Rural Young People's Work/study Priorities and Aspirations: The Influence of Family Social Capital

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Abstract

The transition from school to secure work has become more difficult as young people bear the brunt of the restructuring of the Australian labour market. Young people raised in a rural community are over-represented in the most disadvantaged labour market group – those who have not participated in post-school training and who have experienced long periods of unemployment. Rural labour markets feature lower paid, less secure jobs than their urban counterparts. Education is a proven way of accessing the 'better' jobs offered by national labour markets. Why then do young people from disadvantaged rural areas not take up education and training opportunities to the same extent as their urban counterparts? The research discussed in this paper investigated ways in which family and school/community social capital influence young people's work/study values and priorities with regard to post-school pathways. Family networks and information that are limited and concentrated in rural areas tend to be associated with a desire to find a job before completing school, preferably located near to home. Incomplete understanding and lack of trust of educational institutions and labour markets in urban centres based on local experience may be transmitted through advice of family and friends and influence young people toward current work rather than the longer term goal of post-compulsory education. The implications for regional and national programs of educational and community development are discussed.

Transition from school and rural labour markets

Recent research by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia into the role of vocational education and training and other learning in rural

communities has found social capital to be a key component of the capacity to manage change (CRLRA 2000). The research also noted concern in rural communities about the availability of post-compulsory education and training and jobs for youth. This work has raised important questions about the role of social capital at a time of change in the lives of rural students as they and their families manage the transition from compulsory schooling.

Young people raised in rural communities are under-represented in post-compulsory education (James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis and Stephanou 1999, Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn 2000, p. 28), and over-represented in the most disadvantaged labour market group – those who have not participated in post-school training and who have been unemployed for more than 25 percent of the time since leaving school (Ainley and McKenzie 1999). Rurality is once more firmly on the equity agenda with regard to education and employment. This situation is exacerbated by the restructuring of the Australian labour market where the increasing proportion of casual and part-time jobs are more likely to be occupied by those aged under 25 (Gregory 1999, Wooden and Van den Heuval 1999). Rural labour markets in most Western countries feature poorer pay, fewer security and less rewarding, skilled jobs than their urban counterparts (Shucksmith 2000, Galston and Baehler 1995). Education, especially completion of the final year of school, is a proven way of accessing the more secure, well-paid jobs offered by national labour markets and a key factor in the successful transition from education to work (Ainley and McKenzie 1999, McClelland, Macdonald and MacDonald 1998). However, many rural and remote Australian localities lack local access to secondary education, especially the senior secondary years (Sidotti 2000), and post-school education and training usually means moving to larger urban centres. Thus young people nearing the end of their schooling in rural and remote areas are often forced to make a choice between staying near family and aiming for the disadvantaged rural labour market, or the emotional and financial cost of leaving home and attempting to enter the advantaged national labour market (Shucksmith 2000). Those who stay behind in rural areas find it increasingly difficult later to transfer out of the rural labour market, typically being disadvantaged by low skills, a broken employment record (Shucksmith 2000) and insufficient finance to enter urban housing markets. The national and rural labour markets are an example of the dual labour market hypothesis (Norris 1993, p. 174). This economic theory holds that there are two sectors in the labour market: a primary sector with well-paid, secure jobs and a secondary

sector with low-paid jobs. Entry and wage determination processes in the two sectors are different and there is limited mobility between the sectors, so workers become trapped in the low-paid, secondary sector. The rural labour market is analogous to the secondary sector.

Failure to complete the final year of school or acquire a post-school qualification increases labour market disadvantage. By the age of 24 completion of Year 12 reduces the odds of unemployment by as much as 58 percent (Ainley and McKenzie 1999). While academic ability may affect the choice of school and post-school course (vocational education and training [VET], technical and further education [TAFE] or university), changes to the curriculum, especially the introduction of VET in schools, have provided, at least in theory, school and post-school options for all levels of academic ability. Despite this, those who leave school early and risk unemployment are more likely to have been low achievers (Ainley 1998).

Australia has a loosely coupled system of education-to-work arrangements compared with many other countries such as Germany, Austria and Denmark, and this leaves the individual largely alone to construct a pathway into work (Curtain 1999). A study of post-school outcomes based on analysis of the Australian Youth Survey data revealed that, while family socio-economic status (SES) and gender influence the initial study or work destination within the first year of leaving school, the most significant variable affecting post-school outcomes two years out of school is the initial study or work destination in the first year out of school (Abbott-Chapman, Easthope and O'Connor 1997). The first step on the ladder towards study/work success is therefore of crucial importance, especially for disadvantaged youth. In this sense individual initiative and motivation, usually with family support, and community social capital are essential in overcoming obstacles presented by social background (Coleman 1990, Falk and Kilpatrick 2000). Family members and their networks are sources of information and advice that help shape the aspirations and expectations of young people as they forge pathways from school to further education and/or work, and assist them in raising or lowering their sights on work/study goals.

Rural labour markets are characterised by unskilled, casual, seasonal jobs that make establishing a pattern of steady work difficult. Distance and the availability and cost of transport make it more difficult to find out about and

apply for jobs in other locations and find out about education and training opportunities; in other words access to information about jobs and education and training is costly. The depressed rural economy and low-paid labour market impose extremely high financial barriers for children of many rural families. An effective social network can reduce the cost of acquiring information and increase access to labour markets. Many jobs in rural areas are never advertised but rather given to someone recommended to the employer; access to these information and referral networks is often through family or family friends (Smith and Brennan 2001). This provides a sense of security which may by contrast make entering the national labour market appear less attractive and more risky.

Social capital in relation to economic and cultural capital

Rural labour markets are related to aspects of rural disadvantage, especially economic disadvantage surrounding low income. Neoclassical economic theory holds that income flows from stocks of capital: physical capital in the form of buildings, machines and equipment, human capital or knowledge and skills, and land (McTaggart, Findlay and Parkin 1996, pp. 15-16). The concept of capital as the means of producing economic and social well-being has been long debated by social theorists seeking to include non-material aspects of culture (Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu and Passeron 1988, 1990). Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) sees three forms of capital: economic (wealth, income and property), cultural (knowledge, culture and education credentials) and social (resources linked to membership of a durable network of relationships). He suggests that common ownership of types of capital promotes cohesion in social groupings, so that different social classes share different mixes of economic and cultural capital (Swartz 1997, p. 137). Congruence of individual and institutional cultural capital will advantage a student's progress through the educational system, while incongruence will disadvantage. The hegemony of particular forms of cultural capital within society therefore constitutes a symbolic power privileging particular groups, especially through language, forms of communication and shared values (Bourdieu 1977).

The concept of cultural capital has been extended to embrace the concept of social capital as a community rather than individual characteristic that is central to the discussions of social cohesion, citizenship and social development (Cox 1995). Social capital adheres in the relationships between people (Coleman

1990). A recurring theme throughout the literature is that social capital is central to mobilising other resources for development or betterment, especially for the economically disadvantaged. This suggests that the different endowments of economic, social and cultural capital of different groups are used in different ways to maintain and improve their overall well-being. In examining these endowments the study discussed in this paper benefits from the economics and sociology backgrounds of the two educational researchers within an interdisciplinary approach.

For the purposes of this analysis social capital is defined as a set of social resources of individuals and communities that, when combined with other forms of capital, facilitates achieving social, educational, economic and employment goals (Lin 1988) – goals that will differ for different groups and communities. The effectiveness of social capital lies in the positive impact of bridging (or 'weak') ties between groups within a community and externally, or between communities (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). For example, hiring labour and finding jobs both use networks which draw on trust, and reduce uncertainty that a new employee will have the right skills and share the values of the employer. The hirer trusts the person with whom they have a weak tie to recommend an employee who has the right skills and values for the organisation and so will 'fit in'. The potential employee trusts the network member to identify a job that will 'suit' them, or fit with their values and talents. Trust, networks and shared values are elements of social capital; they are the 'social glue' which holds communities and societies together (Misztal 1996).

Social capital can thus be summarised as two kinds of resources: knowledge and identity resources. Knowledge resources relate to networks: knowing who to go to for information and how to get things done. Identity resources relate to trust and shared values: people being willing and able (including being sufficiently self-confident) to act on behalf of others (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000). Close-knit rural communities and rural schools tend to build high levels of cultural and social capital within the community and school. The small size of schools and overlap of the school and geographic communities facilitate the building of networks with teachers, fellow students and community. Students moving from rural communities will leave the school and community social capital behind and have to build new relationships in the more complex environment of a large urban centre and senior secondary college, and to adjust to other forms of social capital. Trust is likely to be higher in small rural

high schools than the large impersonal, urban senior secondary college, and values are more likely to be shared by the families, community and school. Coleman (1990) suggests that a low level of family social capital, associated with dropping out of school, may be compensated by high levels of school and community social capital which encourage participation.

Stanton-Salazar (1998) links social networks, as aspects of social capital, with social class. Middle-class people have cosmopolitan networks that access privileges, institutional resources and opportunities, including career opportunities. In contrast, working-class networks are bounded, smaller, more homogenous and have little reach into institutions and networks of what Stanton-Salazar terms 'the mainstream' (1998). Educational attainment is a major vehicle for shaping social networks and social capital, producing skills in communicating with and relating to others, and a generalised feeling of self-confidence (all aspects of identity resources). Post-compulsory education thus has a direct effect on labour market pathways, through the educational prerequisites for national labour market jobs, and an indirect effect through building social capital, including networks for accessing jobs in the future. The well-established and continuing relationship between family SES and participation in post-compulsory education (James 2000, Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn 2000) reflects family human capital (typically measured by parental education level), and financial capital (often measured by occupation as a proxy for income) which are interrelated. Education influences occupation and hence income. In our study we argue that social capital is the third, interrelated determinant of SES, especially in rural labour markets that lack career ladders and steady, well-paying jobs.

About the research

A study of the post-school pathways of Year 10 students from three small rural high schools in northern Tasmania, Australia, who left secondary school at the end of 1998, was conducted by survey and interviews during 1999. We investigated factors which shape these rural young people's long-term aspirations and post-Year 10 education and/or work goals, especially the role of family social capital in shaping current priorities and future aspirations, and in the valuing by students of alternative career and community goals within local or national markets. Given the influence of post-compulsory participation, the relationship between initial post-school destination and later

outcomes, and the increasing difficulty of transfer from the rural to the national labour market, it is clear that the decisions made at the end of compulsory education in Year 10 have a significant impact on future lifestyle, income and life choices.

Education at the three rural schools finished at Year 10 until one or two years before our study when limited Year 11 vocational education and training courses commenced. Students wanting an academic course or vocational courses not offered by their school had to transfer to a large urban senior secondary college, a move that for most meant boarding away from home. A study by the Tasmanian Department of Education (1999), *Post-Compulsory Education in Tasmania*, notes that direct retention from Year 10 to Year 11 is the lowest of any Australian State, and lower in rural areas.

Findings discussed are based on data from 84 completed leavers' questionnaires, 15 in-depth one to two hour long interviews with leavers and their siblings and 11 equally long interviews with parents. The 84 respondents comprised 35 percent of the 240 Year 10 leavers from the three schools, and are representative in terms of gender and locality. The initial questionnaires were mailed to potential respondents at addresses obtained from their schools, and respondents, parents and some of the students' older siblings were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview. Most interviews were conducted in respondents' and/or parents' homes, often in rurally remote locations, therefore allowing contextualisation of the responses. Data were also gained from schools' academic records relating to students' English and maths assessment scores. The schools and communities involved were already well known to the researchers through previous research. This study is set in the context of large scale and longitudinal surveys of post-compulsory retention, in which the authors have been involved, which allowed us to locate the findings, their validity and significance within a much broader body of statistical work (Abbott-Chapman, Easthope and O'Connor 1997, CRLRA 2000).

About the data analysis

The data from the questionnaires were first analysed using frequencies and cross tabulations to uncover patterns, using qualitative data from the interviews in the interpretation of findings. This paper reports the subsequent more sophisticated statistical analysis when factor analysis was applied to the data.

Factor analysis reduces a large number of correlated variables to a smaller, more manageable number of factors that can be used in further data analysis, and is a useful technique for learning about interrelationships between variables (Abacus Concepts 1996, p. 101). There are several possible methods for extracting and then interpreting the factors. Principal components analysis is adequate for extracting factors from relatively straightforward data such as that from the questionnaires (Abacus Concepts 1996, p. 102). Rotations are used to transform the factors that are derived by the principal components analysis and to assist in interpreting the structure of the variables, or the contribution (load) each of the original variables makes to each factor. The rotation method used by SPSS is called varimax with Kaiser normalisation. For further information on this technique see www.spss.com

Before the factor analysis was undertaken, two SES indices were constructed for use in analyses: a parent post-Year 10 study index which has a value of one if either parent had an educational attainment of Year 11 or 12 or a post-school qualification (29 percent of cases), and zero otherwise; and a parent occupation index as shown in Table 1. Various combinations of mothers' and fathers' occupation were trialed, including the use of both mothers' and fathers' occupational status. The four-category index shown in Table 1 proved to be the best predictor of the items of interest (current priorities and future aspirations) and captures the predominantly patriarchal values of rural occupational hierarchies.

Parent occupation	Index score	% of sample
Father skilled	1	42
Father unskilled	2	28
Mother working and father not working/absent	3	12
Both not working/occupation not given	4	18

Table 1: Parent occupation index

The discussion firstly presents an overview of the identified questionnaire variables, with the addition of the constructed socio-economic status indices, then presents the factors derived from the factor analysis and notes how they are related to the original variables. The implications of the factors are considered in the remainder of the paper.

Socio-economic status

Parental educational levels were found not to be significantly correlated with occupational status, partly because, consistent with our earlier comments about the low-skilled nature of rural labour markets, a large proportion (42 percent) of parents had left school before Year 10. The lack of correlation between parental occupation and education also reflects the restricted opportunities in the local labour markets (meaning that parents may have followed 'fragmentary' careers and that some were 'overqualified' for their occupation). The same pattern is apparent in the experiences of the older siblings of the Year 10 leavers: 'my fiancée did TAFE and she can still only get 19 hours a week of work. Any other jobs she can apply for are nothing to do with what she has done at TAFE'.

The lack of correlation between education and occupation is reflected in interviews in parents' aspirations (or lack of them) for their children. A 23-year-old sibling sums up the rural labour market and 'realistic' aspirations by saying 'work is there if you want it, not necessarily full-time, but you can work for several different farmers. Some rural people only want part-time work. They know full time isn't available, so they've learnt to manage on part-time pay'. Managing and coping with adverse local conditions were key themes in discussions with some students, siblings and parents – reflecting a paring down of aspirations to what could 'realistically' be achieved rather than aspirations for something more, which were perceived as unattainable 'dreams' for students from their sort of family or community.

Current priorities and future aspirations

Seventy percent of the young people said they had education, training or career goals, and 20 percent were unsure. Of those with goals, 69 percent were confident they could meet their goals. Goals and aspirations were further explored by asking the Year 10 leavers to rank items related to current priorities and future aspirations on a five-point scale. The questionnaire first asked Year 10 leavers to 'indicate how much of a priority each of the following is to you at the moment'. The eleven items related to job, school, other education and training, family and social life. They were then asked to rate the importance of 14 different items in planning their future. These items related to work, income, family, community, learning (but not formal study) and social

life. The items mirror those used in other studies of Australian students' educational aspirations and decisions such as the Higher Education Council's examination of rural student higher education choices (James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis and Stephanou 1999). Most of the items on both questions attracted a large number of 'very important' scores (see Tables 2 and 3).

Item	Very important	Important	Average	Low priority	Not a priority	No response
getting or keeping a job	56.0	19.0	13.1	6.0	6.0	
doing well at school	56.0	28.6	4.8		7.1	3.6
earning money	51.2	25.0	15.5	4.8	3.6	
being involved in sport	26.2	14.3	26.2	14.3	17.9	1.2
enjoying a social life	45.2	29.8	21.4	2.4	1.2	
pursuing hobbies and other personal interests	40.5	25.0	25.0	7.1	1.2	1.2
going through and completing Year 12	42.9	13.1	11.9	11.9	14.3	6.0
getting a VET qualification	21.4	10.7	19.0	14.3	27.3	7.1
learning about things that interest me	41.7	33.3	17.96	3.6	3.6	
travelling and seeing more of the world	35.7	14.3	23.8	13.1	10.7	2.4
staying near my family and friends	39.3	21.4	31.0	6.0	2.4	

Table 2: Current priorities (%)

While getting and keeping a job, earning money and doing well at school were 'important' or 'very important' to over three quarters of the students, the strong influence of local ties is revealed by the finding that 60 percent said 'staying near my family and friends' is 'important' or 'very important'. We should not overlook the fact that these are young adolescents aged 15 or 16 years, most of whom have never lived away from home.

Item	Very important	Important	Average	Low priority	Not a priority	No response
working in employment that interests me	78.6	16.7	3.6	1.2		
earning a reasonable income	61.9	28.6	7.1	2.4		
having good friendships	70.2	19.0	7.1	3.6		
finding a job that uses my talents and abilities	66.7	26.2	7.1			
having a high-status career	26.2	29.8	26.2	7.1	9.5	1.2
making a contribution to society	23.8	38.1	23.8	6.0	4.8	3.6
having my family around me	40.5	29.8	25.0	3.6	1.2	
having fun	56.0	29.8	8.3	6.0		
having a steady job	60.7	28.6	7.1	3.6		
learning and under-standing more about the world	27.4	31.0	31.0	6.0	4.8	
meeting the expectations of my parents and family	19.0	26.2	34.5	9.5	10.7	
making a great deal of money	35.7	25.0	19.0	9.5	9.5	1.2
having opportunities for travel	34.5	28.6	23.8	10.7	2.4	
living in a good community	48.8	32.1	13.1	3.6	2.4	

Table 3: Future aspirations (%)

Items associated with a future idealised work aspiration scored especially highly, with over two-thirds rating interesting employment and a job that uses their talents and abilities as very important. Table 3 suggests that almost all of the Year 10 leavers do aspire to a place in the labour market. However it is not clear from these raw results whether their aim is the local, rural labour market or the national labour market where educational qualifications are a prerequisite for entry.

Factor analysis

Factor analysis was applied separately to the two sets of aspirations data in order to discern patterns in aspirations and hence underlying factors that contribute to post-Year 10 pathways and goals.

Three current aspiration factors emerged (see Table 4). They were labelled 'social', 'work' and 'study'. Table 4 shows that the first factor is loaded by social interest items such as 'pursuing hobbies and other personal interests', demonstrating strong correlations between these items. The second factor indicates a strong focus on work, with 'getting or keeping a job' and 'earning money' making strong contributions – but once again the local/national orientation is not clear. 'Doing well at school', 'going through and completing Year 12' and 'getting a VET qualification' make up the third factor (study).

Items		Factors	
	Social	Work	Study
getting or keeping a job		.854	
doing well at school			.861
earning money		.880	
being involved in sport		.579	
enjoying a social life	.736		
pursuing hobbies and other personal interests	.794		
going through and completing Year 12			.815
getting a VET qualification		.502	.649
learning about things that interest me	.681		
travelling and seeing more of the world	.636		
staying near my family and friends	.619		

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.
Absolute values <.3 suppressed.

Table 4: Current priorities rotated component matrix

A current study priority is the only one of the three factors that is significantly correlated with having education, training or career goals (Pearson correlation coefficient 0.256). This implies that the way to overcome barriers and make the transition from a rural high school to the national labour market is seen to be through the post-compulsory study pathway.

Similar techniques were used to extract long-term or future aspiration factors. Four factors emerged, relating to social and income aspirations (labelled 'lifestyle'), mix of family, community and career status aspirations (family, community, career), interesting work (interesting job) and aspirations relating to learning and experiencing the world (labelled 'learning') (see Table 5).

Items	Factors			
	Lifestyle	Family community career	Interesting job	Learning
working in employment that interests me			.861	
earning a reasonable income	.667			
having good friendships	.764			
finding a job that uses my talents and abilities		.442	.522	
having a high-status career		.784		
making a contribution to society		.403	.488	
having my family around me	.518	.443		
having fun	.769			
having a steady job		.549	.522	
learning and understanding more about the world				.858
meeting the expectations of my parents and family		.737		
making a great deal of money	.640	.537		
having opportunities for travel	.403			.623
living in a good community		.478		.520

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.
Absolute values <.4 suppressed.

Table 5: Future aspirations rotated component matrix

Implications of current priority and future aspiration factors

From the discussion at the start of this paper, it is clear that completion of Year 12 or a post-school qualification is a key to entry to the national labour market. A current 'study' priority of these rural students suggests a desire to finish school with the best possible results, consistent with a national labour

market aspiration and as encouraged by the educational system itself. A parent explains that this path is not easy for students or their parents, because of the threat of social dislocation. 'It's very sad. We both realise that they'll have to leave the State if they want work, follow a career. The way the education system is set up [need to travel for post-Year 10 education] makes it harder for them.'

A current 'work' priority may imply a rural labour market destination because achieving the priority now could mean leaving school before the end of Year 12. This is consistent with the national findings of Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn (2000). This priority also could suggest a need for financial capital to achieve access to further educational opportunities such as a VET or university qualification and so national labour markets. Alternatively, the interviews suggest that a work priority reflects some uncertainty about whether a national labour market destination is attainable, hence the need to look for any work that may be available locally while getting on with study. Such behaviour is consistent with a generally held view expressed by one parent that 'opportunities are declining for jobs requiring better qualifications' as the rural economic downturn bites harder.

Our interviews with family members confirm the importance of social capital in the form of networks in obtaining work, and so the contribution of social capital to SES. 'In the sort of job I do the harder you work the more work you get. Word of mouth is important', explains an older sibling working in casual jobs in the rural labour market. This also reflects an observed tendency for resilient, strongly bonded families of low SES to 'look out for each other' and to share information and resources.

The participants' motivation for a current work priority also stems from a lack of confidence in their ability to enter the national labour market coupled with insufficient motivation to make the significant emotional and financial effort to move away from home. The rewards of remaining within family and community networks are ranked against the risks of an uncertain future away from family supports. A parent sketches a picture of young people who could be in this group, saying employment opportunities for young people are 'fairly poor. For the middle group are vague [about goals] but for intelligent students there's nothing to capture their imagination.'

The presence of a current social priority and a future lifestyle aspiration is to be expected. The current social priority factor encompasses family and learning as well as 'fun' aspects of life. The future lifestyle factor includes income-related items as well as friends and fun. These factors suggest that the young people have a balanced attitude to life, with work and study forming only a part of current priorities and work only part of future aspirations, which is to be expected in this age group.

The family, community and career future aspiration factor suggests a degree of balance in the non-social aspects of life. This balance differentiates it from the third factor, interesting job, which is about the intrinsic nature of work rather than the income and status of a job that are relevant to the family, community and career factor. We have noted that jobs in the rural labour market tend to be unskilled or low skilled and irregular, and not the sorts of jobs that are 'steady' or lead to 'a high-status career' or 'lots of money', all components of the family, community and career factor. On the face of it, therefore, this factor is not consistent with a rural labour market aspiration.

There are contradictions, however. The family, community and career future aspiration factor also contains the item 'having my family around me', which suggests remaining in or returning to the rural home community, and two items, 'living in a good community' and 'meeting the expectations of my parents and family', indicating a preference for the familiar rural community and a sense of belonging. This represents a significant alternative goal of social capital. In addition, the tendency for a large group of students at Year 10 to have unrealistic and confused goals with everything still being possible was noted by James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis and Stephanou (1999). By Year 11 and 12 the students in their study had a better understanding of what was possible for them. Thus it is possible that the factor derived here indicates lack of maturity in aspirations rather than a clear national labour market goal. The 'interesting job' factor is a clearer indicator of a national labour market aspiration as it combines 'working in employment that interests me' and 'finding a job that uses my talents and abilities', both more likely to be satisfied in the national labour market. 'A steady job' and 'making a contribution to society', are also more consistent with the national than rural labour market.

The final future aspiration factor related to learning and experiencing more about the world. This factor reflects an outward-looking orientation more attuned to a national than rural labour market destination. The future aspirations of the Year 10 leavers do not suggest this group has made a definite decision to settle on the rural labour market, and there appear to be a range of wider study and employment goals held by at least some. From the early indications captured in this study, however, the factor out of the four discussed most likely to indicate a future rural labour market destination is the second, somewhat confused family, community and career factor.

What determines the Year 10 leavers' current priorities and future aspirations? Earlier in the paper, academic attainment, gender, family SES, and family and school/community social capital were identified as influencing work and educational outcomes, along with rural/urban residency. We examined how far these factors also influence priorities and aspirations at the end of Year 10 of these rural students.

Predictors of current priorities and future aspirations

The impact of family and school/community social capital on young people's priorities, aspirations and decisions can be expected to be observed through the importance the young people place on the views and advice of family members, school teachers, careers advisors and others. Students asked to rank the importance of the views and advice of a number of different people on their 'current work or study participation' and 'in planning your future', showed that by far the most influential person on both initial pathway choices and on planning the future is the student's mother – 88 percent of respondents rate her influence as 'important' or 'very important' in 'choosing current work or study' and 89.3 percent as 'important' or 'very important' in 'planning the future'. This compares with the father's influence of 76.3 percent and 81.5 percent and only 37.4 percent and 30.5 percent for career advisors, and 36.6 percent and 27.1 percent for classroom teachers. The responses regarding sources of advice were subject to factor analysis. Two current advisor and two future advisor factors emerged.[1] The current factors were labelled 'current family and friends advisors' and 'current school and other advisors'. The future advisor factors were labelled 'future family and friends advisors' and 'future school and other advisors'.

Factor scores for the current priority, future aspiration, current advisor and future advisor factors were calculated and allocated to the cases using the SPSS 10 'save as variables' option of the factor analysis function. Analysis of the variance (ANOVA) for each of the three current priority and four future aspiration factors were calculated in order to determine the variables that predicted the priority and aspiration factors. The predictors were the two family SES indices (parent education and occupation), academic attainment measured by a combined Year 10 English and maths ranking, school (to capture variations in either community or school social capital), gender and the two relevant advisor factors. All predictors were entered, then the backward entry method was used to isolate the predictors contributing most to each of the factors. The results of the full predictor model and best 'reduced' model for current priorities appear in Table 6.

	Social		Work		Study	
Predictors	Beta^	t	Beta^	t	Beta^	t
Full model						
Parent post-Year 10 study	0.036	0.271	0.035	0.28	-0.11	-0.795
Parent occupation (skilled low score)	0.252	1.22	0.308	1.598	-0.173	-0.8
Combined Eng and maths rank	0.256	0.938	-0.827**	-3.245	-0.142	-0.496
School	-0.309	-1.335	0.531**	2.456	-0.023	-0.094
Gender	-0.143	-0.469	-0.1	-0.351	0.362	1.132
Current family and friends advisors	0.317**	2.829	0.197*	1.879	0.194	1.657
Current school and other advisors	0.186	1.663	0.16	1.539	0.224*	1.916
	F Sig=.037		F Sig=.001		F Sig=.292	
Backward entry model (criterion: prob of F to remove >=.1)						
Parent post-Year 10 study						
Parent occupation (skilled low score)			0.325*	1.777		
Combined Eng and maths rank			-0.917**	-4.651		
School			0.526**	2.722		
Gender						
Current family and friends advisors	0.334**	3.045	0.201*	1.98		
Current school and other advisors					0.228**	2.018
	F Sig=.003		F Sig=.000		F Sig=.047	
** sig <.05 * sig<.1						
^Standardized coefficients						

Table 6: Current priorities ANOVAs

The influence of family social capital on students' current priorities is apparent. Current family and friend advisors are a significant predictor of the social priority factor, as would be expected. They are also a weaker predictor of the current work priority, which we have noted is likely to be associated with a rural labour market destination. Fathers who are not in the workforce or absent (a high score on the parent occupation index) are also associated with a current work priority – i.e. the pressure to leave school before completing Year 12. These two predictors suggest that for young people with a current work priority, family networks and information do not reach far into urban centres with their educational and national labour market opportunities (Coleman 1990, Lin 1988, Stanton-Salazar 1998). Having a father available and in an active role increases links to workplaces and reduces anxiety about getting a job in the future after completing school.

There is a school or community effect on current work priority (measured by school attended). Examination of the data shows that students from one of the three schools are more likely to have a current work priority than those from the other two schools. School advisors are not a significant predictor of current work priority – suggesting the influence of a particular community rather than school culture. School/community social capital works in complex ways in building knowledge and identity resources and the data collected does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the mechanisms by which school and/or community social capital influences the current work priority of the Year 10 leavers. School/community social capital impacts on current study priority, with current school and other (non-family) advisors being a significant predictor of this priority. These people have networks and information which reach into the educational institutions and future labour market opportunities in urban centres and the national labour market.

Consistent with the association between early school leaving and low academic attainment (Ainley 1998), a current work priority is associated for these students with a low combined English and maths school achievement rank. Higher academic achievers were more likely to focus on longer term study goals. Gender was not a significant predictor of current priorities or future aspirations, which was unexpected.

Interviews with students and their parents illustrate the factors that make up current work and study priorities. Most parents, especially those without high

aspirations, left current work/study decisions to their children, and supported their choices. However, the influence of family experiences and networks on raising expectations is evident. 'Family expectations were that she would go to college, there was no thought that she wouldn't.' The interviews illustrate how school/community social capital can overcome deficiencies in family social capital, as this girl studying at senior secondary college explains: 'Mum didn't do high school so she was motivated for me to do it. My teachers helped me decide what subjects to do. I'm glad I listened to them.'

VET courses and apprenticeships were regarded by some parents and students as a possible mechanism for mobility between the rural labour market and its poor educational opportunities and the national labour market that demands educational qualifications. Others valued VET courses, but did not see them as relevant for available work. 'I did Year 11, loved the VET course. But you don't need to do Year11/12 for the type of work I'm interested in.' VET courses combine work (sometimes paid) with study, and appear to present a middle way for those struggling to choose between apparently immediately attainable, if insecure, jobs in the rural labour market and relatively unknown future jobs in the national labour market. Family rural networks helped find rural jobs, including apprenticeships, and for those valuing life in the local community these represent success rather than failure to compete in the wider world. 'There was no trouble getting an apprenticeship. Next-door neighbour has a mechanics business, son's interest showed up at an early age, our neighbour took him under his wing.' The relative values and goals involved must be included in any assessment of rural priorities.

Current priorities did not always translate into realised work or study goals. In the time between the student questionnaires in April and interviews in November a number of students had 'dropped out' of senior secondary college or lost jobs. In some cases students had not been able to build friendships and adjust to the more complex environment in urban educational institutions: 'I would have liked him to stay on, wish the college could have catered for him.' Overall, it is much too soon to see the long-term outcomes of current priorities and work/study choices and to determine whether future aspirations are likely to be realised, but findings so far suggest that local labour market orientations are closely related to discontinuation of study.

Predictors of current priorities also feature as predictors of the future aspiration factors. Consistent with the similarity of predictors, there are correlations between the current priority and future aspiration factors.[2] The current social and future lifestyle factors are correlated, as would be expected. The current social priority includes items about travel, learning about things of interest and pursuing hobbies and interests, and so not surprisingly is correlated with the outward-oriented future learning aspiration. Both future aspirations containing a work component (family, community, career, and interesting job) are correlated with a current work priority, which is consistent with the 'getting a job', 'steady job' and 'earning income' items that are associated with both factors. There is a negative correlation between a current work priority and a future learning aspiration. We have already observed that a current work priority is likely to lead to a rural labour market destination, while a future learning aspiration is consistent with a national labour market destination. A current study priority is not significantly correlated with any of the future aspiration factors, partly because, we suspect, students are reflecting back school rather than personal expectations. All future aspirations can follow from completion of Year 12 or a VET qualification, therefore high future aspiration scores of those with a high current study priority score do not cluster around any particular aspiration factor.

Overall, then, there is a link between current priorities and future aspirations, and that link is mainly via the priority placed on work or study during the immediate post-Year 10 period. This is consistent with national findings from the Australian Youth Survey data (Abbott-Chapman, Easthope and O'Connor 1997, Lamb, Dwyer and Wyn 2000). A current work priority seems to be associated with some confusion about what is possible and attainable (the family, community, career future aspiration factor); or students' lack of confidence in their ability to access national labour markets, either because of low academic attainment or lack of sufficient family social capital to access job and educational opportunities in urban centres. These accentuate the young people's perceived risks of moving out of the security of home/local community to pursue broader labour market goals.

Conclusions and discussion of findings

Completion of school and transition from school to further study and/or work are more difficult for rural than urban young people. The difficulty of future

mobility out of the disadvantaged rural labour market means the stakes are higher for the decisions young people make at the end of their compulsory schooling, and our findings suggest they are very much aware of this. Distance imposes cost and time barriers and there are emotional barriers in leaving family and friends to participate in post-compulsory education especially at the young age at which the post-school transition takes place. Family social capital and to a lesser extent school/community social capital influence young people's future aspirations, but more significantly their social capital influences current work/study priorities. It is current priorities and decisions of individuals and families that determine longer term labour market outcomes, through congruence or incongruence of social capital.

The two kinds of social capital resources, knowledge and identity resources (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000) help shape current priorities and future aspirations. Family networks and information (knowledge resources) that are limited and concentrated in rural areas tend to be associated with a desire to find a job before the final year of school is completed – to 'settle' for a job, whatever that job may be. Incomplete understanding and trust of educational institutions and labour markets in urban centres, associated with low levels of relevant family identity resources and limited family educational and employment experience, may be transmitted through the advice of family and friends and influence young people toward current work rather than longer term and more open-ended post-compulsory education goals. The finding that a current work priority is associated with having parents in unskilled occupations or not working, and with placing a high degree of importance on advice from family and friends suggests that the links between social class and educational attainment and networks identified by Stanton-Salazar (1998) hold true in rural Tasmania. It is those with bounded and cohesive local networks who are more likely to end up 'trapped' in the rural labour market without the educational qualifications to escape. Greater willingness to be mobile and the skills, education and knowledge which give confidence to take career risks are associated with attainment within national labour markets.

The social capital present in schools and their communities appears to be being used to supplement family social capital as young people shape their priorities, especially educational priorities and goals. This was especially evident in relation to a current study priority where school and other non-family advisors were important for those who were motivated to complete the

final year of school or a VET qualification. Schools and/or their communities also influenced priorities independently from the advice of teachers and others, with a current work priority being associated more with one rural location than the others, suggesting a specific community social capital influence.

Building social capital in rural families and communities through collaborative ventures which are consistent with broad national labour market goals and the intentions of education policy makers could assist young people to complete school and provide more choice in labour market destination. But this cannot be achieved overnight. Building community trust is an essential part of the equation. Extending and reinforcing external networks and information about educational and employment opportunities in urban centres, or knowledge resources, are important, but they need to be sympathetic to local family and community networks and culture – working with them rather than against them – and recognising their strengths rather than taking a consistently 'deficit' standpoint. The strong pull and local valuing of family and community supports need to be fully recognised. The role of identity resources, self-confidence, trust and understanding of the values that operate with congruence or incongruity in rural and urban educational and labour market institutions must not be neglected in any regional or national strategy using a social capital approach to overcome rural disadvantage.

Notes

[1] Results of principal components analysis and varimax rotation available from the authors.
[2] Results of future aspirations ANOVAs and correlations available from the authors.

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