

## Practice Article

# Meeting Schools Where They're At: Reciprocal Partnerships for Place-Based Aspirations



Han Worsley, Education Coordinator, Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro  
Faculty of Education, University of Canberra

### Abstract

In rural, regional, and remote Australian communities, university-led approaches to widening participation in higher education have been criticised for low efficacy and cultural insensitivity.

This case study explores more appropriate aspirations-based outreach through the lens of reciprocal

partnerships between universities and communities, specifically examining the Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro (CUCSM) and its Illustrator Competition outreach program. Drawing on the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, which necessitates the mutual definition of problems, solutions, and success measures, this case study illustrates how Regional University Study Hubs across Australia are uniquely placed to deliver widening participation programs in rural communities. Reciprocal partnerships between the broader Snowy Monaro community, the CUCSM, the University of Canberra, and the target students themselves, make

clear that positive local engagement from design to evaluation must be considered in aspirations-based outreach if the industry is to avoid the deficit-based model communities are so wary of. The Illustrator Competition leveraged existing student aspirations to discuss future pathways, and to have students co-create a children's book on aspiration through illustrating their own desires. Overall, the partnerships that drove and were developed through this program have resulted in growing engagement with local primary schools, a strong community voice, and the opportunity to conduct further research on how place drives aspiration in rural students. This paper advocates for

the explicit inclusion of place-based education strategies that respect and leverage rurality, paving the way for more inclusive and impactful higher education initiatives in rural contexts.

### Keywords

Rural education, partnerships, aspirations-based outreach, Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, place-based education, Country Universities Centre

## Introduction

There is no doubt that rural, regional, and remote communities have been left behind by the higher education sector. Decades of criticism has been levelled at the “raising aspirations” approach to outreach, based on the belief that gaps in educational attainment can be closed by a focus on individuals, rather than systemic barriers. The issue with this approach is twofold. Firstly, the foundational assumptions are incorrect – groups with lower tertiary achievement do not necessarily have lower aspiration for these studies, meaning aspiration is rarely the significant barrier to university that it is made out to be (Rainford, 2021). Secondly, and perhaps most central to this case study, is that such approaches have typically seen any aspirations outside of a university

education as less desirable (Fray et al., 2020). Looking specifically at rural students, their strong existing aspirations to seek higher education (Vernon et al., 2017), are influenced by community and place-based factors (Cuervo, 2014). Such programs, in their effort to boost participation statistics and ‘fix the problem’ are deficit-based and fail to acknowledge the unique social and structural context of rural Australia (Kilpatrick et al., 2019).

While a wealth of literature has emerged in recent years about why aspiration raising is not turning the tide on educational attainment for rural students (Fleming & Grace, 2017; Fray et al., 2020; Gibson et al., 2022; Guenther et al., 2023) a clear path forward for university outreach programs is yet to be agreed upon. Academics, practitioners, and communities alike have touted the necessity and the power of reciprocal partnerships between communities and institutions (Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024; Pink et al., 2023; Vernon et al., 2017). Importantly, an approach that centres community partnership helps to address both key issues with the aspiration raising approach. By focusing on community needs and relationships rather than individual aspiration or enrolments, there is an acknowledgement that

aspiration itself is not the key barrier to university participation. Furthermore, embedding individual partnership with each community moves away from a homogenous view of rural Australia (Roberts et al., 2024), and ensures programs centre these individual elements of rurality in a way that is not deficit-driven (Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024). While this body of research is growing in breadth and impact, this key question remains; how can universities build more meaningful partnerships with rural communities to deliver outreach programs that actually mitigate barriers to rural student participation?

This case study of aspirations-based outreach run by the Country Universities Centre Snowy Monaro (CUCSM) demonstrates how partnership can engender a place-based approach that serves rural communities, rather than undermining them. The program is explored through the lens of the Carnegie definition which highlights this need for universities to be socially responsible in their engagement with communities (Pink et al., 2023). The CUC advocates for all outreach to be community-led, rather than university-led, with reciprocal partnerships mirroring the newly minted Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification





University of Canberra and Country Universities Centre Snow Monaro with Delegate Public School

(CCEC). Carnegie privileges the mutual exploration and definition of “*problems, solutions, and measures of success*” (Engagement Australia, 2022), which will be highlighted through an exploration of a program called the Illustrator Competition, run by CUCSM.

### Scoping higher education aspiration in the Snowy Monaro

Genuine partnerships between universities and organisations like the CUCs and other Regional University Study Hubs (RUSHs) can ensure a positive impact in communities. Carnegie foregrounds this via the importance of socially responsible universities (Pink et al., 2023), but despite this principle, the raising aspirations approach persists, and fails to consider the impact of valuing certain ambitions over others.

The Snowy Monaro region has a strong history of supporting higher education, founding the CUCSM and ultimately sparking the entire Country Universities Centre network without university or state/federal government support. Despite this, locals remain apprehensive of university-led programs. While universities and policymakers have traditionally seen low university

attendance as a problem in rural areas (Fray et al., 2020), residents voice concerns that university-led outreach programs encourage young people to move away from their communities and may limit their job opportunities at home (Halsey, 2009b). Skilled worker shortages and the rural brain drain are key challenges faced by the region, reflecting the experience of many other rural, regional, and remote locations across Australia (Fleming & Grace, 2017).

In many ways, the Snowy Monaro community has succinctly outlined some reasons why the raising aspirations approach has largely failed – the pressures of place can be incompatible with study (Gibson et al., 2022). The roughly 160 students registered with CUC Snowy Monaro are each a case study of how these pressures manifest, and how solutions that acknowledge location-specific pressures can be most impactful (Fray et al., 2020). One such student, Sarah, dropped out of high school to commence a hairdressing apprenticeship, believing “*university wasn't for me – it felt too hard for many reasons, and I wanted to be with my family. Uni just meant leaving home, even if it did bring me other opportunities*”. After over a decade in this profession, it was in fact her family that supported her to complete a Bachelor of Psychology while

juggling her role as a Mum, wife, and business partner in her family's new surveying business. Sarah has gone on to become an advocate for the CUC model as an example of how her ties to community, once seen as a barrier to study, became her greatest asset. Sarah acknowledges that without this local resource, university study would never have been available to her. The pressures of place would have denied, rather than driven, her aspiration.

Aspirations are complex, and for rural people, often deeply tied to place (Kilpatrick et al., 2019). In many cases, students with aspirations to higher education struggle with their desire for careers seen as traditionally successful, versus those that feel realistic given their circumstances, and better reflect the norms of their community (Gibson et al., 2022). Due to the systemic barriers faced by rural students, key aspiration influences are more expansive than individual characteristics or parental influence, typically extending to cost and distance, teacher and school support, pathway availability and the level of attachment to home and family (Fray et al., 2020). These influences express themselves in unique ways across each town or region. What must ultimately be acknowledged within the university outreach space is that knowing the community, and therefore the relevant pressures of place, allows socially

responsible and effective programs that can support the substantial existing aspirations of students (Gore et al., 2017). Where homogenous discourses of rurality have driven deficit-based approaches (Gibson et al., 2022), partnerships with community can develop a better understanding of characteristics in each place that influence aspiration (Fray et al., 2020).

This tension documented in academic literature reflects the beliefs of the Snowy Monaro community, and there has traditionally been discordance between the community and university programs. A lack of genuine partnership means they differ on their definition of a problem, and therefore on the solutions and success measures. Locals involved in community consultations for CUCSM noted something that many have failed to understand – that those who do study at or aspire to university do not have adequate support, and that it is unfair to “raise” the aspirations of students who then have insurmountable systemic barriers to traditional study at university (Rainford, 2021). For Snowy Monaro people, it is not the numbers that reflect the problem. It is the lack of localised support, and the “*unshakeable feeling that universities don't know us*”, as shared by one local school principal.

To help address these local concerns CUCSM collaborates with several





universities to deliver outreach that departs from the travelling roadshow of freebie-laden tables. Universities will lack a genuine community presence in every town or region they visit, making such partnerships essential to ensure positive, transformative outcomes. Institutions should seek these partnerships and take guidance from the Australian CECC. This case study focuses on a truly homegrown initiative – the Illustrator Competition. In this program, the problems, solutions, and

success measures were co-defined and mutually agreed upon, and engagement was shaped by shared authority, as privileged by the Carnegie Foundation definition. The Illustrator Competition is detailed as a blueprint to form and maintain partnerships in the widening participation space.

### Program overview

Anyone who has ever asked a child “What do you want to be when you grow up?” will have heard a litany of

responses, possibly from the same child within the same minute. From doctor to princess to professional football player, the aspirations of students reflect more than their dreams for themselves. They hold rich data, such as students’ perception of self, the influence of place, and the influence of family (Gibson et al., 2022). Put simply, they demonstrate the possibilities and the barriers a student sees in their future. To ensure outreach does not build or reiterate



barriers for children, consideration of this rich data should form part of outreach. These insights, although reflected in academic literature, were all shared by local educators, parents, and employers in a community consultation held by CUCSM and the University of Canberra to determine how to support locals to engage with higher education. From this consultation, the "Illustrator Competition" was born. The local community wanted to build the imaginative capacity of students



outside senior high school, and to lay the groundwork for year-on-year engagement and future university collaboration that departs from the deficit-based model the region is so wary of.

Aspirations are hard for children to surface or articulate. Their understanding of a job or career may be vastly different from the reality for us adults who pose the question "What do you want to be?". To address this, when CUCSM visited local students in Grades 2-6 asking this very question, students illustrated their aspirations, creatively depicting a version of their future selves. It was clear that Sid, who verbally shared that he wanted to run an Angus bull stud, did not just want to breed prize-winning beef cattle. He drew himself in many additional farming contexts; fixing his broken-down Land Cruiser ("just like my Dad", he explained), and "doing the money accounts", where he drew himself working on a computer to ensure his business was profitable. To have simply asked and received a response from Sid would have failed to show the richness of his aspiration.

The sharing of rich aspirations was by design in this program. To ensure the program supported and nurtured the aspirations students already possessed (Gore et al., 2017), every session began with a discussion

of what students in the classroom wanted to be. Facilitators encouraged students to share the careers of other significant people in their lives and were explicit in their positive feedback for all answers, taking care to avoid redirection towards careers that required further study. Centring student voice has been shown to encourage engagement and ensure students feel heard and supported (Cunningham et al., 2020), and certainly encouraged lively conversation and debate amongst participants. To draw out additional insights such as Sid's family influences and broad view of farming, students undertook several peer-peer activities throughout the session. This included a gallery walk, where students left their drawings face up on the desk and were prompted to walk around and consider things they liked and things they had questions about. It was through the post-walk questions from a peer that Sid's insights were revealed, demonstrating how even in individual encounters, this program was community-led. In a single month, 14 of 16 eligible schools took part in the Illustrator Competition, despite having no previous engagement with CUCSM. Almost 450 students sat down and drew, in detail, an aspiration for their future. These illustrations were then judged for creativity and detailed depiction, and winning illustrations featured in a children's book called "I

Want to Be...". All aspirations could be celebrated, not just those requiring university or tertiary study. In 2024, CUCSM will reach approximately 700 students with the same program, with the University of Canberra supporting a more targeted focus on social, emotional, and practical drivers of aspiration in this community. However, in this field, simple numbers are a flawed representation of success. To better understand how this program reflects reciprocal partnership and a departure from many of its university-led predecessors, it must be examined in the context of the Australian CCEC.

### Reflecting the Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification

Although the CCEC focuses only on universities, the Carnegie Foundation definition of community engagement is based on decades of research and is equally applicable to community-based organisations such as CUCSM. Carnegie defines community engagement as

*"collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities... for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity"* (Engagement Australia, 2022).

This definition is a guiding principle

for how the Illustrator Competition was delivered, and how partnerships should be formed and centred in any aspirations-based work, especially in rural communities.

However, before continuing, it must be noted that the nature of CUCSM as an institution of higher education is fundamentally unique to a traditional university, and these differences, in many ways, remove some of the challenges universities face in their outreach efforts. Rather than having staff from outside of a region delivering content and support, all members of CUC Snowy Monaro (be they founders, board directors, staff, or students) are local to the region. This engenders a particularly place-based relationship and form of trust with stakeholders. Universities must also grapple with pressure to recruit more students, and especially in the face of declining domestic enrolments and other financial challenges (Howard, 2021), the line between marketing and social good can become blurred (Singh & Mountford-Zimdars, 2016). There is also an image problem for universities in many regional towns, and despite explicitly institution agnostic funding for outreach via the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPP; Higher Education Support Act, 2003), universities are businesses and are seen as such by community members in the Snowy Monaro.

Some positive movement in the sector is apparent with more collaboration and agnostic programs such as the Eastern Australian Regional University Centre Partnership; a collaboration between 25 universities and 16 RUSHs (Australia Centre for Student Equity and Success, 2022). However, the sweeping and necessary changes as recommended in the Accord will be slow to implement if an element of social responsibility is not taken on by universities. This case study proposes that community partnerships are a way to do so, when done using a framework such as Carnegie that privileges social responsibility (Pink et al., 2023). Importantly, such partnerships can also accelerate changes in community perception and program impact, helping to overcome many of the challenges in the sector as it stands. Three key actions taken in the overall co-design of the Illustrator Competition are outlined below, in accordance with how they reflect The Carnegie Foundation's definition of a reciprocal partnership.

**Mutual definition of problems, opportunities, and goals:** Personalised, student-centered workshops

A key element of the problem with the raising aspirations approach is that it assumes some aspirations are more worthy than others, and invariably, those aspirations rooted in rurality are seen as lesser (Cuervo, 2014; Fleming





& Grace, 2017; Kilpatrick et al., 2019). In university-led outreach, success is conflated with participating in higher education, while aspirations to working class roles such as farmer, plumber, or labourer are considered prime targets for having their aspirations 'raised' (Rainford, 2021). This can highlight children's goals as problematic (Gore et al., 2017), and centre deficit-based commentary on the roles of their own parents and community members, which are more likely to fall outside of the desired realm (Rainford, 2021).

As identified in the consultation process, the issue to Snowy Monaro locals was the limited focus on imaginative capacity, especially in students outside the oft-targeted Grade 11 and 12. This problem generated the key opportunity to champion the existing aspirations in each individual classroom. In the Illustrator Competition sessions with students, every workshop drew only upon the aspirations volunteered by students, ensuring the program valued existing experiences and understandings. A shared dream to become a truck driver or surgeon became an opportunity to discuss career pathways and draw on the experiences and exposure of those within the class. Personal stories from students and staff were strongly encouraged as a way of grounding aspirations, as was the incorporation of the Illustrator Competition into

other events on the school calendar. In several cases, this meant co-delivering within the University of Canberra's ASPIRE UC Program, and in another, National Park Rangers speaking to students as part of an incursion program. Rather than 'raise' or even 'build' aspirations, our program simply shared and validated existing aspirations, a goal and opportunity that arose from a clear definition of the issue being targeted by this program.

**Mutual definition of strategies and solutions:** Curriculum-aligned lesson plans and casual teacher cover

Unfortunately, rural schools are likely to be challenged by a lack of human and physical resources (Guenther et al., 2023), and the Snowy Monaro region is no different. The main product of this was to have the program facilitator be a registered primary school teacher to not only provide quality delivery, but to give schools some time back in the form of supervised classes. This was an element suggested by schools who shared that they have previously turned down involvement in university outreach or other programs due to a lack of staff capacity. Curriculum-aligned lesson plans that explored aspiration were communicated well in advance, which also ensured teachers were confident in the content and delivery prior to the day. This addressed another concern from educators that previous programs

"needed tweaking for my classroom" or "hadn't taken into account the access needs of my kids, so I had to hover and help". This important element of reciprocity helped schools enhance their curriculum, teaching, and learning environment, while the CUCSM was able to reach and learn about a new cohort of students.

**Mutual definition of measures of success:** Celebrating rural student aspirations in a sustainable annual program

The Universities Accord predicts massive growth in the demand for those with tertiary qualifications (Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024). To ensure outreach programs do not further entrench the inequality between rural and metropolitan students, a concerted effort must be made to provide genuine access to study in rural communities. Nuance is needed in this conversation, that acknowledges that seeing more graduates from rural areas will rely on initiatives that centre rurality, rather than seek to remove students from it, combined with a dedicated attempt to dismantle the structural barriers to university (Guenther et al., 2023). The problem lies in the system, not the students.

To contribute to this greater purpose, the partnership with schools drove mutual definitions of success, and decisions on what was to be

*Figure 1 | Morrison's drawing of his aspiration to be a herpetologist*



measured. Success was deemed early on to be more than students simply aspiring to tertiary education, although a simple categorisation of the aspirations students provided demonstrated similar levels of university aspiration when compared to metropolitan students (Fray et al., 2020). Importantly, success in the 2023 Illustrator Competition on a student level was simply to have and share an aspiration, whatever it may be. On a community level, it was the development of an annual, sustainable

program to help develop a deep understanding that tertiary education is not an enemy of rural cohesion, but a key part of its future (Halsey, 2009a).

The 2023 book, "I Want to Be..." plays a key role in the again popular school-based sessions in 2024, modelling and celebrating local aspiration. This continues long after the school sessions are completed, with over 150 book copies given to individual students, and copies present in every school and local library in the region. Students are excited to learn about

the aspirations of students that they either directly know, or that live very similar lives to their own, creating an environment for ongoing, strengths-based discussions in the classroom. A particular favourite was Morrison's winning illustration of a herpetologist (see Figure 1). A teacher from one Cooma school commented

*"We love Morrison's drawing! This big word has led to many questions from our class, inspiring excitement that someone from their region may go on to be such a scientist and encouraging*

*reflection on what careers they may be totally unaware of."*

This sentiment mirrors the verbal and written feedback collected directly from educators and principals, collected by the CUC throughout the program in the form of short discussions, email communications with schools, and reflective facilitator notes. This data reveals the true community-focused nature of the program, with one parent-helper saying *"I love having you guys here because I know and trust you [the CUC]. You have supported me through my degree, so I know you know the real barriers to my kids"*. Partnership is more than simply 'co-designing' or 'working together'. It extends to knowing and serving each community.

This hyper-local resource, designed into the program as both an outcome and a tool for further discussion, not only recognises and respects the knowledge and perspectives of the schools and students as community partners, but deeply values them as the key tenet of program success.

This is an evidence-based approach to developing confidence and self-belief in students, specifically with regard to any existing aspirations and expectations of university study (Cunningham et al., 2020). In this way, the program is seeking to ensure it does not reiterate or even disregard the systemic barriers that may be faced

by these students. While this program alone cannot dismantle these barriers, strong partnerships embedded across widening participation practice in rural Australia has the potential to contribute to this necessary change. By focusing on empowerment, engagement, and co-defined measures of success, this program was certainly able to depart from an aspiration raising approach, celebrate student success, have discussions about university study in rural classrooms, and garner strong community support. In future iterations of this project, the University of Canberra will conduct a program of parent, student, and teacher interviews to better assess this potential benefit of such strengths-based programs for supporting primary student aspiration. The development of this program into a comprehensively evaluated, year-on-year outreach program with university involvement has been made possible due to the partnership.

### **The impact of engaged partnerships**

Rural, regional, and remote communities are not homogenous, despite being treated as such by the bulk of the literature on aspiration in the last few decades (Fray et al., 2020). Community engaged partnerships in rural settings will differ in how they reflect the standards set by Carnegie. Importantly, research done

by universities on such programs, including simple evaluative procedures, should ensure the location of such outreach is considered, and ideally named to better reflect the impact of these place-based intricacies (Ng, 2021; Seelig, 2021). To measure the success of this partnership, the unique history of the Snowy Monaro region had to be considered, including the way they championed rural, regional, and remote student access to higher education in their drive to establish the CUC.

Guided by Carnegie, the mutual definition of problems, solutions, and measures of success from the outset enabled the creation of a sustainable program, and opportunities for future research and development in the region. The program will also be the focus of a Master of Education Higher Degree by Research project undertaken at the University of Canberra in 2024-25, by a student residing in the Snowy Monaro region. The impact is multi-directional and hyper-local, answering questions held by the community first, followed by those held by the university. Based on the partnerships built across the 2023 Illustrator Competition, the local support for this research is significant, with one principal noting *"Having the University of Canberra and the CUC work together to deliver this program and others mean we know they are invested in our local community"*. As universities seek to embed genuine partnerships,

they must be motivated by a commitment to social responsibility, while maintaining awareness that the impact of genuine community involvement in outreach and research is mutually powerful. As the Accord seeks to understand underrepresented groups, and change the face of the higher education sector (Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024), trust from these very communities will dictate many outcomes. Trust dictates the level of community engagement, their honesty in research settings, and their perception and support of their children and other community members seeking further education (Cuervo, 2014). With community stakeholders genuinely involved in outreach, rather than wary of the university providers, there is the opportunity for the industry to understand and help address the barriers rural and regional students face more meaningfully.

## Conclusion

As the Universities Accord builds on decades of work undertaken by equity practitioners and academics, it is important to stress that initiatives genuinely co-designed with rural, regional, and remote communities can lead to high engagement and improved access. The Australian Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is a way to critically examine the reciprocity of this partnership and

others, and to ensure 'co-design' moves from a buzzword to an action with a measurable impact in widening participation initiatives. By delivering a strengths-based program that met the direct needs of the local schools, CUCSM has been able to create a blueprint for future work with rural schools, including in academia.

As universities rightly look to a future that challenges the "raising aspirations" approach, it is critical that initiatives are consciously developed with communities, preferably as a direct result of their own concerns and desires. Given the chequered history within rural, regional, and remote communities, CUCs and other RUSHs should be seen as catalysts for this co-design and for successful tertiary programs in rural Australia. This close relationship with communities and the development of tailored programs ensures universities can truly know their participants, and nurture and support aspirations. In this way, through design and implementation, institutions are better placed to take on their social responsibility to engage meaningfully with communities.



**Mx Han Worsley**  
**Education Coordinator, Country**  
**Universities Centre Snowy Monaro**  
**Faculty of Education, University of**  
**Canberra**

*Han Worsley is the Education Coordinator at CUC Snowy Monaro, providing academic support and community outreach to holistically support students through their higher education journeys. They are currently studying a Master of Education (HDR) at the University of Canberra, undertaking research on the place-based factors that drive aspiration for rural students. Han's own experience reflects the way rurality can challenge study - Han has also been the CEO of charity Country to Canberra, a rouseabout, and a primary teacher. Their upbringing on the family farm north of Nullamanna NSW, population 40, has been a central driver of Han's decision making and career - they hold a deep personal knowledge that rural communities deserve and can do better. To this end, Han also proudly advocates on rural education and gender issues, speaking for eminent organisations such as TEDx, the Australian National University, Women in Leadership Australia, and the National Farmers Federation.*



## References

- Engagement Australia. (2022). Carnegie Community Engagement Network. <https://engagementaustralia.org.au/carnegie/>
- Australian Universities Accord Final Report. (2024). Australia: Department of Education
- Cuervo, H. (2014). Schooling in rural Australia: Tensions between youth aspirations and community sustainability. *Dynamics of social class, race, and place in rural education*, 217-242.
- Cunninghame, I., Vernon, L., & Pitman, T. (2020). To be seen and heard: Enhancing student engagement to support university aspirations and expectations for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(6), 1487-1506. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3659>
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2015.1100718>
- Fray, L., Gore, J., Harris, J., & North, B. (2020). Key influences on aspirations for higher education of Australian school students in regional and remote locations: a scoping review of empirical research, 1991-2016. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 47(1), 61-93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00332-4>
- Gibson, S., Patfield, S., Gore, J. M., & Fray, L. (2022). Aspiring to higher education in regional and remote Australia: the diverse emotional and material realities shaping young people's futures. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 49(5), 1105-1124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00463-7>
- Gore, J., Holmes, K., Smith, M., Fray, L., McElduff, P., Weaver, N., & Wallington, C. (2017). Unpacking the career aspirations of Australian school students: towards an evidence base for university equity initiatives in schools. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(7), 1383-1400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1325847>
- Guenther, J., Fuqua, M., Ledger, S., Davie, S., Cuervo, H., Lassel, L., & Downes, N. (2023). The perennials and trends of rural education: Discourses that shape research and practice. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 33(3), 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.47381/AIJRE.V33I3.701>
- Halsey, R. J. (2009a). Australia's Sustainability: A New Policy Front for Rural Education? *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 19(2), 11-22. <https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v19i2.567>
- Halsey, R. J. (2009b). Youth Exodus and Rural Communities: Valorising Learning for Choices. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 19(3), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v19i3.571>
- Higher Education Support Act, § 16-20 (2003).
- Howard, J. H. (2021). Rethinking Australian higher education. Howard Partners Canberra.
- Kilpatrick, S., Katersky Barnes, R., Heath, J., Lovat, A., Kong, W.-C., Flittner, N., & Avitaia, S. (2019). Disruptions and bridges in rural Australia: higher education aspiration to expectation of participation. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(3), 550-564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1556619>
- Ng, J. C. (2021). Refuse thy name? Critical reflections on the convention of masking place in rural educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(9), 790-799. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1956624>
- Pink, M., Vanderlelie, J., Binks, P., Possamai-Inesedy, A., Firth, V., & Nyland, J. (2023). Engagement Australia position stand on community-engaged universities: enhancing civic impact through engaged partnerships. *Transform: the journal of engaged scholarship*, 7(1), 13-25.
- Rainford, J. (2021). Are we still "raising aspirations"? The complex relationship between aspiration and widening participation practices in English higher education institutions. *Educational Review*, 75, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1923461>
- Roberts, P., Downes, N., & Reid, J.-A. (2024). Engaging rurality in Australian education research: addressing the field. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 51(1), 123-144. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00587-4>
- Seelig, J. L. (2021). Place anonymization as rural erasure? A methodological inquiry for rural qualitative scholars. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(9), 857-870. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2021.1974971>
- Singh, S., & Mountford-Zimdars, A. (2016). Policy enactment in Widening Participation: enablers and barriers in a comparative English and Australian study. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 18(2), 22-49. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.18.2.22>
- Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success. (2022). Country Universities Centre welcomes funding to encourage more people from the country to go to university. <https://www.acses.edu.au/country-universities-centre-welcomes-funding/>
- Vernon, L. A., Watson, S., & Taggart, A. (2017). University aspirational pathways for metropolitan and regional students: Implications for supporting school-university outreach partnerships. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28(1), 87-103. <https://doi.org/10.47381/aijre.v28i1.167>