCAT. The connections between the environmental, behavioural and personal determinants allow for an in-depth analytical examination of the barriers and enablers that affect the development and realisation of student aspirations.

The selection, of the sample of schools that were included in the research, is described in the next section.

3.4 Selection of Sample Schools

The schools selected for this research were from the eastern regions of Victoria. Having worked previously for the Department of Education and Training in Victoria, and having a comprehensive awareness of government secondary schools, particularly those in the eastern half of the state, it was decided to use schools in eastern Victoria. The original aim was to include six rural secondary schools to provide the rural perceptions of student

aspirations and three metropolitan Melbourne secondary schools to provide a metropolitan contrast or baseline. After approaching the principals of a number of schools with a request that they become involved, several other rural and metropolitan school principals requested that their schools be involved in the research. By the time the data was to be collected, eleven rural and five metropolitan schools were involved. These schools provided a range of socio-economic levels, school sizes and distances from Melbourne.

Whilst the sample of schools included rural and metropolitan schools, the focus of the research was related to students in rural schools. The metropolitan schools were included for reasons of contrast, to provide a benchmark to show the effect of rurality on the aspirations of the students. Throughout the documentation of the data from student surveys and focus groups, rural student data was contrasted with that of metropolitan students.

Figure 3.4 shows a map of Victoria with the research area in eastern Victoria outlined. The approximate positions of the rural schools are also shown. All schools, both rural and metropolitan, were within the designated area in the map.

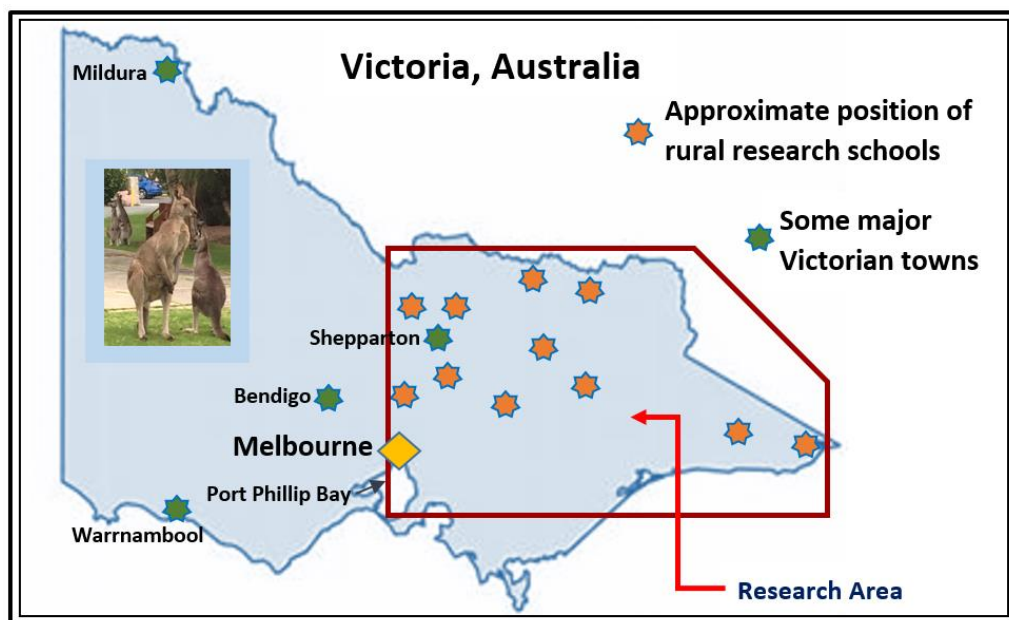


Figure 3.4: Map Showing Victoria, the Research Area and the Approximate Position of the Rural Research Schools

The sample of schools had a range of socio-economic status (SES) levels. This allowed for comparison between lower and higher SES schools, as well as ensuring similarity in terms of SES, for the whole rural and metropolitan samples of schools. The SES data, obtained from the “MySchool” website (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2019), was based on the Index of Community Socio-Educational

Advantage (ICSEA) which, for all schools, ranges between approximately 800 for a very low socio-economic area and 1200 for a very high socio-economic area. The average ICSEA score, for all schools in Australia, is 1000. The ICSEA score is based on parent occupation and parent education levels (ACARA, 2014).

The principal of each of the sample schools was visited and time was spent outlining the research and the benefits to the school, which included providing an opportunity for the students at the school to voice their opinions regarding rural school education, and to have the chance to contribute to possible improvement strategies in the education system in Victoria.

The sample schools are listed in Table 3.3. The names of the schools involved in the research were changed to protect the privacy of the students who were involved. The table shows the schools and their ICSEA value in 2018, when the data was collected, the road distance from Melbourne and the approximate number of students enrolled in the schools.

School	Location of School	Road Distance from Melbourne	2018 Student Enrolment Numbers	2017/2018 ICSEA
Inner East Secondary College	Metropolitan	17 km.	400 - 600	1034
Kingston Secondary College	Metropolitan	27 km.	400 – 600	939
Eastern Secondary College	Metropolitan	29 km.	1500 - 2000	982
Outer Eastern Secondary College	Metropolitan	47 km.	1500 - 2000	948
South East Secondary College	Metropolitan	48 km.	1000 - 1200	983
Central Secondary College	Rural – Inner Regional	88 km.	600 - 800	958
Goulburn Regional College	Rural – Inner Regional	95 km.	600 – 800	933
Highlands Rural Secondary College	Rural – Inner Regional	112 km.	200 – 400	994
Northern Secondary College	Rural – Inner Regional	220 km.	200 - 400	929
Riverside Rural Secondary College	Rural – Inner Regional	231 km.	200 - 400	930
Murray Regional College	Rural – Inner Regional	321 km.	1000 - 1200	N/A
Snowfields Secondary College	Rural – Outer Regional	190 km.	400 - 600	1004
Tree Valley Secondary College	Rural – Outer Regional	323 km.	400 - 600	1051
River View Secondary College	Rural – Outer Regional	365 km.	400 - 600	983
Hillton Rural Secondary College	Rural – Remote	434 km.	Below 200	960
Marlin Bay Rural College	Rural – Remote	513 km.	Below 200	1018

Table 3.3: Metropolitan and Rural Schools Included in the Research^{2,3}

² Schools where focus groups were conducted are shaded in pink

³ Murray Regional College did not have an ICSEA value in 2018

The location of the schools, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) categorisation of rural schools as being inner regional, outer regional, remote or very remote (ABS, 2020), as previously shown in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1, is also included in the table. As previously stated, there are no “very remote” areas in Victoria.

The range of ICSEA values for the rural schools in 2018, when the data was collected, was 929 to 1051 and the average was 976.0 (excluding Murray Regional College, which was included in the data collection, but it did not have an ICSEA value at that time). In 2018, the range of ICSEA values for the metropolitan schools was 939 to 1034 and the average was 977.2. It is noted that the ICSEA value that was available at the time of the survey in term 1, 2018 was the 2017 ICSEA value.

The rural schools in the sample varied greatly from each other. They are located in small, medium or large country towns. The rural schools are from:

- a) farming areas (Central Secondary College, Goulburn Regional College, Northern Secondary College, Riverside Rural Secondary College and River View Secondary College);
- b) seaside fishing and tourist areas (Marlin Bay Rural College);
- c) inland tourist areas, including areas for snow skiing (River View Secondary College, Snowfields Secondary College and Tree Valley Secondary College);
- d) forestry preservation areas (Hillton Rural Secondary College and Marlin Bay Rural College);
- e) small sized towns (Hillton Rural Secondary College and Marlin Bay Rural College);
- f) medium sized towns (Central Secondary College, Highlands Rural Secondary College, Northern Secondary College, Riverside Rural Secondary College, River View Secondary College, Snowfields Secondary College and Tree Valley Secondary College);
- g) larger towns (Goulburn Regional College and Murray Regional College);
- h) towns less than 150 km. from Melbourne (Central Secondary College, Goulburn Regional College and Highlands Rural Secondary College);
- i) towns more than 300 km. from Melbourne (Hillton Rural Secondary College, Marlin Bay Rural College, Murray Regional College, River View Secondary College, Tree Valley Secondary College);

- j) towns that have a university and a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) College (Murray Regional College);
- k) towns that have a TAFE College but do not have a university (Goulburn Regional College).

The metropolitan schools also varied greatly from each other, and included a range of socio-economic areas, and inner and outer suburban areas. The metropolitan schools are from:

- a) affluent inner suburban areas (Inner East Secondary College);
- b) the outer eastern corridor which is expanding rapidly as Melbourne's population grows (Outer Eastern Secondary College);
- c) suburbs in close proximity to Port Phillip Bay (South East Secondary College);
- d) suburbs with a high population of residents from non-English speaking backgrounds (Eastern Secondary College, Kingston Secondary College and Outer Eastern Secondary College).

The number and variety of rural schools involved in the research was designed to ensure a cross section of secondary schools in Victoria, in terms of size, distance from Melbourne and SES levels. The number of schools in the research was similar to the number of schools researched by Dalley-Trim and Alloway (2011) and Watson et al. (2016), who researched ten and thirteen secondary schools, respectively.

Having selected the schools, the selection of the sample of students became the next challenge.

3.5 Selection of the Students in the Sample

The research was based on the perceptions of students in year 10 and 12 in government secondary schools in Victoria. Year 10 students are in their fourth year of secondary schooling and are generally aged 15 or 16, whilst year 12 students are in their final year of secondary schooling and are generally aged 17 or 18. In Victoria, students study a general curriculum from year 7 to 10 and then, in year 11, decide whether to study the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). In this research, all of the year 10 students were studying a general curriculum, although some of the students had elected to commence their VCE program early. This is a

common practice in Victoria, as it allows students to complete a VCE subject early and to benefit from having a taste of senior school studies. None of the year 10 students in the sample had commenced their VCAL program.

Students in year 12 in Victorian secondary schools generally choose to study either VCE or VCAL. These courses are very different from each other. The VCE is an academic program which prepares students for entry to university courses. The VCAL is a vocational program which prepares students for the work force, apprenticeships, traineeships or TAFE courses. In a small number of schools, the International Baccalaureate (IB) is taught at years 11 and 12. No school in this research offered the IB.

Students, who study the VCE in their final year of secondary school, generally study four or five subjects, one of which is an English subject (which could be English, English as a Second Language, English Language, Foundation English or Literature). As a part of their VCE course, students may choose to complete a Vocational Education and Training (VET) certificate and count this as the equivalent of one VCE subject. Details of VCE programs are available from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) (2020).

Students, who study the VCAL, complete a vocational program that includes literacy and numeracy skills, industry specific skills, work related skills and personal development. A VCAL certificate may also include VET certificates, work placements, school-based apprenticeships or traineeships. Details of VCAL programs are available from the VCAA (2020).

3.5.1 Student Sample for the Survey

From each of the five metropolitan schools, between 15 and 25 students from each of year 10 and 12 took part in the student survey element of the research. From each of the eleven rural schools, between 10 and 25 students, from each of year 10 and 12, took part, depending on the size of the school. It was anticipated that this would result in approximately 60 year 10 and 60 year 12 students in the metropolitan schools and approximately 120 year 10 and 120 year 12 students in the rural schools completing the survey.

The students were selected randomly in that, for year 10 students, one class of approximately 25 students was asked to take home a project explanatory statement and consent form, have the consent form signed by a parent or guardian, and return the form to the school. In each school, the class chosen was a mixed-ability class, to ensure that a range

of students was included. Only students who returned the consent form were permitted to complete the survey. For the year 12 students, a mix of VCE and VCAL students was selected. The numbers of VCE and VCAL students at each school reflected the overall population of the year 12 cohort at the school. For smaller schools, all year 10 and 12 students were provided with the explanatory statement and consent form, and were selected to be involved, subject to completion of the consent form.

3.5.2 Student Sample for the Focus Groups

The students involved in the focus groups came from three of the rural schools and three of the metropolitan schools. The schools where the focus groups were conducted were also schools where the student survey had been completed. The students who took part in the focus groups had previously completed the student survey and had returned the consent form, stating that they agreed to be involved in a focus group and that they were willing to have the focus group audio-recorded. The rural focus group schools were Marlin Bay Rural College, Riverside Rural Secondary College and Highlands Rural Secondary College. These schools provided a range of SES levels and a range of distances from Melbourne. The metropolitan focus group schools were Inner East Secondary College, South East Secondary College and Outer Eastern Secondary College. They also provided a range of SES levels and distances from Melbourne. The focus group schools are shaded in pink in Table 3.3.

Having recruited the students and gained the support of the school principals, the administration of the survey was the next step.

3.6 The Student Survey

The 64-item student survey was developed as a part of the research project. The survey focused on eight key areas, which related to the students' aspirations and the enablers and barriers that may assist or prevent them from realising their aspirations. The key areas of the survey reflected the elements of SCAT (see Figure 3.3 and Table 3.2), and also included student demographic data and student aspirations for the future in terms of their career.

The majority of the 64 items in the survey were developed as Likert 5-scale items. The survey items were constructed, based on personal understandings and after consideration of a range of surveys from the literature, which focused on the areas included in Table 3.4. Key references used were Batten and Girling-Butcher (1981), James et al. (1999), Khoo and

Ainley (2005), Petrin et al. (2014) and Watson et al. (2016). Items related to student self-efficacy were constructed after consideration of surveys constructed by Bandura (1997), Fouad, Smith and Enochs (1997), and Chen and Starobin (2018).

Details of the survey structure are indicated in Table 3.4 below:

No.	Survey Section	Details
1	Student Demographics	The student's school, gender, language spoken at home, year level and, for year 12 students, whether they studied VCE or VCAL.
2	Aspirations for the Future	The career the student aspired to in the future and whether the student wanted or perceived that they needed to attend university or TAFE after finishing secondary school.
3	Identity and Self-Efficacy	Items related to identity and identity formation and the student's perception of their self-efficacy.
4	Behaviours	Behaviours related to being a student at school and determining aspirations for the future.
5	Place and Rurality	Items related to connection to the local community, rural isolation and whether a student wanted to stay in the community or leave.
6	Family and Friends	Items related to family characteristics (SES, parental education levels, the number of parents living in the home and the number of siblings), family support and encouragement and the effect of friends on student aspirations.
7	School	Items related to school encouragement and support, curriculum and careers and pathways education and counselling.
8	Student Perceptions of Rural and Metropolitan Schools	The perception of students of their own school and how they compared rural and metropolitan schools.

Table 3.4: Student Survey Section Details

A draft survey was trialled at three rural secondary schools in Victoria, and one secondary school that was on the fringe between metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. The survey trials were conducted in the final term (October/November) of 2017, the year prior to the final survey being implemented. Of the schools that trialled the survey, two schools requested that they be involved in the research. These two schools participated in the research, and completed the final version of the survey. In both cases, the students who completed the trial survey were different from those who completed the final survey, because the students who completed the trial survey were no longer in year 10 or 12.

All copies of the trial survey, whether completed or not, were collected at the trial schools. In each trial, students were asked to complete the survey and write comments related to items that they found to be unclear or ambiguous. Students were also asked to comment verbally on the survey prior to leaving the room where the survey was completed. The

original draft of the survey had not included Likert 5-scale items and the trials suggested that this be changed. This resulted in restructuring the survey to make the items clearer and easier to read. Most students in the trial completed the survey within 20 minutes. In each of the schools where the trials occurred, the principal or assistant principal agreed to read the survey and make comments. Comments were invariably positive and included statements such as “the questions are clear” and “I would like to see the results of the survey for our school”.

Complete versions of the final surveys are included in Appendix 5. Sample items, from the final versions of the surveys, included:

Items related to student demographics

1. What school do you attend?
2. Are you male or female?
3. How many brothers and sisters do you have in total?
4. Did either, both or neither of your parents go to university or TAFE after secondary school?

Items related to student aspirations

1. When working out what I want to do when I leave school, I get most advice from _____
2. The job that I think I would like to get after finishing my education is _____
3. To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE.
4. When I leave school, I want to continue with my education.

Items related to identity and self-efficacy

1. In my life so far, I have been successful in most things that I have tried.
2. I think that the results I have achieved at school are very good.
3. I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career.
4. I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there.
5. I find studying and schoolwork to be boring.

Items related to student behaviours

1. What stops you from studying at home? (Select one or two answers from 7 options).
2. Even when the work in class is difficult or challenging, I always perform very well.
3. I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school.

Items related to place and rurality

1. At school I learn about my community.
2. My local community is important to me.
3. I feel comfortable and secure in the community/town where I live.
4. In my community, I get involved in activities such as sport, clubs or community work.
5. I never want to leave the community where I live.

6. I would leave the community where I live in order to get a good job or to go to university or TAFE.

Items related to family and friends

1. My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.
2. My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE.

Items related to school

1. The school I attend is a very good school.
2. At my school I have not been provided with enough information regarding university and TAFE courses and possible careers.
3. My school provides opportunities for me to explore and imagine possible future careers and to decide what I want to do in the future.
4. My teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.

Student perceptions of rural and metropolitan schools

1. I think that students from rural schools are more likely to go to university than students from metropolitan schools.
2. I think that metropolitan schools have higher expectations of students than rural schools.

The surveys were administered in each of the schools by the researcher. In each school, the survey was explained in terms of its purpose and how the results would be used, as well as information related to how the privacy of the students involved would be maintained. The focus groups were also explained to the students at this time, in order to ascertain which students were interested in being part of a focus group.

The student surveys, in each of the 16 schools in this research, were completed between February and April, 2018, in order to ensure consistency in terms of the length of time that the students involved had been in year 10 or year 12. All students were given as much time as they needed to complete the survey. Most students completed the survey in 15 to 20 minutes with less than 10 per cent of students exceeding that length of time. Students were asked to answer all items and to provide the most appropriate response in each case. Where an item required more than one response, students were reminded of this at the start of the survey and during the survey. The surveys were conducted at a time that was determined by the school principal.

3.7 The Student Focus Groups

Focus groups, as a data collection method, have been used continuously since 1926 (Bogardus, 1926; Merton and Kendall, 1946), as a way of discovering the thoughts of a

number of people at the same time. Calder (1977) discussed the fact that focus groups could supplement quantitative research and that consistency of responses usually occurred after three or four homogeneous focus groups, whilst Krueger (1994) suggested that between 3 and 12 focus groups were usually sufficient. Focus groups also provided for triangulation of data, allowing for the validation of, or addition to, the “primary data source” such as a survey (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Fielding (2012) stated that focus groups allowed the integration of data from different sources, and added to the richness of the data.

By the 2000s, focus groups were used as a stand-alone methodology, or as an adjunct to surveys or other experimental techniques (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). In conducting focus groups, Krueger (2006b) noted the importance of the facilitator remaining neutral and not directing the discussion with his or her own biases. Recording methods in focus groups, including note taking, field notes, audio or video recording, needed to be accurate (Krueger, 2006a). Stout (2009) used five focus groups of parents and teachers, selected from a group, who had previously completed a survey in his research, in a similar way to the methodology used in this research.

In this research, three of the eleven rural schools and three of the five metropolitan schools were selected, based on SES levels and distance from Melbourne, to be included in the focus groups’ part of the research. Two or three focus groups were conducted in each of these schools. The focus groups were homogeneous as suggested by Calder (1977) and Krueger (1994), in that year 10 focus groups and year 12 focus groups were conducted separately. In two cases, year 12 VCE students and year 12 VCAL students were in different focus groups. Overall, fourteen focus groups were conducted. They were:

- a) Three rural and three metropolitan year 10 groups;
- b) Two rural and two metropolitan mixed year 12 VCE and VCAL groups;
- c) One rural and one metropolitan year 12 VCE group;
- d) One rural and one metropolitan year 12 VCAL group.

The separate VCE and VCAL groups were conducted at two of the schools as they provided an opportunity to elicit greater detail, particularly from the year 12 VCAL students.

Having separate groups for year 10 and year 12 students allowed for an exploration of differences between the perceptions of year 10 and year 12 students, and the differences in perceptions between year 12 VCE and year 12 VCAL students. In each focus group, based on the ideas of Krueger (2006b), the focus group size was five or six students. Students were

selected by the individual schools according to the researcher's request to ensure that the focus group included a range of student abilities. All students were required to have completed the student survey, returned the consent form and agreed to have the focus group audio-recorded. Each focus group was required to have a mix of male and female students, and the groups reflected the cultural mix of students at the school. For example, where the college cohort contained a substantial indigenous or non-English speaking background cohort, the focus group structure reflected this.

Focus groups were conducted in school time, at a time arranged by the school principal. In some schools, they were held in class time and in other schools, they were at lunchtime. Each focus group session, which was facilitated by the researcher, lasted for approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and was audio-recorded. The recording was later transcribed by the researcher for subsequent analysis. It was decided that it was preferable that the researcher complete the transcripts, rather than using a transcription service, so that the researcher strengthened his awareness of the detail of the responses of the students.

Once the focus groups were established, the questions were constructed.

3.8 Focus Group Questions

The focus group questions centred on the key determinants (personal, behavioural and environmental) from the SCAT theoretical framework (see Figure 3.3 and Table 3.2). The aim of the questions was to elucidate further information regarding the barriers and enablers for the aspirations of rural students, and to contrast their responses with those of metropolitan students. The focus questions were determined after an initial analysis of the student surveys had been carried out.

The questions were:

1. In the survey completed in term 1, most students had a good idea about what they wanted to do when they left school. How have you determined your direction in life in the future, and who has helped you to determine your future direction? Do you think you will achieve your future dreams?
2. In terms of your education, has living in your community helped you to achieve success? What has helped you and what has done the opposite?

3. In terms of your community, how much do you feel a part of the community? How do you feel that you are a part of the community? If you left the community to go to further education or a job, do you think you would return to live in the community?
4. High expectations are known to be important. Do you think that there are high expectations placed on you? By whom? Do you think it would be different if you lived in the country/city?
5. Do you think that your time at school has been successful? How do you measure being successful at school?
6. Has your school met your needs as a student? If you were able to create a school so that it suited the needs of all students, what would it look like?
7. Why do you think that rural students are less likely to go to university or TAFE than metropolitan students?

After the completion of the focus groups' data collection, the full analysis of the results was conducted, as described in the next section.

3.9 Analysis of Data

The analysis of the survey data was completed, based on the theoretical framework (see Figure 3.3). The analysis considered different groupings of students, namely rural and metropolitan, male and female, and students from different year levels. The analysis also considered students where:

- a) One parent or two parents lived at home with the student;
- b) None, one or two parents had attended university or TAFE;
- c) The number of children in the family was 1 to 3, or 4 or more;
- d) The SES of the school was low, medium or high.

For the purposes of this research, low SES schools had an ICSEA of 960 or less, medium SES schools had an ICSEA between 961 and 1000 (the Australian average), and high SES schools had an ICSEA greater than 1000.

The methods used for the analysis of the student survey data and the focus groups are considered in the next two sections.

3.9.1 Student Survey Data

The method for analysis of the student survey items varied depending on the type of item. Where the item asked students to give a written response, the percentage of students giving each response was recorded. This was completed for rural students, metropolitan students, rural males, metropolitan males, rural females, metropolitan females, rural year 10 students, metropolitan year 10 students, rural year 12 VCE and VCAL students and metropolitan year 12 VCE and VCAL students.

For example, the following item related to parental education levels.

<p>“Did either, both or neither of your parents finish secondary school?”</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My mother did <input type="checkbox"/> My father did <input type="checkbox"/> Both parents did <input type="checkbox"/> Neither parent did <input type="checkbox"/> I do not know</p>
--

To analyse the results, the following results were tabulated:

1. The percentage of rural and metropolitan students responding to each answer option;
2. The percentage of males and females from both rural and metropolitan schools responding to each answer option;
3. The percentage of year 10, year 12 VCE and year 12 VCAL students from both rural and metropolitan schools responding to each answer option;
4. The percentage of students from each school who responded to each answer option.

(This was done to allow an individual brief report to be written for each school involved in the research.)

The following item referred to barriers to studying at home.

<p>“What stops you from studying at home?” (Select one or two responses)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It is too noisy <input type="checkbox"/> Sporting commitments <input type="checkbox"/> Study is boring <input type="checkbox"/> Part time job <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing my friends <input type="checkbox"/> House chores <input type="checkbox"/> I cannot be bothered <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing</p>

To analyse the results, the percentage of students responding to each response was tabulated for:

1. All Rural students;
2. All Metropolitan students;
3. Rural groupings of male students, female students, year 10 students, year 12 VCE and VCAL students;

4. Metropolitan groupings of male students, female students, year 10 students, year 12 VCE and VCAL students;
5. Students from each school in the study.

Many survey items were Likert 5-scale items, where students were asked to provide their response to the item by placing an **X** in the appropriate square to indicate whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were neutral, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. For example:

I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Results were tabulated for each Likert 5-scale item, determining the percentage of students who responded positively to the statement. In most items, a positive response meant that the student indicated either Strongly Agree or Agree. However, in some items, the item was a “reverse” statement, where a positive response meant that the student indicated either Strongly Disagree or Disagree. Again, the results were calculated for the same groupings of students as listed above.

In order to carry out the analysis, the responses from the student surveys were entered into Microsoft Excel and the data was checked for errors and missing data. Where data was missing, the survey was re-checked and the appropriate response was entered. The data was then transferred to IBM SPSS (see Pallant (2016)) and, again, the data was checked. The percentage positive response data for each group, for all Likert 5-scale items in the survey, was then calculated using IBM SPSS. The data from the survey was used to create graphs, showing the results for:

- a) Rural and metropolitan students;
- b) Male and female students (rural and metropolitan);
- c) Year 10, Year 12 VCE and Year 12 VCAL students (rural and metropolitan).

Overall, more than thirty individual graphs were developed from the data, using colour coding to show the different groups of students involved. In order to develop the graphs, the analysis data from IBM SPSS was entered into Microsoft Excel and the graphs were drawn in Excel, as column graphs. It was decided to use the graphical functions of Microsoft Excel rather than IBM SPSS, as the graphs in Excel provided clear insights into the differences between the groups of students.

In addition to the graphs, correlation coefficients were determined for the Likert 5-scale survey items, with the correlation being determined against the item “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”. This item was considered to be a useful item with which to determine correlations, as it referred to the aspirations of the students in terms of the commonly expressed view that education after secondary school is desirable (Bradley et al., 2008; Lamb et al., 2014; Koshy, Dockery & Seymour, 2019). Recently, Koshy et al. (2019) noted that:

“In recent years, Australian policy-makers have committed considerable resources to the support of programmes designed to increase participation in higher education by school students” (Koshy et al., 2019, p. 302).

It was decided to use the Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient (r_s) based on the comments of De Winter, Gosling and Potter (2016), who noted that the Spearman correlation coefficient was preferable to the Pearson correlation coefficient for Likert scale survey items. This point was supported by Pallant (2016, p. 129), who stated that the Spearman Rank Correlation was commonly used for ranked or ordinal data in research, where there was difficulty in assuming that the intervals between the rankings were equal. Stevens (1946, p. 679) had previously suggested that statisticians needed to treat with caution data where “only the rank order” of the data is known.

The Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient, r_s , is calculated using the equation:

$$r_s = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N x_{i,r} y_{i,r}}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^N x_{i,r}^2 \sum_{i=1}^N y_{i,r}^2}} \quad \text{where } x_{i,r} \text{ and } y_{i,r} \text{ are the rank positions of } x_i \text{ and } y_i, \text{ respectively (de Winter et al., 2016, p. 276).}$$

The correlation coefficients were determined using IBM SPSS, and the results were considered to be important if r_s was greater than 0.30 (or less than -0.30) and if it was significant at least at the $p < .05$ level. The items with significant correlation coefficients were mapped back to the theoretical framework to show how the areas, which correlated with student aspirations to continue education after secondary school, matched with the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants of the theoretical framework.

Once the data from the student surveys was analysed, the transcripts from the focus groups were analysed.

3.9.2 Student Focus Group Data

For each of the fourteen focus groups, the discussion was audio-recorded and then transcribed to obtain an accurate record of student comments. Each of the students involved in the focus group created a pseudonym for themselves in order to protect their privacy. The focus groups commenced with each student making the statement, “Hello, my name is xxxx”. This allowed the matching of each comment made in the focus group discussion with the name (pseudonym) of the student in the transcription.

The transcription for each focus group was then colour-coded, according to the key factors of the discussion and aligned to the factors included in the theoretical framework. The colour-coding was:

Colour Coding of Focus Group Responses					
1	Part-time work and sport		7	Connection to place	
2	Goal setting and success		8	Rural isolation	
3	Capacity to continue education		9	Staying or leaving	
4	Family support and encouragement		10	Capacity to imagine and plan for the future	
5	Family characteristics				
6	Friends and peers		11	Behaviours in relation to school	

Table 3.5: Colour-coding of Focus Group Responses

By colour-coding the responses, it was then possible to search the transcript for the comments, made by the students, which aligned with the factors of SCAT. This allowed the grouping of comments related to each factor, thus developing a narrative of responses based on themes matched to SCAT. The results for the focus group discussions are included in Chapter 5.

3.10 Ethical Issues

In each school, the principal viewed the ethics approval from Monash University and the approval to carry out the research from the Victorian Department of Education and Training (see Appendix 2). The principal also viewed the project explanatory statement (see Appendix 3), the student consent form (see Appendix 4) and the Student Survey (see Appendix 5), prior to giving approval for their school to become involved in the project.

All students involved in the project were provided with an explanatory statement of the research and a consent form. Students were permitted to take part in the research if a consent form, signed by the student's parent, was received. At the start of the administration of the student survey and each focus group, the details of the research were explained to the students. Students were given the opportunity to decline to complete the survey, or to withdraw from a focus group if they no longer wished to be involved. No students took up this offer and the comments of students were, at all times, positive. No ethical issues occurred throughout the research.

3.11 Role of the Researcher: Insider or Outsider

My role as a researcher was an interesting one. Research tends to divide the role into two sections, namely that of an insider and that of an outsider (Merton, 1972). There are benefits of being an insider in terms of knowing the people involved and being accepted by the research subjects. Similarly, there are benefits in being an outsider and being able to be detached and to make independent observations. Whilst it is often suggested that it is not possible to be both an insider and an outsider (Savvides, AL-Youssef, Colin & Garrido, 2014), in my case, I was seen as an insider by some people, and as an outsider by others.

Having worked for many years in rural Victoria, many would regard me as an insider, a person who had worked closely with schools in an attempt to improve student outcomes, and one who understood the outcomes obtained by students in rural schools in Victoria. In determining the research topic and research questions, I have been aware that there were advantages derived from my previous employment. I suspected that many principals would see me as an insider, and therefore would be prepared to allow me to conduct the research in their schools. I was equally aware that I could not take this for granted.

Consequently, when I asked the principal of a school whether I could conduct the research in their school, I made it clear that I was only interested in carrying out the research after a conversation with them, where we discussed the merits of the research and the need for a small amount of organisation that would need to be carried out by a member of staff, usually the principal or assistant principal. After the discussion, most of the principals wanted to have their schools involved, knowing that I would be working with students, none of whom would know me in any other way than the fact that I was a researcher from Monash University, who was interested in hearing their perceptions about their aspirations for the

future and the factors that assisted or hindered their aspirations. For the students, I was seen as an outsider.

In conducting the surveys and focus groups, I remained impartial, wanting to hear what the students thought. I kept an open mind based on the fact that the research was about the **students'** opinions and perceptions and not about any perceptions that I had. In the focus groups, my role was to ask questions of the students, to elicit their responses. My questions related to the SCAT theoretical model and I encouraged students to respond to the questions, and to be respectful of others in the focus group. At all times, I was thankful for the participation of the students. I commended them for their willingness to talk about the positives and the challenges of their school and education in general.

Whilst the students saw me as an outsider, not someone who was involved in their educational experience, part of my role was to develop a rapport with the students so that, particularly in focus groups, they felt comfortable to provide honest and open responses. This was done by having a discussion with the students at the start of the focus group, before the audio-recording commenced, explaining the research and how I needed to hear the thoughts of each participant.

As Dwyer and Buckle noted:

“The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and ... it does not qualify us as complete insiders” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

3.12 Summary

In Chapter 3, the methodology, which was informed by the SCAT theoretical framework, and the research instruments (the student survey and the use of focus groups, which were designed to elicit student insights and perspectives) have been outlined. The processes for data analysis, which were informed by the thematic factors inherent in the SCAT theoretical framework, have been explained. Ethical processes and the role of the researcher have been described.

In Chapter 4, the student survey data is presented.

Chapter 4 Student Survey Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the 64-item survey, completed by 363 students from 16 different schools. As this research is seeking to underline the significance of student voice, the survey provided an important way into conversations and dialogue between the researcher and the students. The findings of this chapter provide an understanding of how student voice is insightful and relevant, and that students have clear ideas about who they are and their aspirations for the future.

The chapter begins with the demographics of the schools and the students involved in the research, and an understanding of the aspirations of the 363 students who completed the survey. This is followed by sections that highlight the environmental, behavioural and personal determinants in the lives of the students and how they affect their aspirations for the future.

The survey was designed to elicit the perceptions of rural students in relation to their aspirations, schooling and opportunities, as well as contrasting the perceptions of rural students with those of metropolitan students. Of the 363 students who completed the survey, 50.1% were male and 49.9% were female. The students were a mix of Year 10, Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) students.

Throughout this chapter, key graphs related to the students and their aspirations, and statistics, which show similarities and differences between the perceptions of rural and metropolitan students, are presented. Five additional graphs, which elaborate on some of the graphs in this chapter, are included in Appendix 7.

4.2 The Survey Respondents

The survey, administered to students from eleven rural and five metropolitan government secondary schools in eastern Victoria, was used as a first step to obtain insights into the enablers and barriers that affected their aspirations. The students' responses were used to frame the questions that were asked in the student focus groups, where the voice of the students was realised more directly. The findings of the focus group discussions are presented in Chapter 5.

All students involved in the research returned an appropriately signed consent form which had been provided to them. Altogether, 750 consent forms were distributed, and 363 students returned the form, correctly filled in and signed, a response rate of 48.4%. These students then completed the survey. Table 4.1 provides data related to the students who completed the survey.

Key Data from the Data Collection		
	Metropolitan	Rural
Number of schools involved	5	11
Number of students who completed the survey	136	227
Number of male students who completed the survey	67	115
Number of female students who completed the survey	69	112
Number of year 10 students who completed the survey	52	100
Number of year 12 students who completed the survey	84	127
Number of year 12 VCE students who completed the survey	60	94
Number of year 12 VCAL students who completed the survey	24	33
Number of students involved in focus groups	51	55
Range of school Socio-Economic Status (measured by school ICSEA ⁴)	939 – 1034	929 – 1051
Mean school Socio-Economic Status (measured by school ICSEA)	977.2	976.0

Table 4.1 Key Data from the Data Collection

4.3 The Aspirations of the Students

This research focused on the aspirations of rural students, and used the aspirations of metropolitan students for the purposes of providing a contrast. In this section, the aspirations, in terms of the perceived future careers of the students, are examined.

An item in the survey asked students to indicate their career aspirations. The item was:

Item 48: The job that I think that I would like to get after finishing my education.is...

Student written responses were categorised, according to the Australian and New Zealand Classification of Occupations (ABS, 2013). The categories, (see Appendix 6), were:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| a) Community and Personal Service Workers | e) Sales Workers |
| b) Managers | f) Technician and Trade Workers |
| c) Professionals | g) Machinery Operators and Drivers |
| d) Clerical and Administrative Workers | h) Labourers |
| | i) Unknown or Undecided |

⁴ The ICSEA is a measure of socio-economic status of the school (ACARA, 2019). See Chapter 3.4.

“Clerical and Administrative Workers” and “Labourers” were not included in the graph of the students’ career aspirations, shown in Figure 4.1, as no students selected a career within those categories. The results, for the students in this research, were:

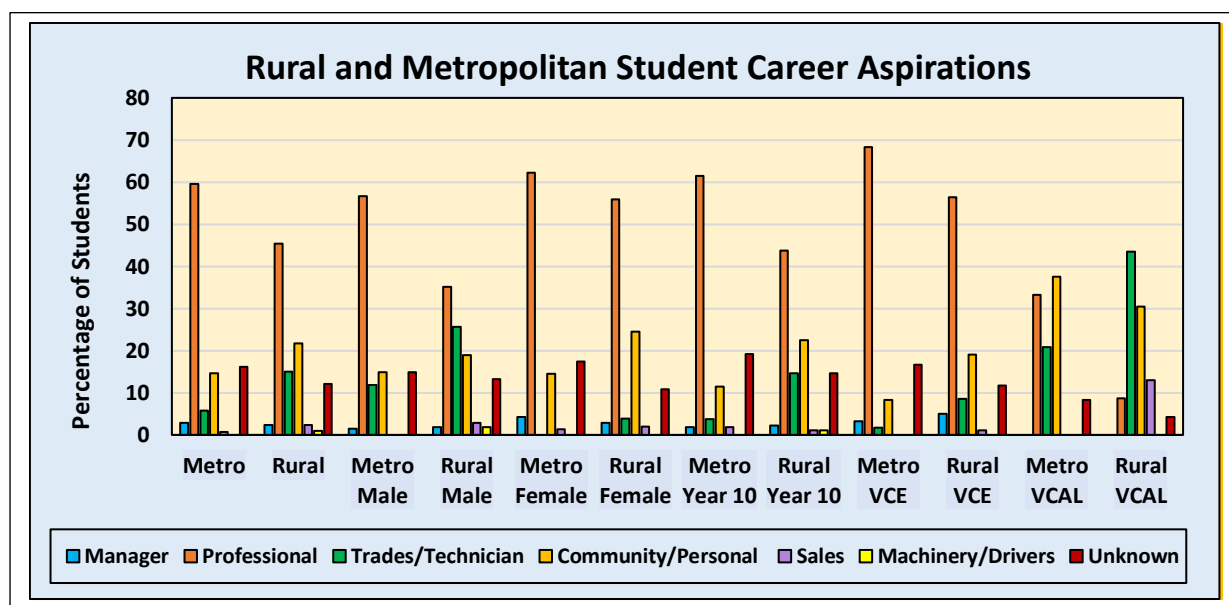


Figure 4.1: Student Perceptions of Future Career Aspirations

As indicated in Figure 4.1, more than 80% of the students involved in this research had a clear idea about their career aspirations for the future. The percentage of students who had not determined their possible future career was 12.1% for rural students and 16.2% for metropolitan students. The most common category of career aspirations was professional. Rural students were 14.2% less likely to aspire to a professional career than metropolitan students (the difference was 21.5% for males and 6.4% for females).

Professional careers were chosen by 55.9% of rural females, 62.3% of metropolitan females and 56.7% of metropolitan males. In contrast, the percentage of rural males who aspired to a professional career was approximately 20% less at 35.2%. Rural Year 10 students were less likely to choose a professional career than metropolitan Year 10, and both metropolitan and rural Year 12 VCE students. The Year 12 VCAL students had different aspirations. For rural VCAL students, 8.7% aspired to professional careers and 43.5% aspired to technician/trade careers, compared with 33.3% and 20.8% of their metropolitan counterparts, respectively.

That less rural students aspired to a professional career was balanced by the fact that 15% of rural students, compared with 5.8% of metropolitan students, aspired to work in the technician/trade area. Of the rural males, 25.7% aspired to a technician/trade career,

compared with 3.9% for rural females, 11.9% for metropolitan males and 0% for metropolitan females. Community/personal careers, which included the military, police force, aged care and child care, formed the aspirations of 14.7% of metropolitan students and 21.7% of rural students. More than 30% of both rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students aspired to community/personal careers.

The most common career aspirations for the students were:

Rural: Trades, Teacher, Medical, Scientist, Engineer, Nursing, Veterinary Science, Sports Related Metropolitan: Teacher, Architect, Medical, Lawyer, Engineer, Computer Related, Nursing, Police

Whilst the lists are similar, rural students were more likely to include trades (as observed in Figure 4.1) and careers in the Sciences, which were most commonly environmental, agricultural or careers related to the study or care of animals.

More than 80% of both rural and metropolitan students aspired to a professional, community/personal, or technician/trade career. The groups most likely to aspire to a trade/technician career were rural males and rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students. Those most likely to aspire to a community/personal career were rural females and rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students.

Knowing the aspirations of the students involved in this research, areas of the student survey related to the environmental, behavioural and personal influences on those aspirations will be examined, based on the SCAT framework (see Figure 3.3 in Chapter 3). Environmental determinants are considered in the next section.

4.4 The Effect of Environmental Determinants on Student Aspirations

Student aspirations were affected by factors related to themselves, their behaviours and their environment. In this section, the responses to the student survey, on items related to the environmental determinants, are presented. It is acknowledged that the factors included in this section were also affected by personal and behavioural determinants, as shown in Figure 3.3, where the triadic reciprocity between the three determinants, is shown (Bandura, 2012).

Figure 4.2 shows the environmental elements and factors from the SCAT framework. The environmental determinants considered in this research were “family and friends”, “place and rurality”, and “school”. Figure 4.2 also shows the factors related to each of the

environmental determinants that were considered in this research. Each of these elements and factors will be examined in the following sections of this chapter.

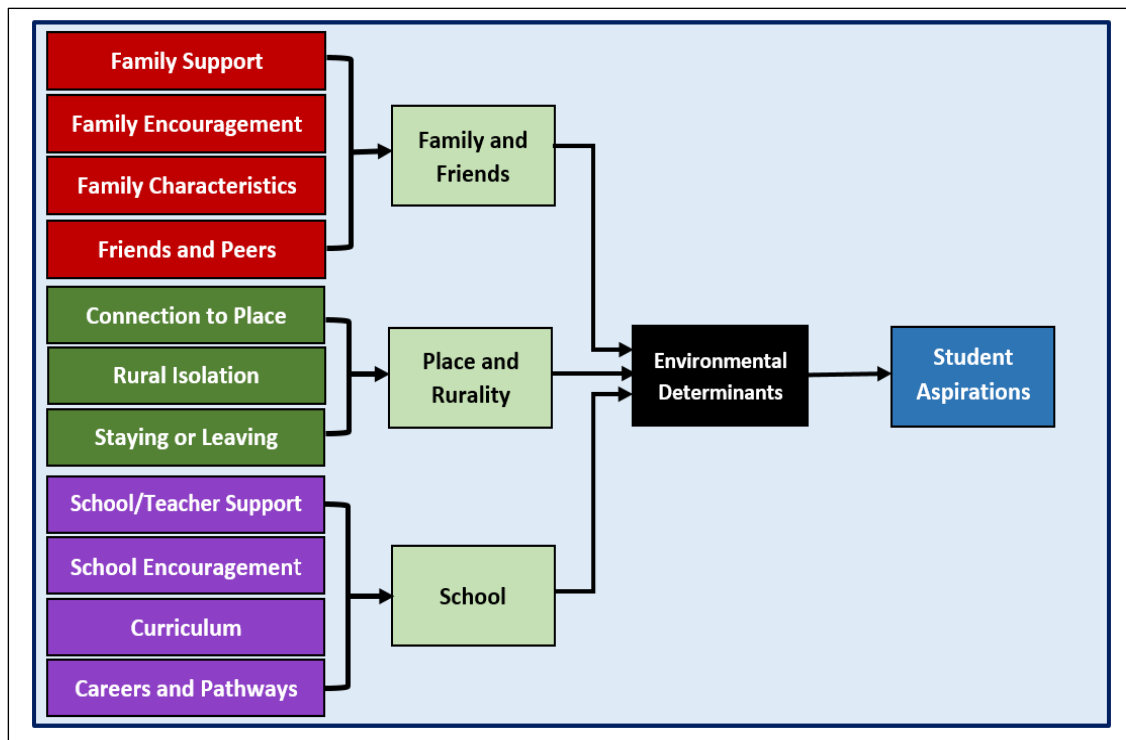


Figure 4.2: SCAT – Environmental Determinants and Key Factors

4.4.1 Place and Rurality

In this section, consideration is given to the effects of the environmental factors, related to place and rurality, on student aspirations and outcome expectations. The factors are connection to place, staying or leaving and rural isolation.

4.4.1.1 Place and Rurality – Connection to Place

Most students in this research indicated that they were connected to their community. For some, the connection was strong, for others it was transient, whilst for others, there was no real connection at all. The survey contained three items which related to the perceived importance of the community for the students. They were:

Item 38: I feel comfortable and secure in the community/town where I live.

Item 40: My local community is important to me.

Item 42: In my local community, I get involved in activities such as sport, clubs and community work.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.3.

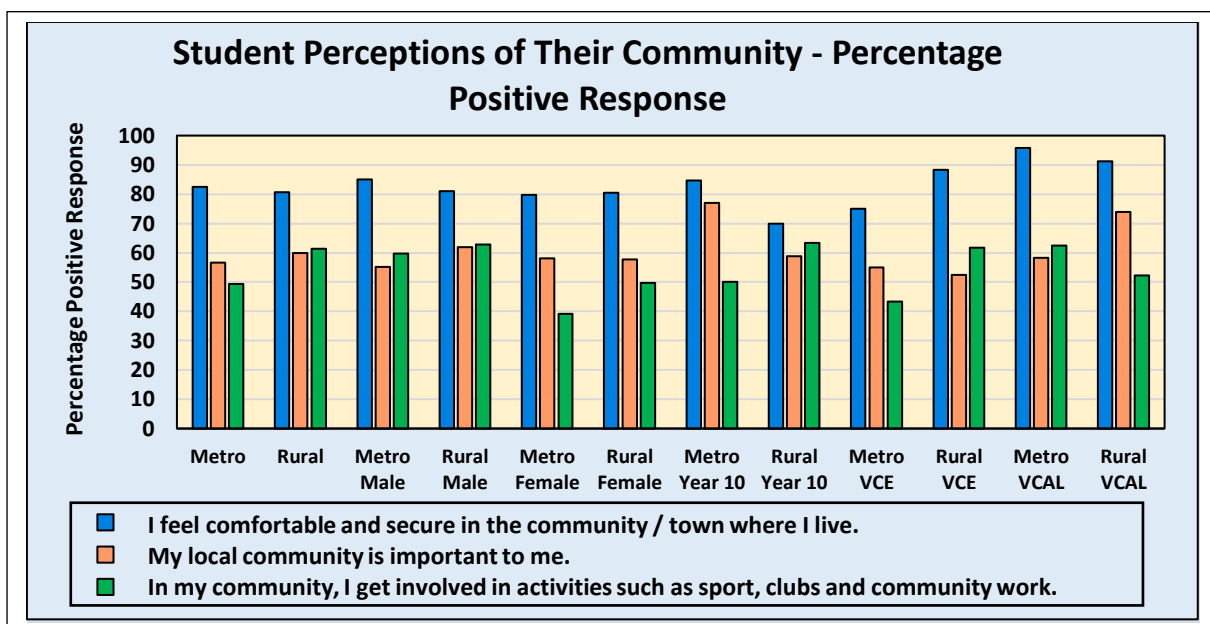


Figure 4.3: Student Perceptions of Their Community

As indicated in Figure 4.3, the perceptions of rural and metropolitan students were similar for these items. Approximately 80% of both rural and metropolitan students felt safe and comfortable in their community, whilst approximately 60% thought that their community was important to them. The student groups who felt most comfortable and secure in the community were the rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students, whilst the rural Year 10 students were least likely to feel this way. Metropolitan Year 10 and rural Year 12 VCAL students were most likely to feel their community was important to them. Rural students were 12.1% more likely to indicate that they were involved in community activities than metropolitan students. However, females were less likely to indicate this than males, by more than 20% for metropolitan females and 13% for rural females.

Whilst one might have expected that connection to community would be a rural trait, as suggested by Petrin, et al. (2014), the data in this research showed that community was important to both rural and metropolitan students.

That 60% of students felt that their community was important to them, indicates that 40% of students did not value their community as strongly. This raised the question as to whether the students wanted to stay in the community or leave, either temporarily or permanently. Staying or leaving the community, for education, employment or other reasons, is considered in the next section.

4.4.1.2 Place and Rurality – Staying or Leaving

The relationship between connection to community and the need for some students to leave, for personal reasons or to access employment or educational options, was the focus of three items from the survey. They were:

Item 43: I never want to leave the community/town where I live.

Item 44: I would leave the community/town where I live in order to get a good job or go to university or TAFE.

Item 45: I want to leave my local community/town as soon as I can.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.4.

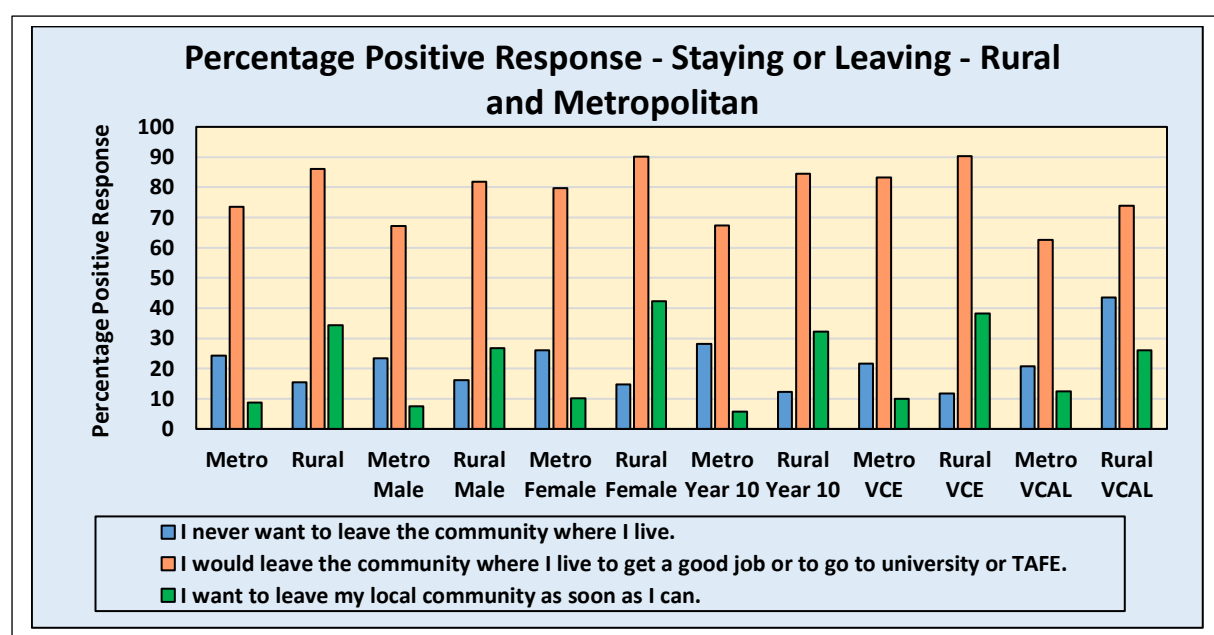


Figure 4.4: Connection to Community – Staying or Leaving

Figure 4.4 indicates that 15.5% of rural students, compared with 24.3% of metropolitan students, never wanted to leave their community. The group most likely to never want to leave was the rural Year 12 VCAL students, of whom 43.5% never wanted to leave. There were two possible explanations here. The result could indicate that the rural Year 12 VCAL students were strongly connected to the community and did not want to leave, or, that they aspired strongly to a trade/technician career, which was available in the community, or both.

Rural and metropolitan female students were more likely than their male counterparts to state that they would leave their community, for employment or to attend university or TAFE. The students least likely to indicate that they would leave for employment or

education reasons were metropolitan Year 10 students, metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students and metropolitan males. In relation to leaving as soon as possible, 42.2% of rural females wanted to do so. The result was 26.7% for rural males and 8.8% for metropolitan students.

Overall, the data in Figure 4.4 showed that whilst many rural students would leave their community for employment or educational reasons, 15.5% never wanted to leave, and 34.3% wanted to leave as soon as possible. If a rural student wanted to leave their community, it was more likely that the student was a female.

A key reason for leaving a rural community is related to education or employment. For some students, however, it was related to the isolation of their rural community, or the desire for an opportunity to develop a different identity. Rural isolation is considered in the next section.

4.4.1.3 Place and Rurality – Rural Isolation

Many aspirations which involve further education can be expensive, especially for rural students living in a community where post-secondary education is not easily accessible. Two items in the survey focused on the cost of further education for students. The items were:

Item 50: I think that going to university or TAFE would be expensive.

Item 51: If I decide to go to university or TAFE, I would continue to live at my current home.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.5.

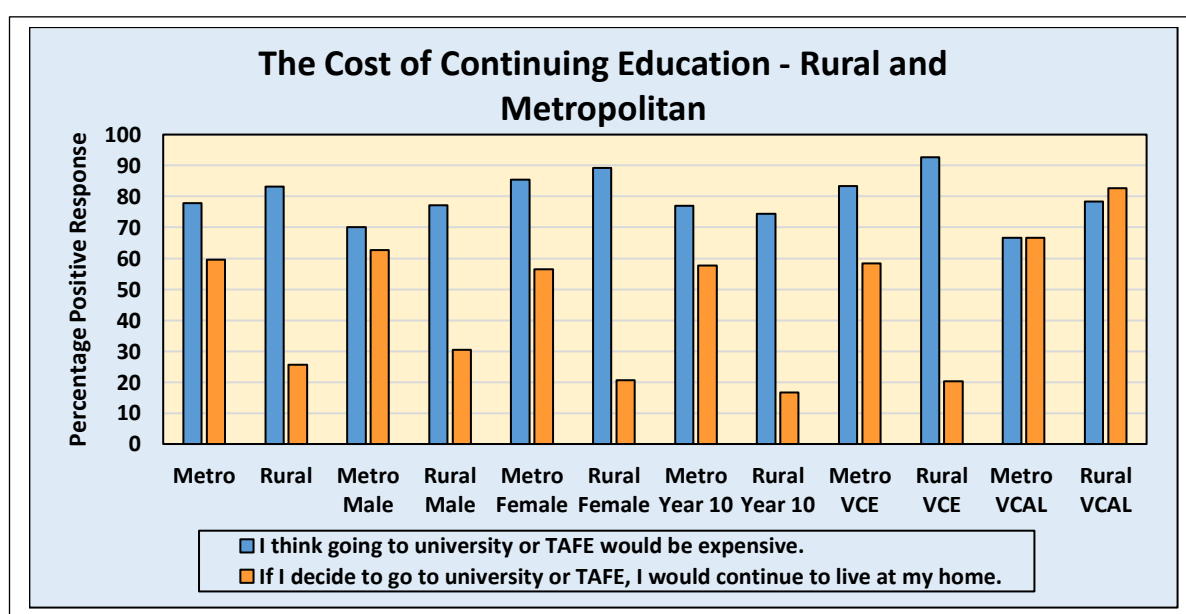


Figure 4.5: Student Perceptions of the Cost of University and TAFE

Figure 4.5 indicates that, with the exception of metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students, at least 70% of both rural and metropolitan students perceived that attending university or TAFE would be expensive. For rural Year 12 VCE students, the result was 92.6%. Whilst approximately 60% of metropolitan students expected that they would continue to live at home, less than 30% of rural students thought that they would do so. Rural Year 12 VCAL students provided different responses. More than 80% believed that they would live at home if they continued with education after secondary school. This was likely to be due to the fact that in some rural communities, there was a TAFE college, and generally, if a VCAL student continued with education after secondary school, it would be in a TAFE college.

Overall, both rural and metropolitan students indicated that they would find the cost of education after secondary school to be expensive. For rural students, however, rural isolation would impact on the cost of attending university or TAFE. The cost of travel, accommodation and living expenses, as well as the cost of course fees, would make continuing education difficult for rural students, thus affecting career aspirations and outcome expectations.

Rural students also faced the prospect of missing family and friends if they left their community, a reason often given for not leaving. The effect of family and friends on student aspirations is explored in the next section.

4.4.2 Family and Friends

In this section, consideration is given to the effect of family support and encouragement, family characteristics and the effect of friends, on student aspirations. In the SCAT framework, “Family and Friends” is an environmental determinant for student aspirations, as shown in Figure 4.2.

4.4.2.1 Family and Friends – Family Support and Encouragement

Families affected students and their aspirations through their support and encouragement. Three items in the survey related to parental and family support and encouragement. They were:

- | |
|---|
| <p>Item 15: If I have difficulty with my school work when I am at home, my family will help me with the work.</p> <p>Item 22: My family encourages me to do well at school.</p> <p>Item 53: My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.</p> |
|---|

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.6.

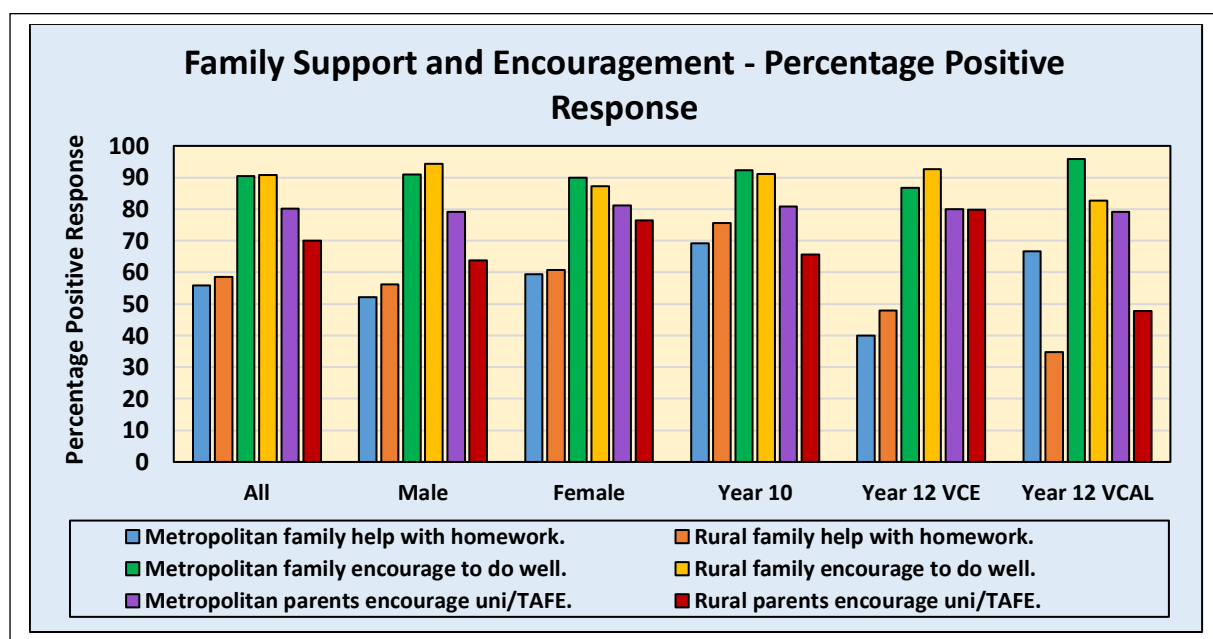


Figure 4.6: Family Support and Encouragement

Figure 4.6 indicates that there was a similarity between rural and metropolitan student responses for parents and family assisting with homework, for all students, male and female students, Year 10 students and Year 12 VCE students. The result for both rural and metropolitan students was between 70% and 80% for Year 10 students, and dropped to between 40% and 50% for Year 12 VCE students, reflecting the increased content knowledge needed to assist VCE students. Rural Year 12 VCAL students were 31.9% less likely to indicate that their parents helped with homework, than metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students.

In relation to parents encouraging students to do well at school, there was little difference between rural and metropolitan student perceptions, except for Year 12 VCAL students, where rural students were 13.2% less likely to indicate that they were encouraged to do well at school than metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students.

In relation to parents encouraging students to continue education beyond school, the difference between rural and metropolitan students was 10.1%, 15.3% for males and 4.7% for females. Rural males were more than 12% less likely to perceive that their parents encouraged them to continue education beyond year 12, than rural females, metropolitan males and metropolitan females. For Year 10 students, the rural result was 15.2% lower than the metropolitan result, which was partly attributable to the males' result. Rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCE students were almost equally likely to indicate that their parents encouraged them to continue education.

For Year 12 VCAL students, 80% of metropolitan students perceived that they were encouraged by parents to continue education, whilst for rural students, the figure was less than 50%. This could reflect the aspirational nature of metropolitan parents, or the fact that rural Year 12 VCAL students did not see, or know about, the need to continue education in order to access their career of choice, and hence may not have sought their parents' encouragement.

When the different career aspirations of rural students were considered, the percentage of students who perceived that their parents encouraged them to continue education, was lowest for students who aspired to technician/trade careers (38.7%). This compared with 57.8% for community/personal aspirants and 86.2% for professional careers. For metropolitan students who aspired to a technician/trade career, 87.5% perceived that their parents encouraged them to continue education, a result that was higher than for those aspiring to professional or community/personal careers (see Figure A7.4 in Appendix 7).

Overall, results for rural and metropolitan students were similar for assistance with homework and encouragement to do well at school. However, rural students, particularly males, were less likely to indicate that their parents encouraged them to continue with education, than metropolitan students. This was particularly true of rural technician/trade aspirants.

An area of consideration, in this research, related to the characteristics of the students' families. It has been found in previous research that the number of parents living at home with the student, parental education levels, the number of children in the family and the socio-economic background, impacted on student aspirations (Hansen & McIntire, 1989; Majoribanks, 2004; Provasnik et al., 2007). These areas are examined in the next section.

4.4.2.2 Family and Friends – Family Characteristics

In order to determine the effect of family characteristics on student aspirations, three items from the student survey were considered. These items related to whether the student perceived that they wanted to continue with education, whether they were smart enough to do so, and whether their parents supported and encouraged them to do so. The items were selected to determine whether family characteristics and demographics affected the aspirations of the student, in terms of continuing education after secondary school. The three items were:

- Item 26:** When I leave school, I want to continue with my education.
- Item 52:** I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there.
- Item 53:** My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.

The effect of family characteristics will be examined in the next four sections.

4.4.2.3 Family Characteristics – Number of Parents Living in the Home

To determine the effect of a student's living circumstances on their aspirations, the data related to whether the family had one or two parents living at home with the student, was examined. Students from both one and two-parent families were considered, as well as a small group who were not living with parents (referred to as "other"). The distribution of the number of parents living in the student's home is shown in Figure 4.7.

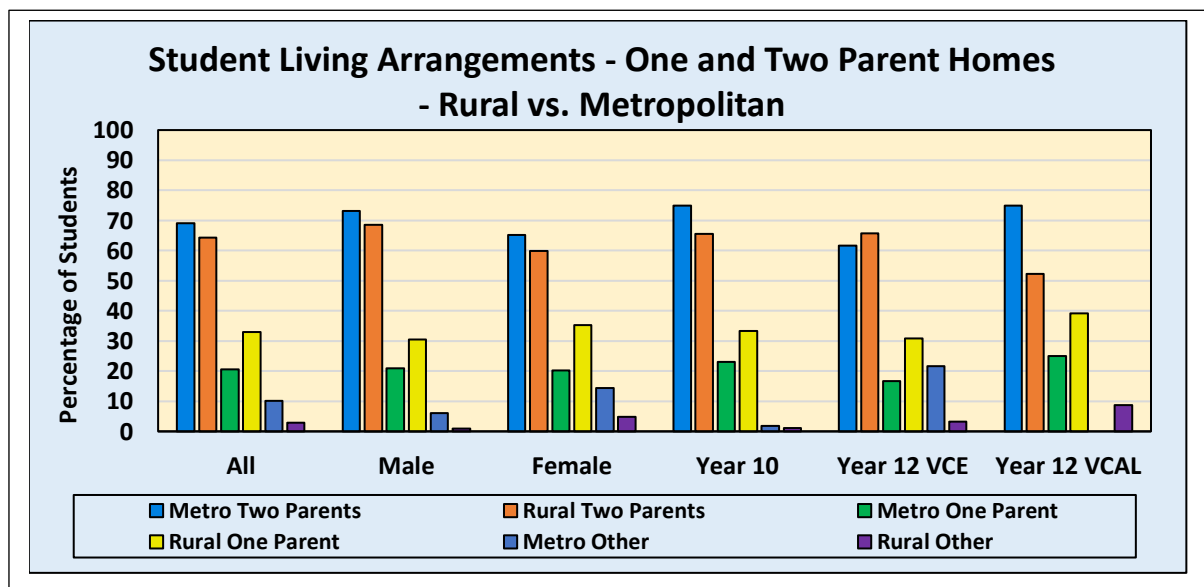


Figure 4.7: Student Living Arrangements – Two Parents, One Parent, Other

Figure 4.7 indicates that approximately 70% of rural and metropolitan students lived in homes with their two parents. The differences were small for all student groupings, except for the Year 12 VCAL students where rural students were 22.8% less likely to come from a two-parent home than their metropolitan counterparts. Rural students were more likely to come from a one-parent home than metropolitan students, whilst almost 15% of metropolitan females and 21.7% of metropolitan VCE students, (including 31.2% of metropolitan female VCE students), did not live with their parents, compared with 4.9% of rural females.

When the results for the three items, listed above, were examined, in relation to the number of parents living with the student, the results were:

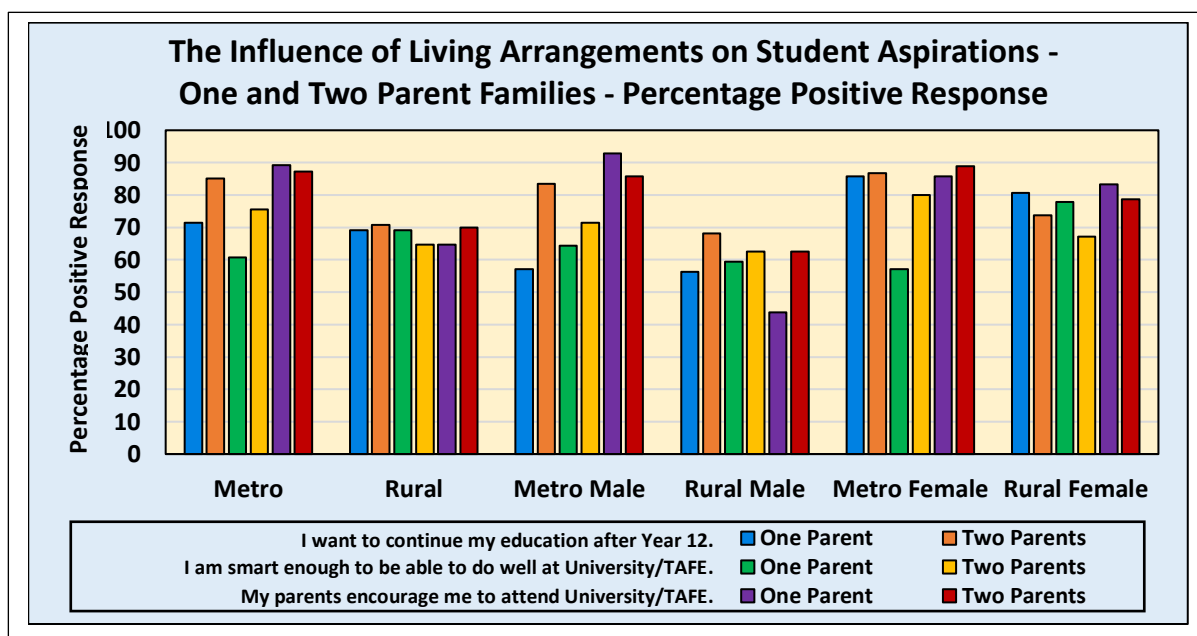


Figure 4.8: The Influence of Living Arrangements on Student Aspirations

As indicated in Figure 4.8, there were some differences between students from one-parent families and those from two-parent families. The main differences were:

- (a) Rural males from one-parent families were almost 18.8% less likely to be encouraged to continue education beyond school than those from a two-parent family.
- (b) Metropolitan males from one-parent families were 26.4% less likely to aspire to continue education beyond secondary school than those from two-parent families.
- (c) Metropolitan females from one-parent families were 22.9% less likely to think that they were smart enough to continue education beyond secondary school, than those from two-parent families.

Whilst there were some areas of difference, the differences were not consistent and would require further research to create a definitive view.

4.4.2.4 Family Characteristics – Parent Tertiary Education Levels

To determine the effect of parent tertiary education on student aspirations, the tertiary education background of the students' parent(s) was considered. The results, shown in Figure 4.9, indicate that 4% more rural students came from a family where neither parent had attended university or TAFE, and that 12% less rural students came from a family where both parents had attended university or TAFE, compared to metropolitan students. The results did not include the 12% of rural students and 20% of metropolitan students who indicated that they did not know if their parents had attended university or TAFE.

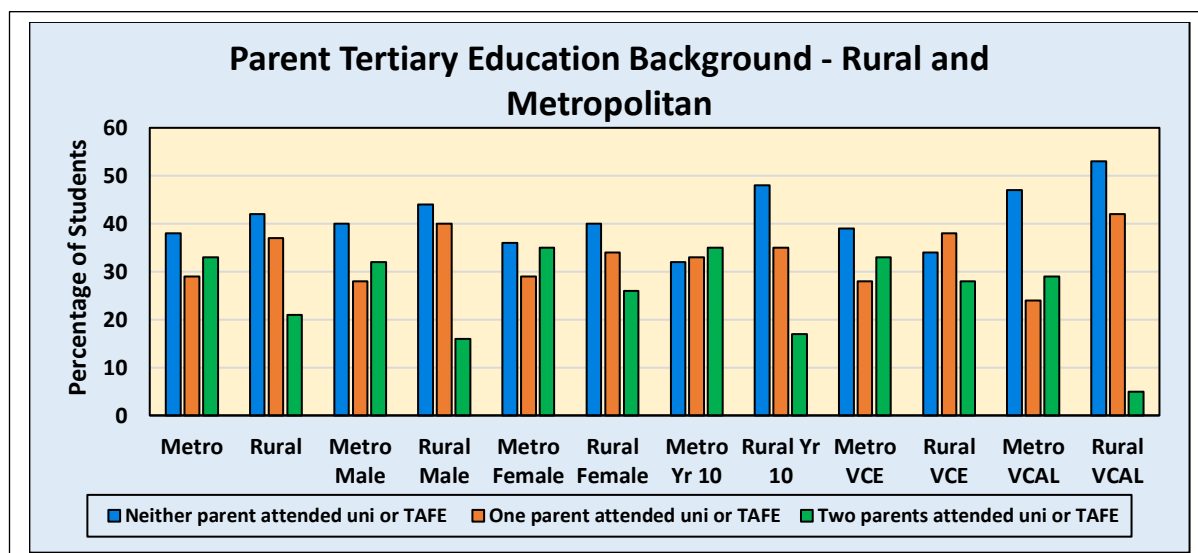


Figure 4.9: Parent Tertiary Educational Background

Figure 4.9 indicates that, for rural Year 10 students and both metropolitan and rural Year 12 VCAL students, the percentage of students where no parent had attended university or TAFE, was approximately 50%. For three metropolitan groups of students, namely females, Year 10 students and Year 12 VCE students, approximately 35% of students had two parents who had attended university or TAFE.

In order to consider the influence, of whether the parent(s) of the student had attended university or TAFE, on student aspirations, the three items, listed in section 4.4.2.2 above, were considered in relation to whether no parent, or at least one parent, had attended university or TAFE. The student responses to the three items are shown in Figure 4.10.

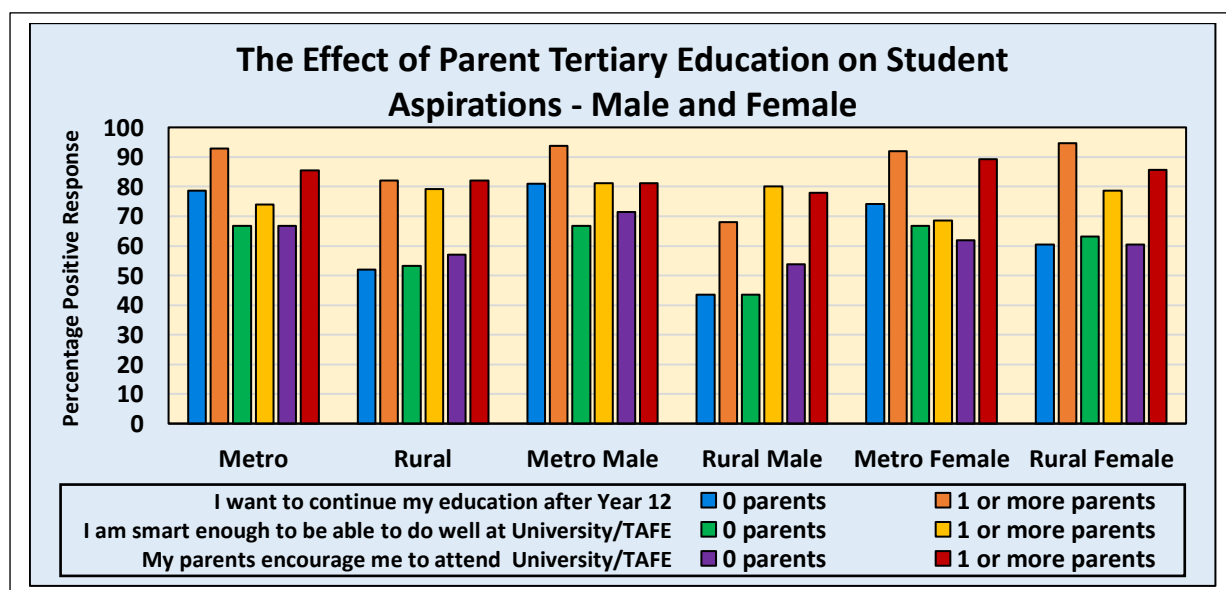


Figure 4.10: The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations

Note: **0 parents** = neither parent attended university or TAFE. **1 or more parents** = at least one parent attended university or TAFE

As indicated in Figure 4.10, if a student had at least one parent who attended university or TAFE, then the student was more likely to aspire to attend university or TAFE, think they were smart enough to do so, and be encouraged to do so by their parents, than if neither parent had done so. This was true for both rural and metropolitan students, although for rural students, the differences were generally greater. Key differences were:

- (a) Rural students were 30.2% more likely to aspire to attend university or TAFE, if at least one parent did so (by 34.1% for females and 24.4% for males), than if no parents did so.
- (b) Rural males, whose parents did not attend university or TAFE, were 36.4% less likely to think that they were smart enough to attend university or TAFE, than rural males whose parents had done so. For metropolitan males, the difference was 14.5%.
- (c) Male and female rural students, whose parents had not attended university or TAFE, were approximately 25% less likely to perceive that they were encouraged by their parents to attend university or TAFE, than students where at least one parent had done so. For metropolitan students, the difference was 27% for females and 10% for males.
- (d) Similar patterns were observed when the students were divided by year levels (see Figure A7.1 in Appendix 7).

Overall, parental education had an effect on student aspirations. The difference was greater for rural students, however.

4.4.2.5 Family Characteristics – Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status (SES) is often said to affect student outcomes and aspirations (for example, Lamb et al. (2014)). In this research, the SES of the school was considered to be a de-facto measure of the SES of the families of the students at the school. The measure used was the school's ICSEA value (ACARA, 2014).

For the purposes of this research, a school with an ICSEA value of 960 or less was considered to be low SES. If the ICSEA was between 961 and 1000, the school was considered to be medium SES, whilst a school with an ICSEA value above 1000 was considered to be high SES. The average ICSEA value of all schools in Australia is 1000 (ACARA, 2014).

The results of the same three items mentioned in section 4.4.2.2 were graphed against the SES of the student's school (low, medium, high SES). The results are shown in Figure 4.11.

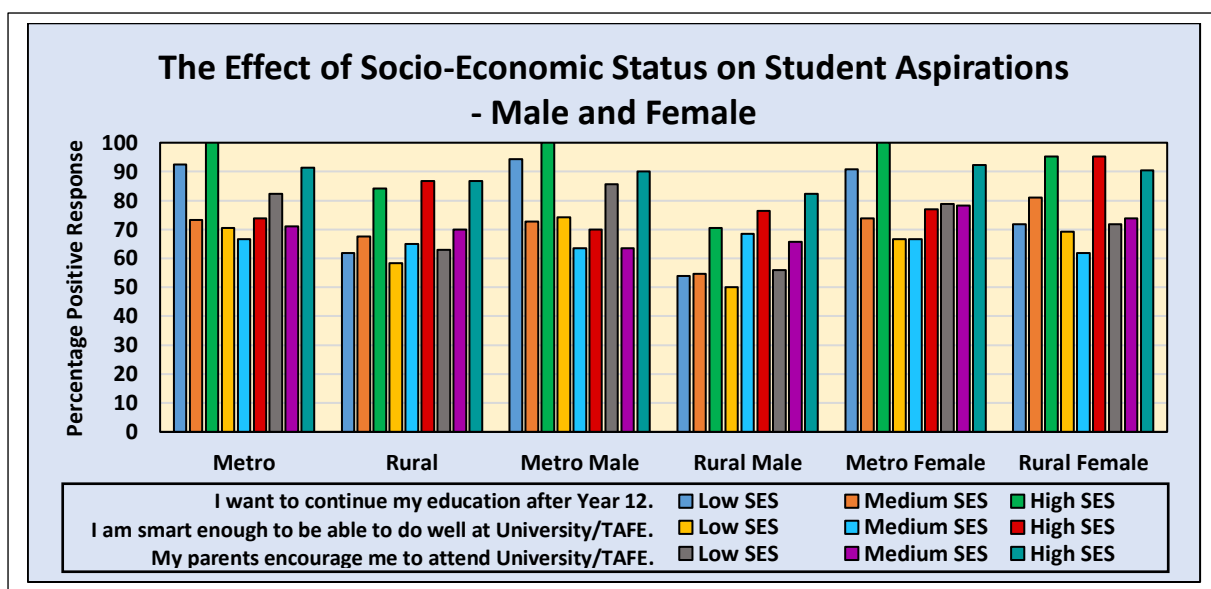


Figure 4.11: The Effect of Socio-Economic Status on Student Aspirations

Figure 4.11 indicates that, for rural students, moving from low to medium to high SES, the percentage of positive responses for each of the three items tended to increase. For example, for rural students, wanting to continue with education beyond secondary school, the results were 61.8% for low SES, 67.5% for medium SES and 84.2% for high SES.

For metropolitan students, the pattern was different. The results for low, medium and high SES for the same item, were 92.4%, 73.3% and 100%, respectively. The percentage positive response for students from low SES schools was consistently above that of students from medium SES schools, although still below that of students from high SES schools. The pattern was replicated relatively consistently for each of the three items.

The implication of this result is that, for metropolitan students, being from a low SES school is not as big a barrier as it is for rural students. The result could reflect the metropolitan students' perception, that parents of students from low SES schools are more aspirational for their children than parents of students from medium SES schools.

In the next section, the effect of the number of children in the family is considered.

4.4.2.6 Family Characteristics – Number of Children

In the literature, it has been stated that the size of a student's family often affects the opportunities that a student has to continue education beyond secondary school (Majoribanks, 2004). The number of children, in rural and metropolitan families, was considered for the students in this research. Figure 4.12 shows the distribution of the number of children in the families of the students.

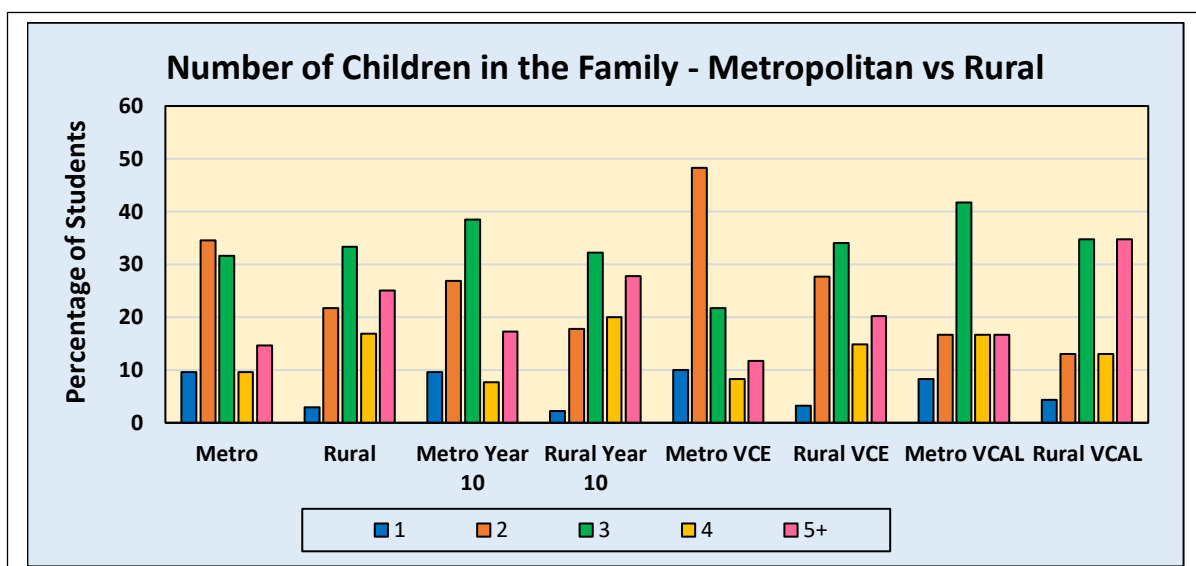


Figure 4.12: Number of Children in the Family

Figure 4.12 indicates that 24.3% of metropolitan students involved in the research came from a family with four or more children, whilst 44.2% were from families with one or two children. The results for rural students were 42.0% and 24.6%, respectively. Rural students were 17.7% more likely to come from a family with 4 or more children, and 19.6% less likely to come from a family with 2 children or less, than metropolitan students. For rural Year 10 students and rural Year 12 VCAL students, 47.8% came from families with at least 4 children. On average, rural families had more children than metropolitan families.

The results of the same three items, mentioned in section 4.4.2.2, were graphed against the number of children in the family. The results are shown in Figure 4.13.

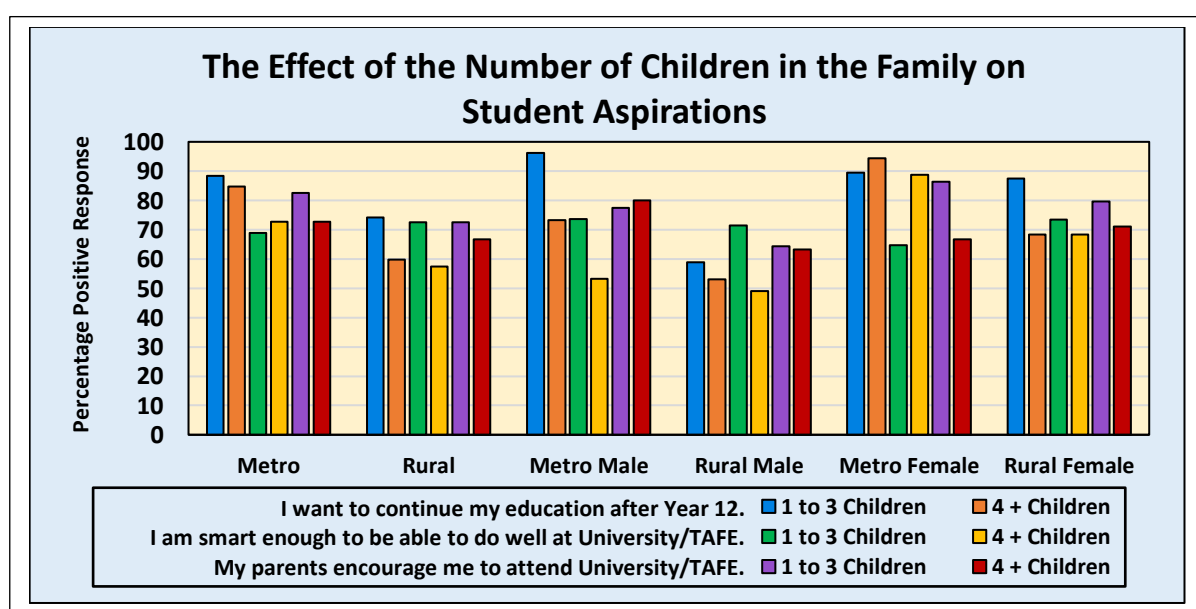


Figure 4.13: The Effect of the Number of Children in the Family on Student Aspirations

Figure 4.13 indicates that the size of the family has an effect on student aspirations. Where the family is larger (4 or more children):

- (a) Rural females and metropolitan males, in particular, were approximately 20% less likely to indicate that they wanted to continue with education, than those from smaller families (1 to 3 children);
- (b) Males (both rural and metropolitan), from larger families, were approximately 20% less likely to think that they were smart enough to continue education, than those from smaller families;
- (c) Rural and metropolitan females from larger families, were 8.6% and 19.6%, respectively, less likely to think that their parents encouraged them to continue with education, than those from smaller families.

Whilst Majoribanks (2004) suggested the effect of family size was relatively small, in this research, it was inconsistent. The results for rural females from larger families was important given the high percentage of rural students who came from larger families.

Having considered the effect of parents and families, the effect of friends on student aspirations is examined in the next section.

4.4.2.7 Family and Friends – Friends and Peers

Friends have been said to influence student aspirations through providing encouragement to do so. It has also been suggested that friends can discourage students from continuing education beyond school due to fear of losing friendships (Oswald & Clark, 2003; Halsey, 2018).

Two items in the survey focused on the influence of friends and peers. They were:

- Item 46:** If I left my local community to get a job or go to university or TAFE, I would miss my family and friends.
- Item 56:** My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE.

Whilst the first item refers to both friends and family, it elucidated the fact that students, if they left their community to obtain employment, or to attend university or TAFE, would find it difficult, in part, because they would miss their friends. A positive result for this item related to the fact that students agreed that they would miss their family and friends. In the second item, a positive result was recorded when students disagreed with the statement, so a positive result occurred where the student indicated that friends were supportive of them

going to university or TAFE. The results for the two items are shown in Figure 4.14, where Item 56 is changed to “My friends are supportive of me going to university or TAFE”.

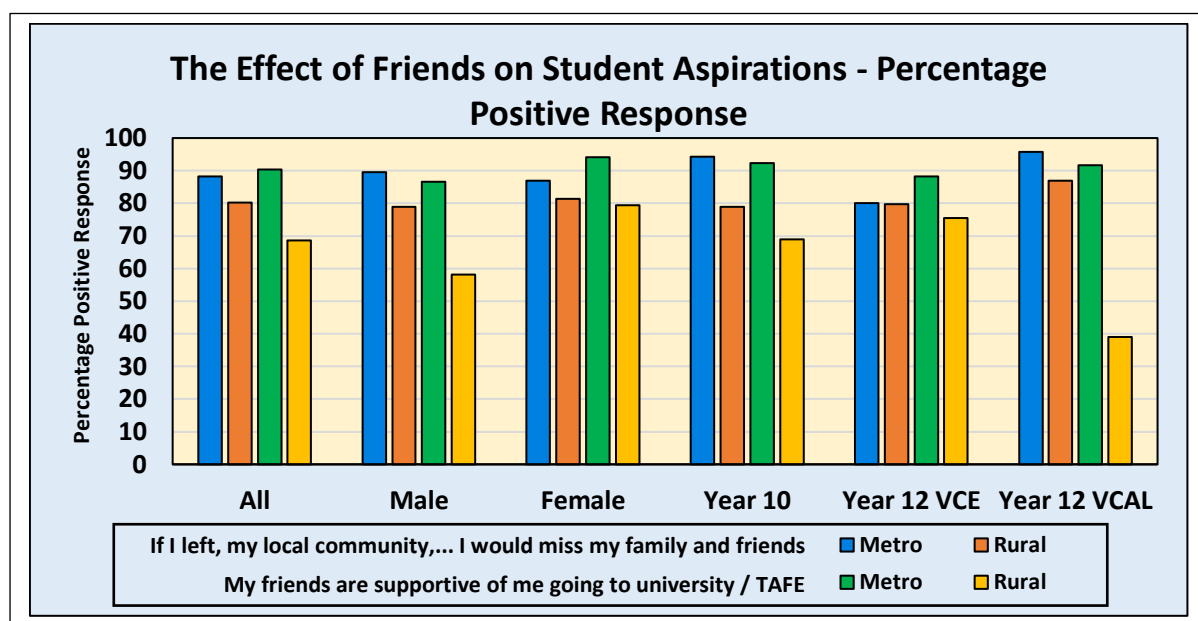


Figure 4.14: The Effect of Friends on Student Aspirations

Figure 4.14 indicates that more than 80% of both rural and metropolitan students believed that they would miss their friends and family if they left their local community. The differences between rural and metropolitan students were generally small, especially for Year 12 VCE students where the difference was 0.2%. Rural students were 21.8% less likely to agree that their friends were supportive of them going to university or TAFE, than metropolitan students. This figure varied from 12.8% for Year 12 VCE students to 52.6% for Year 12 VCAL students. The friends of rural male students and rural Year 12 VCAL students were least likely to be supportive of the student going to university or TAFE.

Overall, both rural and metropolitan students would miss friends and family if they left home, and friends of rural male students and rural Year 12 VCAL students, were least likely to be perceived as being supportive of the student continuing education beyond school.

The third environmental determinant, “school” is examined in the next section.

4.4.3 Schools

Schools and teachers can affect student aspirations in many ways. In this research, school and teacher support, encouragement and expectations, the curriculum available to the students and the quality of careers and pathways programs were considered. These areas are

examined throughout this section, as are the perceptions of the students about their school, and their perceptions about how rural and metropolitan schools compare with each other.

4.4.3.1 Schools – Student Perceptions of Their School

One item in the survey focused on student perceptions of their own school. The item was:

Item 33: I think that my school is a very good school.

The results are shown in Figure 4.15.

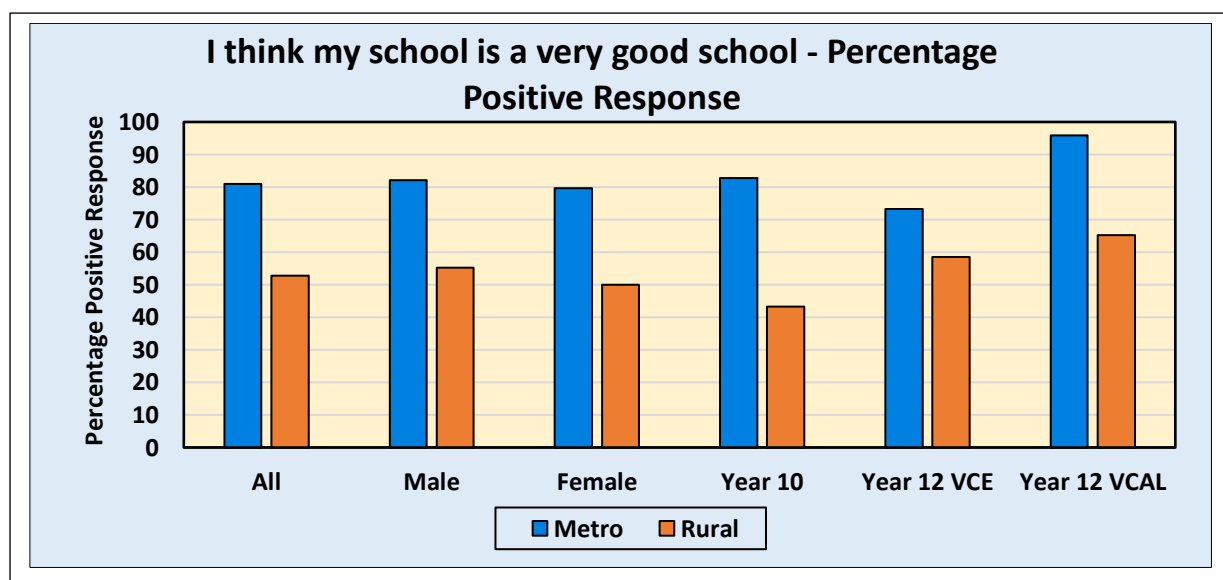


Figure 4.15: Student Perceptions of their School

Figure 4.15 indicates that approximately 80% of metropolitan students and 50% of rural students thought that their school was a very good school. This was consistent for males and females. The percentage positive response was highest for both rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students. The lowest percentage positive response was from rural Year 10 students (43.3%), whilst the highest was 95.8%, for metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students.

Overall, approximately half of rural students in this research thought that their school was a “very good school”. Whether the student’s perception of the quality of the school impacted on whether the student aspired to attend university or TAFE, is considered in section 4.7, where correlation coefficients are examined.

From a student’s point of view, whether a school is very good or not, is often related to the quality of the teaching provided to the students. Teacher support and encouragement are considered in the next section.

4.4.3.2 Schools – Teacher Support and Encouragement

Two items from the survey related to teacher support and encouragement. They were:

Item 32: I think that my school is preparing me well for life after school.

Item 54: The teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.16.

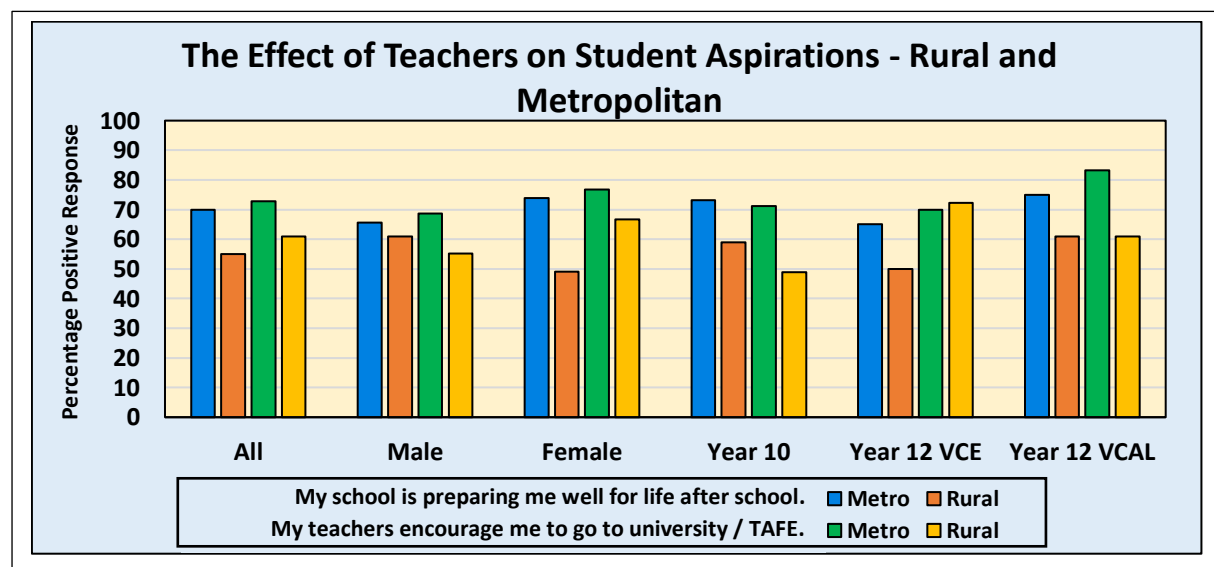


Figure 4.16: The Effect of Teacher Support and Encouragement on Student Aspirations

The results, shown in Figure 4.16, indicate that the rural results were consistently lower than the metropolitan results. Rural students were 14.8% less likely (4.7% for males and 24.9% for females) to believe that their school was preparing them well for life after school, than metropolitan students. For the item related to teachers encouraging students to continue with education beyond year 12, rural students were 11.9% less likely to provide a positive response, than metropolitan students. The difference was more than 20% for Year 10 and Year 12 VCAL students. Rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCE students differed by only 2.3% in relation to their teachers encouraging them to continue education.

When different career aspirations were considered, the percentage of rural students, who perceived that their teachers encouraged them to continue education, was least for students who aspired to technician/trade careers (48.4%), compared with 48.9% for community/personal aspirants and 71.3%, for those aspiring to professional careers. For metropolitan students who aspired to a technician/trade career or to a professional career, 75% perceived that their teachers encouraged them to continue education after secondary

school. For metropolitan students who aspired to community/personal careers, the result was 85% (see Figure A7.5 in Appendix 7).

Overall, rural students, when compared with metropolitan students, were less likely to agree that their school was preparing them well for the future and, with the exception of Year 12 VCE students, that their teachers encouraged them to continue with their education beyond year 12. Rural students, who aspired to a technician/trade career, were almost 30% less likely to perceive that their teachers encouraged them to continue education, than metropolitan technician/trade aspirants.

A key area of education relates to curriculum, which is considered in the next section.

4.4.3.3 Schools – Curriculum

It has been suggested that the curriculum in many rural schools is predominantly a metropolitan based curriculum (Sher & Sher, 1994; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Bartholomaeus, 2013). As Sher and Sher stated, “a concerted effort to make the rural community the foundation and focal point of the curriculum (rather than remaining incidental to it)” is needed (Sher & Sher, 1994, p. 22).

In the student survey, one item focused on the school’s curriculum. The item was:

Item 39: At my school, I learn about my local community.

The results for this item are shown in Figure 4.17.

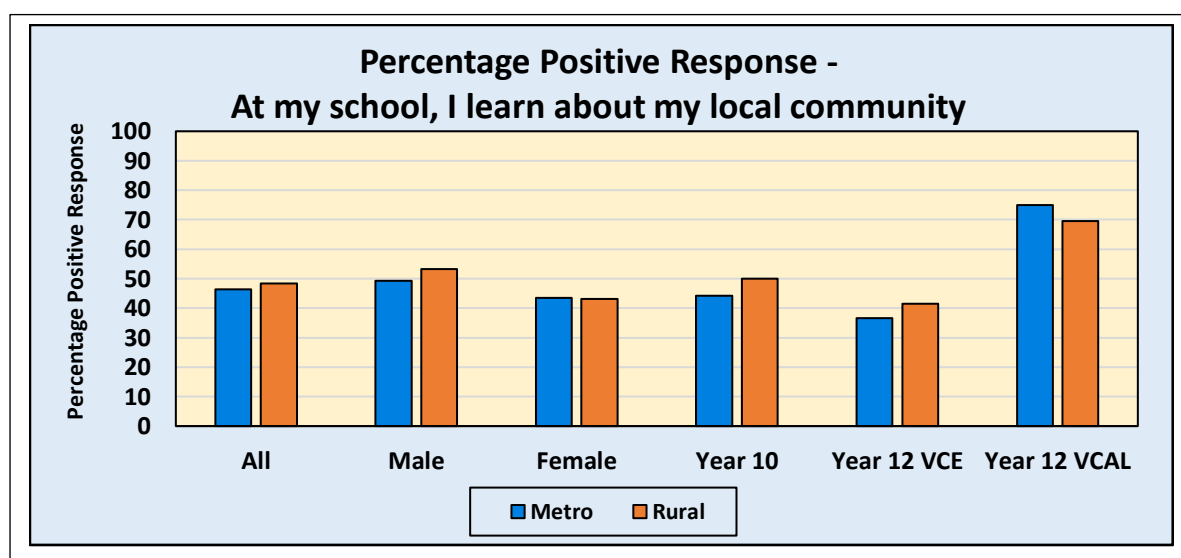


Figure 4.17: Student Perceptions of Learning about the Local Community

Figure 4.17 indicates that less than 50% of students, both rural and metropolitan, agreed that they learned about their local community at school. The exception was the Year 12 VCAL students, who had a 70% positive response (metropolitan – 75% and rural – 69.6%), reflecting the student perception that the VCAL curriculum provided flexibility, and that there was a greater attempt to engage students with curriculum content related to the local context. Whether there is a correlation, between curriculum and aspirations to continue education, is examined in section 4.7 of this chapter.

4.4.3.4 Schools – Careers and Pathways

The Department of Education and Training (DET) publication, on improving careers education, stressed the need for excellence in careers and pathways education, as a way to motivate students to imagine future careers and aspirations (DET, 2019a).

Two items in the survey related to careers and pathways programs. They were:

- Item 28:** At my school, I have not been provided with enough information regarding university and TAFE courses and possible careers.
- Item 29:** My school provides opportunities for me to explore and imagine possible future careers and to decide what I want to do after I leave school.

For the first of these items, a positive response was where a student disagreed with the statement, whilst for the second item, a positive response was where a student agreed with the statement. The results, showing the percentage of positive responses, are shown in Figure 4.18.

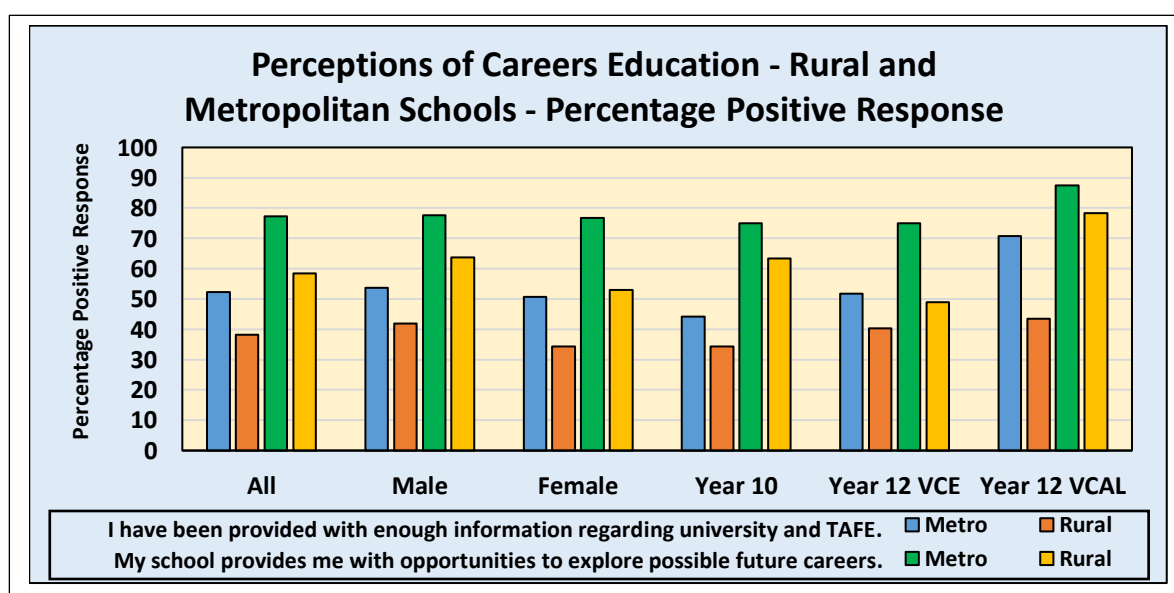


Figure 4.18: Student Perceptions of Careers Education

As indicated in Figure 4.18, 52.2% of metropolitan students and 38.2% of rural students indicated that they had received enough careers advice related to employment and education options. For metropolitan students, 77.2% indicated that they had been provided with opportunities to explore future careers, compared with 58.5% of rural students. For Year 12 VCAL students, 87.5% of metropolitan and 78.3% of rural students were positive about being given opportunities to explore possible careers, a reflection of the perceptions of students, regarding the work-related programs available in the VCAL curriculum. However, rural Year 12 VCAL students were 27.3% less likely than metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students, to agree that they had received enough information about university and TAFE options. The effectiveness of careers and pathways education was followed up in focus groups.

Overall, schools had a significant influence on student aspirations through teacher support and encouragement, careers and pathways programs and the curriculum offered to students. The perception of the students was that rural schools were not as effective as metropolitan schools in these areas. Student perceptions of how rural and metropolitan schools compare are explored in the next section.

4.4.3.5 Schools – Student Perceptions of Rural and Metropolitan Schools

Several items in the survey focused on student perceptions of rural and metropolitan schools in comparison to each other.

The items required rural students to rate how they thought rural schools compared with metropolitan schools. Metropolitan students were asked to rate how they thought metropolitan schools compared with rural schools. In providing their responses, the students were made aware that this was their perception, based on what they had seen, heard or read. The results were a reflection of what the students thought about the comparison between rural and metropolitan schools. For these items:

- (a) a positive response was considered to be “about the same”, “more” or “much more”, “better” or “much better” and “higher” or “much higher”.
- (b) a negative response was “less” or “much less”, “worse” or “much worse” and “lower” or “much lower”.

The items were:

Item No.	Survey	Item
57	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools study more or less than students from rural schools?
58	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from rural schools?
60	Metropolitan	Do you think that metropolitan schools have better or worse teachers than rural schools?
61	Metropolitan	Do you think that metropolitan schools have higher or lower expectations of students than rural schools?
64	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools have a better or worse understanding of possible future careers than students from rural schools?
57	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools study more or less than students from metropolitan schools?
58	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from metropolitan schools?
60	Rural	Do you think that rural schools have better or worse teachers than metropolitan schools?
61	Rural	Do you think that rural schools have higher or lower expectations of students than metropolitan schools?
64	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools have a better or worse understanding of possible future careers than students from metropolitan schools?

The results, showing the percentage of positive responses for these items, are shown in Figure 4.19.

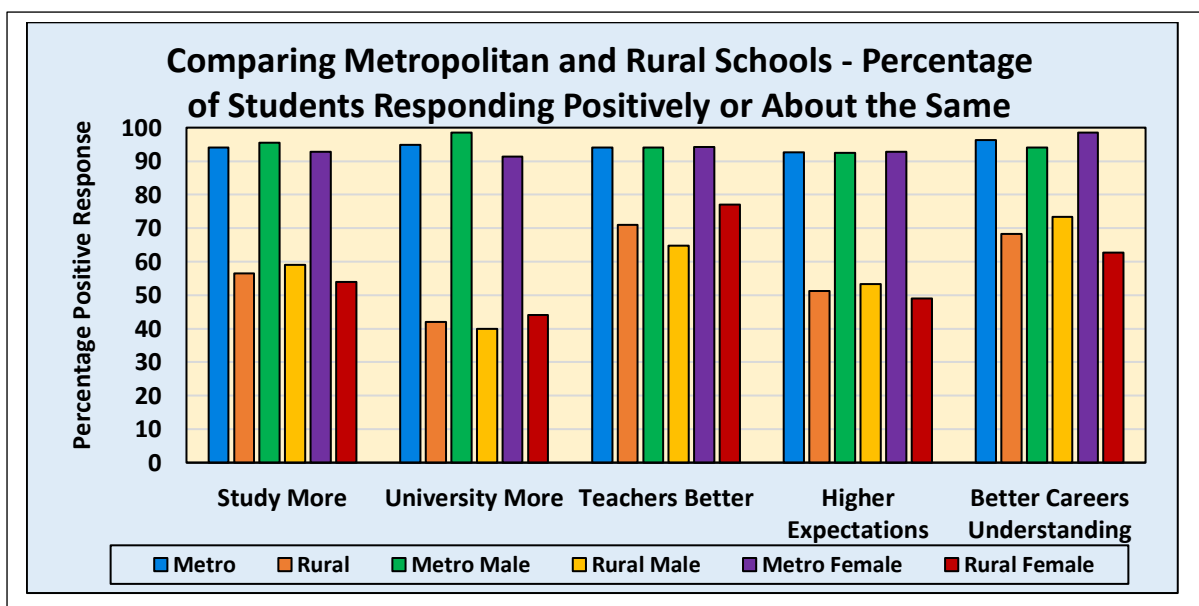


Figure 4.19: Comparison of Rural and Metropolitan Schools

Figure 4.19 indicates that metropolitan students were more likely to be positive about metropolitan schools, than rural students were about rural schools. More than 90% of metropolitan students considered metropolitan schools to be the same or better than rural schools in each of the five areas, whilst less than 60% of rural students considered rural schools to be the same or better than metropolitan schools in three of the five areas. For the items related to teachers (item 60) and careers (Item 64), approximately 70% of rural students thought that rural schools were the same or better than metropolitan schools. The results related to different year levels, which show similar trends, are shown in Figure A7.2 in Appendix 7.

Overall, rural students were more likely to believe that rural students, when compared with metropolitan students, studied less, were less likely to attend university or TAFE, had worse teachers, had lower expectations placed on them, and had less understanding of possible future careers. Rural students perceived that rurality, family, friends, and school affected their aspirations and outcome expectations for the future.

The students, in this research, were also influenced by their behaviours. The effect of the behavioural determinants on student aspirations is considered in the next section.

4.5 The Effect of Behavioural Determinants on Student Aspirations

In this research, the behavioural determinants in SCAT included the behaviours of students in relation to school and behaviours related to the determination of aspirations for the future. Figure 4.20 shows the section of SCAT related to behavioural determinants.

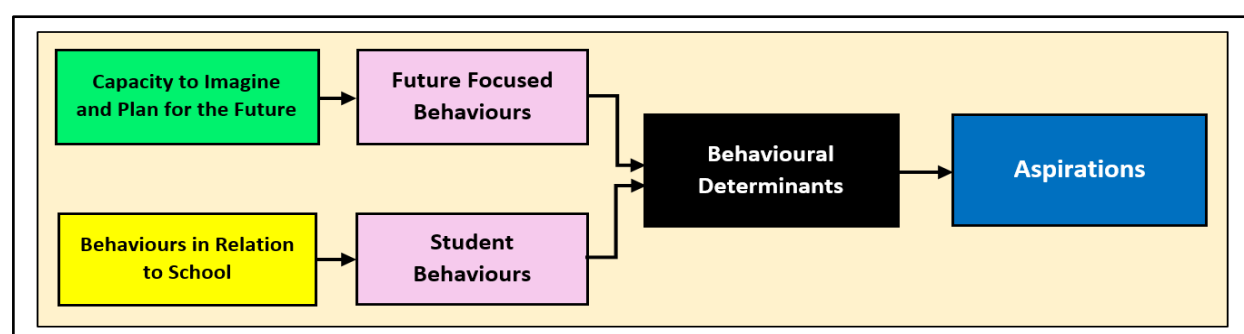


Figure 4.20: SCAT – Behavioural Determinants and Key Factors

Future focused behaviours will be considered in the first section.

4.5.1 Future Focused Behaviours – Planning for the Future

The capacity of a student to find information, related to their possible future career, from a range of sources, strengthens their understanding of their possible future directions and their belief that they can be successful. How students find information regarding future careers is examined in this section.

One item from the student survey related to where students sought information about their future aspirations. The item was:

Item 31: When working out what I want to do when I leave school, I get most advice from:
 (a) My family (b) Friends (c) Teachers (d) No one (e) The internet

The results for this item are shown in Figure 4.21.

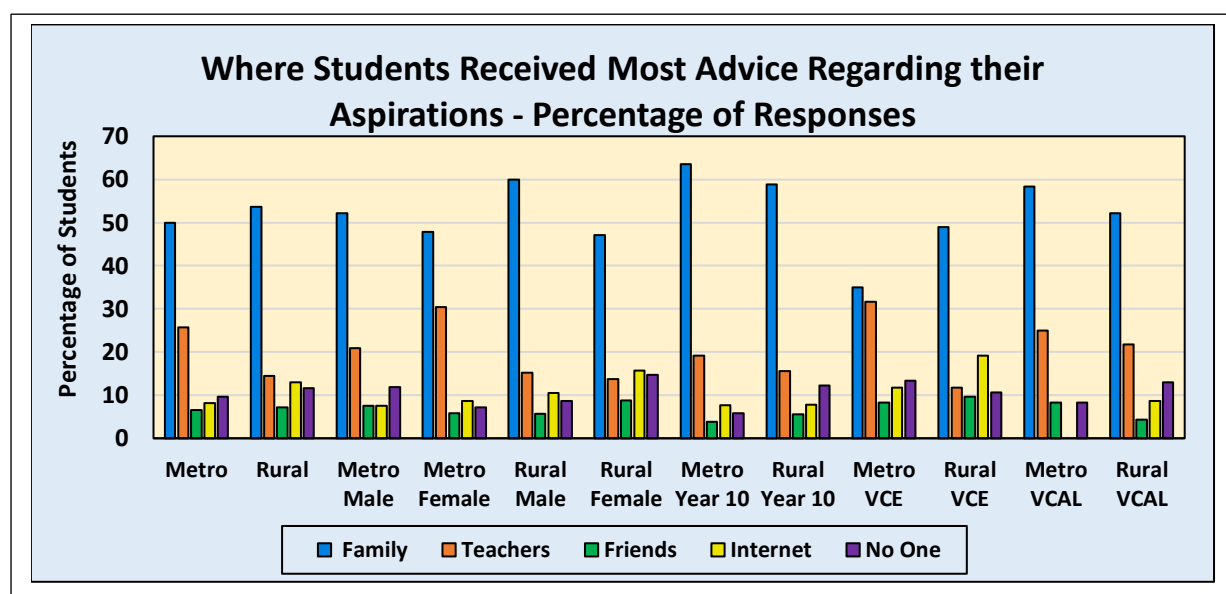


Figure 4.21: Source of Advice Regarding Aspirations

As indicated in Figure 4.21, the major source of future focused careers information, for both rural and metropolitan students, was the student's family. Teachers were the second highest source of careers advice, although rural students were more than 10% less likely to indicate that their teachers were the main source of aspirational advice, than metropolitan students. For all student groups, the percentage of rural students, who indicated that they received most aspirational advice from teachers, was less than that for the equivalent metropolitan student groups. The highest teacher percentages were for metropolitan Year 12 VCE students (31.7%) and metropolitan females (30.4%). The lowest teacher percentages were for rural Year 12 VCE students (11.7%) and rural females (13.7%). Also, approximately

30% of rural females and rural Year 12 VCE students obtained most careers information from the internet or from no one. The source of career aspirations advice was further examined in focus groups (see Chapter 5).

One of the behaviours of students related to whether they aspired to continue education after finishing secondary school. This is considered in the next section.

4.5.2 Student Behaviours - Aspiration to Continue Education

Positive aspirations for the future often provide the impetus for students to succeed at school (Cross & Markus, 1994; Prince & Nurius, 2014). Also, positive student behaviours at school can influence positive future aspirations (Quaglia, 1989; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). In this research, based on the high percentage of careers aspired to by the students, for which some education beyond secondary school was a requirement, it was expected that a high percentage of students would aspire to continue with education beyond secondary school.

The intentions of students, in relation to whether they wanted to complete Year 12 and whether they aspired to continue with education, usually at university or TAFE, after completing secondary schooling, are considered here.

Two items in the survey related to student intentions to finish year 12 and to continue their education after finishing secondary school. They were:

Item 25: I intend to complete year 12.

Item 26: When I leave school, I want to continue with my education.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.22.

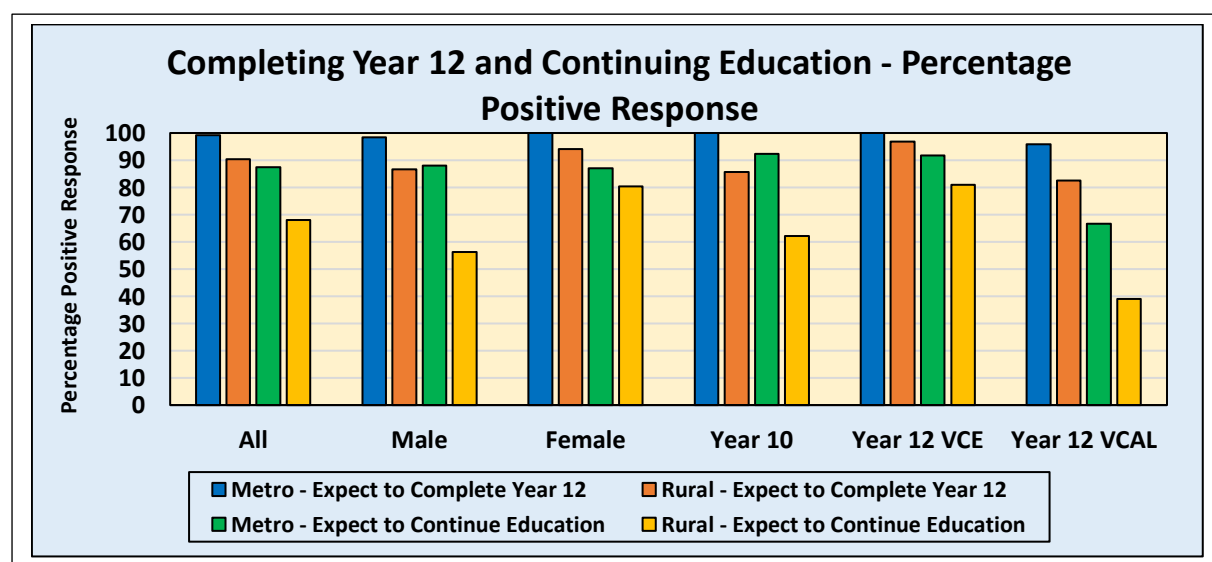


Figure 4.22: Completing Year 12 and Continuing Education

Figure 4.22 indicates that the percentage of rural students who wanted to complete year 12 was 8.9% lower than that for metropolitan students. For males, the difference was 11.8% whilst for females it was 5.9%. The difference was 14.4% for Year 10 students, 3.2% for Year 12 VCE students and 13.2% for Year 12 VCAL students.

Rural students were 19.4% less likely to indicate that they wanted to continue education beyond year 12, than metropolitan students. This difference varied depending on the group of students. For rural males, 56.2% indicated that they would continue education after secondary school, compared with 88.1% for metropolitan males, 87% for metropolitan females and 80.4% for rural females. The results for rural year level groups were affected by the relatively low result for rural males, with the lowest percentage being for rural Year 12 VCAL students at 39.1%. For rural Year 12 VCE students, more than 80% wanted to continue education.

Overall, rural male students were significantly less likely, than metropolitan students and rural females, to aspire to continue with education beyond year 12. This posed the question as to whether rural males aspired to careers that they perceived did not require education beyond year 12. That question was answered through an item in the student survey, which focused on whether students needed to continue with education in order to realise career aspirations. The item was:

Item 47: To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE.

The results for this item, and for the item “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”, are shown in Figure 4.23.

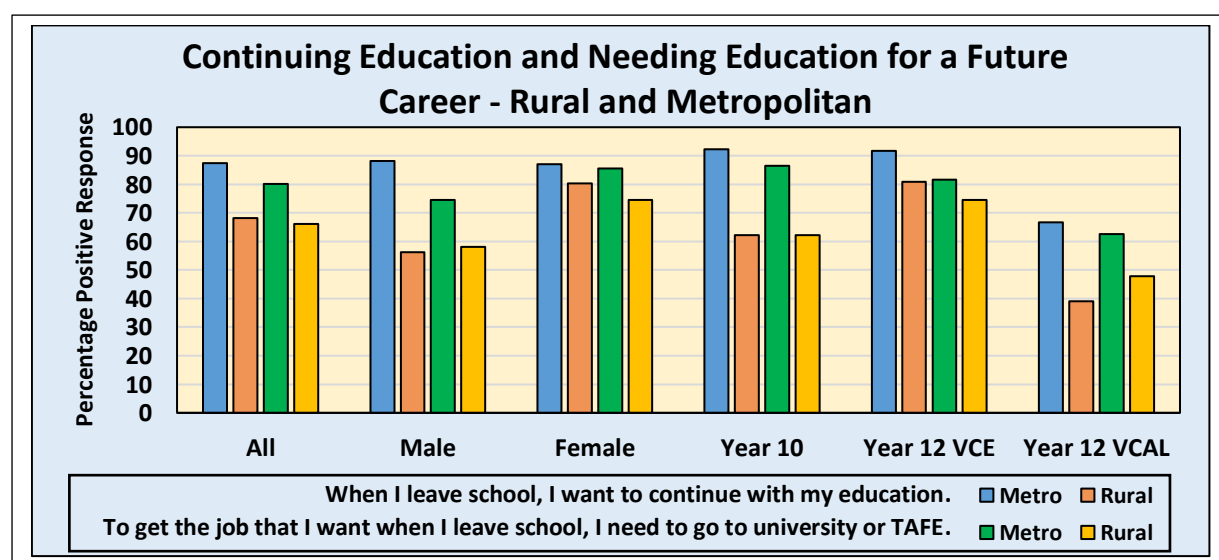


Figure 4.23: Comparison between Wanting and Needing to Continue Education

Figure 4.23 indicates that there is a strong similarity between the percentage of students who wanted to continue their education after secondary school and the percentage who perceived the need to continue with education in order to realise their career aspirations. Whilst 68.1% of rural students wanted to continue education after finishing secondary school, 66.2% indicated that they needed to continue education. For metropolitan students, the percentages were 87.5% and 80.1%, respectively. For rural students, the percentages for wanting and needing to continue education differed by less than 10% for all student groupings, whilst for metropolitan student groups, the differences were less than 15%. This suggested that there may be a strong correlation between these two items. The correlation between these two items is considered in section 4.7.

The students least likely to perceive that they needed to continue education after year 12 were rural males, rural Year 10 students and rural Year 12 VCAL students. This implies that many rural males believed that they would find a job, which did not require further education and study.

4.5.3 Student Behaviours – Behaviours in Relation to School

Student behaviours at school and a positive academic self-concept have been found to impact on student aspirations (Prince & Nurius, 2014). In this research, the students' perceptions of their results at school and whether they tried hard to get good results were considered. In the survey, three items focused on this area. They were:

- Item 10:** I think that the results I have achieved at school are very good.
- Item 16:** Even when the work in class is difficult or challenging, I always perform very well.
- Item 21:** I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.24 which indicates that, for the three items, the percentage positive response for rural students was consistently below that of metropolitan students. In relation to saying that they tried hard to get good results, rural and metropolitan females were relatively equally likely to agree, although rural males were 11% less likely to agree than rural females and were 20.7% less likely to agree than metropolitan males.

The groups of students, where the highest percentage thought that their results at school were very good, were all metropolitan students, namely males, Year 10 students and

Year 12 VCAL students. The groups with the lowest percentages were rural Year 12 VCAL students, rural males and metropolitan Year 12 VCE students.

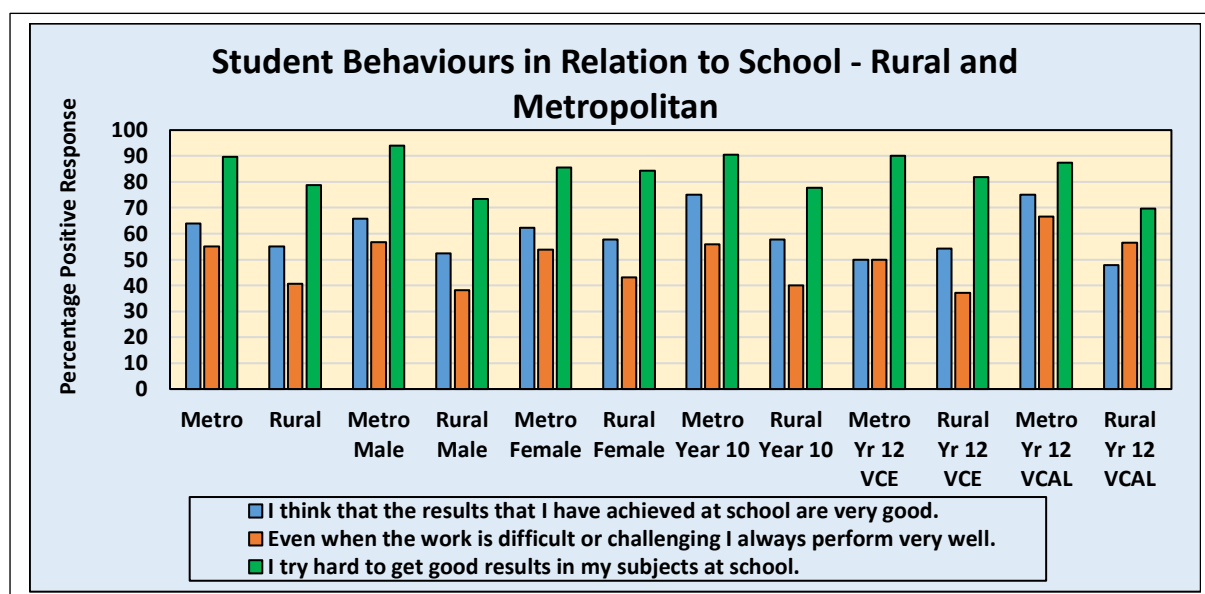


Figure 4.24: Student Behaviours in Relation to School

Rural males and females were 18.6% and 10.7%, respectively, less likely than their metropolitan counterparts to indicate that they performed well even when the work was challenging. Rural males, rural Year 12 VCE students and rural Year 10 students were least likely to agree to this statement, whilst rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL and metropolitan males were the most likely to agree.

A key element of student behaviours related to home study. One question, related to this, was asked in the survey. The item was:

Item 23: What stops you from studying at home? (*Select one or two answers*)

- (a) It is too noisy (b) Sporting commitments (c) Study is boring (d) Part-time job
(e) Seeing my friends (f) House chores (g) Cannot be bothered (h) Nothing

This item focused on barriers to studying at home, including whether there were other aspects of the student's life that prevented them from studying. The results are shown in Figure 4.25, which shows that for rural students, the two most common barriers to studying at home were sporting commitments (35.7% of students) and part-time employment (35.3% of students). These results were much higher than for metropolitan students, for whom "I cannot be bothered" was the most common barrier (33.8% of students), although, for metropolitan females and metropolitan Year 12 students, the result for part-time work was above 30%.

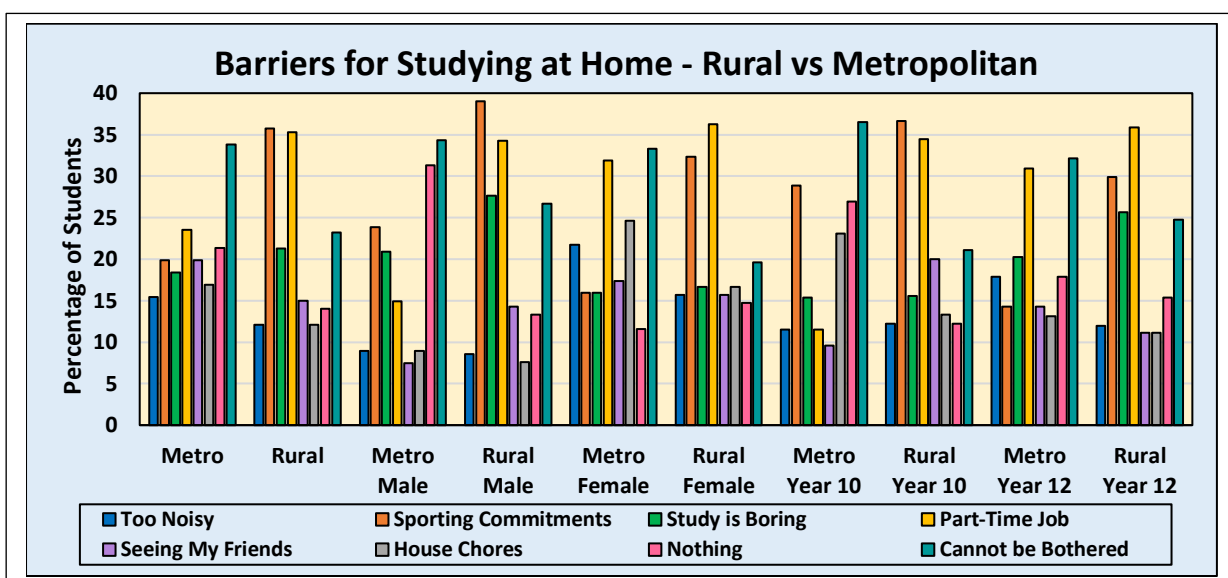


Figure 4.25: Barriers to Studying at Home

A question, related to enablers to studying at home, was included in the survey. It resulted in similar results for rural and metropolitan students, with the most common responses being “I have my own desk”, “I listen to music” and “my family knows the importance of study”. The graph presenting this information is shown in Figure A7.3, in Appendix 7.

One item in the survey related to whether other activities affected the student’s capacity to do their homework or study. The item was:

Item 20: I often miss completing homework because there are other things to do after school.

The results for this item are shown in Figure 4.26.

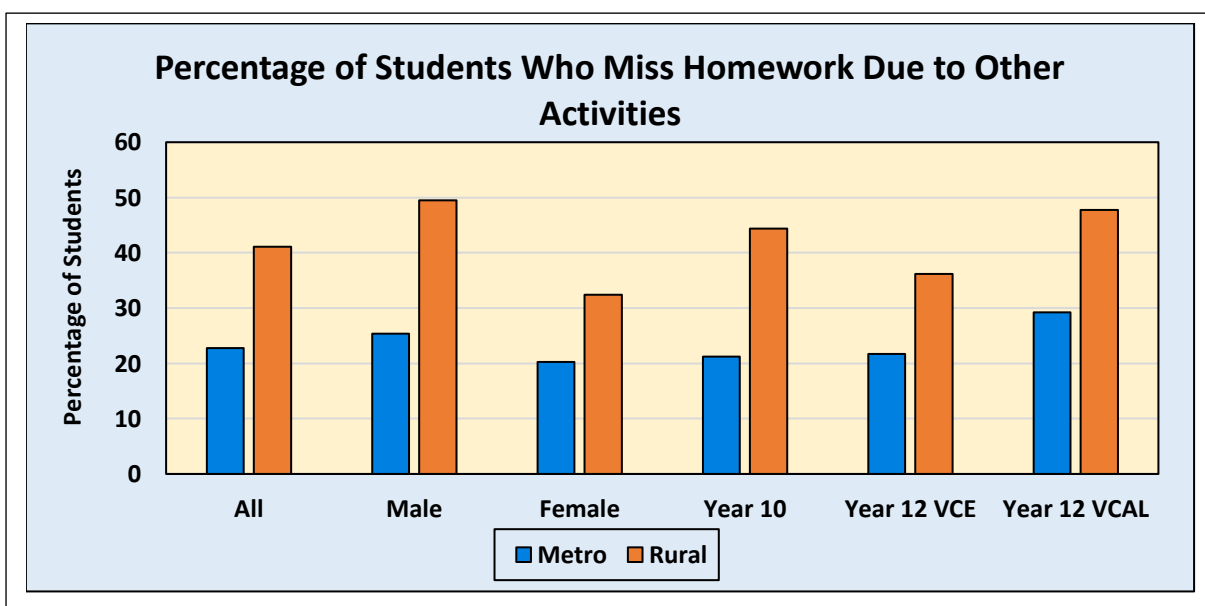


Figure 4.26: Percentage of Students Who Miss Homework Due to Other Activities

As indicated in Figure 4.26, rural students were almost twice as likely, as metropolitan students, to agree that they missed doing homework due to being involved in other activities outside school (rural 41.1% and metropolitan 22.8%). Rural males were the most likely to miss homework for this reason, with almost 50% agreeing that they did so, followed by rural Year 12 VCAL students and rural Year 10 students. The metropolitan students, who were most likely to miss completing homework due to other activities, were the Year 12 VCAL students, but they were less likely to miss homework than any rural group of students. Overall, other activities impacted on homework and study more for rural students than they did for metropolitan students.

As well as being affected by environmental and behavioural determinants, elements related to personal determinants also affected student aspirations. The effect of personal determinants is considered in the next section.

4.6 The Effect of Personal Determinants on Student Aspirations

In this section, the results of the student survey items, related to personal determinants from SCAT, are examined. The elements of identity and self-efficacy were considered. The key factors were part-time employment and sport, goal setting and success, and the student's perceived capacity to continue with education. Figure 4.27 shows the section of SCAT related to personal determinants.

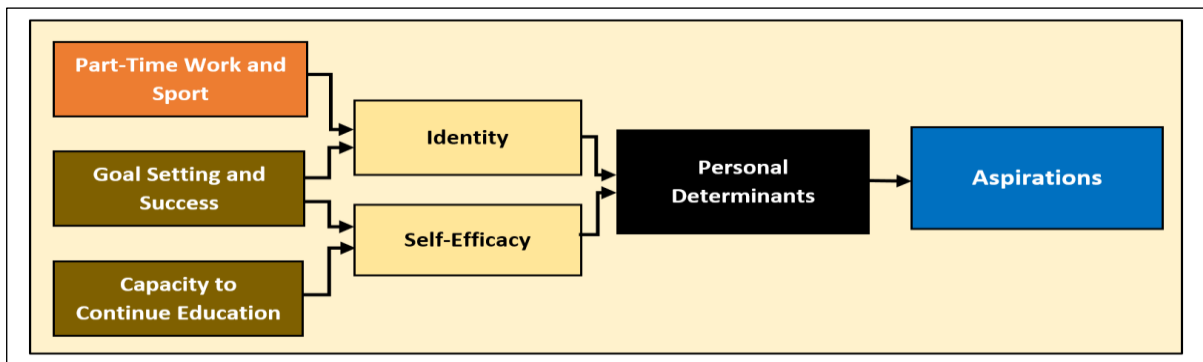


Figure 4.27: SCAT – Personal Determinants and Key Factors

4.6.1 Identity – Part-Time Work and Sport

It is often argued that part-time work detracts from school study, but aids future employability and aspirations (Marsh & Kleitman, 2005; Patton & Smith, 2010). Barling, Rogers and Kelloway (1995) found that the number of hours worked did not significantly affect

student outcomes, but that the usefulness of the part-time work for future employment was positive in terms of aspirations. For many students in this research, a part-time job was an element of their identity, as noted by Maslen (2009), who found that males often equated their part-time job with the capacity to purchase, for example, a car. The students in this research indicated that part-time work impacted on home study, as shown in Figure 4.25, above.

In the survey, students were asked to indicate the number of hours that they worked in their part-time job in a typical week. The results are shown in Figure 4.28.

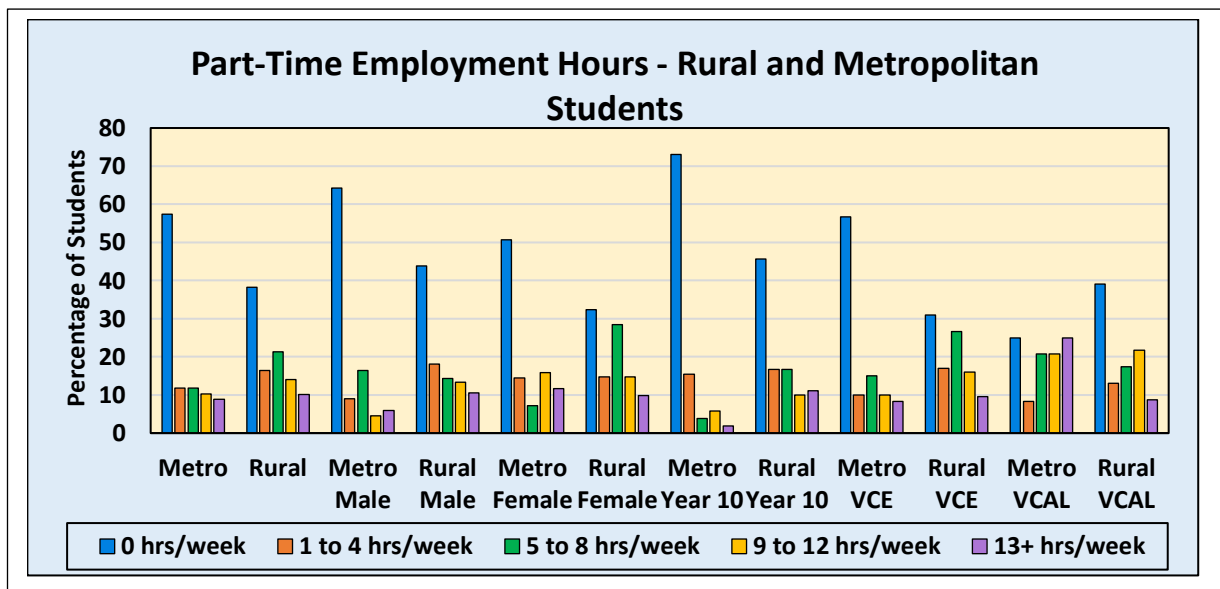


Figure 4.28: Student Part-Time Employment Hours

Figure 4.28 indicates that the percentage of students in this research, who had a part-time job, was 42.6% for metropolitan students and 61.8% for rural students, a difference of 19.2%. Males were less likely to have a part-time job than females, in both rural and metropolitan areas. The students least likely to have a part-time job were metropolitan Year 10 students, of whom 73.1% did not have a part-time job. The students most likely to have a part-time job were metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students (75%), rural Year 12 VCE students (69.1%) and rural females (67.6%). It was noted that 25% of metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students worked more than 13 hours per week, compared with rural Year 12 VCAL students for whom the percentage was 8.7%.

Given the high percentage of students who had a part-time job, the perceived effect of part-time work on study was examined. In the survey, the item related to this was:

Item 13: My part-time job and sporting commitments outside school prevent me from studying as much as I think I should.

Table 4.2 shows the responses for students who had a part-time job and those who did not.

The Effect of Part-time Employment and Sporting Commitments on Study		
	Students With a Part-time Job	Students Without a Part-time Job
Response	Agree or Strongly Agree	Agree or Strongly Agree
Metropolitan Males	21%	9%
Metropolitan Females	27%	9%
Rural Males	49%	19%
Rural Females	35%	18%

Table 4.2: Effect of Part-time Employment and Sporting Commitments on Study – Rural and Metropolitan

Table 4.2 indicates that, for rural males, 19% of students who did not have a part-time job indicated that their study was affected by sporting commitments and their part-time job. This percentage increased to 49% for students who had a part-time job, a difference of 30% which could be attributable to the part-time employment. The differences were 17% for rural females, 18% for metropolitan females and 12% for metropolitan males.

Sport and part-time employment were a significant part of the lives of students in this research. For rural students, sport and their part-time job affected homework and study, thus affecting academic outcomes at school and, in turn, affecting aspirations and outcome expectations. However, sport and part-time employment were positive contributors to life satisfaction and leisure activities which, as suggested by Ahuja (2016), contributed to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is explored further in the next section.

4.6.2 Identity and Self-Efficacy – Goal Setting and Success

A student's self-efficacy is a key personal determinant. The ability to set goals for the future, to know what success means, and to have a belief in one's capacity to continue with education, if that is what one desires, are all factors relating to self-efficacy and identity.

Being able to set goals for the future, and having the motivation to achieve those goals, relates strongly to a student's self-efficacy, allowing students to believe that they can be successful (Bandura, 1977). Two items in the survey related to goal setting and whether students thought that they would be able to achieve their goals. The items were:

- Item 27:** I think I will be able to achieve all of the goals that I have set myself for the future in terms of my education and my career.
- Item 49:** I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career.

The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.29.

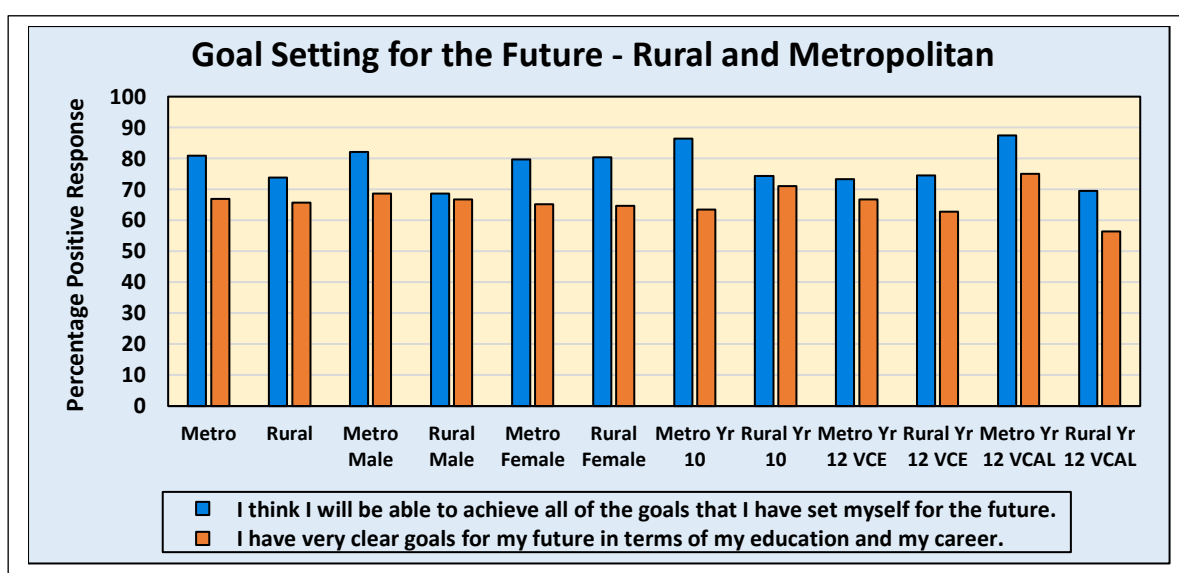


Figure 4.29: Goal Setting for the Future

As indicated in Figure 4.29, there were small differences between the student groups in relation to having clear goals for the future. The exception was rural Year 12 VCAL students, who had the lowest percentage positive response, at 56.4%, a result that was 18% lower than the metropolitan Year 12 VCAL result which, in turn, was the highest result for all student groups. In relation to the perception of students that they would be able to achieve their goals, the result for rural males (68.6%) was below the results for rural females and both metropolitan males and females (80.4%, 82.1% and 79.7%, respectively). That rural males were less certain that they will achieve their goals, adds to the consistently lower results of rural males in many areas of the survey. Whether goal setting correlates with wanting to continue education after secondary school is considered in section 4.7.

Related to goal setting is the concept of success, and whether students perceive that they have been successful in life and at school. Success was considered to be an important indicator of student aspirations, based on Bandura's notion that a student who experienced success was more likely to have higher aspirations than one who did not (Bandura, 1997, p. 39). Three items in the survey related to the student's perception of their own success. The items were:

- Item 9:** In my life so far, I have been successful in most things that I have tried.
- Item 37:** I think that my time at school has been successful so far.
- Item 30:** I will only feel that I have been successful at school if I get into a university or TAFE course.

The results for these items are shown in figure 4.30.

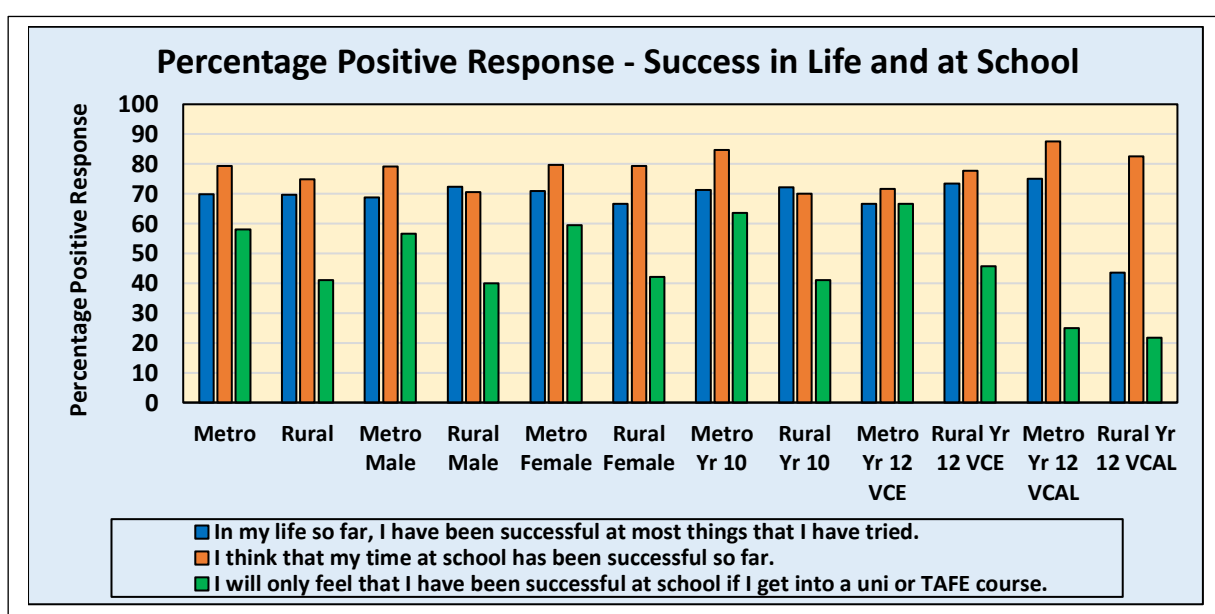


Figure 4.30: Success in Life and at School

As indicated in Figure 4.30, both rural and metropolitan students responded similarly in relation to whether they had been successful with the things they had tried in their lives so far. One group, the rural Year 12 VCAL students, were, however, almost 30% less likely to agree with this.

In terms of school success, between 70% and 80% of both rural and metropolitan students responded positively. The lowest percentage of positive responses came from rural males, rural Year 10 students and metropolitan VCE students, where the positive response rates were 70.5%, 70% and 71.7%, respectively, whilst the highest results came from metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students (87.5%) and metropolitan Year 10 students (84.6%).

There were differences in relation to students equating success in the future with enrolling in a university or TAFE course. The rural result was consistently close to 40%, whilst the metropolitan result was close to 60%. For the Year 12 VCAL group, both metropolitan and rural, less than 25% agreed. The VCAL student result was so low that it affected the overall results significantly. With the Year 12 VCAL students not included, 65.2% of metropolitan students and 45.7% of rural students felt that they would consider themselves as successful only if they were accepted into a university or TAFE course. The difference between rural and metropolitan students remained approximately 20%, a consistent difference for rural and metropolitan males, females, Year 10 and Year 12 VCE students.

Related to this is whether students perceived that they had the capacity to continue with their education. This is examined in the next section.

4.6.3 Self-Efficacy – Capacity to Continue with Education

Two items in the survey provided an insight into the capacity of a student to continue with education, focusing on whether they thought they had the capacity to do so (indicated by their belief that they were smart enough to do so), and whether the student was bored with study, a possible indicator that they would not want to continue with education. The two items were:

Item 52: I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I decide to go there.

Item 19: I find studying and schoolwork to be boring.

Item 19 is a reverse item. A positive response occurred if the student disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The results for these items are shown in Figure 4.31, which gives the percentage positive response for the reverse of Item 19, namely, “I do not find studying and schoolwork to be boring”.

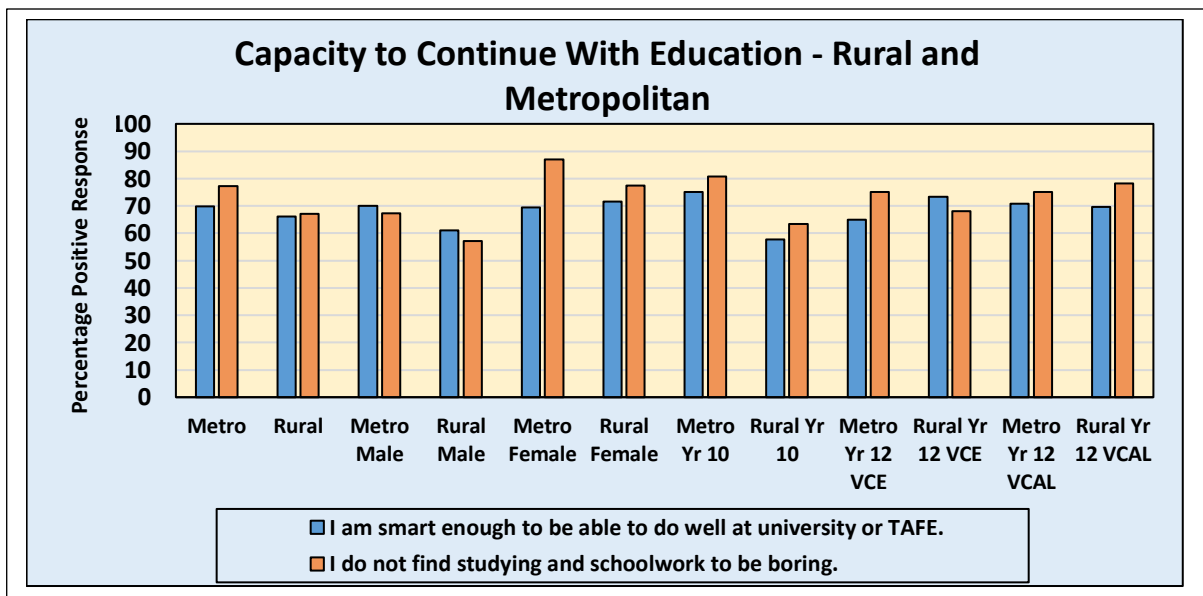


Figure 4.31: Capacity to Continue with Education

Figure 4.31 indicates that there was little difference between rural and metropolitan students in terms of their perceptions as to whether they were smart enough to do well at university or TAFE. The lowest results were for rural males and rural Year 10 students, where the percentage who were positive was approximately 60%, compared with 70% for other groups of students.

In relation to whether students found schoolwork to be boring, rural and metropolitan females were approximately 20% less likely to find schoolwork to be boring than their male counterparts. The difference between the percentage of rural males and females, related to finding schoolwork boring, was similar to the difference between whether rural males and females wanted to continue education beyond secondary school (see Figure 4.22).

Overall, the self-efficacy of the students was generally positive, with high percentages of students perceiving that they had been successful at school and in life and that they had the capacity to continue with education if they wanted to. Where there were differences, they related to the rural male students and rural Year 12 VCAL students. Male students, both rural and metropolitan, were 20% more likely to find schoolwork to be boring than their female counterparts. Of all groups studied, rural males and rural Year 12 VCAL students had the lowest percentage of positive responses to most self-efficacy items.

In the next section, the correlation coefficients between survey items, and whether a student wanted to continue with further education, are examined.

4.7 Correlations between the Survey Items and Student Aspirations

In this research, correlations between items in the student survey and the aspirations of students to attend university or TAFE were considered. As outlined in Chapter 3, correlation coefficients were determined, using IBM SPSS, for all Likert 5-scale items in the survey, as well as for items related to socio-economic status, parental tertiary education, the number of siblings and the number of parents living at home with the student.

The Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient (r_s) was used, based on the ordinal nature of the survey data, as recommended by De Winter, Gosling and Potter (2016) and Pallant (2016), and as discussed in Chapter 3. Appendix 8 shows the correlation between each of the Likert 5-scale items in the survey, against the key item: “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”.

From the items listed in Appendix 8, eleven items displayed medium to strong correlation for all rural students ($p < .01$), whilst thirteen items displayed medium to strong correlation for at least one group of rural students. Three items displayed medium to strong correlation for all metropolitan students ($p < .01$), whilst six items displayed medium to strong correlation for at least one group of metropolitan students.

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient for the items which displayed medium to strong correlation, against the item, “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”. The correlation results for rural students are shown in Table 4.3, and those for metropolitan students are in Table 4.4. The right-hand column indicates whether the survey item was a personal, behavioural or environmental determinant. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 include survey items where the correlation coefficient was greater than 0.3 or less than -0.3. The shading indicates the strength and significance of the correlation.

- (a) Blue shading – correlation greater than 0.3 or less than -0.3, with significance of $p < .01$;
- (b) Yellow shading – correlation greater than 0.3 or less than -0.3, with significance of $p < .05$;
- (c) Green shading – correlation greater than 0.3 or less than -0.3, with significance of $p > .05$.

Apart from the items in Tables 4.3 and 4.4, there were no other Likert 5-scale items from the survey where the correlation coefficient was greater than 0.3 or less than -0.3.

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient comparing “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” with Survey Items – Rural Students							
Survey Item	Rural	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Year 10	Rural Year 12 VCE	Rural Year 12 VCAL	Determinant
I find studying and schoolwork to be boring	-.369	-.332	-.264	-.351	-.462	-.284	Personal
I intend to complete year 12	.611	.552	.642	.737	.496	.169	Personal
I think I will be able to achieve the goals that I have set myself in terms of my education and career	.444	.393	.425	.500	.516	-.166	Personal
I think that my time at school has been successful so far	.323	.229	.370	.339	.383	.317	Personal
I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career	.213	.022	.338	.258	.352	-.351	Personal
I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there	.459	.388	.510	.451	.448	.545	Personal
I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school	.426	.274	.485	.504	.478	-.189	Behavioural
To get the job that I want when I leave school, I have to go to university or TAFE	.645	.589	.642	.735	.550	.375	Behavioural
I never want to leave the community/town where I live	-.342	-.416	-.210	-.283	-.344	-.127	Environmental
I would leave the town where I live in order to get a good job or to go to university/TAFE	.455	.333	.492	.478	.388	-.001	Environmental
My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school	.566	.623	.493	.613	.453	.472	Environmental
The teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school	.380	.446	.267	.414	.261	.530	Environmental
My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE	-.361	-.282	-.288	-.336	-.302	-.238	Environmental

Table 4.3: Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with 13 Survey Items – Rural Students

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient comparing “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” with Survey Items – Metropolitan Students							
Survey Item	Metro	Metro Male	Metro Female	Metro Year 10	Metro Year 12 VCE	Metro Year 12 VCAL	Determinant
I intend to complete year 12	.341	.390	.278	.251	.338	.508	Personal
I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there	.130	.177	.107	.137	.066	.302	Personal
I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school	.297	.236	.364	.312	.312	.221	Behavioural
To get the job that I want when I leave school, I have to go to university or TAFE	.512	.477	.548	.302	.571	.635	Behavioural
My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school	.475	.567	.366	.354	.507	.586	Environmental
My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE	-.259	-.384	-.074	-.230	-.348	-.069	Environmental

Table 4.4: Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with 6 Survey Items – Metropolitan Students

For **rural students**, the thirteen items showing medium to high correlation for at least one group of students were:

1. I find studying and schoolwork to be boring (negative correlation);
2. I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school;
3. I intend to complete year 12;
4. I think I will be able to achieve the goals that I have set myself in terms of my education and career;
5. I think that my time at school has been successful so far;
6. I never want to leave the community/town where I live (negative correlation);
7. I would leave the town where I live in order to get a good job or to go to university/TAFE;
8. To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE;
9. I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there;
10. My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school;
11. The teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school;
12. **For females only:** I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career;
13. **For Year 10 and Year 12 VCE students only:** My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE (negative correlation).

For **metropolitan students**, the six items showing medium to high correlation for at least one group were:

1. I intend to complete year 12;
2. To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE;
3. My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school;
4. **For males and Year 12 VCE students only:** My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE (negative correlation);
5. **For females, Year 10 and Year 12 VCE students only:** I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school;
6. **For Year 12 VCAL students only:** I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there.

The highest overall correlation for all rural students was 0.645, for perceiving the fact that they needed to go to university or TAFE to access the job to which they aspired. This was also the item with the highest correlation for metropolitan students (0.512). The correlation for rural Year 10 students for this item was 0.735, showing that rural students were making decisions at year 10 level about continuing with education or not.

Parental encouragement correlated highly for both rural and metropolitan students. For rural students, having teacher support correlated at a medium level, whilst for metropolitan students, it did not. For metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students, the fact that they needed to go to university or TAFE for their future career was one area that correlated highly.

Several areas that may have been expected to correlate at a high level did not have significant correlation coefficients. These areas included:

- (a) whether the school was a very good school (rural 0.042; metropolitan -0.096);
- (b) whether the school provided opportunities for students to imagine possible careers (rural -0.024; metropolitan -0.231);
- (c) whether the school's curriculum was reflective of the local context (rural -0.110; metropolitan -0.130).

Correlations were also calculated for the family characteristics (number of parents living in the home, parental education levels, the number of siblings and SES). The results are shown in Table 4.5 and 4.6.

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient comparing “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” with Family Characteristics – Rural Students							
Item	Rural	Rural Male	Rural Female	Rural Year 10	Rural Year 12 VCE	Rural Year 12 VCAL	Determinant
Number of parents living at the family home	-.139	-.009	-.227	-.166	-.102	.155	Environmental
Number of parents who attended university or TAFE	.336	.323	.361	.390	.247	.307	Environmental
Socio-economic status (measured by ICSEA value)	.165	.149	.147	.098	.304	-.197	Environmental
Number of siblings	-.128	-.065	-.195	-.222	-.041	.301	Environmental

Table 4.5: Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with Family Characteristics – Rural Students

Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient comparing “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” with Family Characteristics – Metropolitan Students							
Item	Metro	Metro Male	Metro Female	Metro Year 10	Metro Year 12 VCE	Metro Year 12 VCAL	Determinant
Number of parents living at the family home	-.071	-.112	-.057	-.034	-.021	-.180	Environmental
Number of parents who attended university or TAFE	.159	.087	.228	.062	-.039	-.136	Environmental
Socio-economic status (measured by ICSEA value)	-.026	.073	-.150	-.009	-.039	-.136	Environmental
Number of siblings	-.009	-.128	.110	.061	.049	-.155	Environmental

Table 4.6: Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Wanting to Continue Education with Family Characteristics – Metropolitan Students

The results shown in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 indicate that the number of parents who attended university or TAFE correlated, mainly at the $p < .01$ level, for rural students, rural male and female students and rural Year 10 students, but not for metropolitan students. The correlation coefficient was lower for rural Year 12 VCE and was less significant for rural Year 12 VCAL students. The number of parents in the home and the number of siblings did not correlate highly for rural or metropolitan students. The SES level had a medium correlation, only for rural Year 12 VCE students.

The correlation results showed distinct differences between rural and metropolitan students and the different way that Year 12 VCAL students perceive their aspirations.

If a high correlation implies a potential barrier to the aspiration to continue education after secondary schools, then rural students have significantly more barriers than metropolitan students. For rural students, there was an extensive list of potential barriers, covering personal, behavioural and environmental determinants. Added to this, rural students were more likely to continue with education after school if at least one of their parents had done so. Comparatively,

rural students have many more barriers to overcome than their metropolitan counterparts, in order to perceive that they would continue with education after secondary school.

4.8 Summary

Throughout this chapter, a large amount of data has been presented. The data shows that there were differences between rural and metropolitan students in relation to many personal, behavioural and environmental determinants.

The data showed differences between males and females and between students in year 10 and those in year 12 VCE and year 12 VCAL.

As described in Chapter 3, the survey results were used to determine the questions to be asked in the student focus groups part of this research. The focus group results are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 Results from Student Focus Groups

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, results from student focus groups that were conducted in this research, are presented. The chapter is divided into sections based on the determinants of the SCAT framework.

Through their responses to a range of open-ended questions, asked during fourteen focus groups, seven in rural Victoria and seven in metropolitan Melbourne, the students provided insights into how their school, their local community, their family and friends and their own self-efficacy and identity, affected their aspirations for the future. Their responses provided a unique insight into the aspirations of rural students and how they contrast with those of metropolitan students.

Six schools were included in the focus group part of this research. The rural schools were Highlands Rural Secondary College, Riverside Rural Secondary College and Marlin Bay Rural College. The metropolitan schools were Inner East Secondary College, South East Secondary College and Outer Eastern Secondary College.

In considering the importance of student voice, it is recognised that the comments in this chapter were the perceptions of the students themselves. In some cases, their views were shaped by their own experiences, or have been influenced by the thoughts of others.

These were the views of the students and, because students were the clients of our education system, their views were important. They needed to be heard. Their comments provided insights into their lives, and how they formed their aspirations for the future. Their views and thoughts were diverse, but they provided a picture of the perceptions of students from different areas of Victoria, students with different family and cultural backgrounds, males and females, and students from both year 10 and year 12.

The following pages provide a sample of discussions and comments from the focus groups. They are the thoughts and ideas from the students in their own words. They express positive and negative thoughts, and focus on enablers and barriers, people and circumstances, that have affected their aspirations and outcome expectations.

The names of the students mentioned in this chapter are not their real names. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy, as have the names of their schools. However, the comments are real.

5.2 How Environmental Determinants Affect Student Aspirations

The environmental determinants in this research focused on place, rurality, family, friends and schools. Figure 5.1 shows the elements that contribute to the environmental determinants in the SCAT framework.

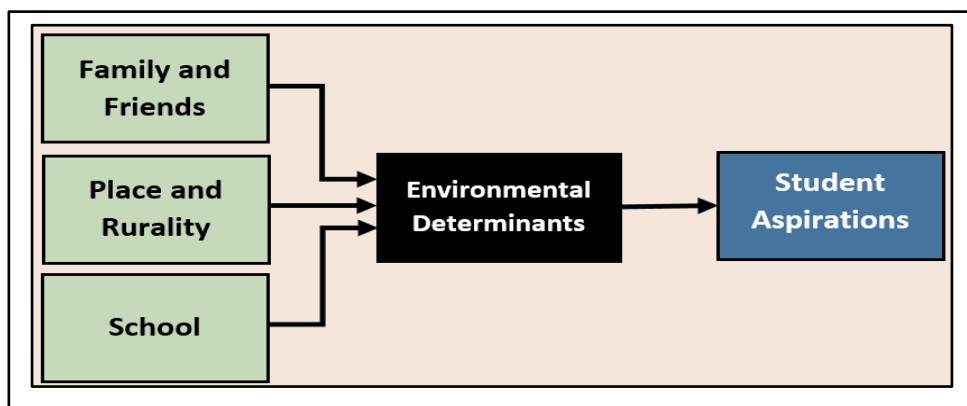


Figure 5.1: SCAT – Environmental Determinants - Key Elements

The student perceptions, related to the environmental determinants affecting student aspirations, were considered in terms of each of the three key elements: Place and Rurality, Family and Friends, and School. The first section focuses on Place and Rurality.

5.2.1 Place and Rurality – Connection to Place

There were similarities as well as differences between rural and metropolitan students, in terms of their connection to place and whether they would leave the community to go to university, or for employment. Rural places were seen by students as being safe and secure but also as providing barriers to continuing education beyond secondary school.

In her focus group, Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, indicated that she was a country girl and that she wanted to stay in rural Victoria. She liked being with her friends and her family and being on the farm where she grew up. She stated that she was connected to her community, but not to the degree that she would never leave. She commented that:

"I feel a part of the community. I play sport and I have close friends who play sport in the town and I go and watch them and support them. If I moved away - actually I don't think I would move away - I would definitely come back because we are all close. Even if I moved away, I would want to come back and be at home on the weekends on the farm ... I love the farm work, so that would be good. But I want to be a teacher and hopefully combine the two."

Marisa was not typical, however. Whilst she wanted to go to university and then return, most of her friends either wanted to stay in the town, or to leave and not return. Her friend, Tom, also from Riverside Rural Secondary College, like several other males in rural focus groups, commented that:

"I play football for Riverside. Most of the community gets around the footy. I will probably live close to Riverside and get a job here. It is a great place to live."

Tom also stated that:

"There is a sense of freedom here. You can go down to the river with the boat and put the boat in the river and fish."

He also commented on the fact that living in a rural community provided a feeling of safety and security. For Tom, Riverside was his place, the place where he wanted to be. It was the same for Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College. He said:

"You feel safe. If you are walking down the street and there is danger or something, you know people in every second house. You can always run in there and they will help you."

Maya, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, contributed her feelings about Highlands and the local rural community. She stated that:

"I went to a Melbourne camp and I stayed there for a week and I hated it. My throat was really sore because the air is disgusting. In Highlands, I like it. I really love it here to be honest. When I came back from Melbourne, I was really happy to be back home. Yes, I would come back to Highlands, after I have done all my career and everything ... My family is here and all my friends and everything like that. You know – great friends here."

Helena, from Marlin Bay Rural College, was less complimentary about life in a rural community. She stated that:

“I just want to get out of this town as soon as I can. I find that it is a real claustrophobic environment, and I don’t think I benefit from it much. Everybody knows everybody and everything about you. If you have a disagreement with someone, it hinders your relationship with a lot of other people. I find that difficult. I don’t like everyone all over my business.”

Daniella, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented on the size of her town and the lack of opportunities. She stated that:

“Everyone knows everyone in the community because of the size that it is. If you see someone down the street, it will usually be someone that you know. And there are sports that they offer around here but there is not really much to do in a small town like this, I guess. There is nothing except sports. I definitely want to leave here. When I go off and hopefully get a good job, I really don’t want to come back because if I did, I would think that I had failed at what I want to try and achieve.”

At Highlands Rural Secondary College, Eamon and Jack discussed the community and their connection to it. Eamon commented that:

“I will probably stay in the community. But at some stage, I think I will have to move away because there is a lack of work in the occupation I want to get. So yeah, I would probably have to go away. But I am part of Highlands. I think that when I am older, I will be living in Highlands. That’s what I think at this stage. Probably get sick of the fog though. But all my mates and family are here and I have got no reason to leave.”

Jack indicated that he was not likely to move away from his community, as he was strongly connected to his place through his involvement in the Country Fire Authority (CFA), stating that:

“I am part of the community. Because it is such a small community, only a thousand people live here, it’s just like you walk down the street and every second person you see, you know. I suppose, being part of the CFA, I am pretty heavily

involved in the community so I get to meet new people. Highlands is a good place to live.”

Maggie, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, knew that she would leave Riverside to go to university but thought she would return to bring up a family in the future. She said:

“I think I have always felt a part of the community. I have never lived anywhere else. I am obviously going to leave, but I am not entirely sure I would come and live here, just because of the career path I want to take. And I know I would like living in a city or in a more populated area, but I think it’s a good place in the future to raise children and so I might return, not to Riverside, but to a town where I can still follow my career, but still have a country aspect.”

Johanna, a VCAL student from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented on the lack of opportunities for girls in her town, and how there were less opportunities for girls than there were for boys. She stated that:

“In this town there is nothing for girls to do and no jobs available. There is no reason to stay or to return. So I will leave as soon as I can. It is different for boys.”

Similar thoughts came from the focus group of VCAL students from Riverside Rural Secondary College. For example,

“There is a lot of people who like, work with their family or work with their dad, and they stick in the area. Like Laurie Jackman⁵, he’s got his son working for him. And farmers, they usually have their son working for them” (Tyrone, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“It is where my family is. I wouldn’t come back though. There is not much to do here. It’s pretty boring” (Johanna, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“I would rather move to another town close by, rather than stay here. I don’t play sport and so there is nothing to do here” (James, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

⁵ Laurie Jackman is not his real name

The sporting nature of the community and the greater job opportunities for males came out strongly. However, for females, the opportunities were limited, resulting in many females wanting to leave the town to improve their opportunities.

Metropolitan students were aware that it was different for them than it was for rural students. There was not the necessity to move away from home if they were going to attend university. However, whilst most were connected to their community, others wanted to leave.

Reuben, from Inner East Secondary College, commented that:

“Even in the suburbs, an urban life is just too quiet for me. In the future, I guess I would prefer to want to move out to the city, a busier place ... When you go to the city it’s really lively... I have set my goals to move out to somewhere like that.”

Jennifer, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, loved her local community because she and her friends were involved in community activities. Jennifer commented that:

“I am very involved in the community. We do church groups and usually once a month we go around and help people. There will be someone who needs their house cleaned, for example. They might want us to do their garden, tidy up their backyard. So members of the church will go there and help as a volunteer and get to know them ... I enjoy doing it ... I wouldn’t leave the community to go elsewhere, I would still want that connection.”

In contrast, Tamara, from South East Secondary College, was not so sure about staying in her community. She was the only metropolitan student who, in focus groups, expressed an interest in moving to a rural area. She commented that:

“I don’t mix with other people in the area. I want to live in the country because I love the countryside, and I know I want to help people and I know that, in the country, everyone pulls in and helps. Everyone is supportive of each other. I don’t do much in the community where I live, because there is not much to do.”

Effie, from Inner East Secondary College, provided a different viewpoint, stressing the fact that some suburbs in Melbourne had communities that acted just like, as she said, “a small country town”. Her comments were similar to those of Helena, from Marlin Bay Rural College. Effie stated that:

“Where I live, there are always a lot of rumours spreading about different people and they are sometimes good or bad and that is what I don’t like. I don’t want people saying stuff about me that might not be true ... It is actually like I live in a small country town.”

Raj, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, spoke about rural and metropolitan areas in terms of opportunities and expectations. He stated:

“I reckon that if I was in the country, the expectations on me wouldn’t be as high because ... there are limited options there. There are limited jobs and you would not be really influenced by all the options that you have in like metropolitan areas. So I reckon that my expectations would be a lot lower if I lived in the country.”

An area which was discussed regularly by the students was the relative isolation of many rural towns in Victoria. Rural isolation is considered in the next section.

5.2.2 Place and Rurality - Rural Isolation

The isolation of some rural communities provided several areas for focus group discussions. In relation to rural students not continuing to university as much as metropolitan students, Eliza, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated that:

“I think it is because we are all pushed to stay on farms or help out in the community. Not many people would say like, ‘oh you’re going to university, you should go there, and it’s a great opportunity’. People are more likely to say, ‘you stay in your home town and help out your family, or help out on the farm’ or whatever. You don’t really have much push to go to university or TAFE unless you put that on yourself.”

Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, originally thought that she would like to go to university in Melbourne. But that changed. She stated:

“I looked away from a university in Melbourne because I am not much of a city person and the crowds of people would not be beneficial for me, and I wouldn’t like it. I would be daunted. I like space.”

Ariel, from Marlin Bay Rural College, commented on the isolation of Marlin Bay in relation to going to university after finishing secondary school, stating that:

“We have to leave the town if we want to go to university or TAFE. It is quite a big step, one coming out of school to go to university, and then two, having to adapt to city life. This is probably what many students from here find to be a struggle.”

At Riverside Rural Secondary College, Isabella stated that it was about money and the cost of going to university or TAFE. She stated:

“Another thing is money. A lot of people get turned away from university or TAFE because they would have to move away to Melbourne or Bendigo. A lot of girls in our year level were thinking about getting a flat, but the expense is too much. So many just don’t do it. The cost of living is way too much. It is harder for us than for students who are in the city because they can travel a short distance away to the university or TAFE ... and they don’t have to pay for travel and rent and food. Our principal says that if we want to go to university, we probably won’t, because of travel and living costs.”

Gareth, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, made similar comments. He stated that:

“It’s more that we give up because it is daunting. We don’t know how we are going to do it. So we don’t do it. It is daunting because you don’t have anyone with you. You don’t have anyone you know living nearby. To go to university on top of that and having to find a part-time job to pay for where you are living. You are by yourself and you are managing yourself.”

Matt, from Marlin Bay Rural College, was positive about elements of his community but expressed concerns about the isolation of Marlin Bay in relation to educational opportunities. He commented that:

“It is a great town to live in because of the environment. You can go surfing every day. However, we are isolated from opportunities. It takes a lot more time to get to places. Last year we were doing Year 11 Art and we took three days to do a trip

to the National Gallery in Melbourne, so you lose a lot of time travelling where a city school can just go there.”

A number of metropolitan students felt that metropolitan schools had an advantage over many rural schools, particularly in relation to rural isolation. Shaun, from Inner East Secondary College, reflected on rural isolation, school resourcing and a more relaxed lifestyle, as issues that he perceived were faced by rural students. He stated that:

“The country would be more of a relaxed community than the city. And the teachers don’t have the same resources as city schools, to help you to achieve your goals or to get where you want to be. In country schools, it’s so far away from university, so travelling like long distances is very hard for some people. They don’t really have the resources or support to get the education that they need and deserve.”

Rosanna, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, also reflected on the access that metropolitan students have to university or TAFE colleges. She stated:

“We have so many places around us locally, such as TAFE and university that we can access. In the country, you have got to really think about where to go and how you would get there.”

Mia, from Inner East Secondary College, felt that differences between rural and metropolitan schools related to the availability of teachers, caused by the remoteness of rural schools. She stated:

“Teachers do not want to live in the country. It is too far away, especially if they come from Melbourne.”

Along similar lines, Tamara, from South East Secondary College, commented that:

“I think country students are disadvantaged because, if they want to do TAFE or university, they would have to travel further and they may not have had the pre-requisite subjects available at their school.”

Rurality affects students in many ways, as do family and friends. Student comments, related to how family and friends affected their aspirations, are presented in the next two sections.

5.2.3 Family and Friends - Family

In this section, the ways in which families affected student aspirations are considered. Family support and encouragement varied between rural and metropolitan students. Rural students perceived that their parents wanted their children to be happy and that this often did not translate into high academic expectations. In the metropolitan area, students were more likely to state that their parents had higher academic expectations, and encouraged their children to aim high with their aspirations.

Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, was afraid to let her father know what she wanted to do after finishing secondary school. She wanted to go to university in Melbourne, but was worried that her father would not support her. Her father's response was positive, however. He wanted his daughter to be happy with her future direction in life. Lucinda stated:

“Most of us want to get out and experience what the city life is like and so we have to set expectations on ourselves, so that we can experience the city. I have worked out what I want to do, but I was scared to tell my father. I look after the home now, cook meals for the family and do all the cleaning, so I was not sure how dad would take it, me leaving home. When I talked to him about these focus groups, I told him I wanted to go to university to do Agricultural Science. He was quiet for a while, but then said that it was my life and that I needed to do what I wanted to do. He just wanted me to be happy. He was kind of really supportive.”

Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, thought that high expectations were important and she indicated that whilst she had high expectations of herself, her family did not consider higher education to be important for her. She stated:

“My family support me but they don't really have expectations. My parents didn't go past year 10 or 11. They have always been on the farm and they value that, and I do too, but they don't really see education as a really high value thing, so I know I have to do well at school for me. But we don't get to our potential because you are not getting driven at home or at school.”

Marisa's friend Jemma agreed. She commented that:

“My parents don't have high expectations of me. They don't really care about what I want to do, as long as I am happy.”

Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, commented that:

“Most of our parents only understand living in a remote town and that school isn’t everything. For our generation, it is different.”

Shelley, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, who aspired to go to university and study veterinary science, stated:

“I want to become a vet. Mainly because I love taking care of animals. And helping animals would be like a good career. I have had no careers advice about becoming a vet, it just sprung to me. My family have not had anything to do with it. I’ve tried getting help from the family but they just say it’s up to me.”

Shelley’s friend Rebecca, also from Highlands Rural Secondary College, commented that her parents had not gone to university and, whilst they made some suggestions about possible careers, Rebecca did not think that their suggestions were helpful. She stated:

“Neither of my parents did year 12, so their expectations kind of vary. They didn’t go to university, so they don’t know how hard it is, or the difficulty of getting into the big universities. It is like they have a lower expectation because they didn’t.”

Calli, also from Highlands Rural Secondary College, supported Rebecca’s comments. She stated that:

“In rural communities, there are a lot more parents that might not have had a traditional school path and have worked on farms and stuff that didn’t require as much schooling, and so they don’t see the need to go to university or higher learning.”

Ashton, from Marlin Bay Rural College, had parents who had attended university. He wanted to follow in their footsteps, stating that:

“I want to go to university ... Both my parents went to university and my dad is a maths and science teacher, so I’ve always wanted to study in that field. My brother is doing engineering at university, so I have places to stay in Melbourne. I can just follow what he did. I don’t have to take the leap like most of the other students.”

Matt, also from Marlin Bay Rural College, who aspired to study medicine at university, commented that:

“My family does not have high expectations of me. They encourage me to do well in school, but it is not something that they force on me. If I wanted to do another career, they would not pressure me to try and go to university or anything like that. They just want me to do what I enjoy.”

Daniella, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented that her parents had high expectations of her because their other children did not have aspirations. She stated that:

“My mum has high expectations for me because, out of my family, I am the only one who tries hard. My brothers have no idea what they want to do after school and I have more of an idea of what I want to do. Mum sees me as the hero of the group. I get higher grades than them in everything!”

Whilst many rural students commented that their parents wanted them to be happy in their future, students from the metropolitan focus groups reflected on the help of their parents in finding or supporting their aspirations. Whilst some metropolitan students had parents who had been to university, there were many students whose parents were new arrivals in Australia, who had little education, but who had higher aspirations for their children.

Jenson, from Inner East Secondary College, noted:

“Both of my parents did not finish school. They just want me to get a job that I like but they want me to get a good job, not like driving vans all day, like my father does. They want me to get a job that I would like to do. Their expectation is for me to do well.”

Aisha, from South East Secondary College, made similar comments. She stated:

“Both my parents came from overseas, so neither of them have an education. Mum dropped out when she was in year 7 and Dad dropped out in year 10. For them, it is like important for me to ... get a good job. I do not want to have the same job that my parents do. They are in factories and stuff. So I also put high expectations on myself.”

Tatiana, from South East Secondary College, had a lot of help from her parents about her future career. She said:

“I want to do VCAL next year. My parents helped and encouraged me a lot in choosing what I wanted to do. They gave me a lot of ideas and I did some

research and it was like TAFE courses and so I looked into them all. I want to be a make-up artist. I have to go to TAFE and then do two years' work experience and then I get a certificate 3 in make-up."

Vasili, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, also had help from his parents. He stated that:

"I've got a pretty fair idea of what I want to do when I leave school and most of that has been advice from my parents. My parents were a big help with that and with achieving that career. I am confident that if I try my best, I probably will get into the career that I want to do."

Rosanna, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, noted that:

"I come from a family of five and my parents dropped out and my brother didn't complete school and he doesn't have a job. So, I am like the first child to do year 12. So my parents kind of expect a lot from me."

Reuben, from Inner East Secondary College, focused on the importance of setting expectations for himself, whilst appreciating support from his parents. He stated:

"I feel like the person who sets the highest expectations for you is yourself. I guess really it comes back to you and what you want to do ... It is good that my parents support me, but in the end, it is my decision."

Jenson, from Inner East Secondary College, believed that expectations were not based on whether a student lived in a rural or metropolitan area, but that the family attitudes were more important. He stated that:

"Whether expectations are different in the country or the city depends on the family and whether they value education."

In the focus groups, students also commented on how their friends affected their aspirations. Student perspectives regarding their friends are presented in the next section.

5.2.4 Family and Friends – Friends

The focus of both the rural and metropolitan students was related more to their parents, than to their friends. The students perceived friends to be important in relation to support and encouragement.

Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, talked about friendships in a small town. She stated:

“Our friendship group has been the same since kindergarten. It doesn’t change very much ... Having the same peer group through the whole of school is different to most schools. If you have lots of friends, you feel supported. You ... are really close because you have to be.”

For Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, friends were a marker of success. He said:

“I reckon I have been successful. I have made lots of friends.”

Jemma, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, appreciated the support of her friends. She stated:

“If I have a bad day, my friends like gather around and cheer me up.”

Whilst rural students focused on the supportive nature of friends, metropolitan students were more likely to talk about friends in terms of competition. For example, Milos, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, stated that:

“I really thrive off competition and I have a lot of friends, peers who are really competitive as well and it drives me to study more and to achieve higher results. And that will work, in turn, to get me a better job.”

Similarly, Hailee, from Inner East Secondary College, commented that:

“With my friends who I hang out with, they are all smart and get high scores and everything, so I have to keep up with them and try. They help me better myself, I guess.”

For Jennifer, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, her like-minded friends were a source of support and inspiration. She stated:

“Friendship groups are important to me. It is about who you base yourself around as to how successful you are. If you want to succeed then you will find friends who would want the same thing. You would be successful if you had friends who, like you, would want to strive to achieve that long-term goal.”

Whilst factors related to family and friends significantly affected student aspirations, so too did factors related to schools, in terms of support and encouragement and the quality of the programs provided. Student perspectives regarding schools are presented in the next two sections.

5.2.5 Schools and Teachers – Support and Encouragement

Rural and metropolitan students were generally positive about, and protective of, their school. At the same time, they were aware of their school’s challenges.

In terms of his school, Highlands Rural Secondary College, Eamon stated that it was the teachers who made the difference. He stated:

“One of the good things is the teachers. The ones who stay anyway. You get to know them a bit and they get to know you.”

Johanna, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented that many younger teachers did not stay at the school for long. She stated:

“All the old teachers have started to retire and the younger ones leave after a short time. We lost half the teachers this year.”

Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, said that, whilst he liked his school, there were issues, stating:

“The main problem that we have is the teachers who teach the classes. Being in such a rural area we are not going to get all those teachers that the metropolitan schools would. Especially in the junior school, we are very, very limited as to what classes we get. I think that is a big key thing to look at – the teachers not teaching the classes effectively.”

Tom, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented on subject choice. He said:

“There are also not enough electives, so you end up doing work that you don’t want to do.”

But being a student in a small school had benefits as well as disadvantages. Hannah, from Marlin Bay Rural College, stated:

“Because we have less students at our school, we cannot choose from a wide range of subjects, so we often end up doing subjects we don’t want to do, and that are not relevant to us. I think this has an effect on our aspirations and results. On the positive side though, we get a lot of one on one time with our teachers because there are hardly any people in our classes.”

For Carrie, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, student behaviour in classes with inexperienced teachers affected her learning and her outcome expectations for the future. She stated:

“We are from a small school and we are all in the same class. Unfortunately, it’s often rowdy. Our class has been a ... loud and [poorly behaved] group and it’s been difficult the whole time ... There is no escape. It’s a constant battle for teachers dealing with the class, particularly the new teachers. You can’t always learn because you are having to fight over the noise of other students.”

Rebecca, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, felt that there were ways that rural schools could provide a better education for the students:

“I do think we could benefit by using other schools more, by combining subjects to gain more facilities and resources and stuff like that. The closest schools, which are about 50 kilometres away, have different things that we don’t have, and we have stuff that they don’t have, and we could work together and use the resources that they have and we don’t have.”

Halle, also from Highlands Rural Secondary College, agreed with Rebecca and added that there was too much competition between schools. She stated:

“We should share rather than being competitive with local schools. There is too much of a focus on which school can do better, rather than focusing on what can we do to give our students a better education.”

In relation to subject selection, Rebecca stated:

“This year, we couldn’t even do Literature because we were told that it wasn’t academic. And I do one of my subjects by distance education because there is no

teacher. Physics had two students, but they said it would be done at school. For Literature, they said we needed five students, which we got, but apparently, it wasn't an academic subject and that it was like, if we didn't run Physics, people would leave the school. They said that there wouldn't be enough people in Literature to have good discussions, but they encouraged us to do distance education by ourselves where we would have no discussions anyway."

Rebecca wanted a wider range of subjects from which to select. She was a member of the Country Education Partnership (CEP), which focuses on improving education for rural students in Victoria (CEP, 2020). She stated that:

"We have a polycom⁶ system in that room over there. The polycom system is never used. The Country Education Partnership says it is ridiculous. Schools should be working together, and sharing resources, teachers and facilities, to give students a better schooling experience."

Shelley, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, also spoke about limited subject choice and opportunities. She commented:

"It would be good to have more access to different subjects like online courses. Even if five new subjects were available, it would be a better school. We don't have the same opportunities as they have in the city. Like travelling to the city and experiencing what that is like. Understanding what the city has to offer. And more careers focus."

Maya, also from Highlands Rural Secondary College, added:

"It [is terrible]. We have such a small class and we don't get the same range of subjects as city students, so you don't get to choose the subjects you really want."

There are some rural schools, however, that work with other local secondary schools to provide a greater breadth of subject choice. One example is Riverside Rural Secondary College that shares some subjects with the neighbouring Catholic college. This is the exception rather than the norm though. Marisa commented that:

⁶ Polycom is a video-conferencing system.

“We get a few extra VCE subjects available because we work with St. Jude’s⁷ as well, so I do two classes down there, which helps. It has been good having extra opportunities of doing courses at St. Jude’s and meeting other kids from around the area.”

Metropolitan students tended to be more positive about aspects of their schools. Ray, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, commented that:

“The school has met my needs. I have had a good education. When I needed help it was there. The teachers here are really inspirational and they are always there to talk to you. They make sure everything’s okay.”

Angela, from South East Secondary College, felt that her teachers cared about her and her education. She stated that:

“The teachers who care is the reason why we are still here. They may not be the best teachers but they genuinely care.”

In the focus groups, several students, both rural and metropolitan, commented on their VCAL program. Declan, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, was proud of his school and talked about the quality of the VCAL program which, he believed, had set him up for his future. He said:

“We have a really good VCAL program, and the teachers find out what you like and what you don’t like and what you prefer and what you don’t prefer. You can narrow your course down to what you really want to do. It is all there.”

VCAL programs were not all as good as Declan suggested, however. Tom, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated that:

“The reputation of VCAL in the school is a problem. More from students and parents, than teachers. Everyone thinks that VCAL is just for drop outs.”

Tyrone, a year 12 VCAL student from Riverside Rural Secondary College, partly agreed. He believed, however, that VCAL was the right program for him. He stated:

“In VCAL we don’t have tests or anything. We are doing it to help our pathway. In year 11 most students [think it’s a bit slack] and do no work ... You get to that

⁷ The name of the school has been changed for privacy reasons

stage when you fall behind on everything and you realise you are not getting anything out of it so you start putting your head down and you see the outcomes – you get certificates and it's more to help your future and getting a job.”

When it came to expectations at school, rural and metropolitan students had different opinions. Hannah, from Marlin Bay Rural College, commented on the expectations that her teachers had of her and her fellow students. She stated that:

“We are not pushed at school either. We could all work at a higher level. If we asked for more work, teachers would set it for you. But you have to ask for it. Teachers do not start with high expectations and do not say what they expect ... Expectations are not put out there for us to strive towards. We don't really know what we've got to do.”

Hannah's comments were similar to those of Halle and Rebecca, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, who stated that the lack of high academic expectations sometimes meant that students were not encouraged to study VCE, or that teachers were not aware of student aspirations and consequentially, did not provide appropriate encouragement. Halle stated:

“There is a lot of focus on ‘you can do VCAL, and then you can get an apprenticeship, and then you can go straight into work’. There is really not much mention of VCE or university from the teachers at this school.”

Rebecca added:

“It is sad that the teachers don't know what we want to do and that we have high aspirations. They assume that we don't. They do not seem to care.”

Eliza, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, also commented on the lack of expectations placed on her at school. She stated:

“There are some expectations here. The principal really pushes you to be the best that you can be, but he's the only one in the school that does. The teachers don't really care as long as you get your work in and they just look at it and put you up to the next level.”

Helena, from Marlin Bay Rural College, put the expectations in perspective, noting that, at her school, expectations were about being a good citizen and being happy in life. She stated:

“The teachers know us more personally and expectations are more about how you are going as a person. They want us to be good people in the community. I think that is where the expectation lies. It is more who you are and how you act than how you are doing in your education.”

At Highlands Rural Secondary College, Jack thought that expectations were not high and were reflected in the way that school uniform was worn and student absence rates. He stated:

“Metropolitan schools have higher expectations of their students because, as you can see here, there are kids who don’t wear their uniform and barely anyone turns up half the time.”

For metropolitan students, the perceptions about expectations were different. Whilst they put expectations on themselves, and they had expectations from their parents, there were expectations from their schools as well. As Paris, from South East Secondary College, stated:

“I do have high expectations from my teachers, because when I was younger ... I did really well in English, so my teachers have always expected me to like keep up all my effort and everything. They still try to just push me to keep on doing my best.”

Paris’ friend, Kayla, added:

“My parents and ... teachers at school like push me to do a lot of work if I am actually good at something like maths or history or art, or something like that. I think that is a good thing as it makes me do my best work.”

An area related to schools is careers and pathways, an area that encourages students to imagine future possibilities for their aspirations. Careers and pathways are explored in the next section.

5.2.6 Schools and Teachers – Careers and Pathways

Careers education was an area that was regularly commented upon, particularly by rural students. Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, was positive. He stated:

“In year 9 we had some careers programs and talked about different sorts of occupations. That was pretty good. See what you like and what you didn’t. And in

VCAL, they have a subject on work and you do work placement, so that will help me with what I want to do.”

There were some negative comments about careers counselling as well. Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, remarked that:

“Our careers teaching is [not effective]. What he does is look it up on the computer, something we could do, and then he shows us.”

In relation to careers advice, Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, noted that:

“We do get careers advice but what we are presented with is limited. Last year I set myself up with work experience. They said, here are the forms, get them filled out. No real discussion about how to fill in the forms. There was not much help from the school ... The school didn’t seem to care.”

The lack of useful information and help in careers education was a common theme in the rural focus groups. Calli, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, stated that:

“The careers teacher is not the greatest ever. A lot of people don’t want to approach him. He has good intentions, it is just that he will work around the answer that you need and, as year 12 students, we do not have time to sit around for an hour to wait for an answer that could have been given in 5 minutes.”

Soula, a friend of Calli’s, commented that there was very little exploration of ideas about future careers at Highlands. She stated:

“The careers meetings that we do, they do not show you different options. They allow you to settle on your own ideas and they don’t suggest alternatives. They just say yes, that is your job.”

Missy, from Marlin Bay Rural College, discussed the careers and work experience programs at her school. She commented that:

“We have pathways and careers in year 7, 8 and 9, but it is at a time when the future is ages away and it is not a problem at that time. I know that when I was in those classes, I never took it seriously. I still have no idea what I want to do. And there has been no careers help since.”

Along similar lines, Jamila, a VCAL student from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated that:

“For me it is a lot harder. There is nothing like what I think I might want to do. It is all about trades and stuff in this town. If I wanted to be a carpenter, there would be opportunities, I guess. But I can’t find anything I want to do. The careers teacher hasn’t given me any advice at all, which is sad.”

But that is not the case for all students at Riverside Rural Secondary College. The male VCAL students had a different view about the careers advice they received. Noah commented that:

“I want to get into a trade like most boys in this town. More like carpentry. I have enjoyed doing trade type subjects. And I have friends who are builders and I also build some stuff around home. The careers teacher was sort of helpful. He got me into work placements for experience and gave us a chance to try different places. He put me into a placement with an electrician and with a kitchen maker.”

In the metropolitan area, students had mixed views about careers education. Tuan, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, stated that:

“We definitely should have careers education earlier in school. When they do give you careers education, they ask you what you want to do when you leave ... Unfortunately, there is no chance to discover the career you want through the school.”

Mia, from Inner East Secondary College, agreed, stating that:

“We did have a one-on-one conversation with a careers advisor. It was kind of helpful but it was, if I’m being honest, it was more like he was obliged to do it, rather than a genuine conversation ... Do you know where you want to go? You do. That’s good. Off you go.”

When contrasting rural and metropolitan schools, in relation to careers programs, Bryson, from Inner East Secondary College, stated that metropolitan students had opportunities that rural students did not, and that, at his school, there were:

“A lot of careers expos and open days ... We are exposed to so much. There would be jobs that we would see at careers expos that we didn’t even know

existed, and so the exposure that we gain from that is incredible. We are able to do the university visits so we know what they are going to be like when we get there.”

Environmental determinants, such as family, friends, schools and rurality impacted on rural students, their aspirations and outcome expectations. In the next section, the self-efficacy, identity and behaviours of the students themselves, are considered.

5.3 How Personal and Behavioural Determinants Affect Student Aspirations

The personal and behavioural determinants in this research focused on self-efficacy, identity and behaviours related to being a student at school, and behaviours focused on the future. Figure 5.2 shows the elements that contribute to the personal and behavioural determinants in SCAT. These elements link to student aspirations.

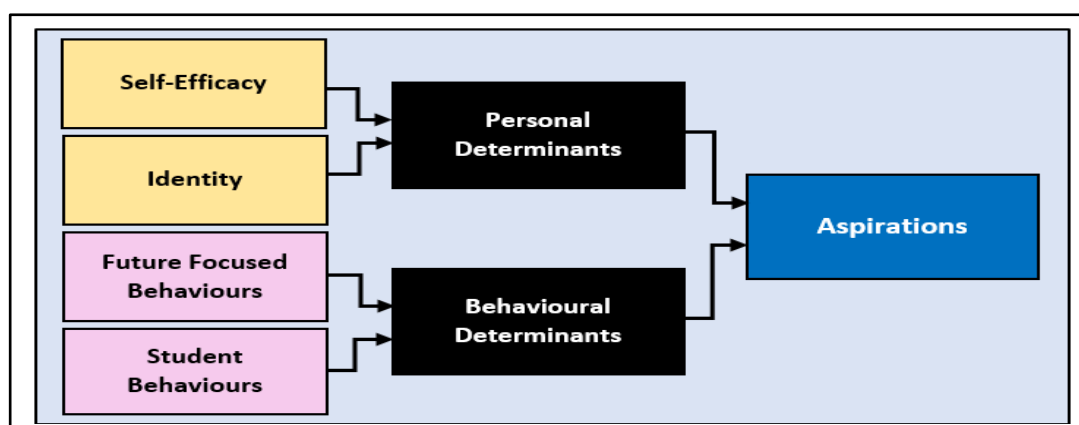


Figure 5.2: SCAT – Personal and Behavioural Determinants - Key Elements

This section has three parts which relate to decisions about the future, goal setting and success, and the influence of part-time work and sport.

5.3.1 Decisions About the Future

Most of the students in the focus groups had made decisions about their future. Their future focused behaviours involved discussing their future career with family, friends or teachers, or simply by making the decision themselves. For some, their part-time job provided them with information about possible future careers. Rural students identified with being from a rural community, but many saw a different identity for themselves in the future, focusing on their future career and whether they would stay or leave their rural place.

In terms of future aspirations, some rural students had family connections and used them to help form their aspirations. Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, aimed to follow in the footsteps of his father, whilst Mikaela, also from Highlands, wanted to follow her parents into the entertainment industry. Eamon stated that:

“I hope to be an earth mover when I leave school. Simply because my father does it and I enjoy it. I have worked with my father and other earth movers around town.”

Mikaela commented that:

“My mother and father work in the circus and in amusement parks. They are involved in Occupational Health and Safety. I do part-time work with them as well. So, yeah, that’s what I want to do when I leave school.”

Eamon’s friend, Jack, commented that he wanted to become a fire fighter and had been influenced by his relatives and the community work that he did in the Highlands area:

“I want to be a fire fighter when I am older. It sounds like a cool job. I am currently in the CFA (Country Fire Authority) as a volunteer. I’ve got some family members that are doing it as a career. I thought it was a good job, so I just decided to do that. My relatives ... have encouraged me to do this. Actually, I’ve always wanted to be a fire fighter, probably since kindergarten.”

Carrie, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, commented on the fact that she made her own decisions about her aspirations. Her parents wanted her to take over the family farm in the future, but Carrie had different ideas. She stated:

“I have kind of always wanted to do something in accounting. I didn’t have any help with deciding this. I have always been pretty self-dependent. Everything I have wanted to do I have done myself. My parents haven’t really encouraged me. They have supported me, but I pretty much do what I want to do. There was discussion about me working on the farm but, in the end, I had to say no, because I have different ideas about my future.”

For many rural students, as in Carrie’s situation, parents played only a small role in their children’s aspirations. Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, wanted to study at

university. As mentioned previously, her father was supportive of her aspirations, when she discussed them with him. She stated that:

“We all put high expectations on ourselves. No one else does though. We all want to finish school and then go to university and I think that all of us have high expectations of ourselves. A good score in VCE is our passport out of this town ... We think the city is very different to being here.”

Maya, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, knew what she wanted to do after she completed year 12. She had her pathway mapped out, assisted by being a cadet with the Australian Army. Maya stated:

“I want to go to the defence force academy ... and hopefully, I will complete a Bachelor of Arts and after that I hope to go to the Royal Academy at Duntroon, and learn how to be an officer for the Australian Defence Force. I reckon what has helped me has been the Australian Army Cadets ... I am part of that. Going to all their recruiting sessions and things like that really help as well. My parents supported my decision but it was me making the decision.”

Many of the rural male students in this research aspired to a technician/trade career. Andreas, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, decided that he would study VCAL rather than VCE because that suited his direction for the future. He stated:

“VCAL suited what I wanted to do. It’s more hands on. I was going to do VCE and I looked for subjects that suited my pathway. But it just wasn’t going to work. Then I checked VCAL and the opportunities that were in that, like the VET⁸ and work placement, and I felt that the subjects suited what I needed. It gives you more opportunities than VCE does. It gives you a foot in the door with the local businesses. It was my own decision to do VCAL and, fortunately, my parents agreed.”

Other students were unsure about their future. For example, Halle, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, did not know her career direction, but knew that she would follow in the steps of her parents and continue her education at university. She stated:

⁸ VET – Vocational Education and Training

“I don’t really have a career plan, but I want to go to university. At this point, I am not sure what course I want to do. My parents both went to university, so I am more inclined to go, because I have heard about it, and my brother has gone.”

Metropolitan students were more likely to comment that they were influenced by teachers and family in determining their future directions.

Jenson, from Inner East Secondary College, said that whilst he made his own decisions about his aspirations, he was also influenced by his family. He stated:

“My dream that I have is to become an aeronautical engineer which was suggested by my parents and grandparents. I think I can achieve my dream. If I work towards it, I reckon I can achieve it.”

Mia, also from Inner East Secondary College, had aspirations to help the community, but she wanted more from life than just her career. She stated:

“I hope to be able to do a double degree in Global Studies and Science at Monash University. In the future, I want to do some kind of scientific work, but I also want to give back to the community, perhaps in underdeveloped countries. That is something I hope to do ... My parents didn’t force an occupation on me; they kind of supported whatever I wanted to do which was really good.”

Rhiannon, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, had not fully decided on her future career, but her parents had pushed her in the direction of the Sciences. She stated:

“I don’t know what I want to do in the future, but my parents have always pushed me to go towards Science because they think it’s like a well-paid job. I do have an interest in Science but I don’t know if it’s something I want to do in the future. My plan has always been to go to university and figure it out from there.”

Similarly, Milos, also from Outer Eastern Secondary College, was strongly influenced by his parents in terms of his aspirations after he left school. He stated that:

“My family and like all my cousins, they are all employed in the army and in the air force and this has had a pretty big significance on my life. So I have been pushed to go into the army or the air force, or just try it out as I don’t know if that is what I really want to do. But I don’t want to disappoint my family.”

Both rural and metropolitan students had developed goals for the future. Goal setting and success are included in the next section.

5.3.2 Goal Setting and Success

The self-efficacy of the students was often related to goal setting and their belief that they had been successful in life and at school. These areas were discussed by the students in the focus groups.

Missy, from Marlin Bay Rural College, perceived that her future and her identity were associated with leaving Marlin Bay. She stated that:

“I do not want to be someone who gets left behind in this town and is doing the same things and just getting by. It is important to leave and do well. That is the expectation that I have of myself. I think I have high expectations of myself here, because I’ve seen what other people have done and I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to stick around and just stay because there is only boring kind of stuff here. A lot of people have stayed around too long. They had their opportunities to leave and didn’t take it.”

Matt, also from Marlin Bay, commented on what he saw as success. He said:

“I used to measure success with doing well in everything, trying to get perfect scores and stuff. Now I measure success in terms of trying different things. I am going to do a logic test for medicine in July and, personally, I don’t know if I will do well, but at least, if I try, I can say that I tried that. It is about trying something different and new. With different experiences, you learn from it and then you are more able to make predictions for the future.”

When asked about success, Marisa from Riverside Rural Secondary College, indicated that she had been successful in life and at school. She noted that:

“I think my time here has been successful. But at the start, I didn’t enjoy school that much, and it got to year 10 and I did a VET certificate, and so I wasn’t at school for one day a week, which was really good. Then, I had the choice of doing VCE in year 11, and I chose to do that, because I wanted to do that for myself. I wanted to be successful in finishing school. So success will be finishing year 12

and it was also being school captain this year, which was quite an achievement for me.”

Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, had a view of success that related to more social areas, whilst at the same time considering that tests and grades were important. He stated that:

“I reckon I have been successful. I have made lots of friends, I have had fun and I have just had a good time really. Perfect. My grades have been alright, but I don’t see success as how high you finish. For me, it’s more about other things like social skills and me as a person.”

When asked about success, Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, stated:

“It depends on what you believe success is. If you reach your goals, I reckon you have been successful ... I have been successful. As long as you get to where you want to end up at the end of year 12, then you will have been seen to be successful.”

For Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, success was about achieving her goals and achieving balance in her life. She stated:

“Success is finding what you want to do for your career. Parents say that you are not going to find a career that you enjoy. If you have goals for the future and you achieve these goals, then you have been successful. Having a school-life balance when you are our age is something that is really important. And finding a job that I enjoy.”

Shelley and Maya, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, were self-assured when they spoke about success. Shelley stated that:

“You can really set your own success goal. No one can judge you for what you consider success. It’s what you see in your mind as success.”

And Maya noted that:

“The most important person in determining if I am successful is me.”

Not all students felt that they had been successful, however. Helena, from Marlin Bay Rural College, commented that she had not really enjoyed school and that she needed to leave school and her community in order to develop her true identity. She stated that:

“I wouldn’t necessarily say that my time at school has been successful. I don’t think it has been for me. Success, to me, is definitely being happy in what you are doing and where you are. That is not how I am at school. Yeah. Success will come once I finish school and can find a life for myself away from here.”

Whilst the rural students were mostly very self-assured, so too were the metropolitan students. In terms of success, metropolitan students gave similar responses to rural students. Mia, from Inner East Secondary College, provided her view of success:

“I have been pretty successful at school, not because I’ve achieved really well or anything, but I feel that I’ve applied myself to every situation that I could and I’ve contributed to everything I can at school. I also feel like I have been successful in having a really good friendship group and I have connected with my teachers.”

Marcus, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, provided a multi-faceted view of success for himself, focusing on academic success, friendships and his personal development:

“In terms of my goals I have been successful. I want to get a high ATAR⁹, but I am not going to stress if I don’t get the 90 benchmark. As long as I am happy. I feel that I have learnt a lot whilst I have been at this school. And especially with my friendship group and my social circle, I really have been successful. Especially here, where it is multi-cultural and very diverse, I have a lot of friends from other cultures and countries.”

Angela, from South East Secondary College, defined what success meant for her. She stated:

“Success is being happy and success is like, at the end of year 12, saying I made it. And I got through happy. Even if you don’t get the best ATAR, or you don’t get accepted into the TAFE course or university course in the next year or whatever,

⁹ ATAR – Australian Tertiary Admission Rank – the percentile rank of students in Australia, used to determine university entrance.

you know that you finished school and you are happy and you enjoyed your time. I reckon that's a great way to measure being successful."

Samir, from Outer Eastern Secondary College, provided his view of his success. He stated:

"There have been times when I was not successful, but the school has helped me to become a better student. I am better now and I used to be a bad student. I used to swear at teachers, and get bad grades in year 9 and 10. It is different now and I have started to study and stuff. I set a goal to make my parents proud and to make myself proud and get good grades."

5.3.3 Part-time Work and Sport

A key part of the identity of the rural students, in this research, related to sport or their part-time job. These activities also increased the self-efficacy of the students. Success in these pursuits gave the students the belief that they could make a successful life for themselves in the future. Metropolitan students were less likely to comment on sport and part-time work as being as important in their lives, than rural students.

Cameron, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated:

"The sporting community is the thing that most of us are a part of. It is the same in most country communities. The footy club is important to me here. The football club is heavily involved in the community. ... Every Sunday, after we play, we volunteer around the town to do jobs for people. So we are very involved in volunteering at the footy club."

Stefan, also from Riverside Rural Secondary College, identified strongly with the football club as well. He enjoyed the friendships that came with being a part of the club. He said:

"This community is tight, probably like many small towns. The footy club plays a really big part in the town, through the success that they have had. And I have had success at footy too. Through the sporting aspect, there is a sense of community. I love playing footy on a Saturday. I really do feel part of the community."

For Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, the football club in his town was the source of part-time work whilst, for Tyrone, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, the

members of the football club, who were mostly trades-people, helped with work placements. Eamon stated that:

“Sometimes in the holidays, when you are down at the football club, they will ask what are you doing and they might offer you some work to make some money. Do a bit of work which is always good. A bit of experience.”

Tyrone commented:

“It is kind of such a small town so you get to know everyone. So you have got contacts. You know everyone so you can say “can you give me a work placement”. Usually they say yes ... most [people] at the footy club are happy to have you.”

Referring to the fact that many rural students had a part-time job, Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, commented that:

“Most of us have part-time jobs, so build skills with work, and skills with people, practical skills. These are all skills that, in life, could be more important than the number that you come out of school with.”

For Tyrone, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, his part-time job with his father provided a clear aspiration for him. He stated:

“I want to get into carpentry because I have been working part-time with my Dad since I was young and he says I am doing well at it. I like doing stuff with my hands. I think I have got an apprenticeship lined up for next year in carpentry and that should allow me to achieve my dreams to become a tradie.”

Eliza, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, also commented on part-time work, but noted the scarcity of opportunities for students in her town. She stated that:

“In Riverside, there is not much around. Like you cannot find choices in work. There is nothing. Like everyone works at the local supermarket and it is packed and literally everyone works there. It is the only part-time job a girl can do.”

Metropolitan students were more likely to talk about community activities than sport. For example, Hailee, from Inner East Secondary College, was involved with her church. She stated:

“My church community is like very important to me. It is the community that I have. All the stuff we do, we kind of do together and we branch out into the wider community. Like outreach and volunteering.”

For Angela, from South East Secondary College, her life was too busy for sport and other activities. She said:

“We are all so busy and some of us have part-time jobs. I work like 38 hours a week. You know, it’s hard to get involved in sport or other activities. It’s like we are so much involved in our own lives.”

5.4 Summary

The students involved in the focus groups provided insightful commentary into the contrast between rural and metropolitan students. The students’ aspirations were affected by family, schools and place. Parent and teacher encouragement were important, as were the quality of teaching, the range of subjects offered and careers counselling. The students’ understanding of themselves was also an important positive influence, through the development of their identity and their level of self-efficacy. Interestingly, friends were not mentioned often in terms of aspirations, although they were considered to be important in everyday life.

Many rural and metropolitan students were positive about their place. However, for rural students, the complex decision about whether to stay or whether to leave was a constant issue. For many rural students, to leave could result in difficulties related to finances, distance, travel and connection to friends, family and their community. To stay, according to the students, provided a variety of outcomes. For many rural males, staying in the community with a good job meant that connection to the community was preserved, through work, friends, family and sport. For others, there was the potential for feelings of failure if they stayed and had a job that did not satisfy their needs.

The aspirations of the rural students were high. Like the metropolitan students, they wanted to make something of their lives. They wanted to be successful in their future careers, whether that included further education or not. At the same time, they understood the barriers that would impact on their aspirations and outcome expectations.

In Chapter 6, the results of the student survey and the focus groups, as presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, will be discussed.

Chapter 6 Discussion – Part 1

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of the research are considered, focusing on student aspirations and discussing them with reference to the Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT) framework.

Throughout the chapter, the elements that contributed to the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants of SCAT, namely identity, self-efficacy, future focused behaviours, student behaviours, family and friends, school and place and rurality, as shown in Figure 6.1, are discussed. The discussion brings together the results of the student survey and the focus groups that formed this mixed methods research, and shows how rurality affected the aspirations of rural students. Consideration is given to key areas related to the academic literature. Differences, between rural and metropolitan students, males and females, and between students in years 10 and 12, are discussed.

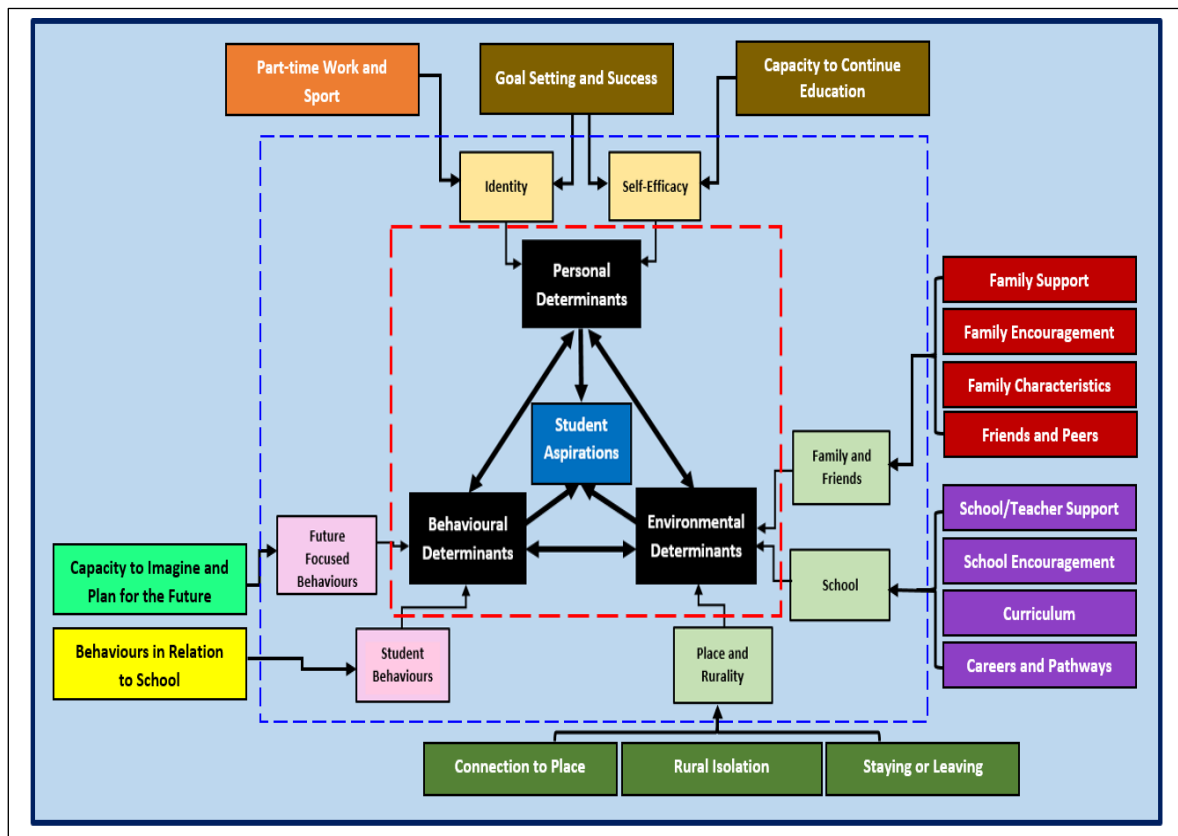


Figure 6.1: SCAT Theoretical Framework

Firstly, consideration is given to the SCAT framework, which provided the analytical framework for reviewing the significant amount of quantitative and qualitative data that was obtained in this research.

6.2 Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT)

The research topic for this investigation was:

“The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools: The perspectives of students.”

A key element of this mixed methods research was the development of a theoretical model based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2001, 2012). Bandura’s SCT was adapted as part of this research project, incorporating the elements and factors that contributed to the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants that affected student aspirations. The adaptation of SCT, named Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory (SCAT), provided a framework for researching, organising and analysing the barriers and enablers that affected student aspirations and outcome expectations. The SCAT framework is shown in Figure 6.1.

In this section, the relationships between the factors and elements of SCAT will be considered. In developing his SCT, Bandura focused on the concept of the triadic reciprocity of the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1986, 2012). This concept ensures recognition of the fact that, in this research, the students’ aspirations were affected not purely by personal, behavioural and environmental determinants. Rather, they were influenced by combinations of inter-reacting factors. As Bandura stated:

“In this triadic codetermination, human functioning is a product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behaviour people engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge upon them” (Bandura, 2012, p. 11).

In developing the SCAT model, it was recognised that Bandura’s triadic reciprocation was important. Most factors in the SCAT model were affected by other factors that were in different parts of the SCAT model. All of the factors were affected by place and rurality to some degree. For example, **Behaviours in Relation to School**, was considered to be a behavioural determinant, but those behaviours were influenced by environmental factors related to the influence of friends and family, and factors related to school (for example, the curriculum and the encouragement and support of schools and teachers). They were also

influenced by factors related to place and rurality (such as connection to place and staying or leaving). Similarly, those behaviours were influenced by personal determinants such as the student's self-efficacy and the identity that they developed for themselves.

The **Capacity to Imagine and Plan for the Future**, also considered as a behavioural determinant in SCAT, was influenced by environmental determinants, including factors related to rurality (such as rural isolation), factors related to school (such as teacher encouragement) and factors related to family and friends (such as family support and encouragement including whether the family had the capacity to provide useful careers guidance).

Each element and factor in the SCAT model was pivotal in the determination of student aspirations. For example, identity was important. The rural students in this research identified with many aspects of their lives. They saw themselves as members of their family, their school and their rural community. They identified with their community, often through their sporting teams, or through the other activities in which they were involved. Many considered themselves as being "country people" and as people who developed their own directions for their future. They had high levels of self-efficacy, developed through their success in sporting activities and through their success in part-time employment. Their self-efficacy was demonstrated through their capacity to find their future directions in life, an often complex and difficult task. Demonstrating the relationship between identity and self-efficacy, Côté (1997), found that, in order to develop their own identity, individuals needed to:

"Be involved in their own personal growth by undertaking more difficult developmental tasks... particularly during adolescence and young adulthood" (Côté, 1997, p. 577).

Further, rural students talked, in focus groups, about not finding their parents' advice useful, and they often rejected the thoughts of parents in determining their aspirations. This aligned with the research of Erikson (1968), who stated that "youth often rejects parents and authorities and wishes to belittle them as inconsequential..." (Erikson, 1968, p. 247). The students, in this research, wanted to be in control of their own futures, their own aspirations and their own careers. At the same time, however, they were aware that their outcome expectations were diminished by the effects of being connected to a rural community.

Bandura's SCT model and the SCAT adaptation are complex, but, in this research, SCAT provided a platform upon which to analyse the data and to determine the enablers and barriers that affected student aspirations.

6.3 The Research Sites

In this research, sixteen schools and 343 students were involved. They provided a significant amount of data. Whilst both the rural and the metropolitan schools varied considerably, the students in this research were considered as two distinct groups: a group of rural students and a group of metropolitan students.

Researchers, including Sher (1983) and Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009), found that schools varied. That was true of the Victorian secondary schools that the students, who were involved in this research, attended. For example, Goulburn Regional College and Marlin Bay Rural College differed in many ways. Marlin Bay was a small coastal tourist and fishing town, more than 500 kilometres from Melbourne, whilst Goulburn was a medium-sized historic town in a farming community, 95 kilometres from Melbourne. Marlin Bay had a mix of high and medium socio-economic status (SES) families, while Goulburn had a mix of medium and low SES families. The student academic outcomes at Marlin Bay Rural College were consistently higher than those at Goulburn Regional College. There were also similarities. Both schools had difficulty attracting and retaining teachers and both had declining enrolments. They were both regarded as rural. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2020) categorised Goulburn as Inner Regional and Marlin Bay as Remote, as shown in Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1. These two schools epitomised one of the strengths of this research, as they contributed to the broad range of rural schools that were involved.

The metropolitan schools, included in this research to provide a contrast to the rurally located schools, were also different. They were all in eastern or south-eastern suburban Melbourne, in locations with differing SES levels, school populations and student academic outcomes.

The results of the survey and the student focus groups indicated many similarities between rural and metropolitan students, as well as some significant differences. The SCAT framework allowed examination of the enablers and barriers to student aspirations, and revealed that rurality was a central theme in the factors that affected student aspirations and outcome expectations. As noted in the academic literature related to rurality, place matters. Student aspirations were affected by where the student lived (Corbett, 2009), the identity of young people was affected by their rurality (Hopkins, 2010), and rurality created challenges for schools (Lamb et al., 2014). As Bæck (2019, p. 61) commented:

“Where you live matters when it comes to educational performance and careers.”

6.4 The Aspirations of the Students

More than 80% of the rural and metropolitan students in this research had plans for their future careers. Most had high aspirations, consistent with the research of Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009), who, in their study of Australian rural young people, stated:

“The vast majority of students interviewed in relation to their aspirations and expectations for the future ... voiced their desire 'to be something' ... There existed generally buoyant levels of aspirations and expectations” (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009, p. 53).

Student aspirations varied, although almost all career aspirations were from the professional, community/personal or technician/trade areas (see Figure 4.1). Some students wanted to continue with their education after secondary school. Others wanted to go straight into employment after leaving school. For others, their aspirations related to the lifestyle that they wanted for themselves. For example, Calli, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, aspired to be a forensic scientist, Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, aspired to become an electrician, whilst Holly, from Marlin Bay Rural College, wanted to “get out of Marlin Bay”. These three examples are representative of the aspirations of the rural students. Mobility was important for Calli and Holly. Calli wanted to leave her community for educational reasons whilst Holly had personal reasons for wanting to leave. Stefan was connected to his community and wanted a trade career and to stay in his rural community.

Popular career aspirations for the rural students in this research included teaching, engineering, science, medicine, nursing, architecture and various trades. The aspirations of the metropolitan students were similar, although trades and the sciences were less common. Trade careers were aspired to by many rural males, whilst rural students who aspired to careers in the Sciences, generally aspired to agriculture, the environmental sciences and careers related to animals. For the rural students who aspired to the Sciences, place mattered and this was reflected in the scientific roles to which they aspired, which were generally related to rural aspects of science.

Career aspirations were mostly traditional, and those perceived by the students to be roles carried out by successful people. The students wanted to be successful in their future and their career. As Jack stated:

“I thought it was a good job so I just decided to do that” (Jack, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

More than 40% of rural male students saw themselves not continuing education after secondary school (see Figure 4.22). For rural female students, the figure was less than 20%. For metropolitan students, it was 12%. Related to this, many rural students, particularly males and Year 12 VCAL students, indicated that they did not need to continue education after secondary school to meet their career aspirations (see Figure 4.23). Further, more than half of the rural students who indicated that they did not need further education, aspired to technical/trade careers which, in Australia, generally requires completion of an apprenticeship or traineeship, including accredited work-skills educational programs at a TAFE or other provider (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020).

Typical focus group comments were:

“I don’t really want to go on with education. I am more of a hands-on type person really. I am hoping to get an apprenticeship in the local area” (Stefan, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“You can do VCAL and then you can get an apprenticeship ... You don’t need to continue with school” (Halle, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

Stefan and Halle, and other rural students, acknowledged that they did not believe that they needed further education for an apprenticeship or traineeship. This belief was observed in rural students more than metropolitan students, and showed a lack of understanding of the requirements for completing an apprenticeship or traineeship, and implied that careers counselling was not effective in relation to this.

None of the rural students in this research aspired to become a farmer. Several commented that, whilst they enjoyed living on a farm, it was currently a financially difficult time for farmers. Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, wanted to become a teacher, but stated that she would come home and spend weekends on the farm. Terry, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, stated that his parents wanted him to take over the farm, but he wanted to become an engineer.

Having considered the aspirations of the students, the factors related to SCAT will now be considered. The effect of the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants, from the SCAT framework, are discussed in Chapters 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5, respectively.

6.5 The Effect of Personal Determinants on Student Aspirations

In this research, the personal determinants affecting the aspirations of the students were identity and self-efficacy, focusing on part-time work and sport, goal setting and success, and the capacity to continue education.

6.5.1 Identity and Student Aspirations

The students who participated in this research identified with being a family member, a student at their school, a community member, a team member (often in a sporting team), a friend or an employee (often in a part-time job). Their aspirations also formed a part of their identity, as did, especially for rural students, their attachment to their local environment and landscape.

Many rural students knew that they would need to leave their community in order to develop their identity in another place. For some students, place was transient. For others, it was where they wanted to be for the rest of their lives. Geldens and Bourke (2008) stated that:

“There is intense pressure to maintain socially prescribed identities that conform to local cultural expectations ... rural communities play an instrumental role in how young people design and manage themselves” (Geldens & Bourke, 2008, p. 283).

In this research, that was not entirely the case. For many rural students, their rural community was important to them and they identified with being a “country person”. For many rural students, rurality affected and was a major constituent of their identity, and they did conform to the local culture through involvement in community activities such as sport and enjoying what many regarded as the relaxed nature of rural life. However, many rural students were in the process of planning to leave their community, some expecting never to return. Many were intent on becoming more independent and making their own decisions about their lives and future careers, reflecting the comments of Erikson (1968), regarding breaking away from parents and others in authority.

For the rural students in this research, most wanted to leave their community, either temporarily or permanently. They appreciated their community but, for many, it did not provide sufficient attraction for them to stay. The exception was the rural males who aspired to

a technician/trade career in the community. They were connected to their community, usually through sporting activities and friends.

Sport and part-time employment contributed to the identity of rural students. Most rural students in this research loved sport and their part-time job. Sport reinforced teamwork, their sense of community and the opportunity to be successful, as suggested by Tonts and Atherley (2010) and Croft-Piggin (2015), and by many students in focus groups. As Stefan and Cameron stated:

“Through the sporting aspect, there is a sense of community. Everyone loves going to the footy on a Saturday, going to watch the game. So I really do feel part of the community” (Stefan, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“I want to get into a trade ... Who helped me make that decision? ... People from the footy club. Most of them are tradies” (Cameron, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

For Stefan, sport provided a community connection opportunity, whilst for Cameron, his football club members helped with his career aspirations. There was, however, a small percentage of rural students, male and female, who did not identify with sports, as they were not good at it, or were just not interested. Some were frustrated that the only activities available in their community were sporting activities. As Daniella stated:

“There is not really much to do in a small town like this, I guess. There is nothing except sports” (Daniella, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

Rural students were more likely to have a part-time job than metropolitan students (see Figure 4.28). For those with a part-time job, many indicated that sport and their part-time job affected their study. The effect was lower for metropolitan students (see Figures 4.25 and 4.26). However, part-time work was important for rural students and it contributed strongly to their identity, as found by Maslen (2009). As stated previously in Chapter 5, Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College, believed that her part-time job was important as it provided her with life skills that would be useful in the future, and it also contributed to her sense of herself and her identity.

As discussed above, for rural students, being successful in sport, having a part-time job, embracing community life and being independent in the determination of future career

aspirations, enhanced their identity and the sense of being successful. Success and goal setting are discussed in the next section.

6.5.2 Self-Efficacy - Success, Goal Setting and Student Aspirations

As Bandura stated, success and goal setting are motivational aspects leading to increased self-efficacy. Success creates a belief in one's ability to succeed further (Bandura, 1997, p.122).

In relation to success, Smith and Skrbis (2017) related success in life to academic success, whilst, for Heckhausen, Chang, Greenberger and Chen (2013), it was a successful transition to further education or employment. For many of the rural and metropolitan students in this research, success included achieving good academic results, completing secondary schooling, accessing a university or TAFE course and finding a satisfying job. However, rural students were less likely to indicate that success meant gaining entrance to a university or TAFE course, than metropolitan students (see Figure 4.30).

But success went beyond academic and career success and included quality of life, as suggested by Quaglia and Perry (1995). For many students, success was also being happy in life, developing school-life balance, having friends and experiencing new activities. For rural students, success also included enjoyment of the local environment and balancing school, work, sport and their family life. Lucinda related success to her goals, stating that:

“If you have goals for the future and you achieve these goals, then you have been successful. Having a school-life balance ... is something that is really important, especially in a place like Marlin Bay” (Lucinda, Marlin Bay Rural College).

For some rural students, there was a dilemma related to their definition of success. Rebecca commented that:

“Success is getting high scores in everything. I think I have been reasonably successful in that area. ... But I wouldn't say I have been that successful because you can't experience as much as you would in a metropolitan school” (Rebecca, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

For Rebecca, whilst she had achieved success at her rural school, she believed she would have been more successful if she had attended a metropolitan secondary school where

she perceived that there would have been higher expectations. Her feelings of success, her self-efficacy and outcome expectations were diminished by this perception, resulting in her wanting to have a year away from study after finishing secondary school.

For Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, success included enjoying his time at school, having good friends and also getting reasonable grades. For Stefan, however, future success related to his goal of becoming an electrician, a goal that he believed he would achieve, allowing him to maintain his connection with his local rural community and his football club. By gaining employment locally, he believed that he could stay in his community. For Stefan, place mattered. For many rural male students, success and self-efficacy related to accessing a trades career. That was more important to them than high grades at school.

Whilst Stefan had achieved good results at school, rural males were less likely to consider that they had been successful at school than rural females or metropolitan students (see Figure 4.30). The rural males who aspired to a technician/trade career generally considered that they did not need to be successful at school, and found schoolwork and study to be boring (see Figure 4.31). They were often more interested in their sport and part-time employment, than they were in schoolwork. Aspiring to a technician/trade career, they believed that they did not need to continue education after secondary school and therefore, did not believe that they needed to try hard at school.

The Year 12 VCAL students provided interesting comments regarding success. Rural Year 12 VCAL students were the least likely group of students to consider that they had been successful in life. This was attributed, by the students, to community perceptions of their VCAL program. Noah's and Declan's comments demonstrated the difference between rural and metropolitan VCAL students, in this regard:

"The people who choose VCAL are usually the ones who can't sit in class all day. People who don't like to study or do homework. We don't get any homework. It's pretty slack I think" (Noah, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

"We have a really good VCAL program ... You can narrow your course down to what you really want to do. You can plan a path to be successful in what you want to do" (Declan, Outer Eastern Secondary College).

At Declan's school, VCAL was regarded as an equivalent pathway to VCE, whilst at Noah's school, and many other schools, VCAL was often, inappropriately, seen only as an option for students who would normally drop out of school.

Setting goals often motivated students to work hard to achieve their goals and aspirations (Quaglia & Perry, 1995; Welsh, 2005), and was a way to improve outcome expectations and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Rural and metropolitan students in this research were similarly likely to indicate that they set goals for their future, whilst rural males were less likely to believe that they would reach their goals, than rural females or metropolitan students (see Figure 4.29). In focus groups, whilst rural females spoke about their goals, most rural males did not. Typical comments were:

"How I measure success is, I always set goals that I have to achieve. If I do not achieve them then I feel let down." (Shelley, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

"I hate goals because I never achieve them" (James, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

James made an instructive point. Setting goals for the future allowed students to work towards their aspirations. However, setting unachievable goals reduced the self-efficacy and outcome expectations for boys like James.

For many students, their career aspirations included enrolling in university or TAFE, whilst for others, it was finding employment immediately after secondary school. Aspirations, related to continuing with education, are considered in the next section.

6.5.3 Capacity to Continue Education and Student Aspirations

It was stated (Lamb et al., 2014) that rural students were 18% less likely to attend university after leaving school than metropolitan students. In this research, rural students were almost 20% less likely than metropolitan students to indicate that they wanted to continue education after secondary school (see Figure 4.22). Significantly, this was more pronounced amongst the rural males than it was amongst the rural females. Many rural males were insistent that further and higher education was not an important aspect of their future life after school and they were significantly less likely than metropolitan students or rural females to aspire to continue education after secondary school (see Figure 4.22). They were also less likely to perceive that they needed to continue with education for their future career (see Figure 4.23).

Vantieghem, Vermeersch and Van Houtte (2014) found that females had higher levels of self-efficacy than males, and that this often translated into females having higher aspirations than males. In this research, rural females had high levels of self-efficacy and most aspired to continue education after secondary school. In comparison, rural males were less likely to think that their results at school were good, or to indicate that they tried hard at school, reflecting the research of Heyder and Kessels (2017, p. 75), who found that trying hard at school was not a male characteristic. In this research, rural males were more likely to indicate that they were bored with schoolwork and less likely to think that they were smart enough to continue with education (see Figure 4.31). Consequently, they were less likely to aspire to go to university or TAFE. But this did not mean that they had lower self-efficacy than rural females. Instead, it reflected that their self-efficacy was focused differently. Noah was typical. He stated:

“Up until I enrolled in VCAL, I didn’t do much and I didn’t try much. It was stuff that was boring but you just had to do it. Now I want to be a builder so I am focused on that” (Noah, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

Like many rural students, Noah did not aspire to continue education after secondary school. He perceived that he did not need to go to university or TAFE to become an apprentice builder, an aspiration that he believed that he would realise. His self-efficacy was focused, not on doing well at school, but on obtaining a job in the community and retaining his community connection.

Overall, rural females and metropolitan students were similarly likely to aspire to continue education after secondary school. Rural males were less likely to do so. In the next section, the behavioural determinants, related to SCAT, are discussed.

6.6 The Effect of Behavioural Determinants on Student Aspirations

In this research, the behavioural determinants affecting the aspirations of the students were student behaviours and future focused behaviours. They related to behaviours related to school and planning for the future.

6.6.1 Student Behaviours

It has been stated that doing well at school can provide a pathway to high-level career aspirations (Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Heckhausen et al., 2013). Further, it has been found that

rural students in Victoria achieve lower levels of academic success than metropolitan students (Fyfield, 1970; Lamb et al., 2014). Ahuja (2016) found that females had higher self-efficacy than males and, as a result, were more engaged and tried harder in class than males.

These findings were supported, in general, by the results of this research. Trying hard and doing well academically were more important to rural females and metropolitan students than they were for many rural male students, as mentioned previously. Rural males believed that they could access a future job through community contacts, such as through the football club and, consequently, did not see the relevance in doing well in school. Whilst 94% of metropolitan males saw a reason to try hard at school, only 70% of rural males shared that feeling. A significant percentage of rural males did not see the need for continuing education, so getting good results and trying hard at school were not imperatives for them. As mentioned previously, however, their self-efficacy was still high, but it was focused on what they saw as being important, namely accessing employment in the local community.

A related behavioural area was home study. Rural male students were more likely to miss homework because of other activities, than were rural female students and metropolitan students (see Figure 4.26). Further, rural students were more likely than their metropolitan counterparts to indicate that sport and part-time employment affected study (see Figure 4.25). For many rural males, sport, part-time work and remaining in the local community were more important than high academic outcomes. Self-efficacy for rural males, who were intent on remaining in the community, was based on their belief that they could be successful in realising their aspirations.

6.6.2 Future Focused Behaviours

Future focused behaviours related to how students accessed information regarding their career aspirations. In general, the rural students, in this research, were proud of the fact that they made decisions about their aspirations themselves. They had belief in themselves and their ability to determine their aspirations. For some rural students, parents were involved, but usually this, according to the students, related to parents supporting the student's career aspirations and decisions. Rural students rarely mentioned parents and teachers in relation to helping with their aspirations. Metropolitan students, however, regularly commented on the assistance of their parents. Typical rural student comments were:

“My parents haven’t really encouraged me. They have supported me, but I pretty much do what I want to do” (Carrie, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“My parents just want me to be happy” (Troy, Marlin Bay Rural College).

In contrast, metropolitan students often acknowledged the influence of parents. Typical comments were:

“It is something that interests me quite a bit and that comes mostly from myself but also from my parents’ influence” (Shaun, Inner East Secondary College).

“I don’t know what I want to do in the future, but my parents have always pushed me to go towards Science” (Rhiannon, Outer Eastern Secondary College).

For the rural students in this research, there was a choice to make. For some, their aspirations meant that they would have to leave their community to continue their education, or to find employment. Others chose to find a job locally and retain connection with their local community. This choice was not necessary for metropolitan students who had the option to live at home and continue education. Connection to community and choosing whether to stay or leave were factors related to the environmental factors in SCAT. Environmental determinants are discussed in the next section.

6.7 The Effect of Environmental Determinants on Student Aspirations

The environmental determinants that were considered in this research were place and rurality, family and friends, and school. This section is divided into four sub-sections related to these areas.

6.7.1 Family and Student Aspirations

Two key areas, related to families, were considered in this research. They were parent and family support and encouragement, and family characteristics.

6.7.1.1 Parent and Family Support and Encouragement

Most rural and metropolitan students involved in this research lived at home with their parents and siblings. As noted in section 6.4.2, rural students commented that their parents had a support role in the determination of student aspirations. Rural students also stated that, whilst they had the self-efficacy and identity to make career decisions for themselves, they

appreciated the support and encouragement of parents. For metropolitan students, parents were more influential in aspiration development.

More than half of both the rural and metropolitan students indicated that they received support from their parents with homework. For year 10 students, the percentage was greater than it was for year 12 students (see Figure 4.6). The differences were attributable to the increased complexity of year 12 courses. Metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students indicated greater support from their parents, than rural Year 12 VCAL students, in this regard.

Whilst rural and metropolitan students were equally likely to indicate that their parents encouraged them to do well at school, rural students, particularly males, were less likely than metropolitan students to indicate that their parents encouraged them to attend university or TAFE (see Figure 4.6). The perceptions of rural students were that parents were more likely to encourage Year 12 VCE students and females to attend university or TAFE, than males and Year 12 VCAL students. For metropolitan students, there was little difference between male and female students or those in the different year levels with regard to this.

The lower result for parent encouragement of rural males to continue education was partly attributable to the fact that some rural males did not perceive the need for continued education. Also, knowing that rural parents wanted their child to be happy, and if the student was intent on an apprenticeship or traineeship in the local area, the parents would be unlikely to encourage further study, unless they, the parents, were aware of the educational requirements of completing an apprenticeship or traineeship. Cameron, who wanted to be a builder, showed a lack of knowledge of the educational needs of his career choice, stating:

“I would like to do building or carpentry. I have kind of decided myself. The teachers and my parents haven’t helped much but my parents support my decision. They know that I do not want to go on with education” (Cameron, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

In relation to whether rural students wanted to continue with education after secondary school, there were three distinct groups of students in this research. They were:

- (a) Group 1: Females and Year 12 VCE students (80% wanted to continue education);
- (b) Group 2: Males and Year 10 students (60% wanted to continue education);
- (c) Group 3: Year 12 VCAL students (40% wanted to continue education).

These groupings aligned with the percentage of rural students who perceived that their parents encouraged them to continue with education after year 12. The three groups were identical and the percentage positive responses were similar, at 80%, 65% and 45%, respectively. The pattern showed that, for rural students, there was alignment between parent encouragement and the percentage of students aspiring to continue with education within each of the three groups. The metropolitan pattern differed as most metropolitan students aspired to continue education after secondary school. For metropolitan students, between 70% and 90% of all groups of students wanted to continue with education and, for each group, approximately 80% perceived that their parents encouraged them to do so. The correlation, between parental encouragement and wanting to continue with education, is further discussed in section 6.6 of this chapter.

In relation to parents encouraging students to continue education after secondary school, there were significant differences between the perceptions of rural students who aspired to professional careers and those who aspired to technician/trade or community/personal careers (see Figure A7.4 in Appendix 7). Rural students who aspired to a professional career were aware that they needed to go to university or TAFE and hence, their parents were more likely to encourage them to do so. However, those who aspired to a technician/trade or a community/personal career were significantly less likely to perceive that they were encouraged by parents to continue education, than those who aspired to a professional career. They also were more likely to perceive, incorrectly in many cases, that they did not need to continue their education in order to realise their aspiration. Metropolitan students' perceptions of parental encouragement were similar for professional and technician/trade careers and slightly lower for community/personal careers (see Figure A7.4 in Appendix 7). This was a reflection of the highly aspirational outlook of metropolitan students and their parents.

Whilst Cuervo (2016, p. 137) found that rural parents encouraged their children to leave their rural town in order to pursue further education, the data in this research showed that this did not occur consistently. Many rural parents, particularly those of students who aspired to technician/trade and community/personal careers, were not perceived by the students to encourage their children to leave the community and continue education. From the perspective of the students, that decision by parents was based on parents supporting their child's choices about their future, whether that was to continue education or to find a job that, they perceived, did not require further education.

6.7.1.2 Family Characteristics

It has been suggested in the literature that family characteristics affected student aspirations, particularly related to continuing education after secondary school. In this research, the effects on student aspirations of: the number of parents living at home with the student; the number of children in the family; parental educational levels; and socio-economic status (SES), were considered.

Byun, Meece, Irvin and Hutchins (2012) and Marks (2017) suggested that students from two-parent families generally had higher educational aspirations than students from single-parent families. In this research, the results were not conclusive. There was little overall difference, between rural students from one-parent families and those from two-parent families, in relation to wanting to continue with education and parents encouraging their students to continue education. There were exceptions, however. Rural males from two-parent families were more likely to indicate that their parents encouraged them to continue with education, than if they were from one-parent families (see Figure 4.8). Metropolitan males were more likely to aspire to continue education after secondary school, if they had two parents living at home than if they had one parent. The data was not conclusive, however.

In relation to parental tertiary education, rural students were more likely to want to continue education, and to be encouraged by their parents to do so, if at least one parent had attended university or TAFE (see Figure 4.10), than if no parent had done so. This effect was similar, but less extreme, for metropolitan students, and was consistent with the findings of Coleman (1988) and Christofides, Hoy, Milla and Stengos (2015), who found that parental education had an effect on a student's aspiration to attend university.

Typical student comments were:

"My parents both went to uni so I am more inclined to go" (Halle, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

"Both my parents went to uni and my dad is a maths and science teacher, so I've always wanted to study in that field" (Ashton, Marlin Bay Rural College).

Parental encouragement to continue education after secondary school was affected by the number of children in the family. Rural females and metropolitan males were less likely to want to continue education, and rural and metropolitan females were less likely to perceive that they were encouraged to do so by their parents, if they came from a larger family (4 or more

children in the family), than if they came from a smaller family (less than 4 children in the family) (see Figure 4.13). The effect was relatively small, however, and could have been attributable to SES differences as suggested by Marks (2006). This result was significant, however, given that rural families were more likely to be larger (4 or more children), than metropolitan families (see Figure 4.12).

The SES of families has been reported to affect student aspirations (Byun et al., 2012; Chesters, 2015). In this research, it was found that the aspirations of rural students aligned with the school's SES, particularly in relation to continuing education. The higher the SES, the more likely a rural student was to aspire to continue education after secondary school and to be encouraged to do so by their parents. The pattern was different for metropolitan students, with students from low SES schools being more likely to want to continue education than students from medium SES schools (see Figure 4.11).

The rural result was similar to that found by Watson et al. (2016), whilst the metropolitan results reflected student perceptions that parents in low SES areas of Melbourne were often highly aspirational for their children, and that those parents were keen to ensure that their children succeeded. In her focus group, as stated in section 5.2.3 in Chapter 5, Aisha, from South East Secondary College, commented that her parents had come from overseas and had left school early, but they had high aspirations for Aisha and her sisters, wanting them to have a good education and obtain good jobs.

As Aisha and other metropolitan students stated, many migrant parents have lower paid jobs, but they have high aspirations for their children and want their children to aspire to attend university, a finding similar to that of Krahn and Taylor (2005) in Canada. For rural students from low-SES families, this situation was not observed to the same degree in this research, and low-SES resulted in lower rates of students wanting to continue education after secondary school.

6.7.2 Friends and Student Aspirations

Both rural and metropolitan students agreed that they would miss family and friends if they moved away from home (see Figure 4.14), aligning with the findings of Irvin et al. (2012) and Halsey (2018). Students commented on the fear of losing friends if they left their community, in line with the research of Oswald and Clark (2003), who found that friendships often decreased when a student moved from school to university.

Friends were important to both rural and metropolitan students, providing support and encouragement. Stefan, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated that missing friends was a reason he would not move away from his home town, whilst Lauren, from Marlin Bay Rural College, knew that she would miss her friends when she went to university. Rural and metropolitan students stated, as suggested by Gilstrap (2016, p. 100), that “friend-based social support” inspired and supported students, and challenged them to do their best. As Jemma stated:

“I have made good friends at school as well. They are kind of supportive. If I have a bad day, my friends ... cheer me up” (Jemma, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

Whilst friends were a source of encouragement to both rural and metropolitan students, almost half of rural males, and more than half of rural Year 12 VCAL students, perceived that their friends did not want them to continue education after secondary school (see Figure 4.14). This was, in all likelihood, related to the number of rural males who did not want to continue their education anyway and who aspired to gaining employment in the local community. Their friends acted in the same way as parents in this regard: they supported the student to continue education if that was what the student wanted, but not if it was not what the student wanted. Associated with this, rural students commented that they chose like-minded students as friends, stating that, if a student aspired to continue education after secondary school, their friends were likely to have that aspiration as well. As Gareth stated:

“If you want to succeed, then you will find friends who would want the same thing. You would be more likely to be successful if you had friends who, like you, would want to strive to achieve that long-term goal” (Gareth, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

As well as family and friends, another significant environmental determinant was school, which is considered in the next section.

6.7.3 Schools and Student Aspirations

This section is divided into three parts, related to school and teacher support, school and teacher encouragement and curriculum, careers and pathways. Each of these areas affected rural student aspirations and outcome expectations.

6.7.3.1 School and Teacher Support

Most metropolitan students in this research, both male and female, believed that their school was a very good school. Only half of the rural students thought this (see Figure 4.15). In focus groups, rural students made many positive comments about their schools. Stefan and Matt stated:

“I can’t complain really ... I am going to finish year 12, so I have done well. And I wouldn’t change the school at all” (Stefan, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“It is great that the school is small so we know everyone. I play footy with a couple of teachers and it’s great. You build a bond with some of the teachers” (Matt, Marlin Bay Rural College).

However, there were many issues raised as well. Rural students referred to the need for quality teachers, higher academic expectations, better subject choice, improved careers counselling and more resources. They reflected the thoughts of Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009), who commented on the lack of subject choice and experienced teachers, and Cuervo (2016), who discussed careers education and the lack of curriculum breadth.

Rural students, especially females, were less likely than metropolitan students to think that their school was preparing them well for life after school and that their teachers encouraged them to attend university or TAFE (see Figure 4.16). Generally, rural students perceived that rural schools were less effective than metropolitan schools in areas such as high expectations, academic results and teacher quality (see Figure 4.19). These results aligned with the comments of Halsey (2018), who stated that the achievements of rural students have fallen behind those of metropolitan students for a long time.

The narrow range of subjects and electives in rural schools was an issue for the students. Rebecca, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, as stated in section 5.2.5 in Chapter 5, wanted to study Literature but it was not offered as there were not enough students wanting to study it. Similarly, Lucinda, from Marlin Bay Rural College commented on the lack of availability of subjects related to agricultural science at her school as a result of the lack of a qualified teacher. Typical student comments were:

“You get forced into subjects that you don’t want to do” (Carrie, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“Because here we have less people, so you are not going to get the subjects that you want, because they cannot offer them” (Ebony, Marlin Bay Rural College).

Students also commented that they often had to complete subjects by distance education, due to teacher shortages or having insufficient student demand for a subject. For some students, distance education was a positive, whilst for others, it was problematical. Typical comments were:

“It’s good that our school does distance education. It’s beneficial but it’s hard because you are by yourself” (Missy, Marlin Bay Rural College).

“We have to do half our classes by distance education. It is pretty hard and I think that it is pretty bad” (Destiny, Marlin Bay Rural College).

Rural students stated that their schools often had trouble attracting and retaining teachers, particularly good teachers, and this affected their outcomes and their aspirations. There were positives as well. In focus groups, rural students stated that their teachers were mostly friendly, helpful and supportive. Typical comments were:

“There are some teachers who have been here for years and they are great and we appreciate them” (Maggie, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

“It seems that you just get to know a teacher and get used to them and they leave the school” (Halle, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

A lack of availability of teachers, the limited choice in the curriculum, together with a lack of opportunities to study the subjects needed for their future, restricted rural student aspirations. This translated into rural students perceiving that their school was not preparing them for life after school, and affected their outcome expectations, thus reducing their belief that they would reach their career aspirations.

6.7.3.2 School and Teacher Encouragement

Byun et al. (2012) found that rural student aspirations were related to the educational expectations of their teachers. In this research, approximately 50% of rural students thought that expectations were lower in rural schools than they were in metropolitan schools. In contrast, less than 8% of metropolitan students thought that metropolitan schools had lower

expectations than rural schools (see Figure 4.19). Rural students commented that high educational expectations were lacking in their rural schools.

Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, stated that there were not high expectations from her teachers. She could get extra work, but had to ask for it. Other rural students commented that:

“In a remote place like this, there are no expectations to get top scores” (Ashton, Marlin Bay Rural College).

“The teachers don’t really care as long as you get your work in” (Eliza, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

Whilst metropolitan students commented on the academic expectations that they had from their schools, rural students more commonly talked about expectations of them for life. Many rural students felt that neither their parents nor their teachers had high academic expectations of them, and they only wanted the students to be happy. Typical comments were:

“They care about if you are going to be secure in your future. If you are going to be happy rather than what you are going to do” (Rebecca, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

“Expectations are more about how you are going as a person. They want us to be good people in the community” (Helena, Marlin Bay Rural College).

This was why many rural students appreciated their school. The relationships with teachers were often positive and students perceived that their teachers wanted them to be happy and secure. However, many rural students also wanted higher academic expectations and wanted to be encouraged to continue with education after secondary school. For example, Halle from Highlands Rural Secondary College, commented that her teachers did not know about her aspirations to go to university and they encouraged her to study VCAL in years 11 and 12, rather than VCE, thus potentially restricting her future educational choices. For Halle, high expectations from her teachers would have increased her belief in her ability to continue studying after secondary school and hence her self-efficacy. Her motivation and outcome expectations were linked to her teachers’ expectations, as suggested by Welsh (2005). Fortunately, Halle had the self-efficacy to ignore the advice and study VCE.

In section 6.5.1.1 of this chapter, the parallels between parent encouragement and a student wanting to continue education were discussed. For rural students, similar patterns occurred with teacher encouragement to continue education. Rural students were less likely than metropolitan students to perceive that their teachers encouraged them to continue education (see Figure 4.16) and, in particular, those who aspired to technician/trade or community/personal careers were more than 20% less likely to perceive that teachers encouraged them to continue with education, than if they aspired to a professional career. For metropolitan students, that difference was minimal. The correlation between teacher encouragement of a student to continue education and the student wanting to continue education is discussed further in section 6.6 of this chapter.

Other areas of schools that affected student aspirations were related to curriculum, and careers and pathways education. These areas are discussed in the next section.

6.7.3.3 Curriculum, Careers and Pathways

In this research, more than half of both the rural and metropolitan students did not think that they learned about their local community at school (see Figure 4.17), suggesting that, in many schools, the curriculum was not responsive to the local context. Rural students believed that, if the curriculum had more local, relevant content, it would be more interesting and motivating. Two groups of students who learned about their community at school, were the rural and metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students. This reflected the curriculum structure of VCAL, which was more flexible and more able to incorporate local content.

Student motivation and, in turn, aspirations and outcome expectations would improve, if the curriculum was focused on student needs, as noted by Bartholomaeus (2013). Similarly, if students do not have adequate careers and pathways counselling, their opportunities to choose the right pathway are diminished.

As suggested by Lapan et al. (2003), quality careers counselling increased a student's belief that they could aspire to their chosen career, thus increasing their self-efficacy. It has also been suggested that rural students often have limited understanding of the benefits of post-secondary school educational options (Carrillo-Higueras & Walton, 2020). The rural students involved in this research expressed concern regarding the quality of careers counselling in their schools.

More than 60% of rural students indicated that they did not have access to useful careers advice related to further education (see Figure 4.18 and 4.19). Metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students were the most positive about careers assistance, reflecting the fact that work placement and work skills were an integral part of their VCAL program. Rural VCAL students were less positive, however. That many rural students did not perceive that they had effective careers teaching, was exemplified by the high percentage of students who aspired to a technician/trade career and who did not understand the need for further education for that career.

Rural students were less confident that their school provided opportunities to explore possible future careers, than metropolitan students. The difference was significant (see Figure 4.18). The students least likely to think this were rural females, reinforcing the fact that rural females did not think that their school was preparing them well for the future. Rural females also commented on the lack of satisfying employment, particularly for females, in many rural communities. This aligned with the research of Dahlström (1996), who found that, in the north of Norway, rural females lacked employment opportunities in their community and needed high-level careers advice in order to find their pathway to the future.

Many rural students commented that their careers teachers were ineffective, often not qualified and did not have sufficient understanding of possible pathways and pre-requisites for university and TAFE courses. Metropolitan students were also not positive about their careers education, but talked about visiting universities, attending open days and careers expositions. They felt that these events provided an opportunity to explore future possible careers. Rural students lacked the same degree of access to such events.

Focus group comments included:

“The careers meetings that we do, they do not show you different options. They ... don’t suggest alternatives” (Soula, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

“There would be jobs that we would see at careers expos that we didn’t even know existed and so the exposure that we gain from that is incredible” (Bryson, South East Secondary College).

Overall, the rural students in this research perceived that careers education was not a priority in their school. Whilst metropolitan students had access to expositions and open days, for rural students, access to these events was restricted by travel and time.

In the next section, how rurality affects the lives of the students and their aspirations, is discussed.

6.7.4 Rurality and Student Aspirations

In this section, the effect of the environmental determinant of place and rurality is considered. This section is divided into three parts, namely connection to community, rural isolation and staying or leaving the community.

6.7.4.1 Connection to Community

Hektner (1995) noted the tension that occurred when many rural students had to decide whether to leave the community or to stay. When rural students were strongly connected to their community, the decision was difficult.

The majority of rural students in this research felt connected to their community. So too were the metropolitan students (see Figure 4.3). Most students felt safe and comfortable in their community and more than half perceived that the community was important to them. Speaking about Highlands, Maya stated that:

“It’s a great town. Everyone in Highlands is friendly and helpful. You feel safe here” (Maya, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

Apart from safety and comfort, rural students associated many positive elements of life with being in a rural place. Students commented that they loved the community connections, particularly through sporting activities. They appreciated the environment and the opportunities to go bushwalking or surfing and to enjoy time with their friends. They spoke about their part-time work and how this gave them money, connection with people and increased their self-efficacy. They commented on their rural identity, often suggesting that they would always be a “country” person. Many rural students knew that, whilst they would leave their home town to go to university or to gain employment, they would always be thankful for being brought up in a rural area. As Troy stated:

“I reckon this is a great place to raise a family. We are lucky being brought up here” (Troy, Marlin Bay Rural College).

However, Troy, and other rural students, discussed features of rurality that were not so positive. Mikaela, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, noted that there was nothing apart from sports in Highlands, whilst Helena, from Marlin Bay Rural College, did not like everyone

knowing her business and found “country town” gossiping difficult to bear. Typical rural student comments included:

“There is really nothing to do. I would like to live somewhere where there is more to offer. The town is really small. It is far away from everything” (Jemma, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

“If I was in the city, there would be a lot more pressure to do well... but here the expectations come from us, not the school” (Matt, Marlin Bay Rural College).

These comments exemplify the effect of rurality. The lower academic expectations from the school and parents reflected the nature of many rural places, as found by Hlinka et al. (2015). The lack of opportunities to get involved in activities other than sport also reduced connection to the community for some students, particularly females.

Alston (2004) and Dalley-Trim and Alloway (2010) found that job possibilities for rural young people who stayed in the community were limited. For Maggie, there were trade/technician jobs available in her rural town, but she wanted to go to university, so she knew that she would have to leave in order to do so. She said:

“If someone wants to do a trade, there are probably more opportunities living in a country town. It probably helps students who want to do that rather than people like me who want to go to university” (Maggie, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

Maggie’s comments were representative of the challenge for many rural students. There were many positives related to living in a rural town, but these were balanced by some significant challenges. One of these challenges was related to rural isolation, as discussed in the next section.

6.7.4.2 Rural Isolation

Rural communities in Victoria are not as isolated as some communities in larger Australian states. However, isolation is still an issue. James et al. (1999) carried out a study in three Australian states, including Victoria, and suggested that rural isolation contributed to rural disadvantage. Student comments, in this research, supported this.

Rural isolation resulted in difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers, as mentioned previously. It also affected the outcome expectations of students who aspired to go to university. Isabella stated that:

“Our principal says that if we want to go to university, we probably won’t, because of travel and living costs” (Isabella, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

In focus groups, rural students also commented on issues, related to isolation, such as the time taken for excursions and the inability to access visits to universities and career expositions. Typical comments included:

“Last year we were doing Year 11 Art and we took three days to do a trip to the National Gallery, so you lose a lot of time travelling where a city school can just go there” (Matt, Marlin Bay Rural College).

“If I want to go to a careers day in Melbourne which is open on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, because my parents both work at the weekend, I can’t get down there to see all the careers info” (Maya, Highlands Rural Secondary College).

Rural isolation affected Maya, even though Highlands was just 112 kilometres from Melbourne. Students indicated that public transport from Highlands to Melbourne took half a day and there were only two buses per day. That, students stated, restricted access to events and activities in Melbourne. For a student from Marlin Bay, it took seven hours by car to travel 500 kilometres to Melbourne. It took 10 hours by public transport. The isolation precluded participating in activities that students would like to be involved in. Helena stated:

“It gets a bit like a bubble here. We talk about going to Melbourne to visit universities or careers expos, but it takes too long and costs too much” (Helena, Marlin Bay Rural College).

Rural isolation also resulted in increased costs for rural students who aspired to continue their education after secondary school. Rural students were more likely to consider that further education would be expensive (see Figure 4.5). They commented on the costs of transport, accommodation and the cost of the course they wanted to do. As Jackson stated:

“It is not fair. The cost of living is way too much. In the city ... they don’t have to pay for travel and rent and food and that sort of stuff. In the end, we don’t do it”
(Jackson, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

Rural isolation affected student aspirations and outcome expectations in rural Victoria. It restricted subject choice and opportunities to be involved in visits to universities and careers expositions. It made continuing education difficult and expensive, with the costs of accommodation, travel and living costs. Further, for students who did not want to leave their community, it was a major barrier.

6.7.4.3 Staying or Leaving

One aspect of rural isolation was related to the lack of access to further education in many rural areas. This lack of universities, TAFE colleges and employment options in many rural communities affected the aspirations of rural students. In order to fulfil their educational and career aspirations, many students needed to decide whether they stayed in their community or left, as found by Corbett (2007) in Nova Scotia and Alloway et al. (2004) in Australia. Corbett (2007, p. 431) stated that “the default position experienced by education-focused, ‘aspirational’ youth was to leave”.

In this research, a high percentage of rural students believed that they would leave their community to take up employment or further education. The percentage of females who believed this was higher than that of males (see Figure 4.4). Whilst a small percentage of rural students never wanted to leave their community, a larger percentage wanted to leave as soon as possible. More than 40% of females saw the need to leave as soon as possible, generally due to a lack of local employment opportunities, their aspiration to go to university, or feeling bored or uncomfortable in their local community. For rural males, the percentage was 27%.

Wilson (2009) found that, in Canada, students aspiring to vocational and trade careers often wanted to stay in their rural community where work was available, particularly for males. In this research, rural Year 12 VCAL students paralleled Wilson’s findings. More rural VCAL students wanted to remain in the community and never leave than any other group. The key factor here, as it was in Wilson’s study, was that employment in the local area was available, particularly for males in the technician/trade sector.

Aspiring to a trade/technician role in the local area was a viable and positive career aspiration for approximately 30% of the rural males in this research. Having such a career, and

staying in the local community, maintained the connection to their community, developed through sport and other activities. For rural females, there was a lack of job prospects and, hence, the need to explore employment and education elsewhere was paramount.

In this research, three main groups of students existed, namely: those who wanted to leave and not return; those who wanted to stay within the community; and, those who needed to leave but expected to return. Daniella and Lucinda wanted to leave and probably not return. They stated that:

“If I left, I might come back for a visit ... I really don’t want to come back because if I did I would think that I had failed at what I want to try and achieve”
(Daniella, Riverside Rural Secondary College).

*“I just don’t see returning as something a career for me would allow.
Employment is a big issue here. There is a lot of temporary, casual employment,
but that is all”* (Lucinda, Marlin Bay Rural College).

For Daniella, the fear of failure was real. If she left, she perceived that returning would be viewed as failing, as suggested by Geldens (2007) and Haartsen and Thissen (2014). Continuing education provided an opportunity to leave, as many students did not see a future for themselves in the local community. Missy, from Riverview Rural Secondary College, stated that she did not want to be left behind in her rural town, believing that she would feel like a failure if she stayed. As Missy said:

“It is important to leave and do well” (Missy, Marlin Bay Rural College).

Several students wanted to remain in the community, often as a result of the trade jobs that were available, and also as a result of maintaining the connection with their friends and with the sporting activities that they enjoyed. These students were typical of the second group. For example, Tyrone, from Riverside Rural Secondary College, wanted to maintain his links with the football club and was keen on a trade career. Eamon, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, wanted to stay in Highlands if there was sufficient work as an earthmover. Eamon and Tyrone exemplified the fact that, if a student wanted to remain in the community, there was a high probability that the student would be a male.

Typical of the third group was Marisa, from Riverside Rural Secondary College. She wanted to be a teacher in the local area and to return to the community after completing her teaching degree. She loved working on her parents’ farm. Marisa was, however, unusual

amongst rural females. Of those who stated, in focus groups, that they wanted to leave to continue their education after year 12, only one third of both males and females indicated that they would return.

6.8 Correlation with Continuing Education

Sharp et al. (2020, p. 543) found that parental expectations, school results and connection to community were important for a student to study at university. In this research, the Spearman Correlation coefficients of several of the items in the survey were determined, showing how each item correlated with the item:

“When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”.

When areas of medium to high correlation were considered, it was found that rural students’ aspirations to continue education after secondary school correlated at a significant level with twelve items from the student survey. For metropolitan students, the number of items was three. The items with medium to high correlation for all students, are shown in Figure 6.1.

Determinant	Rural Items of Medium to High Correlation
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I will be able to achieve the goals I have set myself. • I think that my time at school has been successful so far. • I do not find study to be boring. • I am smart enough to be able to do well at University/TAFE.
Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get the job I want, I need to go to University/TAFE. (Metro)¹⁰ • I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school. • I intend to complete year 12. (Metro)
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would leave the town where I live for education or employment. • I never want to leave the community/town where I live. • My parents encourage me to attend University/TAFE. (Metro) • At least one parent continued education after secondary school. • My teachers encourage me to attend University/TAFE.

Table 6.1: Survey Items with Medium or High Spearman Correlation with the Item “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”.

¹⁰ Note: Areas of medium to high correlation for metropolitan students are labelled **(Metro)**

The items provided a view of the barriers faced by rural students, who aspired to attend university or TAFE, in contrast with those faced by metropolitan students. Rural students faced barriers associated with personal, behavioural and environmental determinants. They related to family and teacher encouragement, parental educational levels, behaviours at school, success at school, goal setting, needing to continue education, connection to and the need to leave the community and the capacity to continue education.

For metropolitan students, there were only three areas, namely that they intended to complete year 12, they saw the need to continue with education after secondary school, and their parents encouraged them to do so.

There were several survey items that had a low correlation with wanting to continue education after secondary school, but which were considered important by rural students. These items focused on:

- (a) thinking that the school was a good school;
- (b) whether the school was preparing students for the future;
- (c) the quality of careers counselling;
- (d) the curriculum of the school.

These items were important to both rural students who wanted to continue with education, and those who did not want to do so, as discussed in focus groups. There was therefore little variation in student responses, thus resulting in a low correlation coefficient.

In order to continue education after secondary school, rural students needed to negotiate twelve obstacles, whilst metropolitan students had only three. This exemplified the fact that continuing education in Victoria is not a level playing field. Rural students face many barriers and many of them are insurmountable. For many rural students who aspire to attend university or TAFE, they will not be successful, resulting in them lowering their outcome expectations and, in many cases, settling on finding, often, less satisfying employment locally. The inequity facing rural students is significant, as suggested by the Australian Schools Commission (1973) and Cuervo (2016). It is an equal opportunity and social justice issue that should not exist in modern times. Solutions need to be found to rectify the situation.

6.9 Summary

This chapter outlined the perceptions of rural and metropolitan students regarding their aspirations and outcome expectations. The SCAT framework provided an organisational and analytical framework for consideration of the enablers and barriers to the aspirations of rural students. Using SCAT allowed enablers and barriers to be compartmentalised as personal, behavioural or environmental determinants in an organised, logical way.

The research demonstrated that rural students are affected by many factors, related to their families, friends and schools, and that they were also affected by the students' own behaviours, self-efficacy and identity. Most of all, it is rurality that affects student aspirations, through the effects of connection to place, rural isolation, and the effects of rurality on families, friends, schools and the students themselves.

In the next chapter, responses to each of the five research questions are provided.

Chapter 7 Discussion – Part 2

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a response to each of the five research questions is provided. In each case, the response focuses on the research topic:

“The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools: The perspectives of students.”

In this research, there was evidence that showed that **place and rurality** had a significant effect on student aspirations and outcome expectations. In some cases, the effect of place and rurality was direct. In other cases, it was related to the effect of place and rurality on other elements of SCAT, namely, **family and friends, school, identity and self-efficacy**.

Environment (place and rurality) was critical in this research. Bandura (2012) stated that the environment, within which a person existed, created a significant barrier, but one that could be overcome by high levels of self-efficacy. Bandura stated:

“The environment is not a monolithic force. The agentic perspective distinguishes among three types of environments—imposed, selected, and constructed. The imposed environment acts on individuals whether they like it or not” (Bandura, 2012, p. 11).

Bandura (2001, p. 4) defined the “agentic perspective” in terms of people becoming agents of change by adapting and influencing their own environment to suit their own needs.

In this research, the environmental factors were significant and, for some rural students, they were, in fact, “monolithic”. However, many of the rural students exercised “an agentic perspective”. They believed that they had agency over their environment, and they constructed a future pathway that they believed to be achievable. In some cases, this pathway involved leaving their community. In other cases, it meant staying connected to the community and securing employment in their local community. The rural students were aware of the barriers that could affect their aspirations and outcome expectations, but many believed that these barriers could be overcome.

In developing this chapter, the key definitions, presented in Chapter 3.3, are reiterated for the purposes of clarity. They were:

- (a) **Aspirations** – The ambitions of a person for the future in terms of their education, career and life in general and the ability of a person to set goals for their future and to work towards realising those goals (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996).
- (b) **Self-efficacy** – The degree to which a person has the motivation, resilience and understanding of themselves, and the belief in themselves, to achieve future goals successfully, overcoming barriers that they confront (Bandura, 2012).
- (c) **Outcome Expectations** – A person’s estimate that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes (Bandura, 1977, p. 193).
- (d) **Identity** – The collection of attributes of a person, such as “ego strength, an internal locus of control, self-monitoring, self-esteem, a sense of purpose in life, social perspective taking, critical thinking abilities, and moral reasoning abilities” (Côté, 1997, p. 578).
- (e) **Rurality** – all areas, in Victoria, outside the Melbourne Metropolitan Area, as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), with the understanding that rural places differ (Looker and Dwyer, 1998).

Throughout this chapter, a response is provided to each of the five research questions. The research questions were:

Question 1: To what extent does living in a rural community affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

Question 2: To what extent do factors related to a student’s family affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

Question 3: To what extent do friends and peers influence the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

Question 4: To what extent do schools and teachers affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

Question 5: To what extent do identity and self-efficacy affect the aspirations of rural secondary school students?

As noted in Chapter 3, whilst each of the research questions begins with the statement “to what extent”, implicit in each research question is **how** the elements and factors in the question affect student aspirations. In this way, both the qualitative nature of the data from student focus groups, and the quantitative data from the student survey, are taken into account.

The response to each research question focuses on the effect of **place and rurality** on student aspirations directly, or through its effect on the other elements of SCAT. The voices of the students take centre stage throughout this chapter.

From the point of view of the students in this research, the significant areas, related to place and rurality, which affected aspirations were:

- i. The decision whether to leave the community for education, employment or personal reasons, versus staying because of connection to community;
- ii. Rural isolation, including the cost of leaving the community for further education or employment;
- iii. The lack of employment opportunities in rural towns which resulted in students, particularly females, needing to leave the community;
- iv. The need to leave a community as a result of incompatibility with the rural culture;
- v. How rurality affected family encouragement of their children to continue education;
- vi. The effect of rurality on family demographics such as SES, parental education levels and the size of rural families;
- vii. How rurality affected teacher expectations of students in terms of academic achievement and aspirations for the future;
- viii. The lack of resourcing of rural schools, affecting teacher recruitment and curriculum breadth, and the effect of this on the outcome expectations of students;
- ix. The curriculum not reflecting the local context in many rural schools;
- x. The less than effective nature of careers education in many rural schools;
- xi. High levels of self-efficacy among rural students but with differing areas of focus;
- xii. The effect of rurality on the identity of rural students and the effect on their aspirations.

Each of these areas, which reflect responses to the student survey and student comments in focus groups, links to an element or factor of the SCAT framework and, through that element or factor, they link to place and rurality. Using the terminology of Bandura (2012), they reflect the imposed environment experienced by the students.

The next sections provide responses to the research questions, presenting the point of view of the students. They show how place and rurality affect the aspirations and outcome expectations of rural students.

7.2 Research Question 1: Place and Rurality

Place and rurality directly affected student aspirations through a number of factors, including connection to place, rural isolation and the reasons for wanting to stay or to leave. Whether a student decided to stay in their community or to leave, was often related to the connection that the student had to their community. It was also related to the need to obtain further education or employment, which was often not available in their local community. Staying or leaving either affected, or was affected by, the selection and construction of the aspirations of the student, their self-efficacy and their sense of agency. It was also related to the effect of environmental factors that formed enablers or barriers to those aspirations.

Connection to place affected the aspirations of rural students. Their aspirations were often compromised by their attachment to their local rural community. As Bæck stated:

“Where you live matters when it comes to educational performance and careers”
(Bæck, 2019, p. 61).

For rural students who did not have aspirations that involved further education, their aspirations may not have been compromised by connection to place. However, their aspirations may have been affected by not being able to imagine or understand the benefits of continuing their education beyond secondary school. Illustrating this latter point, Alloway et al. (2011) found that, in Australian rural cities, there was a lack of role models to encourage students to continue education, whilst Carrillo-Higueras and Walton (2020) found that many rural students, in New South Wales, did not understand what a university education had to offer them.

More generally, other researchers, such as Bæck (2004), found that students were more negative about their rural community and about remaining there, than were city students. In addition, Petrin et al. (2014), in the United States, found that the more able rural students were more likely to be connected to their community, but were still very likely to leave the community to continue their education.

The comments of Bæck, Carrillo-Higueras and Walton, Alloway et al. and Petrin et al. illustrated that the environmental effects of living in a rural community affected the aspirations of rural students. However, there were ways that communities could assist students to overcome the environmental barriers. For example, if the culture of the rural community, as developed by families, friends, schools and community members, nurtured and encouraged

students to follow their educational, career and life aspirations, the outcome expectations of the students could be improved, and the barriers commonly ascribed to rural places, overcome.

In this research in Victoria, a geographically small state in Australia, the students spoke positively about their connection to their community. They spoke about positive elements of rural life, such as the sporting culture and the laid-back nature of the community. The sense of feeling safe in the community was also a key talking point. Such findings did not align with Bæck's research. In this research, negativity about the local community was restricted to the few students who found the nature of their community to be claustrophobic and stifling.

The results of this research aligned with the research of Petrin et al. (2014). Victoria's higher achieving students were connected to their community and still had the need to leave to continue their education and, as in the research of Alloway et al. (2011), students in rural Victoria often found a lack of support and guidance when it came to their aspirations.

The three groups of students, in this research, were:

- (a) Those who wanted to leave as soon as possible and who expected never to return;
- (b) Those who never wanted to leave;
- (c) Those who were prepared to leave in order to pursue their educational aspirations or to find employment, but who expected that, at some time in the future, they might return.

What was the difference between these groups of students? Did it relate to connection to the community? Was it just the higher achievers who wanted to leave?

The difference between the groups was highly dependent on the three key words from Bandura (2012, p. 11), related to the environment, namely 'imposed', 'selected' and 'constructed', and focused on whether the environment was constructed to maximise student aspirations. The culture of Australian rural communities has, for many years, influenced the aspirations of students. For example, it has been traditional for a male to take over the family farm or the family business from his parents (Bessant, 1988). It has been traditional for male students to play football and become connected to the community through the football club. It has been traditional for female students to leave school, and work in the local community. More recently, Alston and Kent (2003) stated that:

“... girls' educational aspirations are driven not only by a valuing of higher education but also by a lack of other opportunities in the towns. Whereas boys

have options including farm work and apprenticeships, girls are not often considered for these positions ... Rural girls also report the macho culture of small towns as being one of the critical factors in their aspirations to finish high school and leave town for higher education” (Alston & Kent, 2003, p. 12).

These thoughts played out consistently amongst the rural students in this research. Females and males regularly commented on the lack of opportunities for females in their local community, and a culture that favoured males. For this reason, many females wanted to leave their community as soon as possible. They did not embrace traditional expectations. Their reasons for leaving varied. Rural females, in focus groups, discussed leaving to continue education or to get a satisfying job. For a small number, it was a way to escape the stifling environment that provided few opportunities. Many of the females, in this research, recognized the fact that their rural community, through its sustained, often ingrained culture, provided few opportunities for them. Most females stated that they simply had to leave. Bæck (2004) found that females were more likely to stay in their community in order to preserve family connections. That was not evident in this research.

For many rural males in this research, rural Victoria aligned with Corbett’s seaside fishing village in Nova Scotia (Corbett, 2005, 2007). In Corbett’s research, males could find work at the local fisheries. Others, mainly females, left the community to find work elsewhere, usually within 50 kilometres, whilst others moved further away to continue education. In Victoria, many rural males experienced a situation similar to that of the females. They needed to leave for education or employment opportunities. However, there was a cohort of rural students, mostly males, who were well connected to the community to such a degree that they never wanted to leave. This was often the experience of the football playing male students, who were a part of what Alston and Kent (2003) regarded as the ‘macho’ culture of the community.

For them, finding employment in the local area was a priority. They stated that they never wanted to leave, as they loved the local culture. They had the perception that they would get an apprenticeship as a tradesperson. The social connections that they had at the football club, they believed, supported and ensured success in their aspirations. For them, the environment may have been imposed, but they embraced it completely. They believed that the environment was an enabler for their aspirations. For them, it was not a ‘monolithic’ barrier.

There were also many rural male students who spoke of the need to leave, often as quickly as possible. They were the students who, like rural females, had aspirations to pursue a professional career after completing a TAFE or university course. For them, like the females, there was little choice other than leaving their community, provided they could overcome the imposed environmental barriers, created by rural isolation. These barriers were related to accommodation and travel costs as well as moving to a possibly alien culture in the city.

Bæck (2004) stated that:

“Job prospects are so important, it is reasonable to assume that areas with poor job opportunities, in the sense of few and/or undesirable jobs, are especially vulnerable to youth emigration” (Bæck, 2004, p. 111).

Bæck’s comments reflected the situation in rural Victoria for females. In rural Victoria, there were job prospects for females, but they were generally low-paid positions in the retail industry. Females stated that there was little else, unless they obtained further qualifications at university or TAFE. For these students, the choice was a difficult one, namely: stay and accept a low-paid job in the community, or leave to obtain further qualifications and accept the costs related to doing so.

Many rural students developed their aspirations, often based solely on their own research. In doing this, they displayed high levels of self-efficacy and, in an equitable environment, they may have been able to achieve their aspirations. However, their outcome expectations were diminished as a result of the imposed barriers related to their environment. In focus groups, rural students stated that the lack of job opportunities and access to tertiary studies affected those who wanted to stay, whilst the costs associated with leaving, including the costs of accommodation, student fees and living costs, were often a barrier for students leaving their community. This situation, in Victoria, parallels the findings of Corbett (2005), who noted that the costs associated with leaving were a significant barrier. As the students, in this research, stated in focus groups, this was an equity issue for rural students.

For the rural students who aspired to a career that required a university or TAFE education, the choice was clearly to leave, either permanently or temporarily. There were students who wanted to leave for education reasons but who expected to return after completing their studies. These students wanted to retain their rural lifestyle and hoped to gain satisfying employment on their return, as previously found by Eacott and Sonn (2006) and Geldens (2007).

The culture of rural life, mentioned earlier, also provided a barrier. Leaving the community often resulted in the difficulty of existing in a community removed from their rural town, in terms of distance as well as the cultural differences associated with “big city” living. These aspects dampened the aspirations of some rural students and certainly affected their outcome expectations and, in some cases, resulted in them deciding not to leave, and continuing to live in their rural town, thus foregoing their aspirational dreams. Associated with this was the concept of fear. Many students recognised that, if they left and were not successful in their educational or career aspirations, and then returned to their rural community, they may feel personally that they had failed, and could be considered a “failure” in the eyes of members of their community, a point previously made by Geldens (2007) and Haartsen and Thissen (2014).

Overall, rurality affected student aspirations and outcome expectations directly in terms of the strength of their connection to their rural community and the issues related to rural isolation. The extent to which these areas affected student aspirations varied between students. For example:

- (a) Some rural students aspired to remain in their rural community. Staying in their local community allowed them to fulfil their aspiration to find employment locally and, importantly, to maintain their connection with the community. There were others who stayed because the barriers, which resulted from the imposed environment, were beyond their ability to overcome.
- (b) Many students aspired to escape their community for personal reasons, whilst others wanted to leave their community for educational or employment reasons. Rurality affected them, particularly in terms of the barriers, which included costs, cultural aspects and the loss of contact with family and friends. This, as noted by Cuervo (2016), is an equity issue that governments in Australia have been unable to resolve.

Bandura (2012, p. 11) stated that the environment was not a “monolithic” force. This was true for some of the students in this research, but not for others. For the students who wanted to continue their education but who were not in a position to do so for financial reasons, the barriers associated with their rural environment were indeed “monolithic”. For those whose career aspirations were in the local community, and for those who, through their own self-efficacy or through the assistance of their parents, were able to meet the financial burden of leaving the community, the effect of the environment was not “monolithic”.

Place and rurality also affected student aspirations through their family. This is discussed in the next section.

7.3 Research Questions 2: Family

There were many areas related to family that affected the aspirations of the rural students in this research. These areas included parental encouragement to continue education and the demographic characteristics of families, which in many cases, were affected by the place where the student lived. Consequently, place and rurality affected student aspirations through the student's family.

Cuervo (2016) found, in North Western Victoria, that parents generally encouraged their children to leave home to continue with their education. Whilst that was true of some students in this research, it was generally not the case. In focus groups, students perceived that their parents, who had often lived in a rural community all of their lives, were not fully aware of the importance of further education in current times and, as a result, did not encourage their children to continue with education. Rather, parents encouraged them to find employment in the community and **not** continue with their education. Parents who were farmers, for example, often encouraged their children to work on, and perhaps take over, the family farm. This situation worked for those students who were connected to their community and who wanted to stay in their local rural town, but it was difficult for the students who had different aspirations, such as to attend university.

This situation, from the point of view of the students, was a direct result of the isolation of rural parents who had spent their lives in their rural community. The students perceived that their parents were aware of the educational needs of the work that *they* did in the local area, but were not aware of educational expectations related to the career aspirations of their children, in the current employment climate.

Students considered that one reason for parents not encouraging their children to continue education was that rural students who continued education almost certainly needed to leave their community in order to do so. Continuing education meant moving from a small rural town to Melbourne, or to a provincial city such as Bendigo (see Figure 3.4). Parents, who discouraged their children from leaving their community, often did so from the point of view of the costs involved, and that they would miss their son or daughter if they left the

community. By not encouraging their children to continue their education, parents often stifled the aspirations of their children, a situation that was directly attributable to rurality.

The lack of parental encouragement to continue education exemplified Bandura's imposed environment (Bandura, 2012). For many students, the lack of parental support and encouragement, and the high costs associated with leaving their community, contributed to students reducing their outcome expectations. For many, the environment in which they lived was a "monolithic" force that was reinforced by the lack of parental encouragement.

Whilst rural students generally perceived that their parents did not encourage further education, for some rural females, the situation was different. Rural parents were more likely to encourage females to continue with their education than males. As mentioned previously, there was employment available for males in the local area, for example, in the trade area, whilst jobs for females were often, from the point of view of the students, routine, limited and low-paid. The students were aware that, unless there was a pathway to stimulating employment in the local area, their only option was to continue education, and many parents realised this as well. In relation to this, Alston and Kent (2003) commented:

"those with restricted access to education are shut out of the global marketplace and limited to local labour market opportunities at a time when these are becoming precarious and insecure" (Alston & Kent, 2003, p. 15).

Corbett (2005) similarly found that females, in the Nova Scotia fishing village that he researched, did not have access to the well-paid positions that were available to males in the fishing industry. As a result, females needed to leave the area, a situation that paralleled with the findings of this research.

The comments from Alston and Kent (2003) and Corbett (2005) resonated with this research. Rural females believed that there was little to keep them in their rural community in terms of employment or education options and, as a result, parents understood the need for females to leave to follow their aspirations. Consequently, parents were more likely to encourage them to do so. However, not all parents of female students encouraged them to continue education, as some parents were unable to overcome the financial barriers associated with rural students continuing their education.

Throughout this research, the students constantly raised the concept of happiness, as they perceived that their parents wanted them to be happy in life. Students thought that

happiness was more important to parents than the career that the students sought. Halsey (2018) stated that, from a parent's point of view:

“a school will do whatever is necessary to ensure that my child/children is/are successful and happy” (Halsey, 2018, p. 22).

There is a difference between the perceptions of the students, in this research, and Halsey's comment. The students perceived that their parents wanted them to be happy, and that success was not as important as happiness. The students perceived that, for parents, it was happiness that mattered most, whilst for students, happiness combined with success was what mattered.

Family characteristics also played an important role in student aspirations. Family size, parental educational levels and SES levels were found, in this research, to influence student aspirations. This was an effect of rurality, given the different demographics of rural families, when compared with those of metropolitan families.

The rural students, in this research, came from larger families than their metropolitan counterparts. They commented that the size of the family had an effect on their aspirations. If the family was large, responses to the student survey showed that there was less chance that the student would continue education. In focus groups, students stated that they believed that their family would not be able to provide the financial support needed to more than one or two children. Of significant concern was that rural students from larger families were less likely to perceive that they were smart enough to continue education.

The effect of family size was previously reported by Majoribanks (2004), who stated that:

“The number of children in families continued to have a small but significant association with the likelihood of attending university” (Majoribanks, 2004, p. 1269).

In this research, the effect of family size for rural students mattered. The reduced self-belief in their capacity to continue with education was of concern, because rural students were much more likely to come from larger families than were metropolitan students. Further research of this area would be beneficial to determine the strength of this barrier to student aspirations.

Another area of family demographics related to parental education. Many rural students commented that, if they attended university or TAFE, they would be the first person in their family to do so. Some rural students, on the other hand, commented that going to university was a natural progression, as their parents had done so. Many rural students, whose parents had not attended university, believed that they also would not attend university, a situation that was different amongst metropolitan students. Whilst the link between parent tertiary education and student aspirations has been found previously (Christofides et al., 2015), there was a question of equal opportunity here. The rural students, in this research, whose parents had not undertaken tertiary education, believed that they were unlikely to continue education, but they also believed that it was not fair that their aspirations were affected by their parents' lack of attendance at university or TAFE. For them, education was an equity issue, one that could discriminate unfairly.

The socio-economic status (SES) of the area where the student lived was also significant. Whilst students from low SES areas in Melbourne were equally or more likely to aspire to continue their education after secondary school than those from middle and high SES areas, in rural Victoria, students from low SES areas were significantly less likely to aspire to continue education than those from higher SES areas. In focus groups, students believed that the metropolitan result was a reflection of the aspirational nature of their parents. Many metropolitan students from migrant families spoke about how aspirational their parents were for them. They perceived that their parents did not want them to have low-paid employment and thus encouraged them to continue education. Rural students, from low SES areas, did not make similar comments, but focused on the lack of encouragement to continue education that they received from their parents. The rural result in this research was also found by Watson et al. (2016) and Byun et al. (2012). The dichotomy between the rural and metropolitan results in this research again pointed to the inequities faced by rural students in many areas, including family background.

As Bandura (2009) stated:

“Regardless of family structure, parents who have a high sense of efficacy are active in promoting their children’s competencies” (Bandura, 2009, p. 15).

Bandura’s point was that the self-efficacy of parents is important in the development of their children’s capacity to focus on their future aspirations. Whilst the rural students in this research often had high levels of personal self-efficacy, the perceived lack of encouragement

from their parents provided a barrier to the aspirations and outcome expectations of their children.

In the next section, the effect of friends on student aspirations will be discussed.

7.4 Research Question 3: Friends

There has been much comment in the research literature about the importance of friends in terms of student aspirations. Irvin et al. (2012) stated that:

“Having to move away and not wanting to leave friends or other supportive ties may be educational barriers to rural youth” (Irvin et al., 2012, p. 73).

This comment was similar to those made by Hektner (1995), who stated that friends could become a reason for young people to stay in their rural community, and Halsey (2018), who stated that the loss of friends was a reason for young people to not leave their community.

Whilst the comments of Irvin et al. were, to a degree, replicated in the student survey in this research, student comments in focus groups did not reflect this. Rural students perceived that they selected like-minded people as friends. As a result, if a rural student aspired to continue education, it was likely that their friends did as well. If a rural student aspired to remain in their community and not continue with education, it was likely that their friends did as well. This aligned with the research of Gilstrap (2016), who found that students valued the support of friends and chose friends who had similar aspirations to them.

Overall, in relation to the effect of friends, the rural students in this research, particularly those who wanted to leave their community to continue education or for personal reasons, did not perceive that friends were as important as family in relation to their aspirations. The group most likely to discuss the importance of their friends were those who wanted to stay in the community. An unresolved question related to whether those students found a job in the community in order to maintain their friendships, or whether retaining friendships was perceived to be a by-product of aspiring to a job in the local area. This area would benefit from further research.

In the next section, the effect of schools on student aspirations will be discussed.

7.5 Research Question 4: School

There were many areas where place and rurality impacted on schools and their teachers, and which, in turn, affected student aspirations. Bandura (2009) focused on three important areas in schools, namely student belief in their self-efficacy and ability to learn, teacher self-efficacy and belief that they can improve learning, and collective faculty self-efficacy and belief that the school can be effective (Bandura, 2009, p. 17).

This research focused on each of these three areas, and found that teachers and schools did have an effect on whether a student believed that they could be successful in their aspirations.

In recent research, Byun et al. (2012) and Halsey (2018) found that the influence of teachers was critical in the determination of student aspirations. Byun et al. (2012) focused on the need for teachers to have high expectations of students in terms of developing aspirations, whilst Halsey (2018) stressed that positive teacher-student relationships were critical for student motivation and development of future directions. Both of these comments were in accord with this research.

From the point of view of the students in this research, one of the most positive elements of rural schools related to teacher-student relationships. In a rural school, the likelihood was that teachers and students knew each other outside the school, and this translated, in most cases, into positive teacher-student relationships at school. Rural students commented that the teachers often lived close to their students, that teachers and students knew each other socially, and that they often belonged to the same sporting clubs. These relationships should have provided a foundation for improved motivation and learning, leading to higher levels of self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations. Unfortunately, there were barriers which related to whether positive teacher-student relationships translated into high expectations of students.

McConaghy (2006) found that “many Australian teachers begin their careers in rural schools, out of place, so to speak” (McConaghy, 2006, p. 325). In this research, students commented that many of their teachers were not from rural Victoria, but were from Melbourne. Students perceived that, often, their teachers did not understand rural schools, and most teachers left after a short time, resulting in a lack of continuity of teaching at the school. Students were positive about the teachers who stayed for a long period of time, but this, in the

eyes of the students, was not commonplace. In one rural school, students described losing half of the school's teachers in one year. From the students' point of view, the rapidity with which teachers left the school was not conducive to strong teacher-student relationships.

In relation to expectations, rural students perceived a lack of expectations from their teachers. The students perceived that their teachers did not believe that rural students wanted to continue education after secondary school or have high aspirations. As students stated, many new teachers did not get to know the students, or try to understand the rural community. In such cases, where a Melbourne teacher was in a small rural community, there was the potential for a clash of cultures occurring, resulting in students not feeling known or understood and, as stated in focus groups, the impression that the teacher did not care.

At one rural school, students commented that their principal told students that, even if they aspired to go to university, they would not do so because it would be too difficult. This exemplified a key issue for students. As the students stated, if the principal thought this, it was likely that the teachers thought this as well. Such comments affected the students' belief that they could aspire to attend university or TAFE.

A direct effect of rurality on rural schools was the inability of schools to be able to employ sufficient teachers with suitable cultural knowledge of rural schools and communities. The result was that students believed that, because their teachers assumed that the students did not want to continue education, they lowered their expectations of their students accordingly. The result was that, using the terms used by Bandura (2012), barriers related to rurality were 'imposed' on rural students as a result of the lack of teachers who understood the rural culture and the needs of the students. The outcome expectations of the students were diminished accordingly.

Also related to rurality was the resourcing of schools. Research (for example, Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2009) has focused on the lack of resources in rural schools and the impact that the lack of human, financial and material resources had on student aspirations. The lack of resources also affected the students' own expectations in terms of continuity of teaching, availability of equipment to support learning and access to programs designed to improve student learning and motivation. From the point of view of the rural students in this research, resources were an issue that affected all aspects of their schooling experience. The lack of qualified experienced teachers and the inability to offer more than a narrow range of subjects, from the point of view of the students, affected their motivation, aspirations and outcome

expectations. Rural students stated that they wanted their school to broaden curriculum offerings through sharing with other schools locally, or through e-learning opportunities. These opportunities were, rural students stated, rare, and this affected their outcome expectations, often resulting in a lowering of aspirations. Rural students stated that they believed that the education they received was inferior to that received in Melbourne schools. This, the students believed, was a result of lack of resourcing and, as such, was not equitable.

Equally as important was the quality of careers advice provided to students. In this research, rural students stated that the quality of the careers advice that they received was below the level that they wanted and needed. This resulted, for example, in many rural students being unaware of the educational requirements of apprenticeships in Australia, and therefore thinking that they did not need to continue with education after secondary school.

This was a significant finding that had the potential to affect the chance of a student achieving their aspirations. This finding aligned with those of Carrillo-Higueras and Walton (2020) in New South Wales, who found that student perceptions about a university education were often limited, and this affected their aspirations to attend university. In this research, however, the strength of the student attitudes towards careers counselling and careers programs suggested that a review of careers education was needed. Without effective careers programs, rural students stated that they were at a disadvantage compared with their metropolitan peers, having to find information for themselves, something that was dependent on the self-efficacy of the student. Some students were fortunate to be able to obtain careers advice from parents but, for the majority of students, they wanted more access to careers information from their teachers and, as the rural students stated, this was rarely forthcoming.

Returning to Bandura's view of the effect of environment (Bandura, 2012), the imposed environment in rural schools restricted the capacity of students to construct or select a school environment conducive to the realisation of their aspirations. However, the students in this research believed that more effective schools could be constructed in a way that improved their aspirations. The constructed school environment would include improved breadth of subjects and electives, more effective careers programs and better access to teachers who understood and appreciated the rural culture.

In the next section, the effect of self-efficacy and identity are discussed.

7.6 Research Question 5: Identity and Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined to be the belief in one's capabilities to successfully achieve something. Self-efficacy requires, for example, motivation, persistence in the face of difficulties, and previously successful completion of tasks (Bandura, 2012, p. 24). For many of the rural and metropolitan students in this research, their self-efficacy displayed itself through their positivity, their success in community-based activities, their determination to make their own decisions about their aspirations and their resilience in developing and pursuing their aspirations.

Many of the rural students enjoyed their environment and constructed their lives within that environment. They stated that they had success in sport and part-time work and that they displayed the resilience needed to live in an often isolated rural community. Through these activities, the rural students built their self-efficacy and this allowed them to imagine a future either within or outside of their local community. They believed that they could overcome barriers to their future aspirations. In focus groups, rural students stated that they knew their capabilities, they knew what they wanted in life and they realised the barriers to their aspirations that were inherent in living in a rural community. For many of the students, they believed that they had the agentic capacity to overcome those barriers.

The students stated, in focus groups, that living in a rural community provided them with more opportunities to get involved in different activities, such as sport and part-time employment, than their metropolitan counterparts. Through these activities, rural students met a variety of people and built up their people skills. They believed that success in sport and their part-time employment, gave them power and agency over their environment. It built their belief in their abilities, showed them that they could be successful, and hence reinforced their self-efficacy. Many rural students commented that they were able to manage their time between their many activities in the community and their schoolwork. This, they stated, increased their level of belief in their ability to succeed in life.

Most rural students, in this research, had a belief in their capacity to access the career to which they aspired. As mentioned previously, rural students had less careers advice than metropolitan students, less access to careers expositions and universities and little input from their parents. Left to their own devices, the students found their own direction in life and aspirations for the future. They believed that they would achieve their ambitions, although

many realised that their outcome expectations might need to be lowered due to the effects of rurality through rural isolation and the strength of their connection to their community.

From the survey items, in this research, which were related to self-efficacy, the apparent self-efficacy of the rural males was lower than that of rural females and metropolitan males and females. This was puzzling, because rural males presented as confident people who were involved in many local activities and had clear notions about their future aspirations.

The rural males who aspired to technician/trade careers in their local community, had high self-efficacy, but it was related, not towards success at school, but towards the successful attainment of their aspirations to access a career in the local area, and hence, to retain their connection with the community. Many of the rural males who were in this situation stated, in focus groups, that they liked meeting people and making or fixing things. They stated that a trade was a career in which they would be successful. They constructed their own narrative of their environment, and they developed behaviours that would support that construction. In their construction of their rural environment, future success would be accomplished through the realisation of their aspirations, which were more important to them than doing well and trying hard at school. They were very clear in their statements that they would be successful in gaining an apprenticeship and subsequently working as a tradesperson. As a result, they would be able to stay in their rural community and maintain the connection to the community through sport and through their work. They commented that they did not need to succeed at school in order to do that. Their aspiration was where their focus lay.

Associated with self-efficacy is identity. For the rural students in this research, the effects of their environment contributed to their identity, which was in the developmental phase. They commented that their identity related to their sporting activities, their part-time work, their enjoyment of their rural community and the landscape. For many, the decision to stay or to leave the area for education or employment purposes also defined their identity. This was previously suggested by Pedersen and Gram (2018), who found that rural youth had “feelings of attachment, detachment, pride and entrapment” in their rural community and through these feelings, constructed an identity that had a role in whether they stayed or left the community (Pedersen & Gram, 2018, p. 620).

For many rural students, in this research, being a ‘local’ was an important part of their identity. As Geertz (1993) suggested, being a ‘local’ meant accepting the local norms and rituals. Many rural students identified as “country people” and most loved their local

community despite the barriers that it placed in the way of continuing education. However, being a 'local' did not mean that the students would stay in the community. For many, their aspirations would take them away, whilst for others, their aspirations were constructed to ensure that they remained connected to their community. Whether they aspired to stay in, or leave, the community, connection to the community was important for most rural students, and the majority of rural students stated that they would always regard themselves as a "country person".

Some students, however, did not identify with their local community. For those students, many of whom did not enjoy sport, they found that there were few alternatives available. They were critical of the lack of jobs as well. They felt "out of place" as stated by Said (1999). They felt that they were aliens in their own rural town and could not wait to leave. Their aspirations often included the development of a new identity elsewhere, a point made by McConaghy (2006).

The extent to which self-efficacy and identity affected rural student aspirations varied with each individual. Most students had the self-efficacy and belief in themselves to develop their own identity. For some, that meant leaving their community, whilst for others, they constructed their aspirations to allow them to maintain their connection with their community. For many of the rural students, their self-efficacy was such that they believed that they could overcome the barriers that their imposed rural environment placed in their way, and realise their aspirations.

7.7 Summary

In this research, there were many areas related to place and rurality that affected student aspirations. In some cases, it was directly related to place and rurality, particularly in relation to connectedness to place and rural isolation. There were other areas where the impact of place and rurality was felt, however. In particular, the effect of family and friends on student aspirations was affected by rural isolation and by the requirement that a student had to leave their community if their aspirations included further education. Schools were affected by resourcing levels, the difficulty of attracting teachers to rural areas, a consequential narrowness of subject and elective choice, the lack of effective careers counselling and teacher expectations and encouragement. The students themselves were affected in their self-efficacy and identity, again through rural isolation, connection to community and the sense of belonging.

However, despite the barriers to achieving their aspirations, many rural students believed that they could be successful in realising their ambitions. They believed that they had the determination, agentic perspective and the self-efficacy to overcome the imposed environmental barriers to their aspirations.

Throughout this chapter, student voice has been the centrepiece. The students provided insights into their lives, and into the effects of place and rurality on their future aspirations. This strength of student voice set this research apart from previous research.

This chapter has also demonstrated the importance and the effectiveness of the SCAT framework that was developed as an integral part of this research. This framework has provided an effective lens, based on the theoretical research of Bandura (1977, 1997, 2001, 2012), for analysing the effects of rurality on the aspirations of secondary students in rural Victoria.

The students' thoughts, in many areas, added to the knowledge about the aspirations of rural students. These areas included the:

- (a) different formations and foci of self-efficacy displayed by individual students;
- (b) importance of careers education in the determination of rural student aspirations;
- (c) issues related to the aspirations of rural female students;
- (d) different pathways taken by rural male students which allowed them to retain their connection to their community;
- (e) significant effects of parents, teachers and schools on rural student aspirations;
- (f) different effects of friends on the lives and aspirations of rural students.

Chapter 8 briefly summarises the findings of this research and provides suggestions for ways to improve the realisation of the aspirations of rural students.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a brief summary of the key findings of the research is presented, focusing on the effect of rurality on student aspirations. This is followed by suggestions for future actions that would improve the chances of rural students in Victoria realising their aspirations. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about possible future research and a return to Jeremy's case study, and how it can be viewed in light of the findings of this research.

8.2 Key Findings from the Research

In this section, the major findings of the research are outlined, focusing on the SCAT framework, student aspirations and the enablers and barriers that affect those aspirations.

8.2.1 The SCAT Framework

The SCAT framework, developed and used in this research, was based on SCT (Bandura, 1977, 1997, 2001, 2012). It focused on the personal, behavioural and environmental determinants that affected the aspirations of rural secondary school students. SCAT allowed for a consistent analysis of the data that was collected in this research and proved to be an effective analytical framework.

8.2.2 Student Aspirations

Most students in this research had well defined aspirations for the future. The aspirations of the rural students were similar to those of the metropolitan students, with the exception of rural males who were less likely to aspire to continue education and more likely to aspire to a technician/trade career than rural females and metropolitan students. Perceived barriers to the aspirations of rural students were related to environmental factors such as the nature of rurality, families, friends and schools. Personal factors, such as self-efficacy and identity, provided many rural students with the belief that they could overcome the barriers related to the imposed environment, which included rural isolation and their connectedness to their community.

8.2.3 Environmental Determinants

The aspirations and outcome expectations of rural students were significantly affected by their environment and whether the student had the belief that they could overcome the barriers associated with living in a rural place. Whilst some students had the agentic capacity to overcome rural isolation, their connectedness to their community and barriers associated with family, friends and school, others did not.

In terms of family, parental education levels, the number of children in the family and the socio-economic status of the family, affected the aspirations and outcome expectations of rural students. Rural students were more likely to want to continue education beyond secondary school if at least one of their parents had done so. Rural females were less likely to be encouraged by their parents to continue with education if they came from a larger family (4 or more children), something that is more likely in a rural setting, due to the larger size of rural families compared with metropolitan families. Of the groups of students in this research, rural students from low SES areas were the least likely to aspire to continue education after secondary school.

Whilst family support and encouragement at school were similar for rural and metropolitan students, parental encouragement to attend university or TAFE was much lower for rural students. This was a consequence of the imposed rural environment. Generally, rural students felt that their parents wanted them to be happy in life and, the students believed that, for parents, this took precedence over career aspirations. Rural students also perceived that, if they aspired to a technician/trade career or a community/personal career, their parents were significantly less likely to encourage them to continue education after secondary school, than if they aspired to a professional career. For metropolitan students, parental encouragement to continue education was similar for all career aspirations.

In relation to friends, rural students often formed friendships with like-minded students. Where a student aspired to continue education after secondary school, it was likely that their friends did as well and this resulted in friends being supportive. If a rural student wanted to remain in the community, it was likely that their friends did as well.

Schools had a significant effect on the aspirations of rural students. Recruitment and retention of teachers, narrow curriculum offerings and the quality of careers counselling were all considered by rural students to affect their aspirations and outcome expectations. Rural

students acknowledged the importance of positive relationships with teachers. However, they perceived that their teachers did not have high academic expectations of them and did not encourage them to continue their education after secondary school. This, students stated, was related to the fact that many of their teachers were not “country people”, but were from Melbourne. Rural students perceived that many new teachers did not understand the local culture and were inclined to leave as soon as they were able to do so, thus affecting continuity of learning.

Careers counselling in rural schools was considered to be ineffective or non-existent by many rural students. A consequence of this was that rural students had to find their own directions for the future without much input from teachers. This often resulted in rural students relying on the internet or their parents to advise them. Rural students wanted better careers counselling which, they believed, would improve their level of agency over their future directions.

These school-related issues resulted in rural students being less likely than metropolitan students to state that their school was a very good school. They were also a reason for rural females not thinking that their school was preparing them well for the future.

The rural environment was enjoyed by most students in this research. However, it also provided many barriers to student aspirations and outcome expectations. Whilst most rural students were connected to their local community, many wanted to leave, often as soon as possible. Rural males were more likely to feel connected to their community than rural females, who perceived that a lack of educational and employment opportunities existed in their community. This resulted in a particularly high percentage of rural females wanting to leave as soon as possible. Many rural males also felt the same way as the females, particularly those who aspired to attend university or TAFE, and those who sought a professional career.

The effect of rural isolation was significant. For example, excursions and visits to careers expositions and universities required significant travel and, as a result, were infrequent. Rural students believed that these activities were important and, if available, would allow them to imagine possible future careers and enhance their understanding of how a university or TAFE education could be beneficial to the realisation of their aspirations. Such activities, students perceived, would also increase their belief that they could be successful in further education, thus increasing their power to overcome their imposed environmental barriers. Rural

students believed that rural isolation prevented such activities occurring as frequently as they did for metropolitan students, a situation that they believed to be inequitable.

Added to this were the costs that would occur for students who aspired to a career that required further education. Leaving their community resulted in significant expense related to the cost of living, including accommodation and travel. Also, for many students, the cultural shift from a rural to a metropolitan lifestyle, was perceived to be problematical and was often considered to be the reason why many rural students did not continue education after secondary school. For many rural students, the environmental barriers were “monolithic”.

8.2.4 Behavioural Determinants

In this research, there were differences in the behaviours of rural and metropolitan students. For example, one area of difference between rural and metropolitan students related to seeking advice regarding their aspirations. Rural students were less likely to seek parental advice in determining their aspirations, than metropolitan students. They often stated that their parents did not provide sound, relevant or useful advice and they believed that they had the agency to develop their own aspirations. Most other differences related to the rural male students.

Many rural males displayed behaviours similar to those of rural females and metropolitan students. However, the rural males who aspired to employment, usually in the technician/trade area, within their local community, perceived that they did not need to continue with education after secondary school. Rural males, like rural females, displayed high levels of belief in their ability and their capacity to achieve their aspirations. However, different behaviours related to completing schoolwork and home study were observed. The rural male students who wanted to remain connected to their community were more likely, than other students, to miss completing homework as a result of other activities such as sport and part-time work. They were also less likely to be motivated to try hard to get good results at school, mainly because they did not see the need for doing so.

8.2.5 Personal Determinants

The self-efficacy of rural students, in this research, was similar to that of metropolitan students. The rural students presented as confident, capable young people. They had opinions and a belief in their abilities. They stated that they had high-level aspirations and wanted to make something of their lives. The rural students, who wanted to remain connected to their

community by obtaining employment locally, however, displayed a different focus to their self-efficacy.

For this group of students, their self-efficacy manifested itself in them having a strong belief that they would be successful in realising their aspirations to obtain a technician/trade apprenticeship in the local area. This was their focus, rather than achieving success at school. This group of students had overcome the issues related to the imposed environmental barriers by immersing themselves in the rural culture. Their aspirations allowed them to remain connected to their community and thus, to avoid the environmental barriers faced by students who wanted and needed to leave their local rural community for employment, educational or personal reasons.

Considering the rural students as a total group, they generally believed that they had been successful in life and at school, the exception being rural Year 12 VCAL students, who often had not been successful in school in their earlier years. Rural students, except those from larger families, generally considered that they were smart enough to continue education after secondary school, even though many did not think that they needed to do so.

The identity of rural students was created through their connection to their community, particularly through friendships, sport, part-time work and their appreciation of the environment. For a significant percentage of rural males, their identity included wanting to stay in their community. Most rural females, as well as many rural males, identified with wanting to leave. Many rural students identified with being a “country person”. They believed that, even if they left their community, they would retain that part of their identity.

8.2.6 Factors Affecting Rural Student Aspirations to Continue Education

Rural students were less likely to aspire to continue education after secondary school than their metropolitan counterparts. Many barriers, mostly related to rurality, impacted on this. The following conditions needed to be met for a rural student to continue with education after secondary school. Students needed to:

- think that study was not boring;
- be encouraged to continue education by parents, friends and teachers;
- try hard at school, and believe they had been successful at school;
- want to complete year 12;

- perceive that, to realise their aspirations, they needed to continue education;
- accept that, to continue education, they would have to leave their community;
- believe that they would achieve their goals for the future;
- think that they were smart enough to continue education;
- have one or more parents who had attended university or TAFE.

The list is much longer than that for metropolitan students, who were more likely to continue education if their parents encouraged them to do so, if they perceived the need to do so for their future career, and if they intended to complete year 12. This list exemplifies the imposed environmental barriers faced by the rural students. For many, these barriers, and consequently, their view of the environment, were “monolithic”. Only with high levels of self-efficacy, and strong support from parents, teachers and the community, could such perceived barriers be overcome.

8.3 Suggestions for Future Action

In this section, strategies, designed to increase the chances of rural students realising their aspirations, are discussed. These strategies were developed from the comments of the students involved in this research.

8.3.1 Student Voice

Throughout this research, student voice has taken centre stage. Appropriately, student voice also provided useful insights into determining ways to improve the situation for rural students, in terms of realising their aspirations for the future.

Whilst most rural students appreciated their rural lifestyle, they were aware that rurality affected their lives, aspirations and outcome expectations. They felt that community-based opportunities and sporting activities should be equally available to males and females, and believed that they should have better access to quality employment opportunities in their local area. Whilst many students aspired to leave their community to study in Melbourne or another larger community, they wanted a choice, to stay or to leave, depending on what they wanted to do. They did not want it to be taken for granted that universities were only accessible in large centres. They believed that leaving their community should not be the only real option they had, if they needed and wanted to go to university.

Above all, they wanted to be treated with respect, not simply as disadvantaged students, who were expected to accept a lesser standard of education, than metropolitan students. They wanted people to hear what they wanted and to understand that they had aspirations. They wanted to have agency over their education, their lives and their aspirations.

Their thoughts, presented throughout this thesis, were perceptive. Notice needs to be taken of them. They provide the seeds of the solutions to a problem that has, to use the words of Halsey (2018, p. 24), “persisted for decades”.

In the following sections, suggestions emerging from the comments of the students in this research, are presented.

8.3.2 Schools – Fit for Purpose?

The students commented that a re-think of rural schooling was needed. They wanted schools to be more flexible. They wanted a curriculum that was personalised to their individual needs and that took into account their aspirations for the future, and they wanted the curriculum to embrace their local environment, culture and context.

The current structures, where students study a metro-centric curriculum and are restricted by timetable constraints, do not support opportunities for place-based learning, as outlined by Sobel (2013), who suggested that there needed to be a “pedagogy of place” which emphasised the “interpenetration of school, community and environment” (Sobel, 2013, p. 17). Such a pedagogy would ensure that learning was based on the environment, people, history and cultural aspects of the area, as suggested by Green (2015). A rural education needs to blend skills in literacy and numeracy, with an understanding of rural life, local and global issues, sustainability, creativity and entrepreneurialism, alongside an understanding of living and working in a modern global world.

Flexibility is the key. The rural students in this study had differing needs. In many schools, however, the education diet was the same for every student. It is time for innovation, time to be flexible and creative with how rural schools educate their students. It is time for student learning to be personalised for each individual student. The students deserve no less.

8.3.3 Communities of Practice

Rural students in this research were disappointed that rural schools did not work together to offer students a broader range of curriculum options. Students commented that

different schools had different strengths and should collaborate and cooperate better for the benefit of the students, a thought that echoed the Country Education Partnership (CEP, 2020) in Victoria, which asked:

“Why can’t rural schools work together to provide senior schooling so that we gain access to a wide selection of subjects and programs?” (CEP, 2020).

Rural schools generally work individually and in competition with each other. Close collaboration between schools is unusual. Opportunities exist to develop communities of practice where schools adopt a community way of thinking and start to own the outcomes of all of the students in the local area. Halle, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, stated that “we should share rather than being competitive with local schools”.

In Victoria, cooperation between schools is not commonplace. Riverside Rural Secondary College provided an example of good practice in this regard, sharing some senior subjects with the local Catholic college. This is not the norm, however. Such sharing is possible in all areas, and cooperative arrangements could benefit the students, by increasing the range of subjects offered at all year levels. Possibilities could go beyond sharing subject offerings. Sharing careers and pathways resources, homework groups and staff professional learning would also be of benefit. Such arrangements would alleviate some elements of rural isolation.

Schools also need to work more with their local community. As Tieken (2014) commented, the best schools serve the needs of the community and the students. A rural school should embrace its community. Learning should include an understanding of the local community, and should contribute to it as well. The participation of rural students in local community projects, related to different areas of the curriculum, would be inspiring and motivational for students, as stated by Avery (2013), who focused on community-based Science projects, employing social learning, where groups worked together for a common purpose. Working with the community would provide learning, applicable in the real world, and relevant to the lives and needs of students, as suggested by Dewey (1959). It would strengthen student connection to the community.

There is also a need for schools to specialise in areas such as STEM¹¹, the performing and creative arts, rural studies, agriculture and technology, as suggested by Harris and de Bruin

¹¹ STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

(2017). If rural clusters of schools were developed, and each school developed a centre of excellence, it would increase the subject selection possibilities for students, encourage innovative pedagogies as suggested by Fuller (2020), and give a boost to the schools, the community and the students through shared practices and resources. Such a scheme would allow for a more creative approach to learning, provide a range of specialisations, and would increase the relevance of education for the students. Schools would also attract teachers to the school, teachers who were inspired by the innovative programs offered by the schools, thus improving the quality of education available in the local area.

Whilst embracing the local community is crucial, young people identify with a variety of worlds: local; global; virtual. The world of young people is governed to a great degree by technology (Corbett & Vibert, 2010; Sellar, 2013), an area covered in the next section.

8.3.4 Technology

When Rebecca, from Highlands Rural Secondary College, rued the fact that her school's video-conferencing facilities were sitting dormant in a classroom, gathering dust, she highlighted an area that was being missed in many rural schools, namely, technology.

Victorian rural secondary schools have, for many years, had access to digital technologies, including video-conferencing equipment, with the expectation that technology would be used to enhance educational opportunities, including increasing the range of subjects offered. In most rural schools, that has not happened to any great degree. Through technology, educational opportunities are extensive. There are possibilities to link, through digital technologies, to major industries, research centres, scientists, writers or artists. Technology would provide opportunities to link schools across the world and to share ideas and opportunities for schools to work with other schools, local businesses and industry. The possibilities are endless and depend upon imagination and willingness to try something new.

Barriers to using technology exist, however. They relate to poor internet access, the logistics of timetabling classes at different schools, and lack of expertise amongst teachers and school leaders. The result is that technology is often underutilised, resulting in students missing out on possible educational experiences. This, in turn, limits student aspirations which are based on what the student knows. As previously mentioned, more flexible arrangements are required in schools. Those arrangements should maximise the appropriate use of technology as a tool to improve student learning and aspirations.

It is not just the technology that matters, however. It is about innovation, creativity and appropriate pedagogical practice, as suggested by Sotiriou, Riviou, Cherouvis, Chelioti and Bogner (2016). It is about accessing a plethora of ideas and strategies, having a lens on the global world and providing students with a world view. However, it needs to be delivered effectively. Barter (2013) noted benefits for teachers, in terms of workload, as well as for students, in terms of subject selection and educational experiences.

In 2020, as a result of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic, technology was used extensively in many Australian schools, often where it had not been used before. Schools and governments must explore the benefits of online learning obtained from this crisis, and to embed the best elements into the everyday teaching practices at every school. This would be of particular benefit to rural students. However, to implement such a program effectively requires quality leadership, reliable technology and high performing teachers who can and will adapt to innovative practices of teaching.

Above all, this is about leadership. Brave leadership creates change and disrupts the status quo for the benefit of the students. As noted by Sahlberg, school leaders should be:

“encouraging teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches – In other words, making the school a creative and inspiring place to teach and learn”
(Sahlberg, 2011, p. 182).

Interestingly, Sahlberg’s comment aligned with a comment made in a focus group in this research, by Matt, who stated:

“It would be good to have a school where students enjoyed learning and were inspired and passionate about their learning” (Matt, Marlin Bay Rural College).

8.3.5 Teachers

The students, in this research, commented that rural schools had difficulty attracting and retaining teachers and that this often resulted in rural schools employing younger teachers, often new graduates, who lacked teaching experience, and many of whom left after a short time. This, in the eyes of the students, affected the quality of their educational experience and, in turn, affected their outcome expectations.

Murnane and Steele (2007) stated that, in the United States, students at risk (including rural students) often had less experienced and less able teachers, which reduced school

effectiveness. In Australia, McConaghy stated that “most Australian teachers begin their teaching career in rural schools, out of place” (McConaghy, 2006, p. 325). Halsey (2018) noted that staffing was one of the most serious issues for rural schools, a point also made by the students in this research.

In 2019, the Victorian Government established the payment of incentives for teachers to stay in “hard to staff” locations, including some in rural locations (Department of Education and Training, 2020). The availability of such positions was relatively small, and whilst this will make a difference in some schools, it is unlikely to make the difference that is needed in rural Victorian schools, with most rural schools attracting, at most, one or two teachers, or possibly losing a good teacher to another rural school, under the scheme. A strategy more likely to improve the staffing situation would be to encourage, through incentive payments, rural students to study a teaching degree and to return to a rural community to teach, as suggested by Cuervo and Acquaro (2018). Alongside this, a local community strategy of welcoming and looking after new teachers would enhance the rural experience for teachers.

A better solution, however, would be to focus on the students, rather than the teachers. Improving the education offered to rural students, in a school that is innovative, well led, and where excellence in personalised learning, course selection and specialisations are provided for all students, and where state-of-the-art technologies are used extensively, would, for many teachers, be an enticement to become a part of that school. The school would attract quality teachers and innovative leaders. This would, in turn, address the staffing profile and student concerns about high academic expectations.

Along with improved structures in schools, high aspirations require students to be able to imagine a range of positive futures for themselves, as stated by Dalley-Trim and Alloway (2010). The area of careers education in schools is covered in the next section.

8.3.6 Careers and Pathways

Several rural students commented that their school did not provide opportunities to imagine possible future careers. In focus groups, the students stated that the careers teaching that they received was non-existent or not very helpful. In some cases, the careers teacher was not qualified and did not understand the range of courses and pre-requisites that the students needed to know.

From the students' point of view, careers counselling, in many rural schools, has not provided the support that the students wanted. As stated by Sellar et al. (2011) and Fleming and Grace (2017), careers education is essential for students to be able to imagine a range of future careers for themselves. Students need teachers who understand their aspirations, have appropriate expectations of them, and a belief that they could realise their aspirations. As Quaglia stated, aspirations with expectations create a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Quaglia, 1989, p. 8).

The rural students in this research believed that their careers counsellors, where they existed, did not provide useful advice, or opportunities to explore different possibilities. For some rural students, particularly those interested in technician/trade careers, this resulted in a lack of understanding of what was required educationally for them to realise their career aspirations.

A fully trained careers counsellor, with the capacity to provide up-dated advice and counselling, is needed in every school, rural and metropolitan. The careers counsellor needs to provide high quality advice, supported by student visits to universities and TAFE colleges, and state-of-the-art careers expositions. This would provide opportunities for students to understand the options available to them, including traditional careers and those that are new, innovative, entrepreneurial and creative, as suggested by Zhao (2015). In addition, quality careers and pathways advice in rural areas should embrace the strengths of the local community, seeking out expertise and resources that would enhance student understanding of employment available within and beyond the local community.

One area that prevents many teachers from applying to teach to rural schools, and which affects student aspirations and outcome expectations, relates to the lack of infrastructure available in many rural communities in Victoria. This is addressed in the next section.

8.3.7 Rural Infrastructure

Rural students commented that the infrastructure within their rural community affected their outcome expectations. Comments related to, for example, train and bus transport, availability of employment opportunities and having to leave the community to attend university or TAFE.

Drummond et al. (2011) commented on the importance of a university presence in rural areas, in order to provide opportunities for students who did not want to leave their rural home, or who were daunted by crowds of people in large cities. Whilst some students are able to find courses at universities in rural Victoria, for many the choice of courses is limited, and hence, to complete courses that match their aspirations, many rural students need to attend a university in Melbourne, where more courses are available. Rural students, in this research, who wanted to continue education after secondary school, faced a dilemma, namely: leave home to do the course of their choice, or stay at home and not be able to complete the course which allowed them to realise their aspirations.

Whilst building more universities is unlikely, improvement in rural educational infrastructure is needed. Development of community education hubs, like those in New South Wales (Davis & Taylor, 2019), that provide resources allowing students to access a university education, would allow students to remain in their local community if that was what they wanted. Such hubs would enhance links between education, business and the local community, as suggested by Ellis, Watkinson and Sawyer (2010), who described a South Australian program where universities used local hubs to deliver a mix of online and face-to-face programs for rural students, thus benefitting the university and the local community.

If these hubs were available in Victoria, the need for students to leave their community would be reduced, thus elevating the self-esteem and intellectual capacity of the community. Hubs could also provide extra services such as careers expositions, linking schools with local business and industry, as well as provision of adult education and job retraining.

A second area of infrastructure relates to the availability of jobs in rural areas. Rural students, in this research, felt that there was a lack of employment opportunities, particularly for females, reflecting the thoughts of Alston (2004), who called for improved tertiary opportunities, increased government infrastructure and better social networks in rural areas. In this research, rural students felt that, for rural females, the community offered less than it did for males. They perceived that males had access to technician/trade careers and a range of sporting activities, but there were less community activities for females, and a lack of employment possibilities, other than working in the retail or hospitality areas. As Alston (2004), and the students in this research stated, without improved access to a variety of interesting jobs to attract females, the balance between males and females in rural communities

will continue to become unbalanced, as many females will leave and not return. Such an improvement in job availability would require community and government support.

A third critical area of infrastructure is that of travel, something that the students mentioned frequently. Whilst there are currently improvements to railway infrastructure in Melbourne, in rural Victoria, trains are infrequent, late or cancelled with great regularity. Little has changed over many years, as explained by McDonald and Green (1996). Further, as suggested by McArthur, Thorsen and Ubøe (2014), a lack of appropriate travel infrastructure can lead to increasing de-population of rural areas.

As previously mentioned, several universities exist in rural Victoria but, for many students, they are not accessible unless the student leaves home. Improved transport infrastructure would remedy this to some degree. A major upgrade, to transport in rural Victoria, would allow more rural students to aspire to careers that required education beyond secondary school. In combination with effective community hubs, rural students would have real choice of educational opportunities, whether they stayed in their community or whether they left. They would have access to further education with either choice.

Improved transport infrastructure would also allow rural students to have easier access to careers expositions, cultural activities and visits to universities during their secondary school years, thus enhancing their ability to imagine future career possibilities.

8.3.8 Summary

There are many ways to improve the outcome expectations of rural students, so that they will realise their aspirations. It will take some new thinking, however. Appointment of a rural ambassador, prepared to meet with students, teachers and community members, to find a way forward, would be an excellent first step.

Redesigning rural secondary schools, including a review of how they are structured, their curriculum and their teaching pedagogy, is necessary. Clustering and specialisation are essential. There is also a need to improve provision of access to tertiary education, through learning and community hubs, thus providing opportunities for students to access university or TAFE courses, without the need to leave home, as is currently the only option for many rural students.

There is also a need to build the agentic capacity of rural students through developing strategies related to student voice and student empowerment over their education. Further, improvement in infrastructure, related to travel, employment and education, is critical if rural students are to achieve the equity with metropolitan students that they deserve.

8.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This research was extensive, examining the enablers and barriers affecting student aspirations, using the SCAT framework (see Figure 3.3) and employing student voice as a central platform. The research was based on a point in time, taking into consideration the results from student surveys and focus groups that were conducted within a five-month period.

Whilst using student voice to study students from a more extensive group of rural schools, and to delineate results from different types of rural schools, would be beneficial, it would also be useful to conduct focus groups or interviews with students in year 10 and then to follow up with the same students in year 12 and then again after they had left their schools. This would use student voice to illuminate the journey of the students through the latter years of secondary school and into university, TAFE, apprenticeships or employment.

Such a study would allow a deeper examination of how student aspirations and outcome expectations, in Victoria, changed over time, as suggested by Gemici et al. (2014).

Another suggestion for future research relates to the variety of rural secondary schools used in this research. An extension of the analysis of the data could include a comparison between the rural schools involved, thus providing insights into the different influences on student aspirations that arise from different rural contexts.

In the discussion of the results of this research, it was noted that rural students from larger families were less likely to want to continue with their education after secondary school, and were less likely to consider that they were smart enough to do so. An interesting future study could relate to consideration of how family size affects the aspirations of rural students. This would be particularly interesting given that, in this research, rural students were more likely to come from larger families than metropolitan students.

8.5 Case Study: Jeremy's Story

This thesis commenced with the narrative of Jeremy, a rural student who loved living in his rural community. It is appropriate to conclude with a reflection of Jeremy's story.

Jeremy aspired to go to university and to become a scientist. Had he not left Marlin Bay to go to school in Melbourne for years 11 and 12, Jeremy believed that he would still have aspired to go to university. Why was he able to achieve his goal of studying at university?

Many of the enablers for Jeremy related to the areas listed in the correlation results for rural students (see section 8.2.6), namely:

- (a) he tried hard at school and did not find study to be boring;
- (b) he thought that he had been successful at school, and that he was smart enough to be successful at university;
- (c) he knew that he needed to go to university to become a scientist;
- (d) his parents, friends and teachers encouraged him to continue education;
- (e) his parents both attended university;
- (f) he knew that he would leave Marlin Bay, to go to university in Melbourne;
- (g) he believed he would achieve his goals for the future.

For Jeremy, there were many enablers and few barriers to him attending university. Unfortunately, this is not true for most of the rural students in this research. The barriers for them are real and, in many cases, insurmountable.

Jeremy eventually returned to Marlin Bay, not as a scientist, but as an English teacher. He returned with his family, knowing that a rural town was a great place to bring up children. Jeremy knows he will stay in Marlin Bay. He identifies with his rural community, and rurality is an integral part of him.

Whether any of the students involved in this research follow Jeremy's lead, only time will tell. Marisa from Riverside Rural Secondary College aspired to go to university and then return to Riverside, or a town nearby, as a teacher, and to do some work on her parents' farm. Most other rural students stated that they would stay in the community and get a job, or leave and never return.

What has become clear through this research is that the aspirations of rural students are similar to those of metropolitan students, except for the large number of rural males who aspire to technician/trade careers in their community. However, there are differences that are related to aspirations, and also to outcome expectations. Those differences are defined by rurality, and barriers which are related to schools, families, friends, rural isolation and rural connection.

8.6 Afterword

This thesis could not be concluded without mentioning the bush-fires that took a heavy toll on eastern Victoria during January 2020. The fires destroyed property and claimed many lives. This research was conducted in rural areas which were affected by the fires. At least five of the rural schools in this research were affected. Some had buildings burnt, others had smoke damage. From several of the schools, there were staff and students who lost their homes and, for many, the trauma will stay with them long into the future. Jeremy's school was affected, many houses in Marlin Bay were destroyed and a number of students have left the area as a result of the bush-fires. Jeremy is still there, however.

My thoughts are constantly with those who were affected.

References

- Agger, C., Meece, J., & Byun, S. (2018). The influences of family and place on rural adolescents' educational aspirations and post-secondary enrollment. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47(12), 2554-2568. doi:10.1007/s10964-018-0893-7
- Ahuja, A. (2016). A study of self-efficacy among secondary school students in relation to educational aspiration and academic achievement. *Educational Quest: An International Journal of Education and Applied Social Sciences*, 7(3), 275-283. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com-au>
- Alloway, N., & Dalley-Trim, L. (2009). High and dry in rural Australia: Obstacles to student aspirations and expectations. *Rural Society*, 19(1), 49-59. doi:10.5172/rsj.351.19.1.49
- Alloway, N., Gilbert, P., Gilbert, R., & Muspratt, S. (2004). *Factors impacting on student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Education Science and Training. Retrieved from <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/20278>
- Alston, M. (2004). 'You don't want to be a check-out chick all your life': The out-migration of young people from Australia's small rural towns. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 39(3), 299-313. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com-au>
- Alston, M. M, & Kent, J. (2003). Educational access for Australia's rural young people: A case of social exclusion. *The Australian Journal of Education*, 47(1), 5-17. doi:10.1177/000494410304700102
- Amini, C., & Nivorozhkin, E. (2015). The urban–rural divide in educational outcomes: Evidence from Russia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 44, 118-133. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.07.006
- Anderson, K., Giesecke, J., & Valenzuela, E. (2008). *How would global trade liberalization affect rural and regional incomes in Australia?* St. Louis, Missouri: Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

- Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition. In V. Rao and M. Walton (Eds.), *Culture and public action* (pp. 59-84). Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press.
- Archer, L. (2013). *Aspires: Young people's science and careers aspirations, age 10-14. Final report*. London, England: Department of Education and Professional Studies.
Retrieved from <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/aspires/ASPIRES-final-report-December-2013.pdf>
- Archer, L., DeWitt, J., & Wong, B. (2014). Spheres of influence: What shapes young people's aspirations at age 12/13 and what are the implications for education policy? *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(1), 58-85. doi:10.1080/02680939.2013.790079
- Archer, L., & Hutchings, M. (2000). 'Bettering yourself'? Discourses of risk, cost and benefit in ethnically diverse, young working-class non-participants' constructions of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(4), 555-574.
doi:10.1080/713655373
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2013). *Australian and New Zealand standard classification of occupations, Version 1.2*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ANZSCO>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2019). *Australian demographics statistics – report 3010.0*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2020). *Remoteness structure*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs>
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2014). *What does the ICSEA value mean?* Canberra, Australia: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. Retrieved from https://acaraweb.blob.core.windows.net/resources/About_ICSEA_2014.pdf
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2019). *MySchool* (Online). Retrieved from <https://myschool.edu.au/>

- Australian Governments Education Council. (2019). *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration*. Carlton South, Victoria: Education Council Secretariat. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/Alice-Springs--Mparntwe--Education-Declaration.aspx>
- Australian Schools Commission. (1973). *Schools in Australia*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/1973-05/apo-nid29669.pdf>
- Avery, L. M. (2013). Rural science education: Valuing local knowledge. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(1), 28-35. doi:10.1080/07351690.2013.743769
- Bæck, U-D. (2004). The urban ethos - Locality and youth in north Norway. *Young*, 12(2), 99-115. doi:10.1177/11033-8804039634
- Bæck, U-D. K. (2016). Rural location and academic success - Remarks on research, contextualisation and methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 435-448. doi:10.1080/00313831.2015.1024163
- Bæck, U-D. K. (2019). Spatial manoeuvring in education: Educational experiences and local opportunity structures among rural youth in Norway. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 3(3), 61-74. doi:10.7577/njcie.3274
- Ball, S. J., Macrae, S., & Maguire, M. (1999). Young lives, diverse choices and imagined futures in an education and training market. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 3(3), 195-224. doi:10.1080/136031199285002
- Bandaranayake, B. (2016). Polarisation of high-performing and low-performing secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: An analysis of causal complexities. *Australian Educational Research*, 43, 587-606. doi:10.1007/s13384-016-0213-8
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W. H. Freeman.

- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1-26. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1
- Bandura, A. (2009). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Bandura, A. (2012). On the functional properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited. *Journal of Management*, 38(1), 9-44. doi:10.1177/0149206311410606
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development*, 72(1), 187-206. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132479>
- Bandura, A., & Locke, E. A. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(1), 87-99. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.88.1.87
- Barling, J., Rogers, K., & Kelloway, E. K. (1995). Some effects of teenagers' part-time employment: The quantity and quality of work make the difference. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 16(2), 143-154. doi:10.1002/job.4030160205
- Barter, B. (2013). Rural schools and technology: Connecting for innovation. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 23(3), 41-55. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com>
- Bartholomaeus, P. (2013). Place-based education and the Australian curriculum. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years*, 21(3), 17-23. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au>
- Batten, M., & Girling-Butcher, S. (1981). *Perceptions of the quality of school life: A case study of schools and students*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Bauch, P. (2001). School-community partnerships in rural schools: Leadership, renewal, and a sense of place. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 76(2), 204-221. doi:10.1207/S15327930pje7602_9

- Beach, D., Johansson, M., Öhrn, E., Rönnlund, M., & Per-Åke, R. (2019). Rurality and education relations: Metro-centricity and local values in rural communities and rural schools. *European Educational Research Journal*, 18(1), 19–33.
doi:10.1177/1474904118780420
- Bessant, B. (1978). Rural schooling and the rural myth in Australia. *Comparative Education*, 14(2), 121-132. doi:10.1080/0305006780140204
- Best, J., & Cohen, C. (2014). *Rural education: Examining capacity challenges that influence educator effectiveness*. Denver, Colorado: McRel International. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED557596.pdf>
- Bjarnason, T., & Thorlindsson, T. (2006). Should I stay or should I go? Migration expectations among youth in Icelandic fishing and farming communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(3), 290-300. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.09.004
- Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., & Robson, K. (2001). Trends and uses of focus groups. In Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., & Robson, K., *Introducing qualitative methods: Focus groups in social research* (pp. 1-18). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
doi:10.4135/9781849209175
- Bogardus, E. S. (1926). The group interview. *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 10, 372-382.
- Bowden, M. P., & Doughney, J. (2010). Socio-economic status, cultural diversity and the aspirations of secondary students in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. *Higher Education*, 59, 115-129. doi:10.1007/s10734-009-9238-5
- Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H., & Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian higher education*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from https://www.mq.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/135310/bradley_review_of_australian_higher_education.pdf
- Brett, J. (2007). The country, the city and the state in the Australian settlement. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 42(1), 1-17. doi:10.1080/10361140601158518
- Brown, D. L., & Schafft, K. A. (2011). *Rural people and communities in the 21st century*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

- Burnell, B. (2003). The “real world” aspirations of work-bound rural students. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 18(2), 104-113. Retrieved from <http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu>
- Burns, E., & Willis, E. (2011). Empty shops in Australian regional towns as an index of rural wellbeing. *Rural Society*, 21(1), 21–31. doi:10.5172/rsj.2011.21.1.21
- Byun, S., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J., & Hutchins, B. C. (2012). The role of social capital in educational aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology*, 77(3), 355-379. doi:10.1111/j.1549-0831.2012.00086.x
- Calder, B. (1977). Focus groups and the nature of qualitative marketing research. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14(3), 353-364. doi:10.2307/3150774
- Calzaferri, G. L. (2011). *Success is the only option – Rural high school students’ perceptions of access to postsecondary education: An exploratory study* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/868664563/>
- Carbonaro, W., & Workman, J. (2013). Dropping out of high school: Effects of close and distant friendships. *Social Science Research*, 42(5), 1254-1268. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2013.05.003
- Carrillo-Higueras, F., & Walton, T. R. (2020). Perceptions and intentions of secondary students in rural Australia to progress to university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(4), 627–642. doi:10.1080/07294360.2019.1685942
- Charles Sturt University. (2009). *Submission to the inquiry into rural and regional access to tertiary education opportunities*. Adelaide, Australia: Charles Sturt University. Retrieved from <http://www.csu.edu.au>
- Chen, Y., & Starobin, S. S. (2018). Measuring and examining general self-efficacy among community college students: A structural equation modeling approach. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 42(3), 171-189. doi:10.1080/10668926.2017.1281178

- Chesters, J. (2015). Pathways through secondary school in a comprehensive system: Does parental education and school attended affect students' choice? *International Journal of Training Research*, 13(3), 231-245. doi:10.1080/14480220.2015.1102467
- Christofides, L. N., Hoy, M., Milla, J., & Stengos, T. (2015). *Grades, aspirations, and post-secondary education outcomes*. St. Louis, Missouri: Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120. doi:10.1086/228943
- Collins Dictionaries. (2020). *Collins English Dictionary (Online)*. Glasgow, Scotland: HarperCollins. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>
- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3-14. doi:10.3102/0013189X031004003
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). 'Change based on what students say': Preparing teachers for a paradoxical model of leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 345-358. doi:10.1080/13603120600895437
- Corbett, M. (2005). Rural education and out-migration: The case of a coastal community. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28(1/2), 52-72. doi:10.2307/1602153
- Corbett, M. (2007). Travels in space and place: Identity and rural schooling. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30(3), 771-792. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ780809>
- Corbett, M. (2009). Rural schooling in mobile modernity: Returning to the places I've been. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 24(7), 1-13. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com>
- Corbett, M. (2014). Toward a geography of rural education in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 37(3), 1-22. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/canajeducrevucan.37.3.08

- Corbett, M. (2015). Rural education: Some sociological provocations for the field. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 9-25. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au>
- Corbett, M., & Vibert, A. (2010). Curriculum as a safe place: Parental perceptions of new literacies in a rural small town school. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 114. Retrieved from <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/42811>
- Côté, J. E. (1997). An empirical test of the identity capital model. *Journal of Adolescence*, 20(5), 577-597. doi:10.1006/jado.1997.0111
- Country Education Partnership (CEP). (2020). *Country education partnership* (Online). Wangaratta, Australia: Country Education Partnership. Retrieved from <https://cep.org.au/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Croft-Piggin, L. (2015). "Kick it to me Pierre!" Bourdieu and football: Theorizing an Australian rural youth culture. *Rural Society*, 24(2), 109-130. doi:10.1080/10371656.2015.1060716
- Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (1994). Self-schemas, possible selves, and competent performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86(3), 423-438. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.86.3.423
- Cuervo, H. (2014). Critical reflections on youth and equality in the rural context. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), 544-557. doi:10.1080/13676261.2013.844781
- Cuervo, H. (2016). *Understanding social justice in rural education*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cuervo, H., & Acquaro, D. (2018). Exploring metropolitan university pre-service teacher motivations and barriers to teaching in rural schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4), 384-398. doi:10.1080/1359866X.2018.1438586

- Cuervo, H., Chesters, J., & Aberdeen, L. (2019). Post-school aspirations in regional Australia: An examination of the role of cultural and social capital. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 46(5), 843-861. doi:10.1007/s13384-019-00305-7
- Cuervo, H., & Wyn, J. (2017). A longitudinal analysis of belonging: Temporal, performative and relational practices by young people in rural Australia. *Young*, 25(3), 219-234. doi:10.1177/1103308816669463
- Dahlström, M. (1996). Young women in a male periphery - Experiences from the Scandinavian north. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 12(3), 259-271. doi:10.1016/0743-0167(96)00018-6
- Dalley-Trim, L., & Alloway, N. (2010). Looking "outward and onward" in the outback: Regional Australian students' aspirations and expectations for their future as framed by dominant discourses of further education and training. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 37(2), 107-125. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com>
- Davis, M., & Taylor, D. (2019). Regional study hubs: Increasing student engagement to support regional students facing high first-year attrition risk factors. *Student Success*, 10(2), 79-90. doi:10.5204/ssj.v10i2.1312
- Day, C., Sammons, P., & Gu, Q. (2008). Combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies in research on teachers' lives, work, and effectiveness: From integration to synergy. *Educational Researcher*, 37(6), 330-342. doi:10.3102/0013189X08324091
- De Boer, H., & van der Werf, M. P. C. (2015). Influence of misaligned parents' aspirations on long-term student academic performance. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 21(3), 232-257. doi:10.1080/13803611.2015.1039548
- De Winter, J. C. F., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2016). Comparing the Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients across distributions and sample sizes: A tutorial using simulations and empirical data. *Psychological Methods*, 21(3), 273-290. doi:10.1037/met0000079

- Department of Education and Training (DET). (2017a). *On track survey 2016: The destinations of school leavers in Victoria – Statewide report*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/Pages/ontrack.aspx>
- Department of Education and Training (DET). (2017b). *The state of Victoria's children report 2016: Why place matters*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/The_State_of_Victorias_Children_Report_2016.pdf
- Department of Education and Training (DET). (2019a). *Transforming career education in Victorian government schools*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/transforming-career.aspx>
- Department of Education and Training (DET). (2019b). *Expert advisory panel for rural and regional students: Executive summary*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/educationstate/expert-advisory-panel-for-rural-and-regional-students.pdf>
- Department of Education and Training (DET). (2020). *Targeted initiative to attract more teachers*. Melbourne, Australia: Government of Victoria. Retrieved from <https://education.vic.gov.au/about/careers/teacher/Pages/targeted-initiative-attract-more-teachers.aspx>
- Department of Education, Employment and Training. (2000). *Ministerial review of post compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Education, Employment and Training. Retrieved from <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A13129>
- Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2019). *Australian apprenticeships*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>

- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). (2019). *Victoria in future: Population projections 2016 to 2056*. Melbourne, Australia: Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Retrieved from https://delwp-internet-m5.clients.squiz.net/_data/assets/pdf_file/0032/332996/Victoria_in_Future_2019
- Dewey, J. (1959). School and society. In M. Dworkin (Ed.), *Dewey on education* (pp. 76-78). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dinham, S. (2013). The quality teaching movement in Australia encounters difficult terrain: A personal perspective. *Australian Journal of Education*, 57(2), 91–106. doi:10.1177/0004944113485840
- Drummond, A. (2012). The Australian curriculum: Excellence or equity. A rural perspective. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 22(3), 73-85. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com>
- Drummond, A. R., Halsey, R. J., & van Breda, M. (2011). The perceived importance of university presence in rural Australia. *Education in Rural Australia*, 21(2), 1-18. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63. doi:10.1177/160940690900800105
- Eacott, C., & Sonn, C. C. (2006). Beyond education and employment: Exploring youth experiences of their communities, place attachment and reasons for migration. *Rural Society*, 16(2), 199-214. doi:10.5172/rsj.351.16.2.199
- Edgar, D. (1975). *The Schools Commission and rural disadvantage*. Bundoora, Australia: LaTrobe University.
- Edgar, D. (1979). *Defining rural schools' disadvantage 2*. Bundoora, Australia: LaTrobe University.

- Edwards, B., Gray, M., & Hunter, B. (2009). A sunburnt country: The economic and financial impact of drought on rural and regional families in Australia in an era of climate change. *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, 12(1), 109-131. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com-au>
- Ellis, B., Watkinson, J., & Sawyer, J. (2010). Promoting rural/regional sustainability through the provision of a quality higher education experience. *Education in Rural Australia*, 20(2), 17-33. Retrieved from <https://search-informit-com-au>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.
- Farmer, H. S. (1985). Model of career and achievement motivation for women and men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32(3), 363–390.
doi:10.1037/0022-0167.32.3.363
- Farrugia, D., Smyth, J., & Harrison, T. (2014). Rural young people in late modernity: Place, globalisation and the spatial contours of identity. *Current Sociology*, 62(7), 1036-1054. doi:10.1177/0011392114538959
- Faulstich, P. E. (1990). *Landscape perception and visual metaphor in Warlpiri world view* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303843957/>
- Fielding, M. (2004). ‘New wave’ student voice and the renewal of civic society. *London Review of Education*, 2(3), 197-217. doi:10.1080/1474846042000302834
- Fielding, N. A. (2012). Triangulation and mixed methods designs. Data integrations with new research technologies. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), 124-136.
doi:10.1177/1558689812437101
- Fleming, M. J., & Grace, D. M. (2014). Increasing participation of rural and regional students in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 36(5), 483-495. doi:10.1080/1360080X.2014.96089
- Fleming, M. J., & Grace, D. M. (2017). Beyond aspirations: Addressing the unique barriers faced by rural Australian students contemplating university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41(3), 351-363. doi:10.1080/0309877X.2015.1100718

- Fouad, N. A., Smith, P. L., & Enochs, L. (1997). Reliability and validity evidence for the middle school self-efficacy scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 30(1), 17-31. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>
- Frederico, M., & Whiteside, M. (2016). Building school, family, and community partnerships: Developing a theoretical framework. *Australian Social Work*, 69(1), 51-66.
doi:10.1080/0312407X.2015.1042488
- Fuller, C. (2020). Education innovation clusters: Supporting transformative teaching and learning. *Childhood Education*, 96(1), 34–47. doi:10.1080/00094056.2020.1707534
- Fuqua, M. L. (2019). *Australian rural pathways advisors: Narratives of place and practice*. (Doctoral Thesis). Retrieved from <https://figshare.com>
- Fyfield, J. A. (1970). Inequality in educational opportunity: Rural-metropolitan aspects. In P. Fensham (Ed.), *Rights and inequality in Australian education* (pp. 88-104). Melbourne, Australia: F.W. Cheshire.
- Gale, T., Parker, S., Rodd, P., Stratton, G., Sealey, T., & Moore, T. (2013). *Student aspirations for higher education in central Queensland: A survey of school students' navigational capacities*. Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University. Retrieved from http://www.deakin.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/365200/student-aspirations-qld.pdf
- Gándara, P., Guttierrez, D., & O'Hara, S. (2001). Planning for the future in rural and urban high schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 6(1-2), 73-93.
doi:10.1207/S15327671ESPR0601-2_5
- Garbutt, R. (2011). *The locals: Identity, place and belonging in Australia and beyond*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.
- Garg, R., Melanson, S., & Levin, E. (2007). Educational aspirations of male and female adolescents from single-parent and two biological parent families: A comparison of influential factors. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 36, 1010-1023.
doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9137-3
- Geertz, C. (1993). *Local knowledge*. London, England: Fontana Press.

- Geldens, P. (2007). Out-migration: Young Victorians and the family farm. *People and Place*, 15(1), 80-87. doi:10.4225/03/590bfae9c7954
- Geldens, P. M., & Bourke, L. (2008). Identity, uncertainty and responsibility: Privileging place in a risk society. *Children's Geographies*, 6(3), 281-294. doi:10.1080/14733280802184013
- Gemici, S., Bednarz, A., Karmel, T., & Lim, P. (2014). *The factors affecting the educational and occupational aspirations of young Australians*. Adelaide, Australia: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Retrieved from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications>
- Geoscience Australia. (2020). *Area of Australian states and territories*. Symonston, Australia: Australian Government. Retrieved from <http://www.ga.gov.au>
- Gibbons, M., & Borders, L. (2010). A measure of college-going self-efficacy for middle school students. *Professional School Counseling*, 13(4), 234-243. doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2010-13.234
- Gibbons, M. M., Borders, L. D., Wiles, M. E., Stephan, J. B., & Davis, P. E. (2006). Career and college planning needs of ninth graders - as reported by ninth graders. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(2), 168-178. doi:10.5330/prsc.10.2.vj457656056x55w7
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Gilstrap, D. (2016). *The influence of perceived barriers, perceived social support, and career decision-making self efficacy on high school juniors' and seniors' postsecondary plans* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1842419502/>
- Giroux, H. A. (1989). *Popular culture, schooling and everyday life*. Granby, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Southgate, E., & Albright, J. (2015). Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(2), 155-177.
doi:10.1007/s13384-015-0172-5
- Graham, A. (2012). Revisiting school ethos: The student voice. *School Leadership & Management*, 32(4), 341-354. doi:10.1080/13632434.2012.708330
- Green, B. (2015). Australian education and rural-regional sustainability. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 36–49. Retrieved from <https://go.gale.com>
- Gruenewald, D. A. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 619-654.
doi:10.3102/00028312040003619
- Gruenewald, D. A., & Smith, G. A. (2008). Introduction: Making room for the local. In D. A. Gruenewald & G. A. Smith (Eds.), *Place-based education in the global age: Local diversity*. New York: Routledge.
- Guenther, J. (2013). Are we making education count in remote Australian communities or just counting education? *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 42(2), 157-170.
doi:10.1017/jie.2013.23
- Haartsen, T., & Thissen, F. (2014). The success-failure dichotomy revisited: Young adults' motives to return to their rural home region. *Children's Geographies*, 12(1), 87-101.
doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.850848
- Halfacree, K. H. (1995). Talking about rurality: Social representations of the rural as expressed by residents of six English parishes. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11(1), 1-20.
doi:10.1016/0743-0167(94)00039-C
- Halpern, R. (2012). Supporting vocationally oriented learning in the high school years: Rationale, tasks, challenges. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 134, 85-106.
doi:10.1002/yd.20018

- Halsey, R. J. (2017). *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education – Discussion paper*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>
- Halsey, R. J. (2018). *Independent review into regional, rural and remote education – Final report*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>
- Hannerz, U. (1996). *Transnational connections: Culture, people, places*. New York: Routledge.
- Hansen, T. D., & McIntire, W. G. (1989). Family structure variables as predictors of educational and vocational aspirations of high school seniors. *Research in Rural Education*, 6(2), 39-49. doi:10.1.1.525.559
- Harris, A., & de Bruin, L. R. (2017). Secondary school creativity, teacher practice and STEAM education: An international study. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(2), 153-179. doi:10.1007/s10833-017-9311-2
- Haukanes, H. (2013). Belonging, mobility and the future: Representations of space in the life narratives of young rural Czechs. *Young*, 21(2), 193-201. doi:10.177/1103308813477467
- Heckhausen, J., Chang, E., Greenberger, S., & Chen, E. (2013). Striving for educational and career goals during the transition after high school: What is beneficial? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(9), 1385-1398. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9812-5
- Hektner, J. M. (1995). When moving up implies moving out: Rural adolescent conflict in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 11(1), 3-14. Retrieved from http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/11-1_3.pdf
- Helyer, R. (2011). Aligning higher education with the world of work. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 1(2), 95-105. doi:10.1108/2042389111128872

- Henry, M. E. (1989). The functions of schooling: Perspectives from rural Australia. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 9(2), 1-21.
doi:10.1080/0159630890090201
- Heyder, A., & Kessels, U. (2017). Boys don't work? On the psychological benefits of showing low effort in high school. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 77(1-2), 72–85.
doi:10.1007/s11199-016-0683-1
- Hlinka, K. R., Mobelini, D. C., & Giltner, T. (2015). Tensions impacting student success in a rural community college. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(5), 1-16.
Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com>
- Hopkins, P. (2010). *Young people, place and identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoskins, K., & Barker, B. (2017). Aspirations and young people's constructions of their futures: Investigating social mobility and social reproduction. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 65(1), 45-67. doi:10.1080/00071005.2016.1182616
- Howley, C. W. (2006). Remote possibilities: Rural children's educational aspirations. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(2), 62-80. doi:10.1207/S15327930pje8102_4
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. (2000). *National inquiry into rural and remote education*. Canberra, Australia: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
- Irvin, M. I., Byun, S., Meece, J. L., Farmer, T. W., & Hutchins, B. C. (2012). Educational barriers of rural youth: Relation of individual and contextual difference variables. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(1), 71-87. doi:10.1177/1069072711420105
- Irwin, E. G., Bell, K. P., Bockstael, N. E., Newburn, D. A., Partridge, M. D., & Wu, J. (2009). The economics of urban-rural space. *Annual Review of Resource Economics*, 1(1), 435–459. doi:10.1146/annurev.resource.050708.144253
- Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods*, 18(3), 3-20.
doi:10.1177/1525822X0528260

- James, R., Wyn, J., Baldwin, G., Hepworth, G., McInnis, C., & Stephanou, A. (1999). *Rural and isolated students and their higher education choices*. Canberra, Australia: National Board of Employment, Education and Training.
- Jamieson, L. (2000). Migration, place and class: Youth in a rural area. *Sociological Review*, 48(2), 203-223. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.00212
- Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(2), 112-133. doi:10.1177/1558689806298224
- Jones, R. G. (2002). *Education participation and outcomes by geographic location. LSAY report*. Camberwell, Victoria: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Kelly, P. (1994). *The end of certainty: Power, politics and business in Australia*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Khoo, T. S., & Ainley, J. (2005). *Attitudes, intentions and participation*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Kiem, A. S., & Austin, E. K. (2013). Drought and the future of rural communities: Opportunities and challenges for climate change adaptation in regional Victoria, Australia. *Global Environmental Change*, 23(5), 1307-1316. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.06.003
- Koricich, A., Chen, X., & Hughes, P. H. (2018). Understanding the effects of rurality and socioeconomic status on college attendance and institutional choice in the United States. *Review of Higher Education*, 41(2), 281-305. doi:10.135/rhe.2018.0004
- Koshy, P., Dockery, A. M., & Seymour, R. (2019). Parental expectations for young people's participation in higher education in Australia. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(2), 302-317. doi:10.1080/03075079.2017.1363730
- Krahn, H., & Taylor, A. (2005). Resilient teenagers: Explaining the high educational aspirations of visible-minority youth in Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 6(3-4), 405-434. doi:10.1007/s12134-005-1020-7

- Kreuz, T. (2005). *The status of teacher quality in rural high schools: A descriptive analysis* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305373971/>
- Krueger, R. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Krueger, R. A. (2006a). Analyzing focus group interviews. *Journal of Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing*, 33(5), 478-481. Retrieved from <https://journals.lww.com/jwocnonline>
- Krueger, R. A. (2006b). Is it a focus group? Tips on how to tell. *Journal of Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing*, 33(4), 363-366. Retrieved from <https://journals.lww.com/jwocnonline>
- Lamb, S., Glover, S., & Walstab, A. (2014, August). *Educational disadvantage and regional and rural schools*. Paper presented at the Quality and Equity Conference: What does research tell us? Adelaide, Australia. Retrieved from <http://research.acer.edu.au>
- Lamb, S., Jackson, J., Walstab, A., & Huo, S. (2015). *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University. Retrieved from <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/reports/educational-opportunity-in-australia-2015-who-succeeds-and-who-misses-out/>
- Lapan, R. T., Tucker, B., Kim, S., & Kosciulek, J. F. (2003). Preparing rural adolescents for post-high school transitions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(3), 329-342. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00260.x
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Towards a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45, 79-122. doi:10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2000). Contextual supports and barriers to career choice: A social cognitive analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), 36-49. doi:10.1037//0022-0167.47.1.36

- Leyshon, M. (2008). The betweenness of being a rural youth: Inclusive and exclusive lifestyles. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(1), 1-26.
doi:10.1080/14649360701789535
- Leyshon, M. (2011). The struggle to belong: Young people on the move in the countryside. *Population, Space and Place*, 17(4), 304-325. doi:10.1002/psp.580
- Lockie, S. (2000). Crisis and conflict: Shifting discourses of rural and regional Australia. In B. Pritchard & P. McManus (Eds.), *Land of discontent: The dynamics of change in rural and regional Australia* (pp. 14-32). Sydney, Australia: UNSW Press.
- Looker, E. D., & Dwyer, P. (1998). Education and negotiated reality: Complexities facing rural youth in the 1990s. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1(1), 5-22.
doi:10.1080/13676261.1998.10592992
- Lupton, R., & Kintrea, K. (2011). Can community-based interventions on aspirations raise young people's attainment? *Social Policy and Society*, 10(3), 321-335.
doi:10.1017/S1474746411000054
- Majoribanks, K. (2004). Sibling effects, environmental influences, and university attendance: A follow-up study. *Psychological Reports*, 95(3 Pt. 2), 1267-1270.
doi:10.2466/pr0.95.3f.1267-1270
- Marks, G. (2006). Family size, family type and student achievement: Cross-national differences and the role of socioeconomic and school factors. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 37(1), 1-24. doi:10.3138/jcfs.37.1.1
- Marks, G. N. (2007). Do schools matter for early school leaving? Individual and school influences in Australia. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 18(4), 429-450. doi:10.1080/09243450701712528
- Marks, G. N. (2017). Is SES really that important for educational outcomes in Australia? A review and some recent evidence. *Australian Educational Research*, 44, 191-211.
doi:10.1007/s13384-016-0219-2

- Marsh, H., & Kleitman, S. (2005). Consequences of employment during high school: Character building, subversion of academic goals, or a threshold? *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 331-369. doi:10.3102/00028312042002331
- Maslen, G. (2009). 24/7 teens: More than half of Australia's senior secondary students are juggling the demands of school and part-time work. *About the House*, 36, 20-25. Retrieved from <https://search.informit-com-au>
- Massey, D. (1995). The conceptualization of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world?* (pp. 45-86). New York: The Open University.
- McArthur, D. P., Thorsen, I., & Ubøe, J. (2014). Employment, transport infrastructure, and rural depopulation: A new spatial equilibrium model. *Environment and Planning A*, 46(7), 1652-1665. doi:10.1068/a46120
- McConaghy, C. (2006). Schooling out of place. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 27(3), 325-339. doi:10.1080/01596300600838777
- McConaghy, C., Maxwell, T. W., & Foskey, R. (2008). Place, poverty and student outcomes: Identifying the new socio-spatial dynamics of schooling disadvantage in NSW. In B. Green (Ed.), *Spaces and Places: The NSW Rural (Teacher) Education Project* (pp. 183-221). Wagga Wagga, Australia: Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University.
- McDonald, J., & Green, R. (1996). Transport for young people in a rural area. *Youth Studies Australia*, 15(3), 38-42. Retrieved from <https://search.informit-com-au>
- McKenzie, P., Harrold, R., & Sturman, A. (1996). *Curriculum planning in rural secondary schools*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Merton, R. K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. Toronto, Canada: Collier-Macmillan.
- Merton, R. K. (1972). Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(1), 9-47. doi:10.1086/225294
- Merton, R. K., & Kendall, P. L. (1946). The focused interview. *American Journal of Sociology*, 51(6), 541-557. doi:10.1086/219886

- Mill, J. S. (1859). *On liberty*. London: John W. Parker & Son. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>
- Morgan, D. L., & Spanish, M. T. (1984). Focus groups: A new tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 7(3), 253-270. doi:10.1007/BF00987314
- Murnane, R., & Steele, J. (2007). What is the problem? The challenge of providing effective teachers for all children. *The Future of Children*, 17(1), 15-43. doi:10.1353/foc.2007.0010
- National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA). (2013). *A snapshot of poverty in rural and regional Australia*. Canberra, Australia: National Rural Health Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.ruralhealth.org.au/document/snapshot-poverty-rural-and-regional-australia>
- Ncube, A. C. (2013). Barriers to learner achievement in rural secondary schools in developing countries: The case of rural Zimbabwe. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(1), 1-5. Retrieved from <https://journals-co-za>
- Ní Laoire, C. (2007). The 'green grass of home'? Return migration to rural Ireland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23(3), 332-344. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.01.00
- Oldfather, P. (1995). This issue: Learning from student voices. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(2), 86-87. doi:10.1080/00405849509543662
- Oswald, D. L., & Clark, E. M. (2003). Best friends forever?: High school best friendships and the transition to college. *Personal Relationships*, 10(2), 187-196. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00045
- Ottosen, K. O., Goll, C. B., & Sørli, T. (2017). The multifaceted challenges in teacher-student relationships: A qualitative study of teachers' and principals' experiences and views regarding the dropout rate in Norwegian upper-secondary education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 61(3), 354-368. doi:10.1080/00313831.2016.1147069
- Paa, H., & McWhirter, E. H. (2000). Perceived influences on high school students' current career expectations. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 49(1), 29-44. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2000.tb00749.x

- Pallant, J. (2016). *SPSS Survival Manual* (6th ed.). Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Patton, W., & Smith, E. (2010). Part-time work of high school students: Impact on employability, employment outcomes and career development. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 19*(1), 54-62. doi:10.1177/103841621001900110
- Pedersen, H. D., & Gram, M. (2018). 'The brainy ones are leaving': The subtlety of (un)cool places through the eyes of rural youth. *Journal of Youth Studies, 21*(5), 620-635. doi:10.1080/13676261.2017.1406071
- Pegg, J., & Panizzon, D. (2007). Inequities in student achievement for literacy: Metropolitan versus rural comparisons. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 30*(3), 177-190. Retrieved from <https://go.galegroup.com>
- Perry, L. (2014). *The scholarship fig leaf: They won't improve access for all*. Murdoch University, Australia: Murdoch University. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com>
- Petrin, R. A., Schafft, K. A., & Meece, J. L. (2014). Educational sorting and residential aspirations among rural high school students: What are the contributions of schools and educators to rural brain drain? *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(2), 294-326. doi:10.3102/0002831214527493
- Pretty, G., Bramston, P., Patrick, J., & Pannach, W. (2006). The relevance of community sentiments to Australian rural youths' intention to stay in their home communities. *American Behavioral Scientist, 50*(2), 226-240. doi:10.1177/0002764206290636
- Prince, D., & Nurius, P. S. (2014). The role of positive academic self-concept in promoting school success. *Children and Youth Services Review, 43*, 145-152. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.05.003
- Pritchard, B., & McManus, P. (2000). *Land of discontent: The dynamics of change in rural and regional Australia*. Sydney, Australia: UNSW Press.
- Provasnik, S., Kewal Ramani, A., Coleman, M. M., Gilbertson, L., Herring, W., & Xie, Q. (2007). *Status of education in rural America*. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007040.pdf>

- Quaglia, R. J. (1989). Student aspiration: A critical dimension in effective schools. *Research in Rural Education*, 6(2), 7-10. doi:10.1.1.541.7163
- Quaglia, R. J., & Cobb, C. D. (1996). Toward a theory of student aspirations. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 12(3), 127-132. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ546437>
- Quaglia, R. J., & Perry, C. M. (1995). A study of underlying variables affecting aspirations of rural adolescents. *Adolescence*, 30(117), 233-43. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>
- Radford, D. (2017). Space, place and identity: Intercultural encounters, affect and belonging in rural Australian spaces. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 38(5), 495-513. doi:10.1080/07256868.2017.1363166
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. London, England: Pion.
- Roberts, P. (2017). A curriculum for whom? Rereading 'Implementing the Australian Curriculum in Rural, Regional, Remote and Distance-Education Schools' from a rural standpoint. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 27(1), 43-61. Retrieved from <https://go-gale-com>
- Roberts, P., & Cuervo, H. (2015). What next for rural education research? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 25(3), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au>
- Rogers, M. E., & Creed, P. A. (2011). A longitudinal examination of adolescent career planning and exploration using a social cognitive career theory framework. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34(1), 163-172. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.12.010
- Rose, G. (1995). Place and identity: A sense of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world?* (pp. 87-132). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Bell, A. D., & Perna, L. W. (2008). Contextual influences on parental involvement in college going: Variations by socioeconomic class. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(5), 564-586. doi:10.1080/00221546.2008.11772117

- Rural and Regional Committee. (2010). *Inquiry into the extent and nature of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria*. Melbourne, Australia: Minuteman Press.
Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au>
- Sahlberg, P. (2011). The fourth way of Finland. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12(2), 173-185. doi:10.1007/s10833-011-9157-y
- Said, E. W. (1999). *Out of place*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- St. Clair, R., Kintrea, K., & Houston, M. (2013). Silver bullet or red herring? New evidence on the place of aspirations in education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(6), 719-738. doi:10.1080/03054985.2013.854201
- Sampson, K. A., & Goodrich, C. G. (2009). Making place: Identity construction and community formation through “sense of place” in Westland, New Zealand. *Society and Natural Resources*, 22(10), 901-915. doi:10.1080/08941920802178172
- Savvides, N., Al-Youssef, J., Colin, M., & Garrido, C. (2014). Journeys into inner/outer space: Reflections on the methodological challenges of negotiating insider/outsider status in international educational research. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 9(4), 412-425. doi:10.2304/rcie.2014.9.4.412
- Scanlon, M., Jenkinson, H., Leahy, P., Powell, F., & Byrne, O. (2019). 'How are we going to do it?' An exploration of the barriers to access to higher education amongst young people from disadvantaged communities. *Irish Educational Studies*, 38(3), 343-357. doi:10.1080/03323315.2019.1611467
- Schafft, K. A. (2016). Rural education as rural development: Understanding the rural school-community well-being linkage in a 21st-century policy context. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91(2), 137–154. doi:10.1080/0161956X.2016.1151734
- Sellar, S. (2013). Hoping for the best in education: Globalisation, social imaginaries and young people. *Social Alternatives*, 32(2), 31-38. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1447217992/>

- Sellar, S., Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2011). Appreciating aspirations in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(1), 37-52.
doi:10.1080/0305764X.2010.549457
- Shamah, D., & MacTavish, K. A. (2009). Making room for place-based knowledge in rural classrooms. *The Rural Educator*, 30(2), 1-4. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>
- Sharp, E. H., Seaman, J., Tucker, C. J., Van Gundy, K. T., & Rebellon, C. J. (2020). Adolescents' future aspirations and expectations in the context of a shifting rural economy. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 49(2), 534–548.
doi:10.1007/s10964-019-01152-6
- Sher, J. P. (1983). Education's ugly duckling: Rural schools in urban nations. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 65(4), 257-262. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20386995>
- Sher, J. P., & Sher, K. R. (1994). Beyond the conventional wisdom: Rural development as if Australia's rural people and communities really mattered. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10(1), 2-43. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED390593.pdf>
- Sheridan, S. M., & Wheeler, L. A. (2017). Building strong family - school partnerships: Transitioning from basic findings to possible practices. *Family Relations*, 66(4), 670-683. doi:10.1111/fare.12271
- Showalter, D., Hartman, S. L., Johnson, J., & Klein, B. (2019). *Why rural matters: The time is now*. Washington, D.C: Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved from <http://www.ruraledu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf>
- Skrbis, Z., Woodward, I., & Bean, C. (2014). Seeds of cosmopolitan future? Young people and their aspirations for future mobility. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(5), 614–625.
doi:10.1080/13676261.2013.834314
- Smith, J. F., & Skrbis, Z. (2017). A social inequality of motivation? The relationship between beliefs about academic success and young people's educational attainment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(3), 441-465. doi:10.1002/berj.3272

- Sobel, D. (2013). *Place-based education*. Great Barrington, Massachusetts: Orion.
- Sotiriou, S., Riviou, K., Cherouvis, S., Chelioti, E., & Bogner, F. (2016). Introducing large-scale innovation in schools. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 25(4), 541-549. doi:10.1007/s10956-016-9611-y
- Spohrer, K. (2016). Negotiating and contesting 'success': Discourses of aspiration in a UK secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 37(3), 411-425. doi:10.1080/01596306.2015.1044423
- Stevens, S. S. (1946). On the theory of scales of measurement. *Science*, 103(2684), 677-680. doi:10.1126/science.103.2684.677
- Stokes, H., Aaltonen, S., & Coffey, J. (2015). Young people, identity, class and the family. In J. Wyn & H. Cahill (Eds.), *Handbook of children and youth studies* (pp. 259-278). Singapore: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-981-4451-15-4_59
- Stokes, H., Stafford, J., & Holdsworth, R. (2000). *Rural and remote school education - A survey for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*. Melbourne, Australia: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au>
- Stout, A. (2009). *Comparing rural parent and teacher perspectives of parental involvement: A mixed methods study* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/288086870/>
- Teddle, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2012). Common core characteristics of mixed methods research: A review of critical issues and call for greater convergence. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(6), 774-788. doi:10.1177/0002764211433795
- Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2019). *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's results. Volume I student performance*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Retrieved from <https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/36>
- Tieken, M. C. (2014). *Why Rural Schools Matter*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

- Tieken, M. C. (2016). College talk and the rural economy: Shaping the educational aspirations of rural, first-generation students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91(2), 203-223. doi:10.1080/0161956X.2016.1151741
- Tonts, M. (2005). Competitive sport and social capital in rural Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21, 137-149. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.03.001
- Tonts, M., & Atherley, K. (2010). Competitive sport and the construction of place identity in rural Australia. *Sport in Society*, 13(3), 381-398. doi:10.1080/17430431003587947
- Tonts, M., & Larsen, A. (2002). Rural disadvantage in Australia: A human rights perspective. *Geography*, 87(2), 132-141. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40573668>
- Topsfield, J. (2014, August 30). Country students falling behind. *The Age*, p. 13. Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com>
- Torrance, H. (2012). Triangulation, respondent validation, and democratic participation in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), 111-123. doi:10.1177/1558689812437185
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Urry, J. (2000). *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century*. London, England: Routledge.
- Urry, J. (2007). *Mobilities*. Cambridge, England: Polity.
- Vantieghe, W., Vermeersch, H., & Van Houtte, M. (2014). Transcending the gender dichotomy in educational gender gap research: The association between gender identity and academic self-efficacy. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 39(4), 369-378. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2014.10.001
- Victorian Auditor General. (2012). *Victorian Auditor General's report: Student completion rates*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Government Printer. Retrieved from <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/>

- Victorian Auditor General. (2014). *Victorian Auditor General's report: Access to education for rural students*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Government Printer. Retrieved from <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/>
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). (2020). *VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook*. Melbourne, Australia: VCAA. Retrieved from <https://vcaa.vic.edu.au>
- Von Reichert, C., Cromartie, J. B., & Arthun, R. O. (2014). Reasons for returning and not returning to rural U.S. communities. *The Professional Geographer*, 66(1), 58-72. doi:10.1080/00330124.2012.725373
- Watson, J., Allen, J., Beswick, K., Cranston, N., Hay, I., Wright, S., & Kidd, L. (2013). Issues related to students' decisions to remain in school beyond Year 10. *Youth Studies Australia*, 32(2), 21-29. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com>
- Watson, J., Wright, S., Hay, I., Beswick, K., Allen, J., & Cranston, N. (2016). Rural and regional students' perceptions of schooling and factors that influence their aspirations. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 26(2), 4-18. Retrieved from <https://search.informit-com-au>
- Welsh, S. (2005). *Goal-oriented personal learning plans and their effect on student aspirations regarding post-secondary education* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305027813/>
- Wheeler, S., Bjornlund, H., Zuo, A., & Edwards, J. (2012). Handing down the farm? The increasing uncertainty of irrigated farm succession in Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28(3), 266-275. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2012.04.001
- Wilson, K. (2009). *Identity, space, place and postsecondary education: Exploring the educational perceptions and ambitions of youth of the rural communities of Manitoulin Island* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/238135077/>
- Wright, C. J. (2012). Becoming to remain: Community college students and post-secondary pursuits in central Appalachia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 27(6), 1-11. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com>

Yeager, D. S., Bundick, M. J., & Johnson, R. (2012). The role of future work goal motives in adolescent identity development: A longitudinal mixed-methods investigation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 37*(3), 206-217.
doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2012.01.004

Zhao, Y. (2015). A world at risk: An imperative for a paradigm shift to cultivate 21st century learners. *Society, 52*(2), 129-135. doi:10.1007/s12115-015-9872-8

Appendices

Appendix 1: Abbreviations and Acronyms Used in this Thesis

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CEP	Country Education Partnership
CFA	Country Fire Authority
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DET	Department of Education and Training
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBM	International Business Machines
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
NRHA	National Rural Health Alliance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSM	Public Service Medal
SCAT	Social Cognitive Aspirations Theory
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Table A1.1: Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Thesis

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval for the Research

(a) Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Certificate



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number: 9014

Project Title: Difference between rural and metropolitan government secondary schools: perspectives of students

Chief Investigator: Professor Deborah Corrigan

Expiry Date: 06/07/2022

Terms of approval - failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MUHREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring - project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Thank you for your assistance.

Professor Nip Thomson

Chair, MUHREC

CC: Mr Bob Stephens

List of approved documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Questionnaires / Surveys	The Questions	05/05/2017	1
Focus Group questions	Focus Group Questions	05/05/2017	1
Consent Form	consent-form-template	05/07/2017	v2
Explanatory Statement	explanatory-statement-template - schools	05/07/2017	v2
Explanatory Statement	explanatory-statement-template	05/07/2017	v2

(b) Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Certificate – Update

During the research, the title was adjusted from:

“Difference between rural and metropolitan government schools: Perspectives of students”.

The updated title is:

“The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students.”

The letter below indicates the approval of the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee to change the title of the research.



MONASH
University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

Project ID: 9014

Project Title: The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students

Expiry Date: 06/07/2022

Dear Professor Deborah Corrigan

The following amendment has been approved by Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee on 18/09/2020:

- Change title from 'Difference between rural and metropolitan government secondary schools: perspectives of students' to 'The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students'

Kind Regards,

Professor Nip Thomson

Chair, MUHREC

(c) Approval from the Department of Education and Training

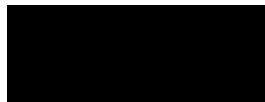
The Department of Education and Training in Victoria approved the conducting of this research in government secondary schools in Victoria, as shown in the letter below.



Department of
Education & Training

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Victoria 3002
Telephone: 03 9637 2000
DX210083

2017_003469



Dear Mr Stephens

Thank you for your application of 25 July 2017 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools titled *Student outcomes in rural and metropolitan government secondary schools in Victoria: the perspectives of students*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Department approved research projects currently undergoing a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) review are required to provide the Department with evidence of the HREC approval once complete.
2. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.
3. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
4. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
5. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
6. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.

Your details will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973 and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Should you have any queries or wish to gain access to your personal information held by this department please contact our Privacy Officer at the above address.



7. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.

I wish you well with your research. Should you have further questions on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Insights and Evidence Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely


John Tomaino
Director
Insights and Evidence

22/08/2017



Appendix 3: Explanatory Statement



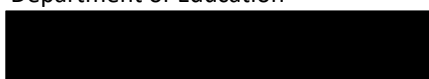
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Project: The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students.

This project is being carried out by Bob Stephens, a Ph.D. student at Monash University. The supervising staff from Monash University are Professor Deb Corrigan and Doctor John Pardy, both from the Faculty of Education.

Contact Details:

Professor Deb Corrigan
Department of Education



Mr Robert Stephens
Ph. D. Student – Monash University



You are invited to take part in this study. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate in this research. If you would like further information regarding any aspect of this project, you are encouraged to contact the researchers via the phone numbers or email addresses listed above.

What does the research involve?

The aim of the research is to understand the differences between rural and metropolitan government secondary schools from the perspectives of students. The research focuses on four key areas, namely:

- i) How students in years 10 and 12 see the purpose of secondary schools;
- ii) What people and events have a positive or negative effect on student outcomes;
- iii) What assistance students receive in determining what they will do once they leave school;
- iv) What differences exist between rural and metropolitan secondary schools?

The first part of the research will be a survey which will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The survey focuses on the areas listed above. The survey will be completed in the last week of February.

After the survey is completed, students will be given the opportunity to become a part of a focus group. The focus groups will be:

- i) A group of five or six year 10 students from each of four selected schools;
- ii) A group of five or six year 12 students from each of the same four selected schools;

Focus groups will run for about 45 – 60 minutes and will be facilitated by Bob Stephens. The focus groups will be held at the students' school. The focus groups will be conducted in March and April.

Each of these activities (survey and focus groups) will be conducted in out of school time e.g. lunchtime or free periods.

Why were you chosen for this research?

The research project will take place in sixteen Victorian schools which are located in the Eastern half of Victoria. Each school will select the year 10 and year 12 students from each of the schools who will be invited to take part in the survey section of the research.

For the focus groups, ten to twelve students in total (five or six year 10 students and five or six year 12 students) from four schools will be involved. The focus groups will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy of transcripts.

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from the research

In order to become involved in this research project, the CONSENT FORM will need to be signed by the students and, if the student is under the age of 18, by his/her parent or guardian. The signed form should be returned to the General Office at your school by Friday 9th February. Once you agree to become involved, you may withdraw from the research at any stage. If you withdraw after completing the survey, it will not be possible to remove your data as the survey will be anonymous and confidential.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

The benefits of this project are far reaching. The benefits include:

- i) Improving the understanding of secondary schooling from a student viewpoint;
- ii) Understanding the barriers to student learning outcomes and future aspirations;
- iii) Focusing on the people and actions that can improve student educational outcomes and opportunities;
- iv) Providing an opportunity for students to influence educational policy.

Confidentiality

Both aspects of the project will be positive and will provide very useful data. There is no risk of any student being identified in this research. Surveys will be anonymous except for indicating the school that the student attends. Students involved in focus groups will not be identified. Student focus groups will be recorded to allow for transcripts of the discussion to be created. Each student in the focus groups will use a pseudonym rather than their own name.

The findings of the research project will be published as a thesis. Possible conference papers and journal articles may be developed from the research data. Confidentiality will be assured as students' names will not be recorded in any part of the research project.

Storage of Data

Data will be stored electronically for the duration of the research project. When the project is completed the data will be retained for two years before being deleted. Student surveys will be retained for the duration of the project and then destroyed.

Results

Results will be made available to each participating school. Students involved in the study will have the opportunity to obtain the results and a report from their school.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Chancellery Building E,
24 Sports Walk, Clayton Campus
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800

Tel : +61 3 9905 2052 Email : muhrec@monash.edu Fax : +61 3 9905 3831

I am sure that students will enjoy participating in this research project. It is a real opportunity for students to influence future directions in secondary schooling.

Appendix 4: Student Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Student Survey and Student Focus Groups

Project: The effect of rurality on the aspirations of students in rural government secondary schools in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of students.

Chief Investigator: Professor Deb Corrigan, Monash University, Faculty of Education

Student Investigator: Bob Stephens, Ph. D. Student, Monash University

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and I hereby consent to participate in this project.

I consent to the following:	Yes	No
Taking part in the student survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voluntarily taking part in a focus group of six students from my school if required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a focus group that I am involved in audio recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____ Date _____

Thank you,

Professor Deb Corrigan

Bob Stephens

Appendix 5: Student Surveys

This Appendix contains the student surveys used in this research. The surveys for rural and metropolitan students were the same, except for Items 57 to 64.

The surveys commence on the next page.

This survey relates to differences between rural and metropolitan secondary schools. There are 64 questions. To respond, place a X in the box to the left of the appropriate answer. Place a X in one box unless the question asks you to make one or more selections. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for participating in this project.

Rural Survey

The questions

1	What school do you attend?	My school is _____			
2	Are you female or male?	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Male		
3	What language is spoken most commonly at your home?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state which language) _____		
4	Which of the following describes your living arrangements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Home with 2 parents	<input type="checkbox"/> Home with 1 parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Live with friends	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Live independently	<input type="checkbox"/> Live with relatives (not your parents)		
5	How many brothers and sisters do you have in total?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
		<input type="checkbox"/> 4 or more			
6	Did either, both or neither of your parents finish secondary school?	<input type="checkbox"/> My mother did	<input type="checkbox"/> My father did	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents did	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Neither parent did	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not know		
7	Did either, both or neither of your parents go to university or TAFE after secondary school?	<input type="checkbox"/> My mother did	<input type="checkbox"/> My father did	<input type="checkbox"/> Both parents did	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Neither parent did	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not know		
8	Which of the following statements describes your current situation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Year 10 and hope to study VCE next year <input type="checkbox"/> Year 10 and hope to study VCAL next year <input type="checkbox"/> Year 10 and will leave school this year <input type="checkbox"/> Year 12 and I am studying VCE <input type="checkbox"/> Year 12 and I am studying VCAL			
9	In my life so far, I have been successful in most things that I have tried.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree			

School and Study Habits

10	I think that the results I have achieved at school are very good.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
11	On days when my classes are not interesting, I am often absent from school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
12	On average, how many hours per week do you spend working at a part-time job?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5-8	<input type="checkbox"/> 9-12	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 12
13	My part-time job and sporting commitments outside school prevent me from studying as much as I think I should.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
14	If I have difficulty with my school work when I am in class, my teacher is always willing to help me with the work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree

15	If I have difficulty with my school work when I am at home, my family will help me with the work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
16	Even when the work in class is difficult or challenging, I always perform very well.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
17	I find studying English to be difficult.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
18	I find studying Mathematics to be difficult.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
19	I find studying and schoolwork to be boring.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
20	I often miss completing homework because there are other things to do after school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
21	I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
22	My family encourages me to do well at school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
23	What stops you from studying at home? (Select one or two answers)	<input type="checkbox"/> It is too noisy <input type="checkbox"/> Sporting commitments <input type="checkbox"/> Study is boring <input type="checkbox"/> Part time job <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing my friends <input type="checkbox"/> House chores <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing stops me from studying <input type="checkbox"/> I cannot be bothered				
24	What assists you to study at home? (Select one or two answers)	<input type="checkbox"/> I have my own desk <input type="checkbox"/> I can study with friends <input type="checkbox"/> It is quiet <input type="checkbox"/> I listen to music <input type="checkbox"/> My family helps me <input type="checkbox"/> I like studying <input type="checkbox"/> My family knows the importance of study <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing				

Leaving School – What do you intend to do when you leave school?

25	I intend to complete year 12.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
26	When I leave school, I want to continue with my education.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
27	I think I will be able to achieve all of the goals that I have set myself for the future in terms of my education and my career.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
28	At my school, I have not been provided with enough information regarding university and TAFE courses and possible careers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
29	My school provides opportunities for me to explore and imagine possible future careers and to decide what I want to do after I leave school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
30	I will only feel that I have been successful at school if I get into a university or TAFE course.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
31	When working out what I want to do when I leave school, I get most advice from:	<input type="checkbox"/> My family <input type="checkbox"/> Friends <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers <input type="checkbox"/> No one <input type="checkbox"/> The internet				

My School and Community– These questions ask about your school and the community/suburb you live in

32	I think that my school is preparing me well for life after school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
33	I think that my school is a very good school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
34	I think I would get a better education if I attended a private school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
35	I think I would get a better education if I attended another school in the city.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
36	I think I would get a better education if I attended another school in the country.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
37	I think that my time at school has been successful so far.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
38	I feel comfortable and secure in the community / town where I live.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
39	At my school, I learn about my local community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
40	My local community is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
41	I think that the local community believes that my school is an important part of the community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
42	In my community, I get involved in activities such as sport, clubs or community work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
43	I never want to leave the community/town where I live.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
44	I would leave the community/town where I live in order to get a good job or to go to university or TAFE.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
45	I want to leave my local community/town as soon as I can.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
46	If I left my local community to get a job or go to university or TAFE, I would miss my family and friends.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree

After I Leave School – these questions relate to getting a job or continuing education after leaving school.

47	To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
48	The job that I think that I would like to get after finishing my education is:	The job that I think I would like is _____				

49	I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and my career.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
50	I think that going to university or TAFE would be expensive.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
51	If I decide to go to university or TAFE, I would continue to live at my current home.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
52	I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
53	My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
54	The teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
55	If I went to university or TAFE, I would have to work to support myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree
56	My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/> Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/> Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree

Rural and Metropolitan Schools – rural schools are schools outside the Melbourne metropolitan area

57	Do you think that students from rural schools study more or less than students from metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
58	Do you think that students from rural schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
59	Do you think that students from rural schools take part in more or less out of school activities (sport, clubs, work) than students from metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
60	Do you think that rural schools have better or worse teachers than metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse
61	Do you think that rural schools have higher or lower expectations of students than metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much higher	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Lower	<input type="checkbox"/> Much lower
62	Do you think that students from rural schools get better or worse results in VCE than students from metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse
63	Do you think that rural schools are more or less important to their local community than metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
64	Do think that students from rural schools have a better or worse understanding about future possible careers than students from metropolitan schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse

Thank you for participating in this survey. It is greatly appreciated.

For the metropolitan survey, the first 56 items were the same as for the rural survey. The last eight items on the Metropolitan survey were:

Rural and Metropolitan Schools – rural schools are schools outside the Melbourne metropolitan area

57	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools study more or less than students from rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
58	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
59	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools take part in more or less out of school activities (sport, clubs, work) than students from rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
60	Do you think that metropolitan schools have better or worse teachers than rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse
61	Do you think that metropolitan schools have higher or lower expectations of students than rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much higher	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Lower	<input type="checkbox"/> Much lower
62	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools get better or worse results in VCE than students from rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse
63	Do you think that metropolitan schools are more or less important to their local community than rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much more	<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> Much less
64	Do think that students from metropolitan schools have a better or worse understanding about future possible careers than students from rural schools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Much better	<input type="checkbox"/> Better	<input type="checkbox"/> About the same	<input type="checkbox"/> Worse	<input type="checkbox"/> Much worse

Appendix 6: Classification of Occupations

Table A6.1 outlines the classification of occupations used in this research.

Australian and New Zealand Classification of Occupations. Based on ABS (2013).

Major Group	Description
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executives, General Managers • Farmers and Farm Managers • Hospitality, Retail and Service Managers • Other Managers
Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals in the areas of the Arts, Business, Design, Education, Engineering, Health Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, Law, Marketing, Mathematics, Media, Science, Transport and Welfare • Other Professionals
Technicians and Trade Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technicians in the areas of Engineering, Information Technology and Science • Tradespersons in the areas of Automotive, Construction, Engineering, Food, Telecommunications and Technology • Skilled workers, including Animal and Horticultural Workers • Other Technicians and Trades Workers
Community and Personal Service Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and Personal Workers, including Carers, Health and Welfare Support, Hospitality, Office Administration, Personal Services, Protective Services (Police, Military, Security) and Sport • Other Community and Personal Workers
Clerical and Administrative Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Clerical Workers, including Clerks, Office Support Workers and Receptionists • Other Clerical and Administrative Workers
Sales Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales Workers including Sales Agents, Sales Assistants, Sales Representatives and Support Workers • Other Sales Workers
Machine Operators and Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Machinery and Stationary or Mobile Plant Operators • Road and Rail Drivers • Other Machine Operators and Drivers
Labourers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labourers including Cleaners, Construction Workers, Factory Process Workers, Farm and Garden Workers, Food Preparation Workers, Mining Workers • Other Labourers

Table A6.1: Australian and New Zealand Classification of Occupations
(Adapted from ABS, 2013).

Appendix 7: Additional Graphs Related to the Student Survey

This Appendix includes five graphs, which provide extra information related to the graphs which were presented in Chapter 4.

A7.1 The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations – Year Levels

Figure 4.10 showed the effect of parental educational levels on the aspirations of students. Figure 4.10 focused on rural and metropolitan male and female students. Figure A7.1, below, considers the effect on the same three items that were used in Figure 4.10, based on the different year levels of the students. The items considered were:

- Item 26:** When I leave school, I want to continue with my education.
Item 52: I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there.
Item 53: My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school.

Figure A7.1 indicates that, where at least one of the student's parents attended university or TAFE, the percentage positive response was greater than if no parent attended university or TAFE. There was one exception, the metropolitan Year 12 VCE students, where the results were equal for the second of the three items. For metropolitan Year 12 VCAL students, students who came from a family where at least one parent had attended university or TAFE, were 63.9% more likely to want to continue with further education than students who came from a family where no parents had attended university or TAFE.

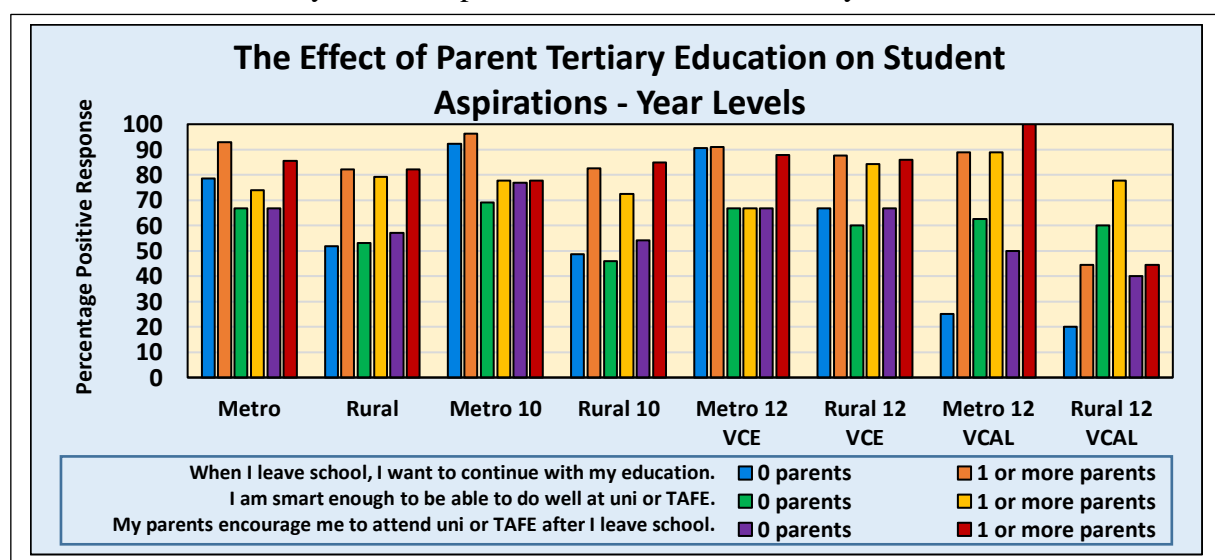


Figure A7.1: The Effect of Parent Tertiary Education on Student Aspirations – Year Levels

A7.2 Comparison Between Rural and Metropolitan Schools – Year Levels

Figure 4.18 considered the results for items which asked students to compare metropolitan and rural schools and students. In Figure 4.18, the perceptions of all metropolitan and all rural students, as well as metropolitan and rural males and females, were compared. In Figure A7.2, consideration is given to comparing students from different year levels (year 10, year 12 VCE and year 12 VCAL). The items included were:

Item No.	Metropolitan or Rural Survey	The Item
57	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools study more or less than students from rural schools?
58	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from rural schools?
60	Metropolitan	Do you think that metropolitan schools have better or worse teachers than rural schools?
61	Metropolitan	Do you think that metropolitan schools have higher or lower expectations of students than rural schools?
64	Metropolitan	Do you think that students from metropolitan schools have a better or worse understanding about future possible careers than students from rural schools?
57	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools study more or less than students from metropolitan schools?
58	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools are more or less likely to go to university than students from metropolitan schools?
60	Rural	Do you think that rural schools have better or worse teachers than metropolitan schools?
61	Rural	Do you think that rural schools have higher or lower expectations of students than metropolitan schools?
64	Rural	Do you think that students from rural schools have a better or worse understanding about future possible careers than students from metropolitan schools?

Figure A7.2 indicates that the differences between the perceptions of rural and metropolitan students were consistent for Year 10 and Year 12 VCE students, but there is some dilution of the strength of the difference for Year 12 VCAL students, particularly related to higher expectations, teachers and better understanding of careers.

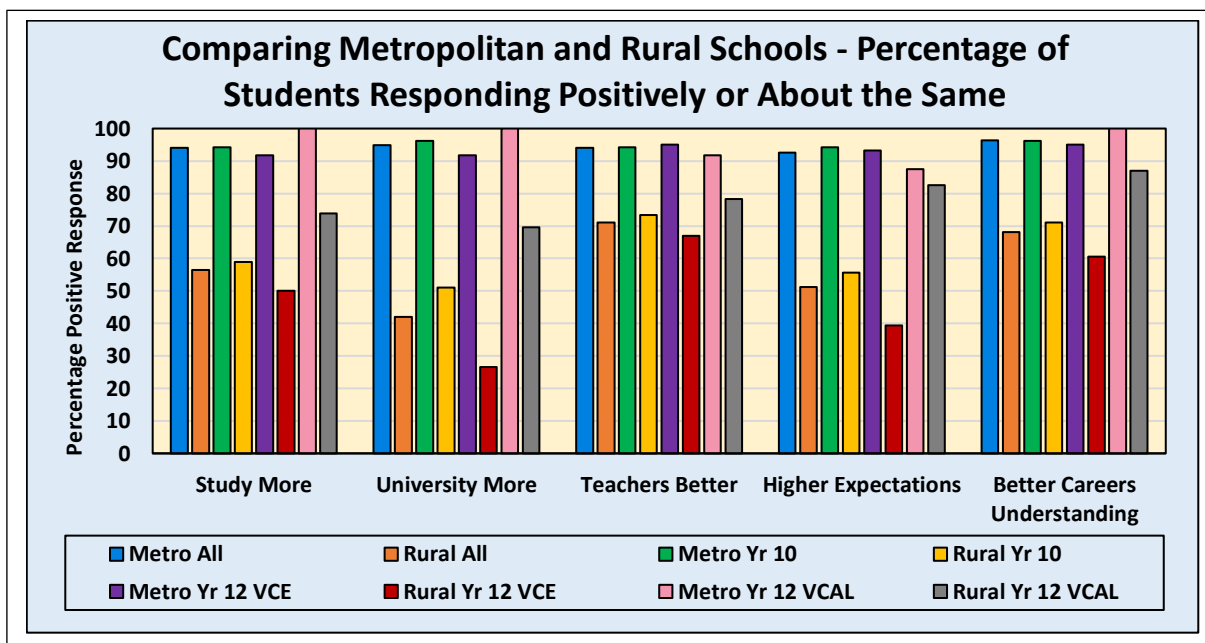


Figure A7.2: Comparison of Rural and Metropolitan Schools – Year Level Comparison

In general, both rural and metropolitan students, at each of Year 10, Year 12 VCE and Year 12 VCAL, perceived that metropolitan students studied more, were more likely to attend university, had better teachers, had higher expectations placed on them and obtained better VCE results, than rural students.

A7.3 Enablers for Studying at Home

Figure 4.24 indicated the perceptions of rural and metropolitan students regarding barriers to studying at home. Figure A7.3 presents the results for the student perceptions of the enablers for studying at home.

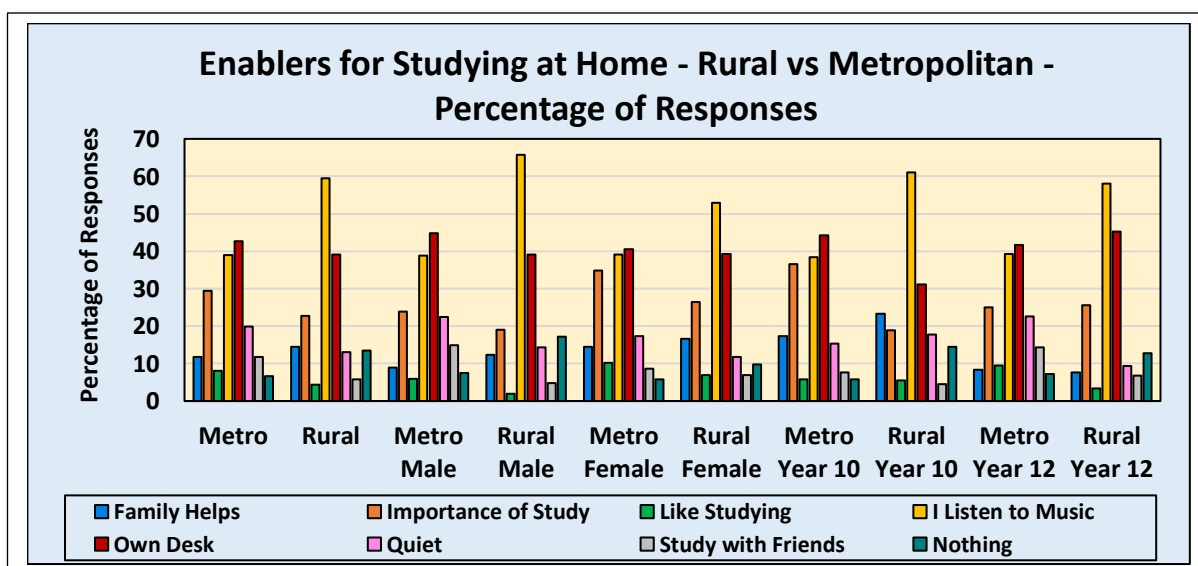


Figure A7.3: Enablers for Studying at Home – Percentage of Responses

Figure A7.3 indicates that the perceptions of the students in relation to the enablers for students studying at home were similar for rural and metropolitan students. For both rural and metropolitan students, the most common enablers were: “I have my own desk” and “I listen to music”. This was the case for all groups of students, both rural and metropolitan. The response “I listen to music” was indicated by 39% of metropolitan students and 59% of rural students.

A7.4 Parent and Teacher Encouragement to Continue Education – Aspiration Groups

In Figure 4.6 and 4.16, the student perceptions, regarding their parents’ and teachers’ encouragement of them to continue education after secondary school, were presented. Figures A7.4 and A7.5 compare the student perceptions based on the career aspirations of the students.

Only three aspiration groups were considered, as the number of students aspiring to each of the other groups was relatively small. Figure A7.4 presents the percentage of students who perceived that their parents encouraged them to continue education, based on whether the student aspired to a Community/Personal, Professional or a Technician/Trade career, whilst Figure A7.5 considers the same groups of students and their perceptions of whether their teachers encouraged them to continue education.

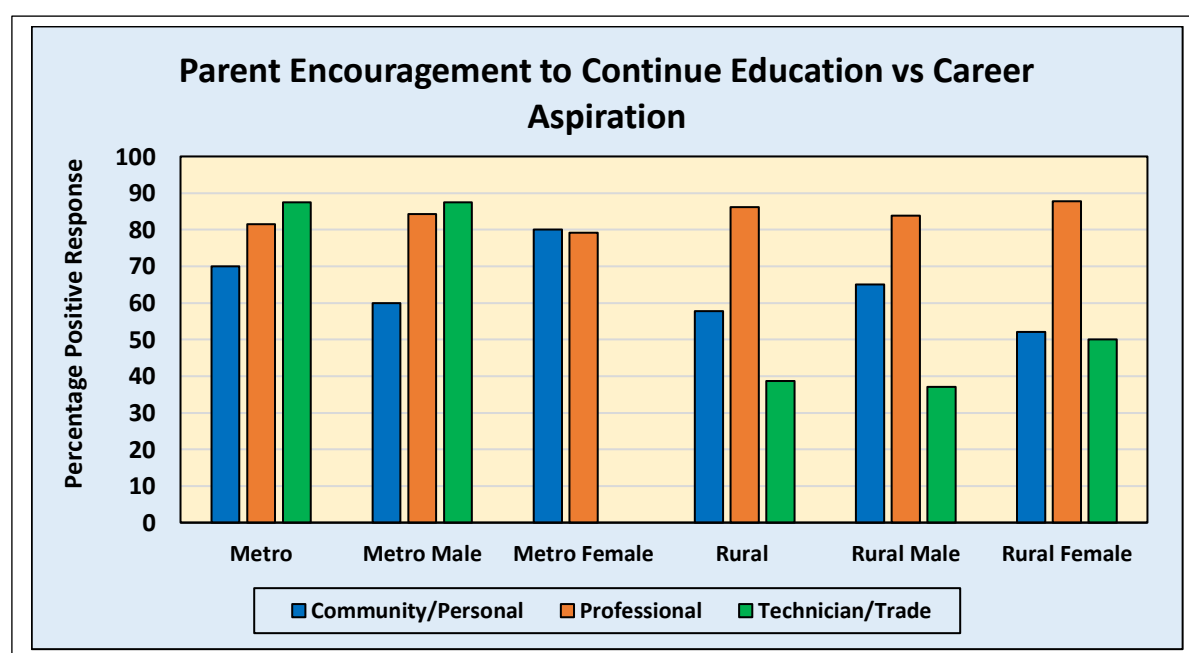


Figure A7.4: Parent Encouragement to Continue Education vs Career Aspiration

Figure A7.4 indicates that, for rural students, those who aspired to a technician/trade career were less likely to perceive that their parents encouraged them to continue education, than those aspiring to a professional career or a community/personal career. For metropolitan students, the differences were smaller.

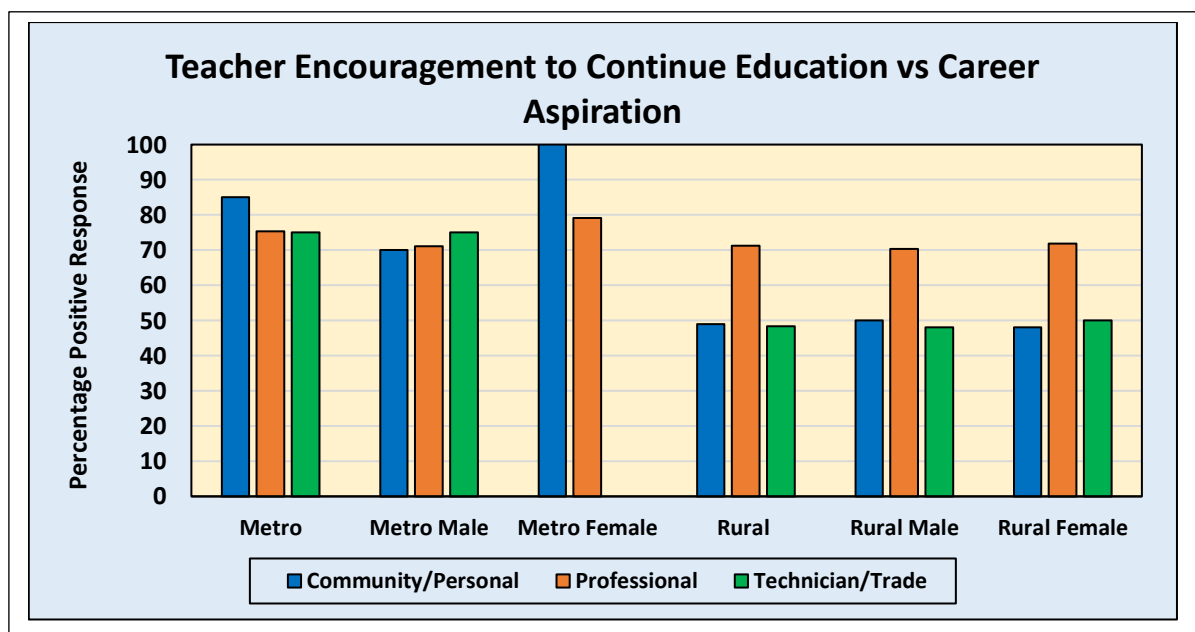


Figure A7.5: Teacher Encouragement to Continue Education vs Career Aspiration

Figure A7.5 indicates that, for rural students, those who aspired to a technician/trade or a community/personal career were more than 20% less likely to perceive that their teachers encouraged them to continue education, than those aspiring to a professional career. For metropolitan students the results were similar for professional and technician/trade aspirants, and higher for community/personal aspirants.

Appendix 8: Correlation Coefficient Results

This Appendix includes the correlation coefficients for the Likert 5-scale items analysed in Chapter 4. Correlations are included for rural and metropolitan students and include, for each item, all students, male students and female students.

In all cases, the correlation coefficient of each of the items was considered against the responses for Item 26: “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”.

Spearman Rank Correlation coefficients were determined using IBM SPSS.

Spearman Correlation between items listed and “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education”							
Item No.	Item	Metro	Metro Male	Metro Female	Rural	Rural Male	Rural Female
9	In my life so far, I have been successful in most things I have tried	.063	.123	-.017	.215	.178	.322
10	I think that the results I have achieved are very good	.116	.162	.071	.283	.246	.278
14	If I have difficulty with my school work in class, my teacher is always willing to help me with the work	.055	.090	.026	.163	.368	-.031
15	If I have difficulty with my school work at home, my family will help me with the work	-.104	-.174	-.066	-.004	.007	-.027
16	Even when the work in class is difficult, I always perform very well	.065	.062	.082	.299	.183	.383
19	I find studying and school work to be boring	-.136	-.214	.001	-.369	-.332	-.264
21	I try hard to get good results in my subjects at school	.297	.236	.364	.426	.274	.485
22	My family encourages me to do well at school	.076	.009	.148	.072	.148	.053
25	I intend to complete year 12	.341	.390	.278	.611	.552	.642
27	I think I will be able to achieve all the goals that I have set myself for the future in terms of my education and career	.086	.076	.127	.444	.393	.425
28	At my school, I have not been provided with enough information regarding uni and TAFE courses and careers	-.073	.081	-.242	-.001	-.114	-.070
29	My school provides opportunities to explore and imagine possible future careers	-.231	-.297	-.170	-.024	.055	-.051
32	I think that my school is preparing me well for life after school	.056	-.027	.129	-.027	.053	-.056
33	I think that my school is a very good school	-.096	.064	-.136	.042	.106	-.004
37	I think that my time at school has been successful so far	.056	.011	.075	.323	.229	.370
38	I feel safe and secure in the community/town where I live	.096	.061	.162	.046	-.004	.094
39	At my school, I learn about my local community	-.130	-.074	-.190	-.110	-.079	-.060
40	My local community is important to me	-.075	-.112	-.024	.015	.078	-.019
41	I think that the local community believes that my school is an important part of the community	-.062	-.035	-.093	.102	.146	.038
42	In my community, I get involved in activities such as sport, clubs or community work	-.049	.056	-.110	.102	.096	.159

Spearman Correlation between items listed and “When I leave school, I want to continue with my education” (continued)							
43	In never want to leave the community/town where I live	.041	-.118	.204	-.342	-.416	-.210
44	I would leave the community/town where I live in order to get a good job or to go to university or TAFE	.136	.047	.216	.455	.333	.492
45	I want to leave my local community/town as soon as I can	.072	-.015	.166	.187	.119	.114
46	If I left my local community, I would miss my family and friends	.103	.009	.179	-.005	.026	-.096
47	To get the job that I want when I leave school, I need to go to university or TAFE	.512	.477	.548	.645	.589	.642
49	I have very clear goals for my future in terms of my education and career	.179	.162	.218	.213	.022	.338
52	I am smart enough to be able to do well at university or TAFE if I choose to go there	.130	.177	.107	.459	.388	.510
53	My parents encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school	.475	.567	.366	.566	.623	.493
54	The teachers at my school encourage me to attend university or TAFE after I leave school	.121	.212	-.004	.380	.446	.267
56	My friends do not want me to go to university or TAFE	-.259	-.384	-.074	-.361	-.282	-.288

Note: Green – Significant $p < .01$ Yellow – Significant $p < .05$

Table A8.1: Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient Comparing Items Listed and Student Perception of Wanting to Continue Education after Leaving School