**Aspirations for higher education**

Literature Review

The main themes in the aspirations-related literature are:

* All student groups explored (low SES, regional/rural/remote, indigenous) generally have high aspirations for higher education (James, 2002; Alloway et al., 2004; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Bok, 2010; Bowdern & Dougherty, 2010, 2012; Wrench et al., 2013; Gale et al., 2013; Reid & McCallum, 2014; Graham, Van Bergen & Sweller, 2015; Fleming & Grace, 2015a, 2015b);
* Females are more likely than males to aspire to higher education (James, 2002; Alloway, 2004; Bowdern & Dougherty, 2012; Gale et al., 2013; Gore, 2014);
* High SES students are more likely than their low SES counterparts to aspire to higher education (James, 2001, 2002; Marjoribanks, 2005; Bowdern & Dougherty, 2010, 2012; Gore et al., 2014);
* Ethnic groups/ Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students are more likely to aspire to higher education (Marjoribanks, 2005; Bowdern & Dougherty, 2010, 2012);

The strength of the focus on aspirations can be explained in large part through federal policy and funding. The 1990 Green Paper ‘A Fair Chance For All’ (Dawkins, 1990), which was the result of Labor’s reforms to higher education and originally identified the six equity groups that continue to frame current equity practice and policy, identified aspirations as a key focus for work with low SES communities. Specific measures for this group outlined in the paper included the development of special entry arrangements, bridging/ support programs, school outreach/ aspirations programs in low SES areas, subsidized child care, better links with TAFE, developing information pathways for long-term unemployed. Outreach and aspiration-building were also identified in an additional funding package announced in the Liberal government’s higher education reforms in ‘Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future in 2003 (Nelson, 2003), with the then Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP) to be increased by $2.3m per year from 2005 (based on performance-based formula) for outreach/aspiration programs and other equity-related activities.

However, the most profound shift, arguably, that has impacted on the research focus on aspirations occurred as a result of the ‘Bradley Review’ (2008), which called for significant reforms on the basis that “Australia faces a critical moment in the history of higher education” (p.xi). Couched in terms of precipitating a decline in ‘knowledge workers’, which would leave Australia struggling to compete in the global knowledge economy, Bradley et al. claimed that an ‘outstanding and internationally competitive’ higher education system was essential to maintaining standards of living in context of ‘rapidly changing future’ (p.xi). On this basis, the Bradley Review put forward now infamous participation targets to widen participation to meet the Australia’s future economic needs of 40% of 25-34 year olds to hold bachelor-level qualification by 2020 and 20% of enrolments to be low SES by 2020. These targets were inscribed into policy in the ‘Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System’ by the then-Labor government in 2009. A new funding mechanism was also introduced at the time – the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP; now HEPP) – which replaced the previous Equity Support Program, and added an addition $394million over four years to support the target of increasing low SES student numbers, $108million of which was for the ‘partnerships’ component, “deliberately putting in place systemic reasons for universities to be engaged with improving the quality of school education” (2009: 14) and offered $325million as an incentive for universities to expand enrolment of low SES students.

**(Critique of) Deficit Discourses and Framings**

Unsurprisingly, this policy shift and funding package provoked a flurry of research and equity initiatives and this activity is reflected in the literature. However, the majority of these 35 papers offer a critique of both the ideologies underlying policy. Many have critiqued the theorisation of aspirations that is instantiated in policy and practice imperatives, which positions aspirations as an individual psychological construct, which strongly connects with a deficit view of certain groups lacking (the correct) aspirations for ‘the good life’ that higher education offers (Bok, 2010; Gale, 2011, 2015; Gale & Hodge, 2014; Gale & Parker 2015a, 2015b; Sellar, 2013, 2015; Zipin et al., 2015). Placing the onus on individuals to aspire to higher education means that individuals and their families need to become neoliberal subjects in pursuit of self-improvement and self-entrepreneurialism, so that they “must display an ability to rationally calculate pathways to and through higher education… for maximum benefit” (Southgate & Bennett, 2012, p.35). This neoliberal view, and its underpinning deficit view of particular groups, is robustly contradicted in the literature, with research showing that many students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds generally having high aspirations for post-school education (for low SES students see Bok, 2010; Graham, Van Bergen & Sweller, 2015; Reid & McCallum, 2014; Wrench et al., 2013; for rural and remote students see Alloway et al., 2004; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Gale et al., 2013; Fleming & Grace, 2015a, 2015b).

Trevor Gale, who has written extensively on aspirations in the context of equity, argues that Labor’s higher education policy lacked ‘sociological imagination’ in terms of considering the wider societal and structural constraints on aspiration, thus resulting in the projection of deficits onto individuals who didn’t want to engage with the neoliberal project into which higher education has become a major player; a ‘neoliberal form of hope’ in the words of Southgate & Bennett (2012). He argues that this lack of sociological imagination is evident in three ways: 1) widespread structural issues were misrecognised/ misrepresented; 2) there was a misalignment of private troubles/ public issues so that aspirations became located in individuals and social/community issues ignored; and 3) policy elevated private issues (individuals’ aspirations) to a public level, with limited/no consideration of how existing systems create ‘private troubles’ (2015: 259). Similarly, Gale & Hodge (2014) returned to this idea, examining aspirations through the lens of social inclusion, drawing on Ball’s (1993) concept of first-order effects (surface change in practice) and second-order effects (change with results in shifts in dominance and relations). They argue that the policy effects of Labor’s higher education policy has resulted in a ‘just imaginary’, with many first-order effects evident, but little second-order effects taking place. This has lead to three dilemmas: limited sustainability of social inclusion/ equity agendas, particularly in view of diminishing political support for the widening participation agenda; ambiguity with regard to what students are aspiring to (what is ‘the good life’?); and the concealed ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2007) that results from the situation where increased opportunity translates into diminished returns.

Other research has also drawn on the related notion of the ‘opportunity trap’ (Munro, 2011; Sellar, 2013, 2015), highlighting the notion of aspirations put forward in policy offer ‘false promise’ (Sellar, 2013), whereby the ‘promise’ of higher education might jostle with a sense of belonging to ‘home’, creating disconnections with friends and family, or where the expansion of higher education results in the devaluation of the currency of a university education in terms of translating into jobs or greater earning potential. Sellar (2013) argues that this results in an erosion of the power of human capital theory (more highly educated people can be more individually and productive and contribute more to the nation’s economy and growth). Sellar (2015) argues that equity has come to be understood “as a matter of providing talent with opportunity and ‘raising aspirations’ for these opportunities” (p.209), but where concurrently “the supply of aspirants outweigh[ing] the supply” (p.212), meaning that the promise of a good life for hard work and investment in education is broken.

A further aspect of the critique of the positioning and effects of aspiration in higher education policy is an implicit hierarchy of educational levels and spaces. Southgate & Bennett (2012) note that the discourse of the ‘proper aspirant’ is intertwined with the idea that university study is better than VET study, which is fuelled by the imposition of middle-class ideals of ‘the good life’ (Gale, 2015). Southgate & Bennett (2012) argue that the ‘proper aspirant’ subject position allows some ways of being/ doing/ knowing to be valued more than others, with ‘working-class’ subjectivity positioned as ‘unknowing’ with ‘deficits on quality’. Building on this idea of a normative hierarchy in education, which they purport to be a direct consequence of Australia’s push to become ‘the clever country’, Graham, Van Bergen & Sweller (2015) conducted a study to explore the aspirations of both ‘mainstream’ and disengaged young people in the context of academic and vocational pathways through school. They sought to explore “differences between three student groups with respect to the purpose of school and whether they see that purpose as consistent with their own aspirations” (p.243). Contrary to popular opinion, the young people with disruptive behaviour did aspire for post-school education and were able to see the value of it for “a secure, productive and fulfilled life”, albeit not necessarily from university study (p.237). Their findings suggest that the majority of mainstream students liked school work, with the opposite true being true for students with disruptive behaviour, who viewed school work as ‘tedious and irrelevant’. Graham and colleagues argue that the preoccupation with becoming the ‘clever country’ and getting students to achieve Year 12 has created an exclusive school curriculum, so that lifting student attainment and pushing towards university enrolment “has been dominant leading to the privileging of academic knowledge, attainment and pathways over vocational knowledge, attainment and pathways” (p.251). In contrast, VET/ TAFE has been positioned as “deficit in parity of esteem” compared with university (p.251), meaning that TAFE is positioned as ‘second rate’. This is problematic for students who reject mainstream schooling, with Graham, Van Bergen & Sweller questioning the availability of ‘coherent and viable’ pathways for disaffected students, which impacts significantly on students’ capacities to aspire.

In terms of the students who constitute the ‘(im)proper aspirant’ (Southgate & Bennett, 2012), the literature focuses predominantly on two ‘equity’ groups: students from low SES backgrounds and rural/ remote students, and educationally disadvantaged school students. Starting with low SES students, Bok’s (2010) study of students in ‘the rustbelt’[[1]](#footnote-1) of South Australia suggest that students’ attitudes and dispositions are heterogeneous and preferred futures are optimistic and hopeful (p.166). Her work is resonant with the findings in Prodonovich, Perry & Taggart (2014), which suggest that students from low SES areas have aspirations which are commensurate with other students, but they have a larger ‘aspiration gap’, meaning the distance between where students are and where they want to be due to systemic inequalities and inequitable access to knowledge, thus rejecting the individual deficit thesis. Bok (2010) argues for a more complex theorisation of aspiration beyond simplistic low v. high aspiration dichotomies: “homogeneous notions of populations and place do not provide sufficiently nuanced descriptions of the aspirations, achievement levels and capacities of students and families in these areas” (p.176). Wrench et al. (2013) also explore aspirations in students from areas of socio-economic challenge, focusing on the intersections between pedagogy and curriculum, and the formation of aspirations. The findings from their qualitative study foreground the importance of students’ identity and subjectivity to aspiration-forming, with pedagogy and curriculum, and teacher relationships integral factors in how students develop aspirations for their futures. Wrench et al. (2013) propose that pedagogy and curriculum that “connect student life-worlds within their particular contexts, building cultural capital and broadening capabilities, self-awareness, aspirations and achievement” (p.932). Similarly, Reid & McCallum’s (2014) research produced similarly findings. They advocate for Place-Based Education, where students’ localities and experiences are privileged in the making of meaning and formation of aspirations for post-school futures. Reid & McCallum note the significance of excursions to a university campus as integral to building a sense of place, a finding which is echoed in Fleming & Grace’s (2015b) evaluation of a university campus experience in which they argue that such visits help students to imagine themselves as university students. Reid & McCallum also note the importance of the student-teacher relationship with regards to aspirations, noting that, “Teachers whom the students trust offer new language and meaning to the students’ future thinking which engages and motivates them in their learning” (p.205).

However, despite the importance of teachers for developing aspirations featuring prominently in this literature (Reid & McCallum, 2014; Robinson, 2012; Gale et al., 2013; Wrench et al., 2014), others have raised the issue of poor student-teacher relationships in the constraining of students’ aspirations. Bland (2012) explored the experiences and aspirations of disaffected students ‘in the margins’ (students who had been excluded from ‘mainstream’ school) through the lens of the deficit discourse. He discusses the damage that deficit approaches/views and labels can have and argues that, ‘Demonising discourses’ have potential/ power to ‘morally exclude’ students who are positioned as deviant, unworthy or at-risk” (p.78). In particular, he notes that teachers can be (unwittingly) complicit in reproduction of social inequity by engaging in “discriminatory practices” such as having low expectations of particular students. In similar work, McMahon, Harwood & Hickey-Moody (2015) also probe the perceptions of disaffected young people in terms of how they imagine university. They found that the participants in their study were so disillusioned with school (predominantly as a result of poor student-teacher relations) that they view universities as ‘big’, ‘massive’/ large-scale alienating schools” (p.1), with the result being that this “lack of differentiation between schools and universities [having] a confounding effect on these young people’s capacity to imagine and pursue university participation” (p.7). They argue that universities have a significant role to play in ameliorating these kinds of perceptions through the juxtaposition of school and differences, foregrounding key distinctions between the aspects of schooling that such young people have rejected. They further argue that universities need to recognize that conversations with disaffected youths are part of the widening participation agenda; however, the relatively small portion of the literature that attends to this group of students appears to confirm that such conversations are not commonplace.

**References**

Alloway, N.; Gilbert, P.; Gilbert, R.; & Muspratt, S. (2004). *Factors impacting on student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Alloway, N. & Dalley-Trim (2009). ‘High and Dry’ in Rural Australia: Obstacles to Student Aspirations and Expectations, *Rural Society,* 19(1): 49-59.

Bland, D. (2012). Imagination for re-engagement from the margin of education. *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 39(1): 75-89.

Bok, J. (2010). The capacity to aspire to higher education: ‘It’s like making them do a play without the script’. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2): 163-178.

Bowdern, M. & 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.

Bowdern, M. & Doughney, J. (2012). The importance of cultural and economic influences behind the decision to attend higher education, *The Journal of Socio-Economics,* 41: 95-103.

Cuthill, M. & Jansen, D. (2013). Initial results from a longitudinal impact study focusing on a higher education ‘widening participation’ program in Australia, *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 15(1): 7-21.

Dalley-Trim, L. & Alloway, N. (2010). Looking “Outward and Onward” in the Outback: Regional Australian Students’ Aspirations and Expectations for the Future as Framed by Dominant Discourses of Further Education and Training, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 37(2): 107-125.

Fleming, M. & Grace, D. (2015). Beyond aspirations: addressing the unique barriers faced by rural Australian students contemplating university, *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* DOI: 10.1080/0309877X.2015.1100718

Fleming, M. & Grace, D. (2015). Eyes on the future: The impact of a university campus experience day on students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, *Australian Journal of Education,* DOI: 10.1177/0004944114567689

Gale, T. (2011). Expansion and equity in Australian higher education: Three propositions for new relations, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(5): 669-685.

Gale, T. (2015). Widening and expanding participation in Australian higher education: In the absence of sociological imagination, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42(2): 257-271.

Gale, T.; Sellar, S;. Parker, S.; Hattam, R.; Comber, B.; Tranter, D.; & Bills, D. (2010). *Interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students*, National Centre Student Equity in Higher Education, Underdale, S. Aust. (A-D).

Gale, T.; Parker, S.; Rodd, P.; Stratton, G.; & Sealey, T. (2013). Student Aspirations for Higher Education in Central Queensland: A survey of school students’ navigational capacities. Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation (CREFI): Deakin University.

Gale, T. & Hodge, S. (2014). Just imaginary: delimiting social inclusion in higher education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(5): 688-709.

Gale, T. & Molla, T. (2015). Social justice intents in policy: an analysis of capability for and through education, *Journal of Educational Policy*, 30(6): 810-830.

Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2015). Calculating student aspiration: Bourdieu, spatiality and the politics of recognition, *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 45(1): 81-96.

Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2015). To aspire: a systematic reflection on understanding aspirations in higher education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(2): 139-153.

Galliott, N. (2015). Youth aspirations, participation in higher education and career choice capability: where to from here? *The Australian Educational Research*, 42(2): 133-137

Gore, J.; Holmes, K.; Smith, M.; Lyell, A.; Ellis, H.; & Fray, L. (2014). *Choosing University: The Impact of Schools and Schooling: Final Report to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education*. University of Newcastle.

Gore, J.; Holmes, K.; Smith, M.; Southgate, E. & Albright, J. (2015). Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions. *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42: 155-177.

Graham, L.; Van Bergen, P.; & Sweller, N. (2015). ‘To educate you to be smart’: disaffected students and the purpose of school in the (not so clever) ‘lucky country’, *Journal of Education Policy,* 30(2): 237-257.

Harwood, V.; McMahon, S.; O’Shea, S.; Bodkin-Andrews, G.; & Priestly, A. (2015). Recognising aspiration: the AIME program’s effectiveness in inspiring Indigenous young people’s participation in schooling and opportunities for further education and employment, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42: 217-236

James, R. (2001). Participation disadvantage in Australian higher education: An analysis of some effects of geographic location and socioeconomic status, *Higher Education,* 42: 455-472.

James, R. (2002). *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students’ aspirations and expectations*. Centre for the Study of Higher Education: The University of Melbourne.

Lynch, J.; Walker-Gibbs, B.; & Herbert, S. (2015). Moving beyond a ‘bums-on-seats’ analysis of progress towards widening participation: reflections on the context, design and evaluation of an Australian government-funded mentoring programme, *Journal of Education Policy and Management,* 37(2): 144-158.

McMahon, S.; Harwood, V.; & Hickey-Moody, A. (2015). ‘Students that just hate school wouldn’t go’: educationally disengaged and disadvantaged young people’s talk about university education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2015.1014546

Marjoribanks, K. (2005). Family background, adolescents’ educational aspirations, and Australian young adults’ educational attainment, *International Education Journal*, 6(1): 104-112.

Munro, L. (2011). ‘Go boldly, dream large!’: The challenges confronting non-traditional students at university, *Australian Journal of Education,* 55(2): 115-131.

Prodonovich, S.; Perry, L.; & Taggart, A. (2014). Developing conceptual understandings of the capacity to aspire for higher education, *Issues in Educational Research,* 24(2): 174-190.

Robinson, S. (2012). Freedom, Aspiration and Informed Choice in Rural Higher Education: Why They Are Saying ‘No’. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education,* 22(2): 79-95.

Sellar, S. (2013). Equity, markets and the politics of aspiration in Australian higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2): 245-258.

Sellar, S. (2015). ‘Unleashing aspiration’: The concept of potential in education policy, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42(2): 201-215.

Sellar, S. & Gale, T. (2011). Mobility, aspiration, voice: a new structure of feeling for student equity in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2): 115-134.

Sellar, S., Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2011). Appreciating aspirations in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(1): 37-52.

Skeyne, J. (2010). Developing productive relationships with partner schools to widen participation. A Practice Report, *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education,* 1(1): 77-83.

Smith, L. (2011). Experiential ‘hot’ knowledge and its influence on low-SES students’ capacities to aspire to higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2): 165-177.

Southgate, E. & Bennett, A. (2014). Excavating Widening Participation Policy in Australian Higher Education: Subject Positions, Representational Effects, Emotion, *Creative Approaches to Research*, 7(1): 21-45.

Wrench, A.; Hammond, C.; McCallum, F.; & Price, D. (2013). Inspire to aspire: raising aspirational outcomes through a student well-being curricular focus, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 17(9): 932-947.

Zipin, L.; Sellar, S.; Brennan, M.; Gale, T. (2015). Educating for Futures in Marginalized Regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations, *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 47(3): 227-246

**Equity in Higher Education Annotated Bibliography Series**

**Aspirations to higher education**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Citation** | **Annotation** |
| Alloway, N.; Gilbert, P.; Gilbert, R.; & Muspratt, S. (2004). *Factors impacting on student aspirations and expectations in regional Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Reports on DEST-funded project. Regional = regional, remote and rural**Aim:** * Provide a better understanding of the aspirations and expectations of students in regional areas of Australia;
* Identify the underlying factors that drive those aspirations and expectations, in particular, any factors differentiating the aspirations and expectations of students in regional areas from those of their urban counterparts – the ‘rurality’ factor(s);
* Identify barriers that might hinder students’ pursuit of their aspirations, and Identify strategies that have proven effective in enhancing and sustaining the aspirations and expectations of students in regional areas.

**Methodology:** Series of focus groups with regional students, parents and teachers from 13 regional research sites across the country (excluding ACT) + 2 urban sites in Melbourne. Where possible, mix of schools in research site recruited (independent, catholic, public). Mix of sizes (towns), mix of school years (yr 10, 11, 12). 72 interview interactions in total (some co-ed, some single sex, 23 with teachers, 3 with parents. Authors note ethical issues (barriers for state DETs resulting in loss of time; difficulty in accessing school; term time constraints with exam time and holidays; difficult to access parents**Findings:** * Students generally had high levels of aspirations – most students sure that Year 12 not the end of educational journey, rather = transition point
* Students’ “awareness of changing economic and social structures and the need for further education and training was naturalised in student discourse” (p.246)
* Students’ aspirations = synonymous with leaving home/ communities: “data suggested that an inverse relationship existed between the strength of the local economy and the determination of students to pursue their lives and careers elsewhere” (p.247).
* Some contrary responses recorded where students wanted to stay in community = reminder there is no one student voice
* Rural parents and teachers = more pessimistic about students’ educational futures beyond school
* Authors note two key dimensions at play with students’ aspirations: personal (impact on self and friends/families) and experiences; social dimension= broader social impact (quality of schooling/ local economies/ paid work/ gender roles)
* Perception that rural spaces are ‘male’ could explain higher aspiration rate of females
* Key obstacles= perceived cost of HE/ lack of occupational models/ lack of educational opportunities
 |
| Alloway, N. & Dalley-Trim (2009). ‘High and Dry’ in Rural Australia: Obstacles to Student Aspirations and Expectations, *Rural Society,* 19(1), 49–59.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *rural, aspiration, voice* | **Context:** Established body of work = rural students are more vulnerable to economic restructuring, shifting demographics, community reshaping = compounded by educational disadvantage (access/ opportunity)**Aim:** To document the voices of rural Australian students; to examine students’ views of obstacles they face in terms of aspirations and imagined futures. Rurality = not homogeneous category. Issues rural students face: SES/financial issues (economic shifts, fewer employment opportunities), fewer role models/ networks, location of HEIs, quality of educational provision. Indigineity and gender also significant: “For many young men and women in rural communities, it is difficult to construct aspirations and expectations that can move beyond the gendered culture of the communities within which they live”(p.52)**Methodology:** Focus group interviews in 2002/3 = secondary school students (13 rural schools)**Findings:** Majority of students expressed desire to ‘be something’ = “generally buoyant levels of aspirations and expectations” (p.53). But two key types of obstacles that rural students face: personal/ social (interconnected)Financial pressures: cost = related to material costs of relocating/ reliance on parentsApprehension: moving away from local community to city, lack of comfort/ familiarity: dislike of hectic lifestyle, unknown, fear for safetyAttachment to home: balance emotional ties and support of family/friends with desire to move away for study (or work!) – many uses of term ‘close-knit’Fewer work opportunities (outside of core work of community)Diminished educational opportunities: smaller numbers, fewer resources, lack of ‘specialist’ teachers (due to difficulty of staffing rural schools) – mention of Distance Ed – and lack of competition in small schools. |
| Baker, W. (2016). Aspirations: the moral of the story, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 38(8), 1203–1216.UKAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Aspirations; identity; inequality; morality; education* | **Context:** Discusses the poverty of aspirations thesis in modern UK political discourse; notes the research focused on this with relation to educational outcomes/ progression; notes scholarly concern with the highly individualistic focus of aspiration in policy rhetoric (see example quote from David Cameron on first page). Makes the argument that moral meanings = essential for making sense of the future; questions how unrealistic optimism comes into play if aspirations = only a reflection of resources and opportunity. Baker views aspirations as connected to the ways that education = valorised for offering possibilities for social mobility; also notes how ideals about good people and a ‘good life’ drive people’s imaginaries: “This background, where economic ideas overlap and blend into moral criteria, provides an organising cultural schema for how many young people think about the future and interpret their decisions” (p.1205). Offers literature review on definitions and studies of aspirations (p.3-4), and intersections with social class, ethnicity and economic background**Aim:** To focus on how aspirations relate/intersect with individual and collective identities, moral meaning attached to imagined futures and decision-making; to investigate “the normative dimensions of young peoples’ aspirations and their lives more generally” (p.1205). Draws on Bourdieuresian work but notes how reliance on his thinking tools has resulted in “little attention to actors’ normative motivations and concerns” (p.4) because scholars drawing on Bourdieu tend to downplay ‘value commitments and normative concerns’ (conflated with social class)**Theoretical frame:** Moral meanings; draws from cultural sociology/ sociology of morality for insights into individual and collective identities: “The moral meaning that my interviewees attached to their aspirations can usefully be thought of as an overarching cognitive framework within which students organised their potential decisions and actions regarding the future” (p.1210).**Methodology:** Qualitative: paper presents on data collected from a large multi-method study of young people’s aspirations in England. Data reported = semi-structured interviews with students (n=29) studying at 6th form college in East London (SES/ethnically diverse community; ¼ = ‘White British’; majority = BME). Questions asked about perceptions of what makes a ‘good life’.**Findings:** Most students expressed a desire to remain in the education system (which = going to university). 22/29 = clear that attending uni was their primary goal, which included students whose achievement was low and the likelihood of progressing to uni was ‘slim’. Only 5 spoke negatively about going to university/ wanting to enter labour market. Baker writes a ‘striking’ feature of data = ‘normative evaluative way’ participants described their goals: “They spoke about their aspirations not just in terms of gaining credentials to succeed in the labour market, but also in terms of self-development and how their choices reflected a commitment to values that were central to their identity” (p.5), which was matched with parents’ reported aspirations for their children. Students may have been vague about exactly what work they aspired to do, but were clear about the kinds of people they wanted to be (see example of Rubel, p.6), which were broadly connected to wanting to be ‘a good person’. University = seen as a way of developing ‘moral self-improvement’ (see Neilson, 2015; p.1208). 2/3 of participants talked about view of university as helping them to ‘grow as a person’. Author questions whether this sentiment reflects the not taken-for-grantedness of attending university (compared with more privileged students). Students stressed similar desires to ‘help’ in terms of their career aspirations. Students’ talk identified a link between education and social esteem (shared perception of conferral of status/ value/ respect due to educational success). Religion = significant (see p.1211).Aspirations also used to make distinctions between individuals and groups. Firstly, the participants “stressed both the importance of certain actions and attitudes, such as determination, to achieving ambitious goals and their commitment to traditional ideals about educational achievement and achieving a ‘good’ job” (p.1211), and these were contrasted against ‘negative’ qualities (such as laziness). The ideal of working hard = significant; not having aspirations or working hard = stigmatized as a ‘moral failure’ (see p.1212). Some students also expressed an egalitarian view – that all students could potentially get good marks – and that laziness was a key reason why this was not the case.**Core argument:** Offers analysis of aspirations as moral meanings for young people and their futures; “young people experience and interpret their educational and occupational aspirations as part of a normatively evaluative narrative about who they are and the sort of person they hope to become” (p.1212), which offers a new insight into students’ educational motivations and decision-making. |
| Ball, S. & Vincent, C. (1998). ‘I heard It on the Grapevine’: ‘Hot’ Knowledge and School Choice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 19(3), 377–400.UKAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Explores issue of parental choice in terms of secondary school selection**Aim:** To map and analyse patterns, effects and variations of ‘grapevining’ (thus: structure, social relations and dissemination of grapevine knowledge) = p.377**Theoretical frame:** Adopts Straussian analysis (structures and processes underlying choice)**Methodology:** Interviewed 172 parents (138 interviews) about school selection**Findings:** Paper produces a typology of parental school-choosing: *skilled/privileged, semi-skilled, disconnected* choosers, representing (partially) class and sets of values used to make choices (scale from high inclination and capacity – low inclination and capacity). Reference to grapevine (informal social networks) is ubiquitous in interview data: “Networks, produced within the personal domain, can also equip individuals for their engagement with the public sphere” (p.378) … “the grapevine is a collective attempt to make sense of the locality and particular features within it” (p.379). The grapevine “is often seen as *more* reliable than other ‘official’ sources of information, especially those provided by the schools themselves” (p.380) or “packaging as public relations” (p.389). Access to different grapevines depends on class-related factors (ethnicity, where you live who you know, what you do). Three sets of broad responses to the grapevine:1. Suspicion = where parents (mostly middle class) seek alternative sources of information (either cold knowledge or widening source pool of people); subset of mostly working class parents rejected grapevine and worked from children’s affective/experiential knowledge; subset of people excluded from grapevine (e.g. men compared with women/ new arrivals in local area)
2. Doubt = parents rely on grapevine but question its verity (mix of skilled/ semi-skilled); uncertainty of choice makes school selection an anxiety-ridden experience (mostly for middle class parents)
3. Acceptance = mostly semi-skilled parents who view grapevine as highly reliable more likely to view cold knowledge with suspicion

**Core argument:** Access to particular grapevines “is socially structured and patterned” (p.392) – there are some class patterns evident: upper-middle class parents more likely to supplement grapevine knowledge with cold knowledge; working class parents more likely to be suspicious of grapevine knowledge because they cannot see differences between schools. Distrust of ‘cold’ knowledge suggest that in the midst of a ‘crisis of representation’, schools’ efforts to manage their image has resulted in “the relationships between signifier and signified becoming increasingly slippery in consequence” (p.392) |
| Bland, D. (2012). Imagination for re-engagement from the margin of education. *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 39(1), 75–89.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Imagination in education, marginalised students, Educational engagement, Students as researchers* | **Context:** Explores notion of imagination through alternative educational approach/ workshop with young people who have been pushed/ have self-exiled to the margins of mainstream education (high school). Uses terms disengagement and marginalisation to describe this ‘outside’ or ‘at-risk’ positioning. Context = recent educational policies that require students to be ‘learning or earning’ until Year 12/ age of 17. Argues that recent “the most educationally disadvantaged students are condemned to mediocrity by exposure to the least stimulating and relevant material” (p.76), leaving some students to feel devalued/ disconnected by the school system, which Haberman (1991) calls the “dulling routines” of school (p.77) – where young people are denied agency or opportunities to change. Discusses the damage that deficit approaches/views and labels can have. ‘Demonising discourses’ have potential/ power to ‘morally exclude’ students who are positioned as deviant, unworthy or at-risk (p.78). Instead, such students “are not necessarily delinquent nor lacking in ability but find the middle class institution of schooling to be ‘completely banal, meaningless and without purpose, except as a reasonably pleasant place in which to meet and socialize with one’s friends’ (Smyth 2006: 286)”. Bland also discusses the damage that labels can have for students in terms of their “stigmatizing and constitutive” possibility, and that teachers can be (unwittingly) complicit in reproduction of social inequity by engaging in “discriminatory practices” such as having low expectations of particular students.Margins of education can be isolating but can also be “places of great creativity” (p.79); rather than trying to punish or coerce students back to the mainstream, needs to be other, creative approaches that engage the margins and the mainstream in dialogue. **Aim:** To explore the attraction of the margins for disaffected students; to question relevance of recent educational policies and discourses; to offer example of participatory action research project (part of author’s PhD?) which offered an alternative program at the margins and had positive consequences for the students who participated.**Theoretical frame:** Works from a typology of imagination (see Table 1, p.82)**Methodology:** Engaged students in a participatory action research project, where the students were positioned as researchers (SaR), thus empowering students to research/ develop understandings of their own situation and opening opportunities to consider new imaginaries for their futures [developing counter-hegemonic practices and discourses; resisting normative positioning by the education system]: “This engagement of the students’ imaginations can reconnect them with the possibilities that formal education can offer, helping them to deal with the requirements and constraints of school education, while imagining ‘that things could be otherwise’ (Noone and Cartwright 2005 , p. 2)” p.80. Imagination in particular = crucial to this, making empathy and creativity possible.**Findings:** The PAR project involved students who had been marginalised/ removed from the classroom in a project that engaged the students in workshop activities and resulted in the production of a DVD and some public speaking. The project appears to have had positive impact on students (many returned to mainstream classes; some enrolled in university). The project activated different kinds of imaginations, primarily: critical imagination, empathetic imagination and creative imagination (see p.86)**Core argument:** That by engaging students in the margins where they are (where they have chosen), it is possible to find more effective solutions for engaging with this group of students. “A students-as-researchers approach offers one means by which marginalised students may find empowerment through imagination, discover those openings, and build bridges for themselves to connect them back with the mainstream” |
| Bok, J. (2010). The capacity to aspire to higher education: ‘It’s like making them do a play without the script’. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2), 163–178.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Appadurai, aspiration, Bordieu disadvantaged schools, equity, higher education, parental attitudes* |  **Aim:** To challenge the deficit framing of low SES students having a ‘lack of aspiration’ and to explore how low SES students “imagine and articulate their aspirations to HE and their broader understandings of the ‘good life’“ (p.164).**Theoretical frame:** Draws on Appadurai’s 2004 notion of ‘capacity to aspire’ and use navigate aspirational maps (with aspiration framed as a cultural capacity rather than individual motivational trait (p.164); Ball & Vincent’s 1998 theory of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ knowledge and Bourdieu’s tools of field/capital/habitus. “…aspirations are complex understandings of the future pathways available to people” (p.164).**Methodology:** Semi-structured interviews with middle year students (11-12 years of age) in a low SES school in ‘rustbelt’[[2]](#footnote-2) S.A. Four students, teacher, school counsellor and principal were interviewed. Students did short survey with families for sociocultural contextual information. Photos of significant locations in life-worlds also collected.**Findings:** Students’ attitudes and dispositions = *heterogeneous* and preferred futures are *optimistic* and *hopeful* (p.166). Transgenerational experiences, access to information networks beyond the local community and academic achievement at school are all important contributory factors in students’ capacity to navigate educational pathways. Low SES students “must often actively seek beyond their families and local communities for information about HE” (p.171) In one interview, a teacher raises/acknowledges the tension between students’ aspirations and a ‘lack’ of requisite academic capacities: “it’s like making them do a play without a script” (p.175)**Core argument:** A more complex theorisation of aspiration needed beyond simplistic low v. high dichotomies; “homogeneous notions of populations and place do not provide sufficiently nuanced descriptions of the aspirations, achievement levels and capacities of students and families in these areas” (p.176).**Interesting fact:** This paper was written by Bok who was a B(Ed) student at the time as a result of a NCSEHE summer school scholarship |
| Bowdern, M. & 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.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *aspirations; SES; method; measurement; NESB; cultural diversity; secondary school* | **Context:** Draws on survey data from Australian secondary school students. Describes aspirations as “a fundamental part of a student’s decision making process and ultimately impact on the choices made by the individual (in this case to attend higher education)” (p.116). SES = measured by parents’ educational background/ ethnic background = based on language spoken at home. Makes claim this is the first such study to explore post-school aspirations and cultural diversity.**Aim:** To explore whether SES and cultural background impact on aspirations (secondary school level; Melbourne); to consider validity of ‘area measures’ as a way of identifying SES**Theoretical frame:** Draws lightly on structure and agency: capital (Bourdieu), social mobility (Boudon), agency (Archer)**Methodology:** Paper based on responses to ‘Aspirations Online’ survey in 2006-7 (Yr 9-12; n = 2189; 36 schools in Melbourne’s metropolitan western suburbs: 23 public, 6 independent, 7 Catholic schools). Slightly different surveys used for Yr 9-10 and Yr 11-12. Compares data against the ‘On Track’ school leaver survey (DEECD, 2008)**Findings:** High SES students are more likely to aspire to higher education and low SES students are more likely to aspire to VET or work; this is stronger for NESB students: “the preference for higher education is strongest among students from more recently arrived non-English speaking groups from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Preference for higher education is weakest among students who were, or whose parents were, born in Oceania (principally New Zealand and the Pacific Islands)” (p.122). The majority of students aspire to higher education (51.2% chose ‘university full time’ as their preferred aspiration) but enrolments do not reflect this. CALD students are more likely to perceive receiving higher levels of support from parents. However, there is a ‘considerable gap’ (20%, p.127) between the number of enrolments of the level of [voiced] aspiration.Use of postcode method of measuring SES finds no link between SES and post-school aspirations**Core argument:** Aspirations are linked to SES. Preference for higher education is stronger in NESB households. Argues for the need for ‘granulated’ measures of SES that are based on parents’ educational background rather than postcode. |
| Bowdern, M. & Doughney, J. (2012). The importance of cultural and economic influences behind the decision to attend higher education, *The Journal of Socio-Economics,* 41, 95–103.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *economic cultural influences, decision, schooling* | **Context:** Explores cultural and economic influences of decision to attend university – focus on aspirations, not enrolments. Works from premise/evidence that higher SES students are more likely to attend school and lower SES students more likely to enter TAFE. 3 potential sources of differentiation between low/high SES students: 1) highly educated students = “have stronger tastes for schooling” (p.96), 2) if education is used as indicator by employers, more education is better than less, 3) cost of acquiring education is less/ expected benefit is higher for high SES students. Race/ethnicity/ language background = also significant. Bowdern & Dougherty (2010) note that higher education aspirations/ value placed on education are/is stronger in LBOTE households**Aim:** **Theoretical frame:** Use a binary logit model to investigate cultural and economic factors that impact on students’ aspirations (using SES and ethnic background as measurable variables) – SES based on parents’ education. Draws on human capital theory, Bourdieu’s habitus, Rational Cost Theory to situate SES. **Methodology:** Paper based on responses to ‘Aspirations Online’ survey in 2006-7 (Yr 9-12; n = 2189; 36 schools in Melbourne’s metropolitan western suburbs: 23 public, 6 independent, 7 Catholic schools). Slightly different surveys used for Yr 9-10 and Yr 11-12. Project information was multilingual. 2189 students in total participated**Findings:** High SES and LBOTE students more likely to aspire to HEFemales more likely to aspire than malesStudents are more likely to aspire to attend if:They have the internet at homeThey are encouraged by teachersThey attend a Catholic or independent schoolThey have high levels of parental support (which is likely to be related to parents’ level of education)**Core argument:** That SES and ethnicity are strong predictors of students’ likelihood to aspire to HE |
| Cuthill, M. & Jansen, D. (2013). Initial results from a longitudinal impact study focusing on a higher education ‘widening participation’ program in Australia, *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 15(1), 7–21.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Impact study, widening participation, equity in higher education, low socio-economic background, raising aspiration.* | **Context:** Reports on 5-year study of impact of ‘young achievers’ program on students, families, schools and community. This program was established in 2009/10 and is a 6-year program with the aim of “build[ing] and support[ing] the tertiary education aspirations of educationally disadvantaged state secondary-school students” (p.9). Students start in Year 11 & 12 (most intense phase) and are supported for a further 4 years while they complete undergraduate studies. The aim is to take 100 students each year who receive: on campus experiences (inc. residential), $1000 bursary per year in Years 11&12, mentoring, assistance and advice, scholarship support up to $6000 per year for UG studies and a guaranteed place (via QTAC). Eligibility requirements for program = ‘financial hardship’, ‘geographic isolation’, ‘indigenous’, and ‘first in family’.**Aim:** The impact study addresses three interrelated questions.1. How successful is the Young Achievers Program in recruiting and transitioning young people from low socio-economic backgrounds to tertiary study at ‘this university’? (Data sourced primarily from Program enrolment records.)2. How do specific initiatives within the Young Achievers Program contribute to overall Program success and outcomes? (data sourced from both interviews and population level surveys.)3. What are the impacts of the Young Achievers Program for participants, their families, schools and community? (Data sourced primarily from interviews, and triangulated against other Program data to check for similarities and differences.) – all p.10**Methodology**: Longitudinal tracking approach/ qualitative methods = in-depth interviewing, workshops, observations + demographic data collection. Total of 35 participants (23 = f, 12 = m): 11 students (interviewed annually), 11 parents, 13 school staff from 4 (out of 27) selected schools (interviewed biannually). Interview questions around 5 themes: aspirations, barriers to participation in tertiary education, impacts, civic responsibility as potential outcome, disadvantage and higher education.**Findings:**Draws on interview data collected in 2011 (researcher travelled to 4 schools: 15 min with students, 25 with parents/guardians, 40 with school staff)Four key ‘impact’ themes: ‘Recognition’, ‘Raised awareness’, ‘Relief’ and ‘Social connections’ Recognition: “Their effort with school studies is now seen as more worthwhile and appropriately rewarded” (p.14) and increased sense of family pride. Recognition extends to school and community: “it’s almost like throwing the rock in the pool and [the ripple effect] ... (teacher)”Raised awareness: all young achievers expressed desire to go to university but there was a lack of understanding/ awareness of expectations and opportunities. Program helped to raise awareness of “course options, career pathways, and support services, and more broadly the practicalities involved with being a university student” (p.15). Also raised awareness for parents (preparing for departure of children: ‘having to let go’). Also evoked parents’ aspirations (‘older achiever dreams’)Relief: relating to cost/ admissions/ entrance requirements for students and parentsSocial connections: through meeting like-minded peers and through mentoring. School staff noted enhanced connections between schools and university |
| Dalley-Trim, L. & Alloway, N. (2010). Looking “Outward and Onward” in the Outback: Regional Australian Students’ Aspirations and Expectations for the Future as Framed by Dominant Discourses of Further Education and Training, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 37(2), 107–125.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *aspirations, rural, higher education* | **Context:** Explores educational/ future aspirations of regional students in terms of *outwards* (away from community) and *onward* (make something of their lives)**Aim:** To explore participants’ talk for descriptions/ positioning of aspirations; ‘navigate students’ narratives’**Theoretical frame:** Based on notion that aspirations and expectations = formed over period of time (Yr 10 = “where decisions about continuing to Year 12 crystallise” (p.111)**Methodology:** “Multi-voiced” project. Draws on data collected for Alloway et al. 2004 (see that entry for details of methodology). Data collected Yr 10 and Yr 12. ‘Regional’ = regional, rural and remote**Findings:** Data suggests that rural students who have high-level aspirations are career-focusedParticipants’ talk “demonstrates that many of them had thought about their futures in detailed ways and had accumulated knowledge and “street savvy” that would assist them in steering their futures” (abstract). Participants’ descriptions of aspirations suggest the changing work landscape and ‘inescapability’ of further education = normalized and integrated into their discoursesNarratives: most students want ‘to be something’ and not be caught in dead-end jobs; for some that idea involved moving out of their regional communityGenerally = buoyant levels of expectation and aspiration (p.113) and desire to continue learning in some form = norm.Post-school education =viewed as naturalised discourse and key to competitive advantage. Also seen as ‘means to an end’ (“inevitability of a “credentialing creep” in employment prospects” (p.117)Talk suggests that many students had thought in detail about their futures and “had accumulated know how and street savvy that would assist them in navigating their futures” (p.113)Students with aspiration for HE = streetwise =strategic view (knew what courses are difficult to get into; tight quotas; knew of pathways from TAFE to university; ‘backdoor’ entries to high-status courses): “Their aspirations were kept afloat by what they knew of Universities that allowed students to cross-over from one course to another, sometimes dependent upon them demonstrating sufficiently high levels of success in their initial studies” (p.119) |
| Drummond, A.; Halsey, R.; Lawson, M.; & van Breda, M. (2012). The Effectiveness of a University Mentoring Project in Peri-Rural Australia, *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education,* 22(2), 29–41.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *mentoring, youth, peri-rural* | **Context:** Set in post-Bradley context (40/20 targets) – notes that ‘peri-rural’ (up to 80km from metropolitan areas; rural = 80km+) = obvious point to examine in terms of meeting expansion targets. Explores a youth mentoring program with Year 9 students in peri-rural area (aim = raise aspirations for university study)**Aim:** To present data on mentoring program; “to investigate whether the in-group identification of school students would be affected by contact with university mentors, and whether this in turn would affect their intentions to attend university following high-school graduation” (p.31); also “to investigate the social expectations on students to attend university or vocational education and the effects these pressures have on students’ intentions” (p.32). Mentors = part of ‘Inspire Peer Mentoring’ at Flinders: weekly interaction over 2 x 11 week terms in small groups. As part of program, mentees also visit campus twice (once per term)**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Quantitative/ questionnaire. Participants asked to estimate in percentage terms likelihood of attending university/ how much contact with university mentors. 18 participants (14 = m; 4 = f) from a peri-rural school in SA. No mention of SES profile. 10 items in questionnaire = in- group identification (“Uni students are just like me”) to create university and TAFE in-group scale. Other items measured contact with mentors and on other external factors affecting likelihood of aspiring to higher education**Findings:** Data suggests that mentoring program increased students’ ‘in-group’ identification [see Slack et al. 2013 = ‘warm’ information], which increased estimated likelihood of intention to attend university. Campus visits did not produce same correlation. Aspirations to attend university or TAFE = don’t appear to be related – perhaps a result of the framing of a dichotomy (either/or), whereas students may aspire for one, both or none. There was no correlation between university mentoring and aspiration to TAFE (aka uni mentoring is useful for aspiration to university, not tertiary education more generally)**Core argument:** If students can make meaningful contact with university students, they are more likely to aspire to go to university (confirming hypothesis on p.32): “Mentoring youth with active members of the university community appears to be beneficial for student aspirations for university education, and may be one critical mechanism for rectifying the inequity in university participation rates for rural students” (p.39) |
| Empey, L. (1956). Social Class and Occupational Aspiration: A Comparison of Absolute and Relative Measurement, *American Sociological Review,* 21(6), 703–709.USAnnotated by Sally Baker Keywords: *occupational mobility, occupational choice, aspirations* | **Context:** Examines occupational aspirations of ‘lower classes’ – rejects the thesis that lower classes have lower aspirations (not or managerial or professional jobs); draws on socio-psych reading of aspiration (multiple factors/ lower classes = more strongly motivated**Aim:** To compare the actual and relative aspirations of male high school seniors to test these hypotheses:1. absolute occupational aspirations of higher/middle class = higher than those of lower classes
2. Relative occupational aspirations show lower class participants expect/ prefer higher occupational status than fathers
3. Lower classes more inclined than those from middle and upper strata to reduce their occupational aspirations when faced with the necessity of choosing between their preferred and anticipated occupations. (p.704-5)

**Theoretical frame:** Social psychology**Methodology:** Questionnaire administered to probability sample of male high school seniors in Washington State in 1954 on occupational plans/ aspirations. Results analysed according to absolute and relative standard (absolute: compare lower and higher class; relative= compared with father’s occupation).**Findings:** Hypothesis 1: There was “a direct relationship be-tween present social level and future occupational aspiration for both preferred and anticipated occupations” (p.706)Hypothesis 2: Correct – lower classes preferred and anticipated higher occupation status than fathersHypothesis 3: not supported by the data**Core argument:** A “measurement of aspiration for comparative purposes would likely be most accurate if it took relativities into account” (p.709). |
| Fleming, M. & Grace, D. (2017). Beyond aspirations: addressing the unique barriers faced by rural Australian students contemplating university, *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 41(3), 351–363.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Widening participation; rural students; university access; barriers; higher education* | **Context:** Discusses rural and remote students’ transitions through ACT Experience camp (a joint venture with Country Education Foundation ((CEF)) Australia, Uni of Canberra and ANU) providing “academically able” (abstract) rural students with taster of urban/university life. CEF’s mission is in part to support rural and regional communities/ young people to participate in post-school education and training. ACT Experience = HEPPP funded. Every year, 50 students (Years 9-11) travel to Canberra – students chosen on basis of ‘academic ability’. Purpose of camps “to provide a unique experience relevant to rural youth who, despite performing well academically and perhaps already considering university, have difficulty envisioning themselves at university” (p.3). Camps also offer information about finances and scholarships. Discusses: adolescents’ post-school decisions, rural students’ views on university**Theoretical frame:** Draws on discussion of ‘imagined futures’**Methodology:** Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). Pilot study: 41 (31f: 10m; 35 = Yr10, 6 = Yr9; 3 = Indigenous) from 5 high schools in 2012; students asked about views of university at start/end of camp (survey = demographic data, questions about future plans; students asked write down 3 words that come to mind). Words rated as positive, negative, neutral. Main study: 48 (24f; 24m; 39 = Yr10; 9 =Yr11; 3 x Indigenous) from 5 high schools. Pre/post-course surveys + focus groups 7 weeks after.**Findings:** Pilot study: 82% interested in uni before camp; 17% undecided. Students = positive words about university got more positiveMain study: went into 2014 camp with “the intention of more accurately ascertaining students’ attitudes toward university, and addressing potential barriers” (p.356), particularly knowledge of university, confidence to transition and successfully live in city. Also included parents’ and friend’s plans for future. Students were surveyed and had to complete reflection (various formats) of what the camp meant to them (small groups).Findings (main study): prior, 70% intended to go to university. Little change post camp. Focus group data themes: positive expectations/ learning something interesting; concerns about university (financial cost, accommodation/ moving away from home; students’ impressions of university: most students had not seen a university before; students’ changed views of university: after visiting two campuses, students were more positive; imagined selves as university students (expectations about workloads, work, friends, classes + going home at weekends); imagined selves beyond university.**Core argument:** Rural students are generally “less confident about their ability to succeed at university given their self-perceptions as being different to urban/metropolitan young people” (p.361). “[S]tudents reported (1) greater understanding of university, of their post-school options and of living in a city; and (2) increased confidence in their decision-making and in their ability to move away from home” (p.359); latter point= particularly relevant for rural/remote students. However, rural/remote students still need “assistance to believe that they can make the transition to university and (albeit temporarily) city life” (p.361). |
| Fleming, M. & Grace, D. (2015). [Eyes on the future: The impact of a university campus experience day on students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0004944114567689), *Australian Journal of Education,* 59(1), 82–96.AUSAnnotation written by Sally Baker Keywords: *Disadvantaged, socioeconomic status, aspiration, university attendance, Secondary school students, gender differences* | **Context:** Describes impact of *UC 4 Yourself* university experience day (part of HEPPP-funded *Aspire UC* outreach) for students from low SES (‘financially disadvantaged backgrounds’). Navigates literature on SES and aspirations (lower rates of Yr 12 completion/ lower levels of parental education/ lack of support networks/ stratification of school system =reproduces inequity. Barriers to study = distance, cost, low academic achievement, and low otivations/ aspirations (Gale et al. 2010). Imagined futures (draws heavily on Sellar/Gale et al.)**Methodology:** 2 x surveys (n=525 students; 231 m/ 294 f from 29 high schools – most Yr 9. 31 = indigenous) administered before/after visit. Survey 1: students rated 3 statements 1) ‘I have often considered going to university’; (2) ‘I like the idea of going to university’; and (3) ‘My plans for after high school don’t include university’. Survey 2= (i) ‘I like the idea of going to university’; (ii) ‘I feel more comfortable on a university campus’; (iii) ‘I can imagine myself as a uni student’; (iv) ‘I feel more confident that I could attend uni’; (v) ‘I want to find out more about uni’; and (vi) ‘I want to go to university’.**Findings:** Attendees = more likely to attend university and better able to imagine themselves as university studentsSurvey 1= no differences found between students on basis of year level, indigineity, previous experience with Aspire UC. Revealed ‘high levels’ of interest in HE. Females reported more interest than males but scores for both genders =highSurvey 2 = difference found between students who had experienced Aspire UC before (“additional visits further enhance the capacity to picture oneself in the situation, that is, to conceive of oneself as a student of the university” (p.91). No gender effects with regards to barriers. Students reported uni = less expensive than expected**Core argument:** Provision of information = paramount (p.92); tangible experience (physical experience) = important and facilitates imagination of self as uni student. |
| Gale, T. (2011) Expansion and equity in Australian higher education: Three propositions for new relations, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(5), 669–685.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *higher education; student equity; social inclusion; widening participation; socioeconomic status; aspiration* | **Context:** Australian HE post-Bradley review (widening participation in Australia as a response to a futures-crisis of skilled/graduate workers which could damage Australia’s potential “to secure for Australia a more competitive position in the global knowledge economy” (p.670)**Aim:** To propose three propositions for student equity: 1) new relations between demand and supply – demand will struggle to match intended supply (20/40 targets); 2) government and universities will need to develop new way of thinking about the students they want to attract; 3) more attention to nature of HE/its appeal will be needed.**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Essay**Findings:** Proposition 1: changing relationship between demand and supply.There has been no net gain in academics (54% of Australian academics are over the age of 45) and more academics are needed (as well as students) in order to meet the 20/40 targets (220,000 more student places needed by 2025 to meet targets: expansion = 4-5x size of Monash). Also considers financial resources needed for infrastructure investments/developments needed to sustain increased student numbers. Universities don’t have enough surplus funds to fund these. Low SES student numbers have increased but proportional representation has remained steady and there are similar trends in TAFE (Cert IV/ diploma courses) meaning that VET cannot fill shortfall in numbers. Proposition 2: Aspiration and design of outreach: Gale et al. (2010) argued that three equity perspectives inform high quality university outreach programs: 1) they unsettle deficit views of disadvantaged students and communities; 2) they research local knowledges and negotiate local interventions; 3) they build capacity in communities, schools and universities. Gale et al.’s work identified 10 characteristics (DEMO) – listed on p.675 – which feed into a matrix. Optimum performance/ outreach has all 10 characteristics; effective programs need a combination of at least 5 characteristics. Sellar & Gale (?) identify 3 levels of aspiration: individual (economic/ sociocultural); institutional (economic/ symbolic); national (economic/ sociocultural). Positioning of low SES with ‘low’ aspirations = incongruent with national economic ambitions. Similarly, the national ambition to encourage fairer distribution of educational goods = in conflict with hierarchical/elite system and competition between students/ places/ universities.Proposition 3: teaching for equity: retention rates are similar between low /medium/high SES students (aka = low SES students do as well as their peers at staying with their courses; see Bradley Review 2008). New understanding needed that *all* students bring “assets” to university (p.679) requires new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and current practices create the image of a homogenous HE system that may prevent some students from aspiring to belong/join. Identifies 3 narratives from UK/ AUS/ US (common themes) that guide principles for teaching and learning (see p.680): diversity of learners to be considered in curriculum and pedagogy, active engagement (pedagogy), assessment should be linked to pedagogy (needs revisiting). Gale identifies possible equity principle in each: 1) consider student-faculty contact (familiarity/distance); 2) valuing of informal learning; 3) research for teaching – informing teachers. Suggests taking ‘funds of knowledge’ approach (Moll et al. 1992) to recognise that all students come to learning environment with knowledges which positions them differently (as experts of their own domains). Zipin (2009) suggests funds of pedagogy; Gonzales et al. (2005) suggest a hybrid of these two ideas, involving “lightly framed, open curricula and pedagogy that allow for student contributions without these being predetermined” (p.681). Refers to TLRP ‘connectionist pedagogies’ (Hockings, Cooke & Bowl, 2010) to create collaborative and inclusive spaces, student-centred strategies, connecting with students’ lives, being culturally aware.**Core argument:** Australian universities need to work together, rather than in competition, to meet the 20/40 targets. Need to consider role of teaching and learning to tackle equity issues. |
| Gale, T. (2015). Widening and expanding participation in Australian higher education: In the absence of sociological imagination, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42(2), 257–271.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *widening participation, equity, aspiration, sociological imagination* | **Context:** Offers an assessment of whether the Rudd/Gillard policy approach to widening participation ‘worked’. Characterises the 20/40 targets as ‘widening’ and ‘expanding’ participation (40% target dependent on 20% target), achieved in policy terms by attending to equity in and raising aspirations to HE. Contextualises Australian focus with international/OECD countries, noting many share the push to increase numbers of knowledge workers, albeit with social inclusion agenda also prevalent. Notes that ‘universal participation’ has become new social imaginary (Gale & Hodge, 2014); others note that the 20/40 targets are not close to being achieved and recent reviews (e.g. Kemp & Norton, 2014) do not share this vision.**Theoretical frame:** Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination = relations between private troubles and public issues (see p.258).**Methodology:** Essay**Findings:** Absence of sociological imagination in Rudd/Gillard policy = evident in 3 ways: 1) widespread trouble was misrecognised/ misrepresented; 2) misalignment of private troubles/ public issues so that aspirations = located in individuals and social/community issues ignored; 3) policy elevated private issues to public level – limited/no consideration of how existing systems create ‘private troubles’. Furthermore, preference for/reliance on quantitative measurements foreground private issues, whereas qualitative research has a better possibility of illuminating the social-structural constraints. Gale notes how bounded systems (e.g. UG study) = becoming more porous as result of globalisation = discusses high SES students studying in elite universities in other countries to gain positional advantage (geographic mobility)Qualifying equity: not just about access, participation, success in HE; it’s now about those in relation to particular forms of HE and ignores what students bring and HE serves students’ needs (p.264) – therefore focus is on diversity of student body, not HE’s response to accommodating that diversity – there has been more creation of spaces for new bodies but not commensurate consideration of what they embody (ref to Dei’s epistemological equity; also see Connell’s ‘southern theory’)Aspiration strategies: notes how aspiration has been positioned as individual psychological construct (private issue) with information and guidance to individuals and their families held up as best approach to ‘convert’ students to aspiring to HE. “Yet the distinction between desire and possibility remains important: for the advantaged, possibility is mediated by desire but for the disadvantaged, desire is mediated by possibility” (p.266)There is plenty of research that shows that low SES students do have aspirations for HE – thus suggesting that aspiration is not the problem. Instead, perhaps = diminished navigational capacities, less map (‘in the know’) knowledge. Also = problematic positioning of HE as key to ‘good life’“Equity is at once conceived as a public response to the private troubles of individuals and specific groups, while also contributing to the private troubles of these individuals and groups through limited conceptions of social-structural issue… the aspiration troubles of individuals and specific groups are escalated to the level of public issue when they reveal problems with structural arrangements.” (p.260)**Core argument:** Labor (2007-13) policies lacked sociological imagination, resulting in the projection of deficits onto individuals who didn’t want to ‘play’. Also argues that this means that participation of disadvantaged groups = set to continue“A sociological imagination and thus new policy commitments are now required: (1) to expand the application of equity to other parts of the HE system, including and centrally to the nature of HE itself, and (2) to recognize and resource the aspirations of under-represented groups for HE without these aspirations being confined to or by HE” (p.268). |
| Gale, T. & Hodge, S. (2014). Just imaginary: delimiting social inclusion in higher education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(5), 688–709.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker*Keywords: social inclusion; higher education; social imaginary; policy effects; aspiration deficits; opportunity trap* | **Context:** Look at social inclusion agenda through lens of OECD and Australia, examining the ‘policy effects’. Argues that social inclusive is ‘just imaginary’ because of systematic/structural disconnections between aspirations and possibilities. Argue that widening participation = strategy to supplant industrial economy with knowledge economy. Draws on Raco (2009) = neoliberalisation and widening participation have created a ‘politics of aspiration’ (expansion = dependent on widening participation to non-traditional students but is sold as a project of self-improvement, individual competitiveness)**Aim:** To unpack three dilemmas at heart of social inclusion discourse and agenda**Theoretical frame:** Taylor’s (2004) notion of ‘social imaginary’ = common understandings/ widespread practices creates legitimacy for new orders/ discourses; ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2007)**Methodology:** Essay**Dilemmas:**Dilemma 1: Sustainability of social inclusionDraws on Ball’s (1993) idea of first and second order effects (first-order effect = change practice; second-order effect = change of relations/ dominance)**;** thus there can be an appearance of change without any substantial systemic change in terms of the power orderor change being sustained. To date, changes have been sustained because of numerical (first-order) arguments – little evidence of second-order effects. Discusses diminishing political will = conflation of social inclusion with drops in quality (despite evidence to the contrary in terms of increased retention figures), particularly in context of 2013 election and subsequent change of governmentDilemma 2: Expanding HE with uncertain interest: what aspirations? – value of HE not immediately evident, especially to non-traditional students. View of aspirations inscribed in policy (and some practice) = deficit; authors argue that these assumptions are contradicted by the evidence (aka = low SES and other equity groups do generally aspire for further study and HE) – covers a lot of Gale’s work; “Rendering higher education more socially inclusive necessarily involves unsettling ‘the centre–periphery relations in the realm of knowledge’ (Connell 2007, viii) through the legitimation of a variety of knowledges and ways of knowing, so that students are able to recognize themselves and hear their own voices” (p.698)Dilemma 3: increased opportunity/diminished returnsProblem with prospect of government’s vision/ participation targets – credential creep = more graduates competing for fewer jobs/ lower graduate salaries = ‘cruel optimism’. Social inclusion = more than just access; needs support (see classic Engstrom & Tinto (2008) quote: ‘access without support is not opportunity’). Assumptions of deficit fuel assumptions of slipping standards because of increased participation of non-traditional students. Low SES students (congregated in particular disciplines/ occupations) = most at risk from qualification devaluation/ fewer opportunities post-study because middle-class+ families are able to barter better positional advantage by drawing on enhanced resources (money/ knowledge/ networks)**.Core argument:** Based on Taylor’s (2004) theory that social imaginaries come into being in 2 ways: through ‘penetration’ of theory and through reinterpretation of old practicesDilemma 1: new social inclusion practices are starting, but out of neoliberal logics/throery – therefore new practices = economic rather than socially oriented, leading to restriction to first-order effects.Dilemma 2: Analysis exposes limited theorisation that keeps aspirations as first-order effect (surface change rather than deeper systemic/discoursal changes) resulting in, “The new practices instituted by policy are not being understood by under-represented groups as benefitting them” (p.702). Theories and practices based on strengths and epistemological equity = necessary to move beyond deficit framings of aspiration.Dilemma 3: “points to a cruel trap awaiting participants who have invested on the basis of promised economic rewards, and the need for the images, stories and legends of higher education to be founded on a different basis” (p.703)A ‘just imaginary’ is *just* imaginary |
| Gale, T.; Parker, S.; Rodd, P.; Stratton, G.; & Sealey, T. (2013). Student Aspirations for Higher Education in Central Queensland: A survey of school students’ navigational capacities. Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation (CREFI): Deakin University.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *higher education, aspirations, social imagination* | **Context:** Reports on research commissioned by CQU: research aspirations for HE of 250 high school students from 14 public schools in Central Queensland, with data gathered from TASSA (9 = low SES schools; 5 = mid-SES)**Theoretical frame:** Taylor (2004) ‘sociological imaginary’; taste (Bourdieu, 1984); desire (Butler, 1987), possibility (Bourdieu, 1984), navigation (Appadurai, 2004; de Certeau, 1984) and resources (Appadurai, 2004)**Methodology:**  2 surveys designed = TASSA (The Australian Survey of Student Aspiration), based on 6 themes: social imaginary, taste/status, desire, possibility, sociocultural navigation, and resources (financial and material but also cultural and social). TASSA-C = The Australian Survey of Co-curricula School Activities looked at efficacy/ limitations of co-curricula programs which schools/ students were involved in. Students completed surveys on uni campus days to CQU as part of outreach program.**Findings:** Navigational capacity = primary concept67% of participants desire/ aspire to have university degree in future (no significant difference between metro/rural/remote students). However, only 60% see it as a possibility (less for males = 47% compared with 71% of females).No appreciable difference between low and mid SES/ between Euro-decent and indigenous studentsStudents navigational capacity (identify pathways from school to HE) = ‘patchy’ (e.g. don’t know what they want to study or where). Students from schools more than 50km from nearest uni campus = less idea of differences between TAFE and uni. Most students limit choice of uni to geographic locality. Most students appear to draw from “limited archive of knowledge and experience” (p.6)Advice of teachers and parents = significant (84% students ((94% of indigenous) believe parents’ opinion = important or extremely important re: decisions for future (inc. education)96% of students had received some encouragement from families to go to uni but few parents had experience themselves of studying in HE (14% mums, 6% fathers, 18% siblings)“In brief, their aspirations are informed by a quite distant knowledge and experience of higher education” (p.6).**Core argument:**Two main implications: 1) increase development of students’ navigational capacities (through schools and uni outreach) – map knowledge needs to be added to tour knowledge. Focus of aspiration building needs to extend beyond focus on individuals/ particular groups to families and communities (so as to build social imaginary) |
| Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2015). Calculating student aspiration: Bourdieu, spatiality and the politics of recognition, *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 45(1), 81–96.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Reports on study of aspirations (low SES secondary school students in regional Australia)**Aim:** To find explanations that ‘transcend Bourdieuian accounts’ of aspiration – to distinguish between historicising and spatialising aspriations**Theoretical frame:** Draws on Appadurai’s (2004) concept of navigational capacity. Uses two analytical categories: doxic and habituated aspriations.Doxic = ‘desirable’ – “state of immediate adherence” (Bourdieu, 1990: 68) or “a belief that escapes questioning” (Gale & Parker, 2015: 85) = *ritualised experiences*Habituated = ‘possible’ – related to habitus: “designates a way of being, a habitual state, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination” (Bourdieu, 1984: 562) which reflect biological/ historical conditions = *reproduction*Aspiration as future-oriented (p.88): navigational capacity develops out of navigational nodes between past and future (based on ‘map of norms’ (Appadurai, 2004: 69) which create an ‘archive of experiences’ (p.89)Gale & Parker also draw on de Certeau’s (1984) notion of ‘map’ and ‘tour’ knowledge: *map* = knowledge from above (familiarity/ ‘big picture’) = “appreciation of the end from the beginning” (and therefore can see other routes). *Tour* = knowledge of operations (knowing way around a space)**Key question:** What is a ‘reasonable possiblity’ for aspiring? Answer is based on individual’s structural limits based on resources and capital available**Core arguments:** * Aspirations are a matter of policy (part of demand-driven system and 20/40 targets);
* Aspirations are historically informed (doxic/ habituated aspirations);
* Aspirations are future oriented (navigational capacity – map v. tour knowledge);
* Aspirations are connected to/part of politics of recognition (aspirations are situated in/ by social contexts within which people live; ‘spatial turn’; mis/non-recognition of marginalised groups and their futures).
 |
| Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2015). To aspire: a systematic reflection on understanding aspirations in higher education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(2), 139–153.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Works from international focus on (“narrowly conceived” (p.141)) aspiration raising for low SES school children and seeks to engage in “intellectual craftsmanship” to create a more nuanced account of ‘aspriations’ as public issues/ private troubles. Work from notion of social neoliberal imaginary and how this drives/ constrains aspirations, and distils down to matter of ‘cultural tastes’, “which tend to reflect and reproduce our place in the world” (p.141)**Aim:** To draw on 4 “overlapping concept-clusters” (p.140) to build an understanding of aspiration that is not limited to the individual: social imaginary, taste/distinction, desire/ taste, archives of experience/ navigational capacity **Theoretical frame:** Mills (1959) – ‘systematic reflection’*Social imaginary*: aspirations guided by social circumstances and beliefs about place in the world (Bourdieu referred to this as ‘doxa’: ‘a state of immediate adherence’ between habitus and field). Taylor (2004) coined the term ’social imaginary’: common understanding that makes common practices legitimate (see p.141) – representing way that perceive ourselves as fitting together (or not) and normative expectations – how we imagine collective social life (p.142). Views about HE from social imaginary = what/who it is for – legitimises deficit discourses and concerns about slipping standards etc. Aspirations are thus influenced by self-perception and beliefs about social context (“how they read the futures that fit them” (p.142)). Current neoliberal imaginary limits aspirations to biographic-historic conditions (Zipin et al. 2015).*Taste/Distinction*: - Bourdieu= taste is differentiation between good and bad (‘beautiful and ugly’) within aesthetic fields – particular tastes connect with particular ‘classes’ and reflect particular “cultural dispositions” (p.143) – Essex girls (UK); bogans (Aus). From this conceptual standpoint, aspirations are located in a [cultural/epistemological/ valorised] hierarchy (some aspirations are better/ more tasteful than others). Aspirations also reflect structures and systems that perpetuate inequitable situations/ unequal distribution of ‘tasteful’ aspirations (see Burke, 2009). Anything less than aspiring to university = height of vulgarity.*Desire/ Possibility*: desire is about what we promise to ourselves about our futures (and is relational). Sellar (2013) = desire for HE is “a promised relationship between learning and earning” (p.254; on p.145). What is desirable and what is possible = not always the same. De-regulation of HE = increased possibility of participation in HE but it’s not universally desired (see limited gains on proportional representation). Desires are not always about material possibilities – sometimes sociocultural factors impact on desire (e.g. jostling selves; incongruity with home/ uni selves). Not many marginalised students see themselves in HE (p.146).*Navigational capacity*: Appadurai’s notion = archives of experience gained from previous navigations (self + family + community) – needs a sense of direction and immediate nodes. Disadvantaged have less nodes and weaker sense of direction/ unfamiliarity with destination. Also discusses tour and map knowledge (de Certeau) – gives example from data of students electing for university for jobs that don’t require HE study.**Methodology:** Draws on analysis of data on 244 school students (13-15 years old) from low/low-mid SES backgrounds from 14 schools in regional Australia and their aspirations (participation in TASSA)**Core argument:** “Aspirations are not simply an array of all futures from which people pick and choose according to individual taste, even though this is how it is represented in much policy and practice” (p.141). Student aspirations are framed by all 4 concept-clusters (and other potential notions) = aka not residing only at level of individual aspirations |
| Galliott, N. (2015). Youth aspirations, participation in higher education and career choice capability: where to from here? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 42(2), 133–137.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *aspirations, higher education* | **Context:** Editorial for SI of Aus Ed Res on youth aspirations – situates the SI in the context that youth aspirations and post-school transitions are a hot topic for researchers and policy makers alike, but that an SI of Critical Studies in Education (following NCSEHE symposium in 2010) pointed to how “the modern conceptualisation of ‘aspiration’ risks establishing disadvantaged young people with dreams that are different to the dominant culture as ‘outcasts’” (p.133). National policy context = ‘National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions’ requires all young people to remain in education or training until the age of 17, and income support for people aged 15-20 = conditional on this engagement. Moreover, DET made many career development resources available in 2014 (including ‘My Big Tomorrow’) to assist young people in making post-school**Papers:** Gale & Parker (2015): ‘To aspire: a systematic reflection…’ – critique of discourses underpinning aspirations; 4-concept clusters: social imagination, taste/distinction, desire/possibility and navigational capacity/archives of experience; draw on empirical data to argue low-SES students have less of specialized knowledge needed for navigation.Gore et al. (2015): ‘Socioeconomic status and career aspirations…’ – draw on longitudinal aspirations survey to examine degree of certainty of career ambitions of students in Years 4,6,8. Findings suggest low SES students are more likely to base decisions on money rather than interest.Galliott & Graham (2015): ‘School-based experiences…’ – draw on survey with 706 high school students (Yr 9-12); findings suggest students largely are uncertain about aspirations, experience a lack of curriculum diversity and have little/no exposure to careers advisory advice. Authors suggest that careers advice should be offered to all students prior to selection of elective subjects.Sellar (2015): ‘Unleashing aspiration…’ – looks at promises made by policymakers with relation to social mobility and employability and higher education. Explores discourses of ‘potential’ (realization and waste) exploit learners’ feelings; broken promises are often ‘explained away’ as a lack of talent or potential, rather than the unrealistic expectations set up by the discourse/ system.Harwood et al. (2015) ‘Recognising aspiration: the AIME program…’ – explores possibilities of strengths-based approaches for individual aspirations to show how AIME (Aus Ind. Mentoring Experience) impacts on indigenous high school students.Molla & Cuthbert (2015) ‘Issue of Grad Employability’ – explores assumptions in policy about graduate employability and the ‘skills gap’ between HRD graduates and labour market. Findings = skills deficit in dominant discourse = unfounded as most PhDs have worked prior to RHD and thus have already developed ‘soft skills’Gale (2015) ‘Social imaginary’ – examines social inclusion strategies in Aus HE agenda (Labor policies) and argues that there is a lack of social imagination in strategies, thus placing assumptions of deficit on students. |
| Gannon, S. & Naidoo, L. (2020). [Thinking–feeling–imagining futures through creative arts-based participatory research](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00330-6), *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 47, 113–128.AUSKeywords*: Arts-based methods; Aspiration; Imagination; Girls*  | **Context:** Young women’s aspirations for higher education in single-sex high school in Sydney; aspiration and higher education + outreach funded by HEPPP. Authors argue that an expansive view of aspirations that resists “the naïve optical metaphor of the radar screen” (p.114) needs “subtle and innovative methods of investigation, which may themselves provide opportunities for capacitation” (p.114), so as to develop students’ imaginaries**Aims:****Theoretical frame:** Gender as performance (Butler, 1990; see Gannon’s other work) “Gender is thus a dynamic, elaborate, continuous, contingent on recognition and repetition of behaviours, desires and ways of being in the world” (p.117); gendered aspirations; authors note the research on young men + aspiration**Methodology:** Collaborative participatory research with arts-based methods (creating ‘aspiration artefacts’) because they offer “subtle ways to explore the affective, material, imaginative and relational labour of aspirations” (p.114). Research design “entailed students creating ‘aspiration artefacts’ of their imagined futures, with varying resources made available for them to think and feel themselves into the future” (p.115). Participant/co-researchers = Year 9 girls, 72% of whom are CALD. In this article, authors profile 3 students who fit low, mid and high SES profiles, as identified by teachers and authors argue that they need to maintain a critical distance from these categories. Each wrote a letter from the future: “Their hopes, desires, dreams and memories are articulated in the interviews, and their letters from the future describe the anticipated navigational pathways that would take them to those futures” (p.118). Creation of aspiration artefact = PowerPoint; slide 1 = image of student as future self + digitally embedded interview; slide 2 = image from letter from the future. Students interviewed each other (rather than researchers conducting interviews) but questions = written by researchers. All components of artefacts = co-constructed/created. **Findings:** Discussion of aspiration artefacts of Aria (high SES — wants to be a cosmetic dermatologist, invokes neoliberal discourses of hard work at school to get to university to do more hard work); Betty (mid SES — wants to be a tattoo artist, doesn’t have clear sense of how school helps suggesting she has a “haphazard and meandering” navigational map, p.122); Connie (low SES —wants to be an airline hostess, but talks about wanting to marry Justin Bieber in the interview — authors question why students would automatically reply in serious terms to these questions).Authors are clear that they do not intend to generalise**Core argument:** Arts-based methods “provided scope for the young people to mobilise their imaginations” (p.124). Ideally these are used to open conversations, not as an end point. |
| Gore, J.; Holmes, K.; Smith, M.; Lyell, A.; Ellis, H.; & Fray, L. (2014). *Choosing University: The Impact of Schools and Schooling: Final Report to the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education*. University of NewcastleAUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Project description**:This project worked with data collected from 15 NSW government secondary schools located in low socioeconomic areas to identify factors connected to schools and schooling that impact on students’ aspirations to attend university. The students who participated in the study were from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The project set out to examine the data for:* Patterns identifiable in the complex relationships between student background and their aspirations for university;
* Enabling and constraining conditions related to aspirations to participate in higher education that schools have some control over; and
* The extent to which and ways in which schools support students’ aspirations for university.

The project objectives were to draw on the findings of the project to illuminate possibilities for improvements for the participation and success of low SES students, and other groups of student who are typically less likely to go on to study in higher education.**Conceptual and/or methodological framework**:This project employed a mixed methods research design to provide a detailed analysis of factors that impact upon low SES Year 11 students’ decisions to attend university or not, with a particular emphasis on the impact of schools and schooling. Firstly, the research team drew on survey data collected from the Aspirations Longitudinal Study[[3]](#footnote-3), which had already collected three years’ of survey data with these participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 62 Year 11 students, 15 school principals, 18 parents, 31 Year 11 teachers and 13 high school careers advisers. In addition, students were conducted with 25 university students who had previously attended one of the 15 participating schools, and four detailed case studies of participating schools. **Key findings**:The key findings of the project are:On choosing university1. Just over 40%, of the participating students intended to go to university (more females than males; less low SES than high SES; more high prior achievers than low prior achievers), and 32% planned to go in the year immediately after school;
2. 21% of students were unsure of their educational intentions; the rest planned to complete Year 12 at either school or TAFE;
3. Students’ decisions to go to university appear to be connected to the perception that travel could be a potential barrier. The students who aspired to go to university were more likely to identify such barriers and this could possibly indicate their stronger intention to transition into higher education;
4. Students who aspired to university were more likely to seek information about career and study options from a broad range of sources (such as family and friends, use of the internet, attending careers expos, and receiving information from educational institutions) than non-university aspirants; and

In all analyses, Aboriginality and school location (metropolitan/provincial) did not appear to impact on aspirations to higher education |
| Gore, J.; Holmes, K.; Smith, M.; Southgate, E. & Albright, J. (2015). Socioeconomic status and the career aspirations of Australian school students: Testing enduring assumptions. *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42, 155–177.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Set in Australian context where recent policy and funding efforts have concentrated on raising aspirations for higher education, especially in low SES students in relation to 20/40 targets set in Bradley Review (2008). Discusses the appropriacy of offering career advice in Year 10 when pathways to post-school destinations are set in motion before this age. Also makes the point that relatively little is known of younger students’ aspirations or insight into how aspirations change over time**Aim:** To test two key assumptions that underpin recent efforts to raise aspirations in low SES students: 1) that low SES student have lower career aspirations and 2) outreach activities are appropriate for secondary school students.**Methodology:** Quantitative study.Paper maps career aspirations of [different] students’ aspirations in Years 4,6,8,10 with their SES and other demographic information. Two RQs drove the paper: 1) how early do career aspirations take shape? 2) how do career aspirations vary by SES? Data drawn from Year 2 of 4-year study through purposeful sampling (50% schools metropolitan/ provincial) and used school-level Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage to determine SES (in line with NSW DET). Also examined NAPLAN and demographic data for each student. Team developed measure of occupational certainty (certain, tentative, unformed)/ prestige/ justification. 3504 students in total surveyed.**Discussion:** Aspirations of younger students similar to those of older students; weak relationship between age and occupational prestige (older students chose slightly more prestigious careers). Older students more likely to justify choice on basis of interests and strengths = students draw on dominant discourses of career education. With regards to SES, weak/ moderate relationship between SES and job prestige but vast majority of all participants expressed interest in professional or skills/paraprofessional careers (vet, teacher, sportsperson = consistently in top 5). High SES more likely to justify choice according to interest; low SES more likely to cite money as reason. Students with higher prior achievement (NAPLAN) more likely to be unclear about future career (possibly due to array of options available to them) |
| Graham, L.; Van Bergen, P.; & Sweller, N. (2014). ‘To educate you to be smart’: disaffected students and the purpose of school in the (not so clever) ‘lucky country’, *Journal of Education Policy,* 30(2), 237–257.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: s*tudent aspirations, alternative schooling, social mobility, policy* | **Context:** Presents research with students in ‘special’ behaviour schools and aspirations for (further) education. Set in historical context of Australia struggling to deal with collapse of industrial sectors and youth unemployment – transitioning from ‘the lucky country’ to ‘the clever country’ as education increasingly moving towards investing in people, ideas and technology – human capital theory = particularly influential (i.e. people’s knowledge and skills = contributes to national economy growth and competition). First focus = getting schools student to complete Yr 12 (Finn Review set target of 95% of all Australian children to complete Yr 12 by 2001) – which involved revising school curriculum to make it more relevant/ connect more with world of work. However, 24% of Australian teens still do not complete Yr 12 (Wierenga, 2011) – young men (15-19) from low SES backgrounds mostly likely to drop out and become unemployed. Dominant idea = these people (young people and families) lack aspirations and do not value education. NSW has 35 alternative schools for students whose behaviour has moved them out of mainstream schools/ who have rejected and become disaffected with mainstream schooling. Many students stay in these schools until they drop out or enter juvenile detention: “In so doing, these young people have come to embody the problem of educational failure, youth unemployment and social disorder about which successive Australian governments have been so concerned” (p.241).*VET* conceptualised as stepping stone between school and work. However, disconnections between TAFE and HE= prevented development of coherent set of pathways into further study, which have been further complicated by “tensions and contradictions” that exist in school sector (p.239). Triad of school-TAFE-university damaged by political devaluation of TAFE and privileging of school-university pathway = VET = “victim of status hierarchy” (p.239). Arguments made that Bradley review and marketization of TAFE made this worse, which impacts low SES most (in lower level certificate courses – see Wheelahan, 2009). Notes ‘savage’ destruction of TAFE through funding cuts and uncoordinated reforms. Reports research that has argued that TAFE has set higher entry requirements (completion of Yr 12) and are less willing to accept students with learning disabilities or disaffected early school leavers. **Aim:** to report on ARC-funded research; to explore “differences between three student groups with respect to the purpose of school and whether they see that purpose as consistent with their own aspirations” (p.243)**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Cross-sectional mixed methods with students in mainstream/ alternative schools (aged between 9 -16): 33 students currently enroled in behaviour school, 21 students with history of disruptive behaviour, 42 school children with no history of disruptive behaviour. Semi-structured interviews (75 questions); responses to following questions analysed: (1) ‘What is the purpose of school?’ (2) ‘Is that important to you?’ (3) ‘Do you enjoy schoolwork?’ (4) ‘Do you know what you want to do when you leave school?’ (5) ‘What do you want to be?’**Findings:** Contrary to popular opinion, these participants did aspire for post-school education and were able to see the value of it for “a secure, productive and fulfilled life”, albeit not necessarily from university study (abstract). There was no significant difference between 3 groups in terms of perception of purpose of school/ education. Majority of mainstream students liked school work; opposite true for students with disruptive behavior11 dissenter students = none connected education with future employment, most did not enjoy schoolwork and that was primary reason for getting in trouble. ‘Tediousness and irrelevance’ of school = repetitive theme; appears to be perceived difference between education and ‘learning’ (with learning strongly connected to school); others distinguished between school and work learning. Identifies ‘wicked problems’1. academic school curriculum = preoccupation with becoming clever country and getting students to achieve Yr 12 has led to lack of attention to exclusive school curriculum: Lifting student attainment and pushing towards university entrance “has been dominant leading to the privileging of academic knowledge, attainment and pathways over vocational knowledge, attainment and pathways” (p.251). TAFE = “deficit in parity of esteem” compared with university (p.251), so that TAFE = positioned as ‘second rate’
2. availability of ‘coherent and viable’ pathways for disaffected students =all dissenting students expressed a preference for ‘practical’ subjects taught at behavioural school – most began to experience issues in primary school; none made it to senior secondary school (where they could enrol in vocational subjects). 4/11 dissenters = TAFE was primary learning destination (signalling possibility of connections between behavioural schools and VET)

**Core argument:** “Such indicators suggest that in privileging certain pathways, occupations and qualifications over others, the ‘clever country’ agenda has succeeded in privileging academic forms of knowledge over technical knowledge and expertise; a stance that may prove to be self-defeating” (p.253).None of the students interviewed said they wanted to become a criminal (!!) or nominate a career that does not exist – most interested in vocational/ hands-on education and pathways but with Australia focusing on driving ‘traffic’ to university, TAFE/vocational education pathways and options have been lost |
| Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2018). [Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/berj.3475), *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(5), 914–938.UKAnnotation written by Katie Osborne-CrowleyKeywords: *aspirations, expectations, possible selves, attainment* | **Context:** Despite nearly 20 years of concerted policy attention and significant funding streams, stark differences remain in the proportions of young people from different SES groups who progress to HE in the UK. Often this has been conceptualised as a problem with their ‘aspirations’, with the solution being seen as the provision of ‘aspiration-raising’ activities. The policy aim to widen participation has thus been inexorably linked to the discourse of aspirations for nearly 20 years.**Theoretical frame:** Markus and Nurius (1986) notion of ‘possible selves’ provides a theoretical lens for examining the interplay between future selves a young person might *desire* and ones they think are *likely*. The pool of possible selves a young person can imagine derives from the categories made salient by their particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individual’s immediate social experiences. For disadvantaged young people, fewer options may seem (or objectively are) possible. However, possible selves are working concepts which are constantly in flux, responding reflexively to accumulated personal experiences, social encounters and the wider sociocultural context. **Method:** A review of the literature on aspirations and expectations, following by a mixed method empirical study exploring the construction of ‘success’ among two generations of practitioner-managers working to widen participation in HE in England.**Findings:***Literature Review:**Aspirations and SES:* Disadvantaged young peoples’ aspirations for both HE and future careers are high. Indeed, they are often higher than the realistic opportunities available to them within the labour market and/or at their likely level of attainment. *Aspirations and attainment:* There is insufficient evidence of a causal link between aspirations and attainment to justify trying to raise aspirations in order to raise attainment. *Attainment and participation:* The direct impact of socioeconomic status is reduced to nearly zero once age 11 and age 16 attainment are taken into account, but the majority of this effect is age 16. This isn’t to say that SES factors have no impact on decisions to enter HE, but rather that their effect is mediated through earlier attainment.*Aspirations vs. expectations*: There is little relationship between aspirations and expectations based on large national datasets, but this is particularly the case for disadvantaged groups. Whereas the relationship between SES and aspirations is weak, the relationship is much stronger for expectations. Further, expectations are a better predictor of outcomes such as HE participation. This is because a desired future that is not also considered probable is unlikely to increase motivation or spur action.*Empirical data:* The language of aspiration-raising continues to permeate the field—it is where practitioner-managers appear comfortable and where they feel their institutions are successful. There is little confidence that institutional efforts to raise attainment are successful, with a common reliance on raising aspirations to improve school results. Further, around a third of institutions felt that attainment-raising was entirely outside their remit. Finally, there has been a falling away of activities with more potential for social transformation, in favour of those which have tangible short-term measures of ‘success’ and a presumed causal relationship with recruitment outcomes. **Core argument:** Authors call for rejecting the discourse of aspiration-raising and argue that young people’s expectations and attainment are more appropriate targets for policy intervention. Three key recommendations: 1) work with younger groups of children while their expectations are still forming and when a more expansive pool of possible selves can be developed, 2) engage more directly with parents and other community influencers to challenge the expectations they hold for young people and 3) focus more attention on teachers, including assisting in terms of developing theory-grounded attainment-raising interventions across the primary and early secondary phases. |
| Harwood, V.; McMahon, S.; O’Shea, S.; Bodkin-Andrews, G.; & Priestly, A. (2015). Recognising aspiration: the AIME program’s effectiveness in inspiring Indigenous young people’s participation in schooling and opportunities for further education and employment, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42, 217–236.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, Education* | **Context:** Seeks to showcase successful mentoring program which takes a different approach [from individualist-neoliberal, deficit-based programs] – takes a cultural wealth approach so as to inspire participants (resisting deficit approaches/ views) and recognise aspiration. AIME connects indigenous school students (Yr 7-12) with university students in 5 Australian states (18 universities in NSW, VIC, SA, WA, QLD and ACT). Program works from idea ‘indigenous = success’ and recognition of aspiration = foundational. Dominance of western cultural knowledge = imposes white middle class norms. Has produced series of materials; in university, mentors sit with mentees to help complete tasks (uni based); school based = AIME curriculum delivered in schools 2 hours from uni campus. In 2013, 1066 mentors & 2789 mentees = effective for improving school retention and engagement**Aim:** **Theoretical frame:** Engages with Appadurai’s theory of the capacity to aspire/ Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth framework, especially ‘aspirational capital’ ( building on Bourdieu, 1986): “an individual’s ability to maintain hope and dreams for the future despite real and perceived obstacles” (p.220)**Methodology:** Ethnographic observations of 150 AIME sessions (over 56 days/ in 15 uni campuses) = repeat visits. 6 unis = single visit. Semi-structured interviews with 86 mentees and 79 mentors. Also, 91 mentees completed surveys (indigenous/culturally-sensitive)**Findings:** AIME “significantly and positively impacts Australian Indigenous high school students’ aspirations to finish school and continue to further study, training or employment” (abstract)Majority of mentees aspire to complete year 12 (89%)44% aspire to go to university74% have clear post-school aspirationsAIME= developing strong(er) sense of self-perception [but notes: no control group; difficult to make substantiated claims]Qualitative data: macro level= all mentees sign contract: “The philosophy behind the practice is not one of compulsion, but rather, communicating a belief in the young people’s capacity and right to completing their education and exploring further opportunities with employment, training and university” (p.277)Mirco level = program sets high expectations in every AIME day: “At AIME, Stepping up is communicated as a means for developing confidence and skills that underpin success both at school and in future careers” (p.228).**Core argument:** AIME celebrates aspiration capital of indigenous students by “perpetually link[ing] the past, present and future in aspirational terms, and in so doing, recognise the navigational capacity that the young people already possess” (p.230) |
| Hegna, K. & Smette, I. (2016). Parental influence in educational decisions: young people’s perspectives, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(8), 1111–1124.NORAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Educational choice; youth; parents; autonomy; social background; minority youth; Norway* | **Context:** Exploration of how young people make decisions about education in Norway where decisions about education = relatively autonomous. Constructs youth as ‘majority/ minority (immigrant) youth’. Works from (English) theorisation of choice as classed – middle class parents = more strategic and knowledgeable/ immigrant families = more ambitious (Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010): “Therefore, both professional middle-class and immigrant parents could be described as strategically and consciously promoting their educational ideals in their offspring’s educational choices in Britain” (p.1111). In Norway = society/institutions ‘strong normative value’ of giving young people autonomy – age 15 students make a choice of upper-choice secondary school/ educational track (VET or General Education). Parents’ involvements in decision making = ‘almost taboo’ (p.1113). Scopes literature on parents’ involvement (largely UK studies)**Aim:** To examine parental influence and class of parents on students’ decisions in Norway**Theoretical frame:** None explicit. Draws on critical sociological literature**Methodology:** Qualitative: draws on responses to open-ended questions in a survey about youth choices (n=2029) – specifically experiences of difficult decisions**Findings:** Analysis suggests no difference in parental influence but minority students = experience parents = more strongly influencing, with negative and strong parental opinions making things more complicated. Analysis also mapped information channels and their impact:84% = ‘myself’ = ‘very strong influence’19%/ 21% = mother/ father = ‘very strong influence’ for majority students45%/ 47% = mother/ father = ‘very strong influence’ for majority studentsFew students (both majority and minority) = perceived parents as trying to influence decisions.Analysis of responses related to difficult decisions = 33 specific responses mentioning parents (25f, 8m; 23 = maj/10 = min). One form of influence = deterrence; other times = when young people don’t have a clear idea: “Parental certainty poses a problem given the construction of the choice as supposedly autonomous” (p.10). Minority students = perceived parents as negative re choice more than majority**Core argument:** Class is less significant in terms of parental influence in Norway than in English/ UK. Very useful overview of previous studies on decisions of immigrant students (especially p.1118). Overall argument: “we argue that parental influence on educational decisions may bea much more multifaceted phenomenon than suggested by the ideas of the contrasting approaches of parental pressure and autonomous decisions” (p.1120).Argues at end for contribution of qualitative data gathered from surveys. |
| James, R. (2001). Participation disadvantage in Australian higher education: An analysis of some effects of geographic location and socioeconomic status, *Higher Education,* 42, 455–472.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *access and equity, higher education access and participation, rurality and isolation* | **Context:** To explore goals and plans of Australian school students + attitudes towards education = focusing specifically on low SES. Drawing on previous research, James hypothesises that proximity (or lack of) to university campuses = significant factor, especially because Australian students tend to stay at home/close to home . Also notes SES-related family values and support for higher education**Methodology:** Survey of Yr 10,11 ,12 students (n=7023; 40% usable responses) from both urban and rural settings. Critiques postcode methods of categorising SES and instead uses parents’ education as level, with higher SES = parent(s) have university degree; low SES = parents may or may not have attended school. Physical access = measured by distance from home to nearest university, which connects with rurality. Uses 4-part categorisation of access = low access (300km+ to uni), medium access (151-300km), high access/rural = fewer than 150km, high access/urban (fewer than 150km). Low + medium = rural students**Findings:** SES is significant influence on likelihood to aspire to HE, especially when combined with rurality – particularly related to completion of high schoolParticipation for R&R students less likely to be affected by distance/ social context than SES* Low SES students = on average less likely to report experiencing range of encouraging factors (p.465)
* High SES students = stronger perceptions of teacher/parental encouragement
* More ambiguous findings re: urban v. rural students
* Low SES = report more agreement with barriers to access
* High SES students more likely to aspire to HE (70%); medium SES = 50%; low = 42%
* Over 20% of low access = report having no intention of going to university

**Core argument:**“…educational advantage and disadvantage are the result of a three-way intersection of family socioeconomic background, the characteristics of the urban or rural context in which people live, and the physical distance from campuses” (p.469) |
| James, R. (2002). *Socioeconomic Background and Higher Education Participation: An analysis of school students’ aspirations and expectations*. Centre for the Study of Higher Education: The University of Melbourne.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Research commissioned by Higher Education Council (HEC). At the time, low SES students = half as likely as mid/high SES peers to go to university. “With the expectation of completing secondary schooling now close to a social norm, tertiary education remains the locus of differing class expectations regarding educational participation” (p.49)**Aim:** To investigate attitudes of senior secondary students towards higher education**Theoretical frame:** Based on data previously collected from 7000 students from NSW, VIC, WA for HEC**Methodology:** Based on data collected in 1998 by CSHE and YRC: students from Yr 10, 11, 12 from stratified schools (urban/rural/isolated, SES and gender). Survey asked students about post-school priorities/ intentions**Findings:** “The study reveals appreciable social stratification in the opinions of senior secondary students about the relevance and attainability of a university education” (Exec Summary). Differences in aspirations/attitudes = based on SES (biggest factor), gender and geographic location.90% expressed desire to go to further study (in ideal circumstances) = 2/3 = university; ¼ = TAFEHigh SES = stronger confidence in getting to university study (approx 70%) compared with 50% mid-SES and 42% low SES students. 16% low SES desired uni but did not think it was possible.Low SES = more likely to view TAFE as more useful; have weaker interest in future subject(s); less confident that their parents supported desire to go to HE; stronger motivation/interest to earn money after school. Also, less confident academic results = good enough for entry to university; less likely to believe subjects studied at school = good for uni study. Low SES = more likely to view cost as barrier to university study. 41% believed families would not be able to support costs and 1/3 perceived that they would have to self-support if they went to uni. View of cost as deterrent = heightened for rural students.Gender: females more likely to show commitment to school. Males = less likely to see relevance and attainability of higher education. Females more likely to believe friends will go to uni and more likely to believe their teachers were supporting that aspiration.Level of parental education = most closely tied with students’ aspirations for uni study**Core argument:** Lower participation of low SES appears to be “created by the cumulative effect of the relative absence of encouraging factors and the presence of a stronger set of inhibiting factors” (p.xi). Five areas for further consideration:1. measurement of SES (parental education = better than postcode method)
2. more research needed to understand how HECS is perceived, especially by low SES students/ families
3. more research into early outreach/ collaborations between universities and schools
4. more research to ascertain influence of curriculum on students’ aspirations/ how can curriculum accommodate p/t work
5. system-wide rethink of selection procedures = “vital ingredient” for making progress on access/entry for low SES students
 |
| Lynch, J.; Walker-Gibbs, B.; & Herbert, S. (2015). Moving beyond a ‘bums-on-seats’ analysis of progress towards widening participation: reflections on the context, design and evaluation of an Australian government-funded mentoring programme, *Journal of Education Policy and Management,* 37(2), 144–158.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *academic performativity; academic practice; de Certeau; equity and access; evidence-based approaches; higher education participation**ASPIRATIONS* | **Context:** Explores equity of access and aspirations of low SES students from perspective of mentoring program. They note the focus can be skewed by research and practitioners so that focusin “on the funding and development of programmes, and the construction of evidences of impact, rather than speaking back to the deficit discourses that often underpin these agendas “(p.144). Paper situated in 3 levels of context: performative, policy and local. Works from policy moves that have framed outreach in context of raising aspirations**Aim:** To explore issues in design, implementation and evaluation of mentoring program designed to address low SES representation in HE – working at nexus of aspirations, problems and solutions; to “relays a particular account of the origins of a mentoring programme, the types of impacts that were observed and the efficacy of the data in terms of documenting change” (p.145). Authors note conflict between aspirations agendas and a desire ‘to give voice’ to educationally disadvantaged students and teachers. Locates funding bid as part of ‘new managerialism’, which privileges evidence-based, quantitative research (see Oriel, 2011)**Theoretical frame:** Take a pragmatic approach to presenting research [basically they reflexively acknowledge the dynamics at stake and selections made to represent the world/ their research/ the mentoring program in particular ways]. Authors explicitly position themselves as locals – low SES/ FiF/ regional students themselves – who interact with school in question on multiple levels (alumni, school council members) and interact with students in local area**Methodology:** Draws on gov’t policy docs, university funding guidelines, questionnaire responses and interview data. Participants = university staff, school students, school teachers (all partners in mentoring program) 12 Yr 9 students (4 m, 8 f) in pilot chosen on basis of unlikelihood to go to university without intervention but who were seen as ‘on track’ academically (authors note influence of funding criteria as driving these selection criteria). Participants completed pre/post-program questionnaires to measure change (to meet quantitative data requirements of HEPPP funding). 10 completed pre and post questionnaires (8 = matched)**Findings:** Mentoring program described = HEPPP-funded (partnership component) between university and large local regional secondary school (40% of students = low SES, receiving family payment). Program = Yr 9 “to experience, and gain confidence with, a range of spaces and information” (p.150) = 12 activities over 2 terms done alongside university mentors (but constrained by HEPPP 12-month funding cycle).Questionnaire data: rather than suggesting an increase in students’ desires to go on to HE, the post-program questionnaire shows that from the 4 students who chose uni pre-program, 0 chose it post-program, with a 4-point increase in ‘don’t know’ category. However, qualitative data tells stories of increased confidence and aspirations. Authors argue that ‘don’t know’ could be a more mature response that ‘I’m going to be…’Offers case study of two students (Aden and Charlie) – both from 4-children, single parent families. **Core argument:** Quantiative funding frame and reliance on numerical data as indicative of tracking and change= “is likely to underestimate the significance of smaller qualitative changes” (p.156). Authors argue for power of small changes, rather than ‘education revolutions’. |
| Marjoribanks, K. (2005). Family background, adolescents’ educational aspirations, and Australian young adults’ educational attainment, *International Education Journal*, 6(1), 104–112.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Family background, educational attainment, educational aspirations, ethnic group differences, gender differences* | **Aim:** To test 3 hypotheses: family social status, ethnicity and aspirations have 1) large associations; 2) moderate aspirations/ attainment; 3) family social status and attainment are mediated by aspirations**Theoretical frame:** Family contexts = ‘opportunity structures’ (p.104) = SES/ ethnicity. Also draws on Bourdieu [but does not specifically name capital or habitus]**Methodology:** Quantitative. Participants = 6811 young people (3547 f; 3264 m) who were in Year 9 when study began. Data collected from LSAY (1995-2000)**Findings:** Large associations between family backgrounds, ethnicity aspirations and attainment, in which there were significant gender differences. In low SES families, there were differences in terms of ethnicity at all aspiration levels (but for high SES, ethnic differences = ‘minimised’ (all abstract)**Core argument:** More research needed to probe: “what are the experiences and conditions that families from certain ethnic or immigrant groups provide that allow their children’s aspirations to be expanded into high educational attainment, when family social status conditions might be expected to constrain relationships between aspirations and attainment?” (p.111) |
| McMahon, S.; Harwood, V.; & Hickey-Moody, A. (2016). ‘Students that just hate school wouldn’t go’: educationally disengaged and disadvantaged young people’s talk about university education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 37(8), 1109–1128.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *imagination, university participation, school disengagement, disadvantage, teacher-student relationships* | **Context:** Explores ‘classed and embodied’ nature of imaginations/ aspirations of young people who are disengaged from ‘mainstream’ schooling = who are often not included in discussions of widening participation (but see Graham et al. 2014). Explores UK and Australian contexts. Discusses NEET category in UK – not homogenous but “low academic achievement, school disaffection and belonging to low socio-economic groups respectively affects the likelihood of entering this demographic” (p.2). Work from Pemberton’s (2008) contention that teacher-student relationships/ lack of teacher support = influential factor in students becoming NEET/ imaginings of university (addition of discussion on imagining university = new direction for WP/disaffected students research). Considers WP literature; notes that most literature relating to teachers = positive accounts. **Aim:** To explore how disaffected young people perceive/ imagine university; “to bring the voices, educational experiences and imaginings of young people at the margins of tertiary education into literature on educational disengagement” (p.1110), whereby margins = ‘dead zones’ (Harwood et al. 2013) – aka not considered in dominant models of university outreach. Premise of research = university not an idea that offers new possibilities.**Theoretical frame:** Precarity (precarious relationships with education); draws on Appadurai’s navigational capacity/ social imagination when discussing aspirations**Methodology:** From ‘Imagining University Education’ study. Interviewed 250 young people (aged between 11 and 18) living in disadvantaged communities in five Australian states who had disengaged from school. Research team deliberately did not ask about teachers but there was “significant talk” about teachers/ influence of teachers on imagining further study. Students often recruited through youth sector and youth workers often sat in on interviews/ in youth settings. Interviews designed to work with imagination (close eyes and imagine…)**Findings:** The participants view universities as ‘big’, ‘massive’/ large-scale alienating schools” (abstract): “This lack of differentiation between schools and universities is problematic; and had a confounding effect on these young people’s capacity to imagine and pursue university participation” (p.7)Elements of schooling become barriers to imagining and pursuing university education; in particular, relationships with schoolteachers are significant – so that universities are viewed as bigger schools full of teachers (p.1115) = form of subjugated knowledge in uni-access literature (offering a different perspective from the norm). Students suggested that teachers = not considered ‘normal adults’, rather uncaring, strange, aggressive with power to significantly impact on education. “The young people’s descriptions of schooling typically featured teachers as individuals who were authoritarian, apathetic, unsupportive, uncaring, unjust, aggressive, unreasonable and, at times, ‘hateful’ humiliators” (p.1117) – but acknowledgement of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ teachers. As a consequence, imagining gaining respect and building relationships with educators at university was rareAuthors propose a continuum, where disengagement from school is seen as leading to non-engagement with ‘big school’ \*aka uni\***Core argument:** “Universities need to take initiatives to connect with LSES schools and model responsive student–teacher relationships” (p.14). This is not an individually located issues, rather “the problem lies in the structural factors” that mediate our lives (including our imaginations — p.1122). Disaffected students need to develop a ‘defiant imagination’ of education (Castoriadis, 1993) – aka to imagine things without getting tangled up in previous conceptions/experiences of compulsory schooling. Use of juxtapositions could be useful tool for developing new/defiant/radical imaginations. Also, universities need to recognize that conversations with disaffected youths = part of WP agenda. |
| McMahon, S.; Harwood, V.; Bodkin-Andrews, G.; O’Shea, S.; McKnight, A.; Chandler, P. & Priestly, A. (2016). Lessons from the AIME approach to the teaching relationship: valuing biepistemic practice, *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 25(1), 43–58. AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME); teacher–student relationships; power; epistemology; Indigenous Australians; Shawn Wilson; relationality* | **Context:** Describes AIME program through frame of Shawn Wilson’s theorisation of Indigenous ways of knowing to develop ‘egalitarian and trust-filled’ pedagogies and relationships. Set in context of power dynamics within schools, particularly teacher-student relationships. This is located primarily at the epistemological level – unpacks the notion of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing (relational/ related/ connectedness) – particularly with people/ land/ animals/ plants**Aim:** Poses this question: “what could an effective classroom with egalitarian teacher–student relationships look like?” (p.1); to describe “pedagogies that … demonstrate the potential for effective egalitarianteacher–student relationships” (p.1); to argue that Western educators have a lot to learn from Indigenous education and epistemologies; to push for ‘biepistemic’ practitioners (based on notions of heterogeneity); “to ‘un-subjugate’ Indigenous epistemologies or ‘ways of knowing’ in the field of education” (p.).**Theoretical frame:** Draws on Foucault’s notion of subjugated knowledges (Indigenous against Western) at a systemic level; observations based on ‘Setting theory’ (Barker 1968) – see p.7 for discussion. Paper draws on analysis of 23 interviews (1/3 of total interviews)**Methodology:** Discussion based on ethnographic classroom observations and student interviews (n=143 student mentees from Years 9-12)**Findings:** Students = report that relationships between teachers and students = respectful (‘egalitarian pedagogical relationships’“AIME engages in biepistemic work by selecting concepts from multiple knowledges and practices to create a montaged, composite pedagogy for a culturally responsive classroom.” (p.48)AIME reconceptualises teachers as ‘presenters’ and mentors/mentees as ‘students’Student data: majority ‘indicated a high regard’ for AIMEAIME = different from school: “generally, more fun, chilled, relaxed, welcoming and freer” (p.50)Disruption of ‘standard’ power dynamics = conducive to building trust by “demonstrating vulnerability; listening to and deeply valuing mentees’ contributions to class discussion; and selecting and presenting learning materials that communicate high expectations of mentees” (p.51). Relationships = characterized as generous and humble (sharing personal stories = ‘humble connectivity’). Students sensed authenticity and sincerity in AIME presenters’ intentions to listen to students and value their contributions.AIME learning tasks “confer trust” because there is a clear expectation that the students will succeed [aka not being set up to fail]**Core argument:** “learning from the lessons of biepistemic practice has the capacity to contribute to improved inclusion for all students” (p.45). |
| Munro, L. (2011). ‘Go boldly, dream large!’: The challenges confronting non-traditional students at university, *Australian Journal of Education,* 55(2), 115–131.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords*: on-campus students non-traditional students academic staff; student attitudes barriers to participation part-time employment* | **Context:** Examines experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students in the “stretched university” (a regional campus in Victoria: Monash Gippsland). Non-trad students = “full-fee-paying international students, older, mature-age students studying mainly on a part-time basis by distance education, and increasing numbers of domestic students who only in recent times have aspired to a university education” (abstract), many of whom work. Literature review illuminates 3 main themes: increased numbers of student-workers, negative impact of work on studies and effects on quality of university education. Author critiques slogans of universities (see paper title). Examines literature on aspirations and low SES/ working class students**Aim:** To examine experiences of ‘student-workers’ – describing what’s at stake for students and universities, particularly in a regional context.**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** In-depth interviews with 30 students. Paper features vignettes from 9 students**Findings:** 60% of Gippsland students = term-time employed; Robbins (2010) draws on AVCC data (18,000 students) = 70% students had p/t jobs (average 15 hours/week) with self-perception of hybrid identities (student-workers)Author’s findings suggest students perceive a difference between metropolitan and regional universities/ staff.Suggests 4 characterisations of students:*Pragmatists*: have a strong desires to make the most of a ‘second chance’ education*Traditionalists*: want to learn about oneself and the wider world *Aspirationalists*: want to improve their own life chances and those of their children*Idealists*: want to ‘fit in’ to the culture of the universityStudents commented on how balancing study and work = ‘hard work’**Core argument:** More support is needed for students in contemporary higher education systems: “in the absence of financial support, slogans such as ‘Go boldly’ and ‘Dream large’ are misleading for the increasing numbers of students from regional areas, low SES backgrounds and other disadvantaged minorities who may not be able to ‘survive’ if, as ‘customers’ and ‘consumers’, they are required to pay their own way” (p.129). |
| Nathan, D. (2005). Capabilities and Aspirations, *Economic and Political Weekly,* 40(1), 36–40.BANGLADESHAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Explores ‘capacity to aspire’ thesis from economic perspective: “The capability set reflects the person's ability to live different kinds of lives and to choose between one or another kind of life” (p.36) – looks at ‘ways of living’ as combination of being and doing = how increased income can develop new capabilities/ changes ‘capability set’. However, making something possible does not necessarily bring about changes expected or desired (e.g. Micro Finance Initiatives for poor Chenchu women).“Aspiration relates to how people want to be in the future, for which reason people use their existing capabilities differently from a situation where they do not have this aspiration” (p.36).Uses examples of hunter-gatherers/ ‘swiddeners’ to exemplify different approaches to meeting needs/ production. The way labour is used to meet demand/fulfil aspirations changes in order to develop new capabilities. Changes in ways that education is viewed requires a reallocation of resources. Differences between men and women in this article exemplify how capacity to aspire is unevenly distributed and are a matter of group interaction/development |
| Priyadharshini, E. & Watson, J. (2012). Between Aspiration and Achievement: structure and agency in young migrant lives, *Power and Education,* 4(2), 150–161.UKAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Aspirations for further/higher education of young migrants (EU-UK) in East Anglia. Review of aspirations literature; assumption = migrants carry fresh hopes and dreams when they move for social mobility and a ‘better life’ (p.153)**Aim:** To argue that higher education policy creates structural barriers rather than structures of support for young migrants wanting to access higher education in the UK; research project= sparked by interest in “thenotion of whether and how these young people learn to arrive and stay” and set out to explore migrant children’s sense of education identity in relation to FE and HE, to explore barriers and facilitators to considering FE and HE as potential destination. Context = change of government in 2010 and subsequent policy changes relating to HE (including fee increases)**Methodology:** Outreach project (with migrant children considered a hidden subset of low SES students = target of university’s outreach activities) = called ‘Broadening educational horizons for school students from central and eastern European backgrounds in Norfolk’. Project in two secondary schools, working with 40 children in Year 9&10 (age 13-15). All students = from other European countries (predominantly Eastern Europe but also Portugal). Two phases: phase 1 = focus group discussions with students and interviews with two teachers; phase 2 = university campus visit, based on data collected from phase 1 interviews. Methods in phase 1= open discussion, projection methods to visualize futures, response to visual stimuli (photos of HE and FE institutions), favourite/least favourite parts of school, scrapbooks and short survey. Post-phase 2 (campus visit), students and teachers asked to complete evaluation survey.**Findings:** Overall = mismatch between young people’s aspirations and agency.Most students saw their futures in UK, despite strong links to home countries but 4 substantial obstacles to aspirations and potential futures:1. sense of low social status: most students = reticent to disclose parents’ occupations; teachers view on this = most parents worked in local food processing factory and this was embarrassing for the children because their parents had higher status jobs in home countries
2. poor psycho-social and community support = according to teachers, the parents had to travel long distances to go to work, meaning that their children were left alone for long periods of time/ didn’t spend much time with parents (and often = single mother families). Issues also with parents supporting children’s education because of their own low(er) levels of English proficiency: “The teachers emphasized that the educational implications of such arrangements were substantial, as children had less support than they would otherwise receive towards academic work or towards the complex, if exciting, process of adjusting to a new educational system in a new place and society” (p.155), leading to disillusionment with school for some children.
3. schools’ inaccurate assessment of students’ academic potential because of unhelpful testing tools like IQ tests
4. financial issues; teachers reported that contrary to media outcry about migrants relying on state support, many families = not aware of financial hardship support available to them (e.g. free school meals)

Structural constraints caused by policy reduce possibilities for migrant children (stated policy intention to reduce numbers of EU citizens entering UK; reduced work rights for new EU member states like Bulgaria = all serve to fuel negative media discourses and stories). Also movement away from New Labour policy of ‘community cohesion’ (which used schools as tools for this end) replaced by Tory-Lib Dem coalition push for ‘Big Society’ (more liberalist idea of removing state supports and reaching out to community members to fill gaps) and reduced funding (such as EMA, closure of AimHigher, cutting funding for Connexions + increase in tuition fees)/ imperative for community cohesion work in schools. Structural/ policy-related constraints = financial; without EMA, families/ students unlikely to be able to afford post-compulsory education. Tuition fees = also prohibitive. Phase 2 sought to respond to lack of knowledge about student loans/ bursaries. ‘Cold’ knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998) “– and in particular their awareness or view of financial pressures – continued to shape their cultural capacity by making them resistant to ‘official’ information, in this case about help with student finances, that could structurally support their drive to succeed” (p.159).**Core argument:** Central/Eastern European students = ‘hidden disadvantaged group’. While they certainly held aspirations for further study, capacity to realise them = structurally constrained: “Young migrant students remain uncomfortably suspended in the gulf between desires and outcomes, with government policy failing to capitalise on the vibrancy of their agency to achieve” (p.159). |
| Prodonovich, S.; Perry, L.; & Taggart, A. (2014). Developing conceptual understandings of the capacity to aspire for higher education, *Issues in Educational Research,* 24(2), 174–190.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Set in Australian context where recent policy and funding efforts have concentrated on raising aspirations for higher education, especially in low SES students in relation to 20/40 targets set in Bradley Review (2008).**Aim: “**to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the capacity to aspire and its use in the field to support practical measures designed to both broaden participation in higher education for those who aspire to it, and to support alternative strategies to build educational aspirations, particularly for students who attend low SES secondary schools” (p.174). Specifically discusses MAP4U (Murdoch University’s equity program)**Theoretical frame:** Draws on Appadurai (2004): aspiration as navigational capacity; draws on notion that ‘the poor and the disadvantaged’ have lesser navigational capacity “as the social resources and networks that they have access to may be fewer in number and less likely to be connected to aspirations such as university attainment” (p.178). **Methodology:** Literature review**Findings:** Authors discuss Appadurai, pose question relating to what students are aspiring to (determined by culture and social networks; desirable aspirations formed by dominant groups). Authors explore constraints to aspiration (structural, social and access issues), including “adverse terms of recognition” (Conradie, 2013) – in terms of others’ perceptions of an individual’s aspirations – as well as time and money restraints on ‘disadvantaged’ students capacity to realize aspirations (aka go to university). **Core argument:** Two core ideas emerge from literature on aspirations: 1) there is no real difference in aspirations of students according to SES but 2) ‘disadvantaged’ students have a larger ‘aspiration gap’ (distance between where they are and where they want to be due to systemic inequalities and inequitable access to knowledge – not individual deficit)  |
| Reid, A. & McCallum, F. (2014). ‘Becoming your best’: student perspectives on community in the pursuit of aspirations. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(2), 195–207.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Aspirations for students living in low SES communities in context of Australian policy that seeks to increase representation of particular groups in HE. Community = issue/ impact on resources available to people. Draws on Bok (2010) and Smith (2011) to position niche.**Theoretical frame:** Appadurai: aspiration as cultural/ navigational capacity **Methodology:** Qualitative study: 5 students aged 14-15 years old from north Adelaide secondary school (semi-structured focus group discussion of community/ visual methods – photographs of local community and ‘river journey’ to story past, present, futures and semi-structured interviews to understand “social structures that shape lifeworlds of the participants”**Findings:** Students’ futures: participants had high aspirations/ speak optimistically about the future. They view schooling as critical for pursuing dreams/ambitions.Community: location and relationships: geographical location and relations = significant. All participants identified something positive about people in their community as impact on their lives. Also discusses places and social spaces through which aspirations are developed. Mentions excursions to university as developing sense of place. Talks about how trust relationships with teachers helps capacity to aspire to develop (p.202). “Teachers whom the students trust offer new language and meaning to the students’ future thinking which engages and motivates them in their learning” (p.205)**Core argument:** Advocates Place-Based Education (PBE) – concerned with learning connected with particular place in which it takes place; also see Place/Community-Based Education (Smith & Sobel, 2010). Suggests that academic achievement is directly linked to achieving aspirations. |
| Robinson, S. (2012). Freedom, Aspiration and Informed Choice in Rural Higher Education: Why They Are Saying ‘No’. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education,* 22(2), 79–95.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Explores how university campuses in rural/regional locations can interact with communities “to shape aspirations and flexibly deliver sustainable academic programs” (abstract) in various modes. Works from assumption that various factors impede rural/regional students’ engagement with HE (small populations making difficult to run programs/ distance education not good for all). Starts from Dalley-Trim & Alloway’s 2010 paper, and highlights the limitation of not being able to access those who had already left school. Notes difficulty of defining what counts as ‘rural’- careful about treating all people who live outside of metropolitan areas as homogenous group (p.81). Argues that not all rural students want to move away from home, but may be limited in options as a result: “A campus that cannot provide a reasonable variety of programs runs the risk of, simultaneously, patronising its target population and reinforcing entrenched social stereotypes” (p.82) = leading to forms of (social) exclusion. Therefore, policy rather than geography = determining factor in social exclusion**Aim:** Asks: to what extent are those living in rural and remote communities ‘free’ to pursue their dreams of higher education? What would count as adequate educational opportunity for those embracing regional and rural lifestyles? (abstract) **Theoretical frame:** Draws on Isaiah Berlin’s two concepts of freedom: negative freedom (free from interference from others) and positive freedom (freedom as self-mastery); discourse of ‘option-freedom’ (as opposed to ‘agent-freedom’) and discourse of social inclusion/exclusion. “Option-freedom reflects two things: the character of the options that are accessible to the agent; plus the nature of the agent‘s access to those options (Pettit 2003, p.389), p.82). Also draws on Gidley’s 3-part typology of ‘social inclusion’ agendas (2010)**Methodology:** Essay**Discussion:** 1. considers ‘one-room’ campus (regional/rural centres) offering IT access for external/blended learning – notes pros and cons. Ideal: “To ensure greater success for one-room classrooms, it would be desirable to follow each remote-delivered lecture with a face-to-face tutorial allowing instructors to test and confirm students‘ understanding of lectures, plus students‘ skills in extracting information and meaning from print-based course materials” (p.87)
2. Flexible programming: regional campuses need discretion to enact flexibility
3. Scholarships
4. Regional campus as ‘shaper of educational demand’: metrocentrism pushes a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach: “regional university campuses would be well-advised to follow the lead of rural community schools in modelling academic possibilities to the local population” (p.88)
5. Local knowledges and local course content: curriculum needs to be relevant to communities served – calls for place-based education
6. Symbolic importance of rural campuses: “needs to become a locus for aspects of community life, including teacher education and continuing professional development” (p.90)
7. Supporting teacher education: based on research that argues where teachers train to become teachers is strongly connected with where they work
8. Supporting professional development:

**Core argument:** Regional/rural students are important and warranted more attention and different approaches; they “represent a gain to their universities and to the higher education system as a whole” (p.91)For regional/ rural campuses to respond to local communities = based on assumption that they know what they want; “rural campuses must act not only as brokers between rural populations and higher education institutions, but as educators of public opinion and shapers of local educational aspirations” (abstract) |
| Sellar, S. (2013). Equity, markets and the politics of aspiration in Australian higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2), 245–258.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Discusses policy agendas in context of post-Bradley Review Australian HE; explores aspirations for university study of low SES students: for years, the dreams of working classes have been considered disruptive to classed status quo; but beware of ‘opportunity trap’ = are the conditions for real equitable access/participation there?**Theoretical frame:** **Methodology:** **Discussion:** ‘Poverty of desire’ thesis: emerged from English utopian socialist politics – similar to Gramscian politics calling for politicisation of working classes (stop being distracted by leisure activities) so as to build support for socialist movement. Has evolved from issue around political motivations toissue of social mobility. Cites Labour (UK) push to create ‘aspirational citizens’ = “neoliberal imaginary” (p. 248).Raising aspirations in Australian HE: explores how politics of aspiration align in current equity agendas, underpinned by neoliberal assumptions about self-entrepreneurial behaviour in educational markets. Questions notion that participation in markets is innate (as implied by policy statements that call for an ‘unleashing’ of unfettered aspirations for social mobility; p.251).False promise of aspirations: Aspirations are formed relationally against a set of promises about the future: “these promises operate affectively, as well as at the level of conscious intentionality, and are imbricated in the ongoing production of subjectivities” (p.251), which gives rise to ‘cruel optimism’ that arises when objects of desire that sustain people’s life projects undermine them at the same time. For example, the promise of economic mobility might come at the loss of a sense of belonging to ‘home’ (family and friends and peers). See Brown et al.’s (2010) notion of ‘opportunity trap’ (relates to expansion of HE devaluing currency of HE qualifications and a ‘global war for talent’), meaning that human capital/knowledge economy arguments are undermined. Discusses ‘Cashed-Up Bogans’ as an exception to this [albeit not so much with current mining downturn] and as example of cultural divide between middle classes and working classes (even though Cubs are able to purchase items considered middle-class, their cultural and educational capital is dismissed as lesser than middle class ideals require.**Core argument:** Can the aspirations of others (outside of middle class) be supported without imposing the ideals that police desire? |
| Sellar, S. (2015). ‘Unleashing aspiration’: The concept of potential in education policy, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 42(2), 201–215.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *aspirations, potential, merit, talent, opportunity, cruel optimism* | **Context:** Discusses/ analyses/ “diagnoses the potential of potential” – the use of term ‘potential’ in educational policy as a set of promises that set out individuals’ futures, employment and social mobility (and national productivity/ economy) for people who ‘invest’ in higher education. Examines equity policy in Australia and UK (and OECD) and examines how potential brings equity and economic purposes together in policy.**Aim:** To analyse how ‘potential’ functions in policy and how it implies a relationship between talent, aspiration and opportunity and a distribution of responsibility between governments and citizens.**Theoretical frame:** Deleuze – actual/virtual; reality of virtual = structure (see p.204); “The virtual is real but not yet actual, while the possible is actual but not yet real” (p.205). Also, draws on Raco’s (2009) ‘opportunity bargain’; Berlant’s (2011) ‘cruel optimism’**Methodology:** Engages in analysis of how “potential operates at the centre of rhetorical strategies in policy texts” (p.203)**Discussion:** Opportunity bargain = “new market state social contract, ‘a politics of aspiration’” (p.202) – aims to produce optimism about advantages of education; optimism = affective dimension of aspirationConcept of potential: indicates one of three states: “the presence of talent without aspiration or opportunity; talent and aspiration without opportunity; or talent and opportunity without aspiration. Thus, talent is constructed as essential to potential, while aspiration and opportunity are framed as sites of intervention to enable its realisation” (p.204) – thus constructing meritocratic view/approach to education. Draws on UK gov’t (BIS 2010:2) *people become what they can be*. Draws attention to use of ‘can’ = ability and possibility (or inability or lack of possibility = wasted potential) – constructs potential as individual attribute (“essential quality”, p.204). Draws on Deleuze’s actual/virtual binary to conceptualise potential *weak potential* (possibility) and *strong potential* (virtuality). The polysemous nature of potential means that it “multiple possible connotations resonate in any particular reference to ‘potential’ (p.206), while always holding semiotic potential to connect to future (feelings about possible) change = ‘performative potential’ = key word of policy (see Gee & Lankshear, 1995).Sellar’s analysis of policy illustrates potential as rhetorically linked to national-economic, institutional and individual (p.208) – see Transform Australia’s Future (2009)/ OECD (2007). Wasted potential = wasted lives (Bauman, 2004). Equity has come to be understood “as a matter of providing talent with opportunity and ‘raising aspirations’ for these opportunities” (p.209) = social investment in equity = economic investment in human capital. Wasted potential (optimism, persistence, aspiration = “key sites of social control. The potential of ‘potential’ to slip between different meanings and to attract the investments of multiple audiences, for whom it may connote very different promises about the future, is one example of how policy works to modulate flows of desire and belief” (p.209). Aspiration = a site of government intervention but has produced a new social contract: governments have to take responsibility to “remove obstacles to aspiration” and “enter into an opportunity bargain with citizens” – they have to both provide educational opportunities and also encourage people to pursue opportunities.Cruel optimism: Higher education has become an ‘opportunity trap’ due to four conditions: credential inflation, high quality products/ low costs are not mutually exclusive (?), knowledge work no longer requires knowledge workers and with many people holding same level of qualifications, top global firms look to recruit ‘talent’, opening up gaps in the rewards paid (and with “the supply of aspirants outweigh[ing] the supply” (p.212), it means the promise of a good life for hard work and investment in education is broken (see Brown et al. 2011). “…optimism may become cruel when the realities of educational competition, changing labour markets and technological developments do not match the utopias of knowledge capitalism foretold in education policy”… “Potentiality itself becomes a trap” (p.213). **Core argument:** |
| Sellar, S. & Gale, T. (2011). Mobility, aspiration, voice: a new structure of feeling for student equity in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2), 115–134.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Changed ‘structure of feeling’: mobility, aspiration, voice. Structural changes to HE = global phenomenon (‘global field of HE’: Gale, 2011) but still “stubborn problems in accessing and participating in HE for disadvantaged groups” (p.115).**Aim:** To advocate for conception of *capacities* rather than *barriers* to access**Theoretical frame:** Work from Sen (1985): mobility = cultivating networks; aspiration = shaping futures; voice = narrating experiences – all increase “people’s ability to access, benefit from and transform economic goods and social institutions” (p.116)**Methodology:** Critical review of literature**Findings:** Mobility: movement is given aspect of modern life in globalising world but is also significant factor in (re)production of inequalities – HE is contributing to this. Different types of mobilities: geographic, social, virtual. Urry (2007) – argues that symbolic cultural capital connected to mobility = network capital. Core question: which groups are mobile/immobile and why? Key example of UK student who did degree at Ivy League university (p.119) - mobility as ‘added value’ as way of distinguishing from competition.Aspiration: Politics of aspiration connected to neoliberal ideology (Raco, 2009) – new governance strategies that make individuals responsible for own ‘projects’ (p.122). Aspiration in Australia – “characterised by new urgency” due to panic discourse in policy – that Australia will not have enough graduates to compete in global knowledge economy and hence 20/40 targets in Bradley Review 2008 (p.123). Draw on Appadurai (2004): aspiration = future-oriented and is a ‘collective cultural capacity’ – least advantaged in society have weakened capacity to imagine futures (p.124).Voice: significant concept for rethinking relationship between knowledge construction and power (p.126) – ‘epistemological equity’ (Dei, 2008) = all people speaking from their experiences/standpoints are constructors of knowledge. Possibilities of pursuing epistemological equity = unequal across HE field. Couldry (2010) argues that to have voice, need two resources: language and recognised status; voice involves ongoing exchange of narratives; voice speaks from embodied histories; need to recognise we all have multiple narratives (compartmentalisation of knowledge enables northern theory to ignore/marginalise the other – Connell, 2007) – voice is denied when structures privilege one voice over another (‘voice as values’)**Core argument:** A capacities (rather than barriers) approach = counterhegemonic: challenges deficit discourse and sets about “changing institutions to make access and participation more possible and desirable to a wider set of groups in society” (p.129) |
| Sellar, S., Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2011). Appreciating aspirations in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(1), 37–52. AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Analyses new [uncritical] emphasis on notion of aspirations (‘raising aspirations’). Draws on Raco’s (2009) concept of ‘politics of aspiration’ that position people as citizens who are responsible for making consumer choices that maximise opportunities (aspiration as entrepreneurialism). Contrast = ‘politics of expectation’. Works from Anderson et al. (1980) 4 As: conditions for university entry (Availability, Aspiration, Accessibility, Achievement).**Aim:** To critique application of aspiration as a neo-liberal wolf in sheep’s clothing**Critiqued assumptions:** 3 problematics with ‘aspiration’: 1) aspiration implies offensive and normative judgements and assumptions about ‘best’ pathways and employment – those who don’t aspire to HE have *lower* aspirations; 2) ignores stratification of HE system (less advantaged students ‘diverted into lower status institutions’: “increasing desire for HE in order to attract underrepresented groups does not ensure that they will have equitable access to different parts of the system once the enter, or that their participation will necessarily provide satisfactory social and economic returns” (p.38); 3) no evidence that underrepresentation is due to ‘low’ aspirations (underpinned by middle-class ideologies).**Theoretical frame**: Appadurai (1996, 2004). Appadurai (1996) argued that global movement has created new diasporic public spheres which have dramatically increased and diversified our resources for self-conceptualisation and imagining futures.**Methodology:** Case study of Australian HE**Findings:** Case study of Australia: tracks changing place of aspiration from 1980s to 2011; acknowledges changing aspirations of government for national economic future (p.40) – details numbers of students/ groups of students needed to meet 20/40 targets. Competition of qualified aspirants could be decentred in future – ‘raising aspirations’ = strategy for widening participation through early outreach. Aspiration has become a public issue due to insufficient demand for places (to meet targets). Notes use of aspiration in third way politics (New Labour, UK) – from where Raco’s thesis was derived.Rising prominence of imagination: Appaduraian notion (rising prominence of imagination in every life) due to rise of modernity and globalisation (through media-suggested possibilities), which permits new ways of imagining ourselves and our worlds. “Understanding the relationship between aspiration and HE demands attention to both the increasing prevalence of imagination in the production of group identities and cultural practices *and* the inequitable distribution of capacities to realise these new imaginaries” (p.45). Aspiration conceived of only in economic terms = appears “relatively autonomous set of individual preferences and choices” (p.45) but conceals imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1996) or social imaginaries (Taylor, 2004). Fraser (1997) – raising aspirations without challenging dominant forms of recognition (epistemological privilege) “is an affirmative remedy for injustice that leaves its underlying causes intact” (p.47).**Core argument:** How can HEIs “better appreciate the aspirations of the different communities they serve…?” (p.48) – creating public spaces of debate about shared imaginaries for/through HE. |
| Slack, K. (2010). Whose aspirations are they anyway?, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 7(4), 325–335.UKAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords (Sally’s): *UK, aspirations, working class, boys, Bourdieu, habitus, taste* | **Context:** Works from Select Committee Report (2001) – Access to Higher Education –and examines one case study of an initiative to raise aspirations. Notes how access and aspirations are inextricably linked in HE/ WP policy. Notes positioning in the report as aiming to ‘raise aspirations’ of young people from traditionally under-represented backgrounds, which played out in predictable ways (low SES schools participating in various initiatives designed to ‘raise aspirations’**Aim:** **Theoretical frame:** Notes predominance of Bourdieu’s theories (habitus in particular) in other literature on students’ aspirations and decision-making**Methodology:** Case study of evaluation of one initiative in a low HE participation/ high unemployment area. Mixed methods approach – this paper offers data collected from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: steering group members, teaching staff, project organisers, and students (n=6 students). Case study initiative started in 1995 (broader project explored evaluation post-5 years of implementation) and targeted Year 9 students in local schools in various workshops (an inspirational talk/ dance and music workshops/ end-of-year performance). Schools were free to choose what activities they participated in and which students could participate (some students self-selected; others were selected by teachers).**Findings:** Interviews with students suggested that selection for participation was problematic (Slack notes the guidelines on participation were not clear until the end of the project). The students who were interviewed felt that the selection was unfair, with the ‘best’ students chosen – many felt ‘left out’ on the basis of their status and academic ability in the school. This feeling was reiterated by students who had taken part who felt that they shouldn’t have participated because they had already decided to pursue further education. Furthermore, the types of activities on offer = attractive to ‘swots’ (aka those more academically inclined), and a reduced appeal for boys (because of music/ dance focus). The activities were chosen by adults (with no input from pupils): “they felt they had little say in what was offered as part of the project. Activities were, therefore, based on the ‘tastes’ of adults, and reflected their habitus: one which differed significantly from that of the intendedbeneficiaries, young people from a predominately working class background” (p.331); draws on Bourdieu’s notion of ‘taste’. Interview data from the project organisers suggests that they viewed the activities as offering ‘wonderful opportunities’ and lifelong memories; in contrast, interviewed students said they though the activities had been organized by people in their 60s.**Core argument:** The success of the activities described in the case study was inhibited by a lack of consultation with children in the local area, and a lack of clear direction in terms of who could/ should participate in them. The construction and focus of the activities was seen to exclude working class students, and boys in particular, from conception. Furthermore, “additional questions must be asked in relation to aspiration raising initiatives themselves: to raise aspirations and not increase opportunities realistically available is both demoralizing and unfair” (p.333). These issues need to be addressed and considered for initiatives to be successful for ‘raising aspirations’. |
| Slack, K., Mangan, J., Hughes, A., & Davies, P. (2012). ‘ Hot’, ‘cold’ and ‘warm’ information and higher education decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(2), 204–223.UKAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Government mandate that students need ‘high quality information’ when making HE choices (David Willetts – then Universities and Science Minister).**Aim:** To explore notions of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ knowledge/ re: university choice in the context where “different sources of information are not equal in terms of depth of knowledge, applicability to particular students, or their independence” (p.205) and that choice process is qualitatively different for students depending on their class background (Reay et al. 2001). Other work has suggested that students are generally distrusting of institutional (cold) information and prefer to trust the ‘hot’ knowledge offered by ‘grapevine’ social networks (Ball & Vincent, 1998)**Theoretical frame:** ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ knowledge**Methodology:** Questionnaire (1544 completed) on usefulness of different information and focus group data with prospective students, FE students and university students around different ‘information scenarios’**Findings:** Students supplement their information channels with ‘warm’ knowledge: other students, friends and family who have perceived synergy/ perceived as ‘honest’ (such as student ambassadors)**Core argument:** Addition of extra category to Ball & Vincent’s seminal categories of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ knowledge: ‘warm’ knowledge from personal connections – albeit not in their social networks. Hot and warm sources of knowledge. Prospective students know that universities stage their promotional materials in particular ways to sell higher education futures |
| Smith, L. (2011). Experiential ‘hot’ knowledge and its influence on low-SES students’ capacities to aspire to higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2), 165–177.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Paper situated against deficit framings of low SES aspirations in Australian HE (post Bradley Review) and looks at social and cultural (not academic) factors affecting aspirations. Looks at influence of siblings with experience of HE on low SES secondary students’ aspirations to HE**Aim:** To develop more complex characterisation of how access to different resources (social, cultural, economic) impact on students’ capacities to articulate and follow their aspirations**Theoretical frame:** Appadurai’s notion of capacity to aspire/ Ball & Vincent’s (1998) ‘hot’/’cold’ knowledge**Methodology:** Semi-structured interviews with students (Year 11/12) – only 3 profiled in paper. Students from a low SES area of SA where students are 7 times less likely to go to university than more affluent neighbours**Findings:** Aspirations are heterogeneous and influenced by developing (relational) subjectivities, financial concerns/interests and family experience/perceptions/expectations. Discusses campus excursions as a form of ‘hot’ knowledge that can have an ‘othering’ effect (“outsiders looking in”, p.172). Mentions difficulty of decoding cold knowledge – teachers or others who had recently been to university = considered most appropriate sources of help for decoding. One student had an older brother at university as his decoder. Having siblings currently studying at university = useful: “sibling-transfers of cultural capital may strengthen students’ capacities to aspire” (p.174) – but not “all-pervasive. Rather, they open up a new sense of possibility” (p.175)**Core argument:** Proposes concept of *intragenerational* family scripts (variation on Ball, David, Davies & Reay’s 2002 notion of *transgenerational* family scripts)**Interesting fact:** This paper was written by Smith who was a B(Ed) student at the time as a result of a NCSEHE summer school scholarship |
| Smyth, E. & Banks, J. (2012). “There was never really any question of anything else”: young people’s agency, institutional habitus and the transition to higher education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 33(2), 263–281.IREAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *social class; institutional habitus; educational decision-making; secondary schools* | **Context:** Access to information/ decision-making about higher education for students and families from different social classes. Transition = not understood as process/ phenomenon/ discourse; rather = choice to go to university (or not) – informed by Irish school system having a ‘transition year’ towards end of compulsory schooling**Aim:** To explore to what extent students from different schools/ social classes have equal access to information about higher education, and to examine the role that schools play in the process**Theoretical frame:** Situates paper against social class/ social reproduction (institutional habitus - Bourdieu)/ rational choice arguments about higher education choice – but notes the difference (I.e. habitus = largely not agentic and explicit, whereas rational choice is). Agency = used “to reflect the conscious decisions made by young people in deciding whether to go to university and which college or course to attend” (p.264). Post-school planning conceptualized as:1. individual/ familial habitus
2. institutional habitus
3. agency

**Methodology:** Qualitative (part of broader post-primary longitudinal study): questionnaires and in-depth interviews/ focus groups with final-year students and staff from two different high schools (1: middle class, fee-paying = Fig Lane; 2: working class, state school = Barrack Street)**Findings:** 82% of FL students planned to go to university compared with 52% of BS students.Fig Lane: Many of students from FL = not first-in-family and so could request advice from parents/ siblings (although only a third thought parents were influential on post-school decision-making). Authors note “an extraordinarily high level of expectations and confidence” in FL students about going to university (plan not aspiration). 76% planned to go to university. Students at FL given lots of support from guidance counselor about going to university (but most students = dissatisfied with guidance given) but the orientation/ campus visits organized with elite university = viewed positively by students and staff. Overall, “students’ subjective assessments are most probably based on the multiple habituses of family and school over longer periods of time” (p.271).Barrack Street: BS students = generally first-in-family and deference to parents’ influence = considerably higher (75% mothers; 60% fathers) = suggests classed/ gendered difference. Students reported being frustrated by lack of guidance on offer at BS – they felt the onus was on them to collate information about university and students appeared to have a lack of information about courses available and many felt the guidance counselor did not care about them because she is too busy (disputed by interview data from guidance counselor). 59% of BS students wanted more information about different options at uni/ 67% wanted more information about college (compared to 20% at FL). Analysis of the data suggestions expectation gap between students have higher aspirations than teachers/ guidance counselor; “Instead of withdrawing or becoming disengaged from school, students appear to react to these low expectations and are mobilised to do well at school, which is an unusual form of resistance” (p.275). Peer influence = more important for BS students than for FL students**Core argument:** Students in middle class/ working class schools appeared to have different sets of habitus/ capitals for negotiating the education field. The institutional habitus of the schools “are made manifest through the academic climate and through guidance provision” and “is reflected in the nature of guidance within the school”, impacting on a students’ view of/ approach to/ aspiration or plan for further education. However, the data also demonstrate the students’ agency in obtaining information/ making decisions which is often ignored in similar research: “Young people make rational decisions about attending higher education, but this rationality is ‘bounded’ by their individual, familial and institutional habituses and it can in no way be assumed that the information to which students have access is complete or impartial” (p.279). For some students, academic achievement = “a form of resistance to classed expectations” (p.279). |
| Southgate, E. & Bennett, A. (2014). Excavating Widening Participation Policy in Australian Higher Education: Subject Positions, Representational Effects, Emotion, *Creative Approaches to Research*, 7(1), 21–45. AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker | **Context:** Australian widening participation (UK term used, not sure why)**Aim:** To ask critical questions about neo-liberal forms of social justice**Theoretical frame:** Uses Foucauldian discourse analysis on policy documents (2008-2013)/ ‘feeling-rules’ = modes of emotional existence: “techniques of the self that are inherent in neo-liberal ideologies where each person is considered to be their own entrepreneur responsible for the cultivation of their own personal human capital” (p.26)**Methodology:** Bacchi’s ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR) = ‘digging tool’ comprising 6 questions:1. What’s the problem represented to be in specific policy/ policy proposal?
2. What presuppositions/ assumptions underpin this representation?
3. How has this ‘representation’ come to be?
4. What is left as unproblematic in this representation? Where are there silences?
5. What effects are produced by this representation?
6. How/where has this representation been produced, disseminated and defended?

**Findings:** Identifies two subject positions and ‘feeling-rules’ within Australian WP policy: *the cap(able) individual* and *the proper aspirant*.The cap(able) individual: a “quintessential neo-liberal subject who possesses ‘natural ability’, hope for social mobility and highly individualised and entrepreneurial disposition”. ‘Capability’ = “a floating signifier” (p.29) – left as commonsensical but it is informed by a suite of tacit assumptions about structural, sociocultural and environmental factors that are lacking in WP documents. Links with biological essentialist views (Cartesian views of identity?) = ‘natural ability’The proper aspirant: “must display an ability to rationally calculate pathways to and through higher education… for maximum benefit” (p.35). This subject position is based on a normative hierarchy (e.g. university is better than TAFE) which privileges middle-class ideals (p.34). This subject position “diminishes the feeling-rules that permeate governmental power relations” and allows some ways of being/doing/knowing to be valued more than others. Here, ‘working-class’ subjectivity is positioned as ‘unknowing’ with ‘deficits on quality’.**Core argument:** Aspiration is a ‘neo-liberal form of hope’ (p.38) |
| Walker, M. (2008). Widening participation: widening capability, *London Review of Education,* 6(3), 267–279.UK/SAKeywords: *widening participation; higher education policy; equality; capability formation; student learning* | **Context:** Takes a view of WP as about first-in-family entry and participation in HE, and specifically related to working class students. Uses Sen’s (1992) thinking about capability and the potential for students to become ‘strong evaluators’ (see Taylor, 1985) about what is a ‘good life’ for them. Offers a critique of WP policy as primarily driven by human and economic capital arguments. Questions the normative drivers for equality [note: not equity] research and advocates the questioning of “what sort of equality ought higher education to be promoting for widening participation students” (see p.268). Taking a capabilities approach permits the inclusion of being and doing to the dominant valuing of knowing in HE: “Equality in higher education in these terms would mean equality of valuable capabilities” (p.268). Takes three key developments as starting points: 1) establishment of Equalities and Human Rights Commission (thinking about employment equality in HE, which is an area where UK was not achieving equality = e.g. gender pay gap, ethnicity gap, disabilities gap); 2) increase in economic logics in neoliberal HE, and commensurate shifts in what ‘counts’ in HE; 3) the measure of inequalities taken by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission = based on Sen’s work**Aim:** To argue for a reframing of widening participation as ‘widening capability’; to ask “how higher education contributes to the formation of a society which is free, fair and equal in the way it provides for each individual to realise his or her fullest potential reflectively to choose and lead a good life” (p.269)**Theoretical frame:** Amrtya Sen’s work on capabilities as a measure of justice and equality (as opposed to metrics based on individual preferences, income or wealth); Sen does not eschew human capital theory in his thinking, but he sees beyond the economics, seeking to include the intrinsic benefit of education and its social impact/ responsibility: “a capability discourse would also value non-economic ends and more expansive understandings of what is valuable in human lives and for human flourishing” (p.270). Thus capabilities = judged on “real and actual freedoms that people have to do and to be what they value being and doing” (p.270), rather than a narrow focus on achievements.**Methodology:** Draws on previous research (two projects) on students’ experiences of university/ learning and a focus on WP in one. Offers interview data from both projects**Findings:** Working from a notion of ‘widening capabilities’, WP = we need to ask questions of how students are enabled to develop ideas of what the ‘good life’ is in reflexive ways that contribute to self-understanding: “Todevelop students’ capability as strong evaluators is to develop them as agents able to reflect on and re-examine their valued ends, when challenged to do so through teaching and learning experiences. Students would reflect on what is of more or less ethical significance in the narrative interpretation of their lives” (p.271).Three barriers to the success of WP:1. neoliberalism and human capital theory: HE = dominantly positioned as instrumental (investment in future earnings), and New Labour policy in England = appropriated the language of social justice/ egalitarian. The marketization of HE/ New Labour policy has stratified the sector into gold, silver, bronze education (see also Archer, 2007) = insurmountable tension between equity/ social justice and neoliberalism/ human capital
2. Purposive rationality: skills discourse that shaped pedagogy/ critical thinking: “embedded in purposive (instrumental) rationality, technicism and instrumentality”, p.273) = dominant paradigm under neoliberal regime because of how it serves the market and performative logics; second = purposive rationality privileges success in the task at hand, rather than the goals, means, meanings attached
3. Pedagogies of disrepair (Luke, 2006) = limited access to valued ‘capitals’ of HE for particular groups (e.g. working class students) “sets up classroom cultures in which being confident and middle class is the norm against which all students are judged by each other and by lecturers” (p.273). Pedagogy can ‘undermine’ the project of inclusive and equitable teaching; instead it can expose the knowledge and power structures at play in HE.

Walker argues there are 4 resources for positive transformation/ rejection of contemporary logics:1. point to the disfunction of human capital arguments – knowledge economy is not delibering its promise of jobs (the ‘opportunity trap’; Brown, 2003) and credential creep = impacting on the graduate job market
2. Promote communicative rationality (Habermas): “oriented to human potential and actions for mutual understanding, formative dialogue, self-analysis, and transformation of ends” (p.275) = promotes ‘ethical goal revision’ (aka strong evaluation; aka reflexive decision making). “Thus as Sen would also argue, what matters is to choose rationally and freely, where reason is not reduced to purposive rationality and critical skills nor domesticated to serve instrumental ends” (p.275).
3. Reclaiming discourses of choice, agency and aspiration: being a ‘strong evaluator’ and raising awareness of the appropriation of key discourses in a way that serves the needs of the underpinning economic program driving HE = allows students to have and make ‘genuine choices’, which recognize “the conscious and deliberative aspects of human agency” and aspire to, and possibly disrupt, ideas of what ‘life is like’ for particular social groups (all p.276)
4. A promissory note (Habermas): optimism that universitites can flourish despite the rigidity of the neoliberal shape of contemporary HE; “universities ought to be defended as one of the remaining public spaces of reasoned argument and inclusive dialogue about important and difficult questions” (p.277).

**Core argument:** “Widening participation ought … to be conceptualised as widening capability as a matter of full justice” so as to support the development of students as ‘strong evaluators’ and the development of inclusive pedagogies that teach students “to be critical and active participants in democratic life” (p.277). |
| Wrench, A.; Hammond, C.; McCallum, F.; & Price, D. (2013). Inspire to aspire: raising aspirational outcomes through a student well-being curricular focus, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 17(9), 932–947.AUSAnnotated by Sally Baker Keywords: *well-being; aspirations; pedagogy; low socio-economic status; education* | **Context:** Examines federal policies which relate to students’ aspirations for university – Transforming Australian HE (2009), based on Bradley review = SES targets – cites Bok’s critique of the individual nature of this policy, which fails to recognise the social and cultural/ complex community connections with aspirations. Based on **Aim:** To explore intersections between pedagogical practices, curriculum based on a well-being framework, and the shaping of subjectivities and aspirations of young people in a region characterised by socio-economic challenge (abstract)**Assumptions**: aspiration is social/cultural – not individual; last 2 years of school = too late for outreach; action research facilitates ‘professional conversations’ which enables change**Thematic frame:** Well-being, based on South Australian DECS Learner Well-being Framework (2007).**Methodology:** Draws from data collected in ‘School of Education Aspirations Project’ (SEAP) 2-year case study/ action research project in high school (R-12) in South Australia (2010 = 4 networks of schools; 2011 = 6 networks). Data include: narratives, field notes, student work samples and professional conversations (abstract). Series of interventions in curriculum were co-designed with schools, including experiential learning for schools teachers, school and university students; curriculum redesigns and “a performative expectation for student learning” (p.934). School described = 40% of students have school cards (low SES marker) and increasing number = NESB**Findings:** 3 themes: Pedagogies and learning activities, Relationships, caring and connections, Places, spaces and belonging. Describes pedagogical strategies of ‘Dee’ with critical support from ‘Marnie’ = Dee believes that self-awareness is key to aspirations: “Explicit teaching and learning included work on ‘strengths and values’ resource cards, learning styles, aspirations and student conceptualisations of well-being” (p.937) and catered to diverse learning styles. Connections made to Dee’s recognition of emotional and modeling role she plays in classroom. Also foregrounds Dee’s belief in place-based experiences – worked hard to create a sense of belonging and social/emotional connectivity. Part of project = university visits as part of Group Adventure InitiativeTasks (GAITs)**Core argument:** Low SES students have aspirations. Foregrounds importance of identity and subjectivity to aspiration-forming. Pedagogy and curriculum are significant for student engagement; the role of the teacher is highly important in social and emotional domains “which connect student life-worlds within their particular contexts, building cultural capital and broadening capabilities, self-awareness, aspirations and achievement” (abstract). “…a sense of ‘place’ underpinned Dee’s classroom curriculum and was strengthened through socially critically pedagogies that incorporated, developing student voice around how they learn, building emotional connectivity and relational trust within the classroom community, developing a sense of student ownership, identity and belonging and creating spaces for dialogue” (p.943) |
| Zipin, L.; Sellar, S.; Brennan, M.; Gale, T. (2015). Educating for Futures in Marginalized Regions: A sociological framework for rethinking and researching aspirations, *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 47(3), 227–246.AUSAnnotated by Sally BakerKeywords: *aspirations, curriculum and pedagogy, funds of knowledge, community study, Bourdieu, Appadurai* | **Context:** Problematises mainstream aspiration raising in context of globalisation, where ‘aspiration raising’ exacerbates the situation by simplifying the complexities. Argues that “optimism is a cruel experience for many in the historic present, given lived conditions fraught with structural obstacles that thwart even the most reasonable strategies for pursuing futures hopefully” (p.227-8). Argues that policy relating to student aspirations fails to account for complex web of factors that are (at least partially) a result of globalization and fuels deficit discourses. Policy (specifically post-Bradley review) has focused on aspirations that inadvertently position those who do not aspire to HE as lacking the motivation for the ‘good life’ (see Gale, 2015 etc. for critique) and thus conceals the ‘education as reproduction’ social structure. Offers critique of human capital theory: it “remains a shibboleth of tenacious neoliberal governmentalities, permeating national policy discourses that place individual educational and vocational aspirations at the center of efforts continually to increase productivity and economic competitiveness” (p.230)**Aim:** To “theorize aspirations as a subjective and intersubjective process among young people in marginalized social positions and geographic regions” (p.228) and to offer a sociological framework for understanding aspiration. Asks: “how do individual lacks of motivation apply to social groupings?” (p.229)**Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu, Raymond Williams, Appadurai, Funds of knowledge; ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2011)**Methodology:** Essay, drawing on action research project in collaboration with schoolteachers to redesign curriculum with ‘funds of knowledge’ approach [connections here with Robinson (2012)]**Findings:** Offers a conceptual framework for rethinking aspiration:1. doxic aspirations: ‘commonsensical’ notions – so that when questions are asked in research, they yield ‘doxic responses’ (aka – interpellative/ responding to what seems commonsense). Authors argue that “impulses to pursue out-of-reach dreams of upward mobility are incited and reinforced by varied populist mediations” (p.232) = if you work hard enough…, leading to self-blame if failure, rather than recognising social structural limitations
2. Habituated aspirations: policy makers make assumptions based on simplistic judgements not based on observation or contextualised research that suggests that those who don’t get where they want to be are lacking intelligence/ resilience/ ‘correct’ lifestyles (embodied dispositions). Habitus = “Such primary dispositions constitute deeply latent structural patterns for later perception of possibilities for ‘the likes of us’ as against ‘the likes of them’” (p.234)

Emergent aspirations: difficult to empirically examine because “social presents-becoming-futures, the ‘logics’ of which … do not yet have language” (p.236)Drawing on the action research, authors offer example of art class where students asked to draw on own experiences (funds of knowledge) to make videos. Class negotiated sensitive topics to avoid. Authors argue this activity “*capacitated* students to enact their agency—— as citizens of their locales—— to desire, imagine, articulate and pursue community *futures* that exceed, rather than reproduce, historically receivedsocial–structural limits” (p,238)**Core argument:** Aspirations are “complex formations” (p.241). Paper offers two logics: doxic and habituated + emergent. Emergent = capacitation and resourcing futures not yet imagined (but not commonsensical or habitual) |

1. ‘Rustbelt’ = “a post-industrial area situated in the outer suburban fringe, which has been adversely affected by the closure of factories and small businesses, resulting in relatively high unemployment and concomitant social disadvantage (Bok, 2010: 169; see also Thomson, 2002). Contrast with ‘leafy green’ communities near the city. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Rustbelt’ = “a post-industrial area situated in the outer suburban fringe, which has been adversely affected by the closure of factories and small businesses, resulting in relatively high unemployment and concomitant social disadvantage (Bok, 2010: 169; see also Thomson, 2002). Contrast with ‘leafy green’ communities near the city. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The full title of the study is *Educational and Career Aspirations in the Middle Years of Schooling: Understanding Complexity for Increased Equity*. The study is an Australian Research Council Linkage project (LP120100013) jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and the NSW Department of Education and Communities. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)