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Smith, Erica. (2019). Environmental sustainability practices: *How adults learn. SCUTREA (Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults) Adult Education 100: Reflections & Reconstructions*

Which has been published in final form at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qUsLRh8y8fjUZcEDUS1TwnS9bHRHhT5q/view?usp=sharing>

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Environmental sustainability practices: How adults learn

Erica Smith
Federation University, Australia

Abstract

This paper reports on a small research project which investigated how adults in Australia learn about, and adapt to, developments in environmental sustainability practices. The project was based on two major changes in Australia in 2018: the cessation of free 'single-use' plastic bags in many shops, particularly the major supermarket changes; and a gathering momentum towards more rigorous recycling practices. These changes, particularly the first, have affected the daily lives of most Australians. The research, consisting of a focus group, an expert interview and an on-line survey was undertaken with staff working for a regional university based at several campuses across the State of Victoria. This paper reports on preliminary results from the project, including analysis of the initial set of results from the survey. The results so far show that people learn from a range of sources, but some are much more common than others. Among media sources, two-thirds of the survey respondents learned from television, and around 40% from social media and the internet more generally; and among other sources, friends and family were information sources for two-thirds of people, while community information and public notices in shops or on litter bins were used by around half of the respondents. Some respondents were passionately engaged with the topic. The paper presents the responses to a number of key questions in the survey and analyses by age, and gender; and makes some suggestions about the effectiveness of learning sources on sustainability practices. The paper addresses the conference themes of formal and informal learning; adult political education; and community learning and engagement.

Introduction

The project was inspired by, and draws upon, two previous studies. A research project 'Learning to be drier' was carried out in 2009 in rural communities in Victoria during a severe drought, examining how community members adapted to drier conditions in their domestic life as well as in farming practices, and how they learned about new practices (Golding, Brown, Foley, Smith, Campbell, Schulz, Angwin & Grace, 2009). The researchers in the current project led two of the case studies in that research; and one followed up with a study of the educative role of the local newspaper in one of the sites, the Wimmera-Mallee wheat farming area (Campbell, Smith & Siesmaa, 2011). The second study of relevance, presented at the SCUTREA conference in 2015, was about adults' learning and education about the 2014 Scottish independence referendum (Crowther & Mackie, 2015; Crowther, Boeren & Mackie, 2018). Data were gathered in that project through an on-line survey of adults.

Recently in Australia, large supermarket chains and some other shops have ceased providing free plastic bags for packing consumer items, instead offering reusable, supposedly environmentally friendly, bags. This change has come about in an effort to reduce plastic waste. For some time, customers had been offered canvas bags for sale, and many brought those when shopping. In addition, Australia is currently facing a challenge regarding recycling materials, with China reportedly no longer importing Australia's recycled waste. It has been reported that there is poor practice in the sorting of household waste into recyclable and non-recyclable bins (Planet ARK, 2017). People are said to find the rules about recycling confusing (Downes, 2017). These matters are not, of

course, confined to Australia. Recent studies have been carried out in, for example, in Brazil looking at changes in waste management in a hospital (Paniza & Cassandri, 2018); and in Malaysia looking at the implementation of a plastic bag ban (Little, Lee & Nair, 2019).

It is well-recognised that waste, particularly plastic waste, is a major threat to the environment (United Nations, 2019). Micro-plastics affecting marine life have been featured in recent months as an important problem. Awareness of the two issues covered in the current project is growing, partly because of a TV series 'War on Waste' by a well-known comedian Craig Reucassel (<https://www.abc.net.au/ourfocus/waronwaste/>). In particular, the ban on free plastic bags in supermarkets has raised a great deal of public discussion. It was therefore an opportune time to gain a better understanding of how people learn about recycling and the avoidance of plastic bags when shopping in order for education campaigns to be better targeted in the future.

The Crowther, Mackie and Boeren study (2015, 2018) showed that adults used a range of information sources to inform themselves about the issues relating to the Scottish referendum. The internet was the most popular source followed by social media (both generic and specifically about the campaign), followed by friends and family and then newspapers.¹ There were variations among age groups, which showed young people more likely to mention friends and family; and older people more likely to mention newspapers and attending meetings, for example.

Research method

Using participants from a university meant a potentially diverse sample because of the range of workers: teaching, professional, administrative, services and maintenance. The university was dual-sector, operating in Higher Education and in Technical and Further Education (TAFE), providing further diversity of staff. In addition the spread of campuses of the university potentially elicited a population living in each of metropolitan, regional and rural areas. 1952 staff were employed at the university at the time of the survey, in May 2019.

University ethics committee approval was obtained for the project. In late 2018, a focus group with eight staff, and an expert interview with a Business School lecturer who was formerly the Director of the university's sustainability centre, were undertaken to discuss the issues and to help advise on questions for the university-wide survey. The on-line survey, using Survey Monkey, was then developed. The 'sources of information' list in the Crowther & Mackie survey (2015) was used as a basis for the relevant questions, with additional items included. In the first week of administration, 81 responses were received, of which 79 responses were within scope as employees. The survey was designed with a screening question so that people not employed at the university who tried to access the link were 'bumped out' of the survey at the beginning, to maintain the integrity of the sample.

¹ In the published papers by Crowther *et al.*, no overall percentages are provided; only a breakdown by age. The overall order that we mention is inferred from the tables in the papers, but as we do not know the proportion of respondents in each age group, it may not be quite correct.

The focus group participants were as follows (Table 1)

Table 1: Focus group participants (n=8)

	Male	Female
Academic	1	5
Administrative	2	0
Total	3	5

The survey comprised four sections:

1. 'About you' (demographic data, job role, education level, home location [rurality]);
2. 'About your engagement with communities' (digital, political and local);
3. 'About your engagement in specific sustainability practices', i.e. plastic bags in shops and recycling (understanding, practices, and changes over the previous twelve months);
4. 'Learning about specific sustainability practices' (using a provided list of (a) media sources and (b) other sources; and a number of qualitative questions).

The survey included a total of 35 questions. Seven were purely qualitative, and several of the quantitative questions provided space for further comment. The survey was trialed with 12 staff, and administered via a link in the daily staff e-newsletter. The survey took people between 10 and 15 minutes to answer with an average of 12 minutes.

The 79 eligible respondents had the following characteristics:

- 87.3% female, 12.7% male;
- 11.4% aged 20-29, 15.2% aged 30-39, 31.7% aged 40-49, 34.2% aged 50-59, 7.6% aged 60 or more;
- 6.33% working full-time at the university, 36.7 working there part-time or casually;
- 27.9% academics or TAFE teachers, 27.9% professional, 40.5% administrative/clerical, 3.8% services, trades and technical;
- 8.9% identifying as senior managers, 21.5% as 'supervisor or co-ordinator', and 69.6% as 'other';
- Two-thirds of respondents reported living in a regional city, one-quarter in rural or remote area, and only 8% in metropolitan areas, most of those in outer metropolitan areas.

All but five respondents had completed all the years of secondary schooling (12 years); and respondents' highest qualification levels were well distributed across the different levels of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education qualifications. The quantitative questions were completed by all respondents (with one drop-out after section 1), except that 9 people did not completed the final section, about learning.

In this paper the findings from the focus group and interview are reported, together with the results of the first week of administration of the on-line survey (n=79). The survey will

continue to be available, with reminders planned and special efforts to be made to include responses from under-represented groups. For example, males form just over a third (37.5%) of the university's workforce, and so the low proportion of responses from males (only 10 people – 12.7%) is clearly a limitation of the responses so far. Academic staff (both higher-education and TAFE) are also under-represented so far.

Findings

In this section the findings from the focus group and expert interview are reported first, followed by the survey results.

Qualitative component

It is not surprising that those who volunteered for the focus group (which was advertised by notices in the School of Education at the largest campus of the university, and by personal invitation) were people who were committed to environmentally sustainable practice. The discussion indicated that participants were aware and committed to environmentally ethical behaviour (Cherrier, 2006) associated with recycling and using eco-friendly carry bags when shopping. They had a commitment to recycling practices both at home and at the work place. But they felt confused regarding identifying which materials are recyclable and which are not. The focus group participants recounted their own and others' problems with the way the withdrawal of plastic bag provision in supermarkets was managed. It was agreed that there were circumstances in which this created inconvenience, but nevertheless there was general support. Participants mentioned initiatives being developed such as replacement or recycled bags such as 'Boomerang Bags' and bag recycling bins indicating public commitment to the changes. They reported active use of social media as a way of staying informed about environmental and ecofriendly information and activity. Several participants said that the environmental education of school-children worked to inform the family and broader community about environmental sustainability practices. Participants were also keen to discuss other related issues such as illegal dumping of household waste in rural areas.

The interview with the sustainability expert, who was male, provided useful information about state and local government initiatives. These included TAFE courses in green skills, training council employees on sustainability, rebates for insulation and solar panels for private homes and recycling through local council rubbish collection. Recycling was traditionally the domain of local councils in Australia and the systems for what can and cannot be recycled depended on the individual council, and this was said to create confusion about recycling among the general public and businesses, and leading to inconsistency across the country.

Survey findings

As with the focus groups, the responses so far display a high level of commitment to sustainability. This is evidenced by the fact that even the qualitative questions which were non-compulsory were answered by most people, with over 60 responses (from a total of 79 respondents) to nearly every qualitative question.

We were aware that several factors were likely to affect people's preferred information sources, and in this initial paper we focus on gender and age. We also asked about level of engagement in national, local and digital communities but have not yet analysed those responses.

Tables 2 and 3 show the responses to questions about the level of understanding of the issues, with a breakdown by gender.

Table 2: No plastic bags in shops: What is your level of understanding of the issue?

Response \ Gender*	Male		Female		All respondents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
High	7	70.0	54	79.4	61	78.2
Medium	3	30.0	13	19.1	16	20.5
Low		0.0	1	1.5	1	1.3
Total	10	100.0	68	100.0	78	100.0

* A gender option of 'prefer not to identify' was provided, but nobody in the first set of respondents selected this option.

Table 3: More rigorous recycling practices: What is your level of understanding of the issue?

Response \ Gender	Male		Female		All respondents	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
High	4	40.0	36	52.9	40	51.3
Medium	6	60.0	27	39.7	33	42.3
Low	0	0.0	5	7.4	5	6.4
	10	100.0	68	100.0	78	100.0

These tables indicate that understanding about the new plastic bags regime was much higher than that of the momentum towards more rigorous recycling: nearly four-fifth had a high awareness of the former, but only just over one-half had a high awareness of the latter.

Other questions showed that nearly 70% of people always took bags with them even when not intending to shop, with one-quarter at least taking bags when planning to shop. These proportions were fairly similar for recycling: just over two-thirds of people always sorted materials very carefully and chose appropriate bins wherever they were, and 28% either sorted very carefully at home only; or were fairly careful. However there were different results when asked about changes in practice over the previous 12 months, when both these matters had come to public attention. 39.7% of respondents were 'much more likely' to take their own bags to shops compared with 12 months ago, with 16.7% saying 'more likely'. But these percentages were reversed in relation to care with recycling practices

There were some slight differences between men and women; women were slightly more aware of both issues (Tables 2 and 3), but considering the low numbers of male respondents at this point it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. By age, younger people (in their 20s) were more likely to have changed their practices than other age groups, with relation to both issues; and showed the least level of awareness of both issues. Those who described themselves as active in their local community were the group most likely to have a high level of understanding of both topics. Those who described themselves as 'politically aware but not active' at a national level were more likely than the politically active to say they understood the single-use plastic bags topic.

In terms of learning, Figures 1 and 2 below indicate the sources of information that had informed the survey respondents about both the issues. Because of the large range of

potential sources of information, two questions were asked, each listing a potential number of sources: media sources (12 options plus 'other'); and other sources (also 12 options plus 'other'). Respondents were asked to list all that they had used. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, 'television documentaries' was the most frequent media source of information, selected by almost two-thirds of respondents, with various internet sources somewhat behind. 'Friends and family' was the most often listed 'other' source of other information, again with two-thirds of respondents listing that source.

Figure 1: Which of these media sources of information have informed you about these changes?

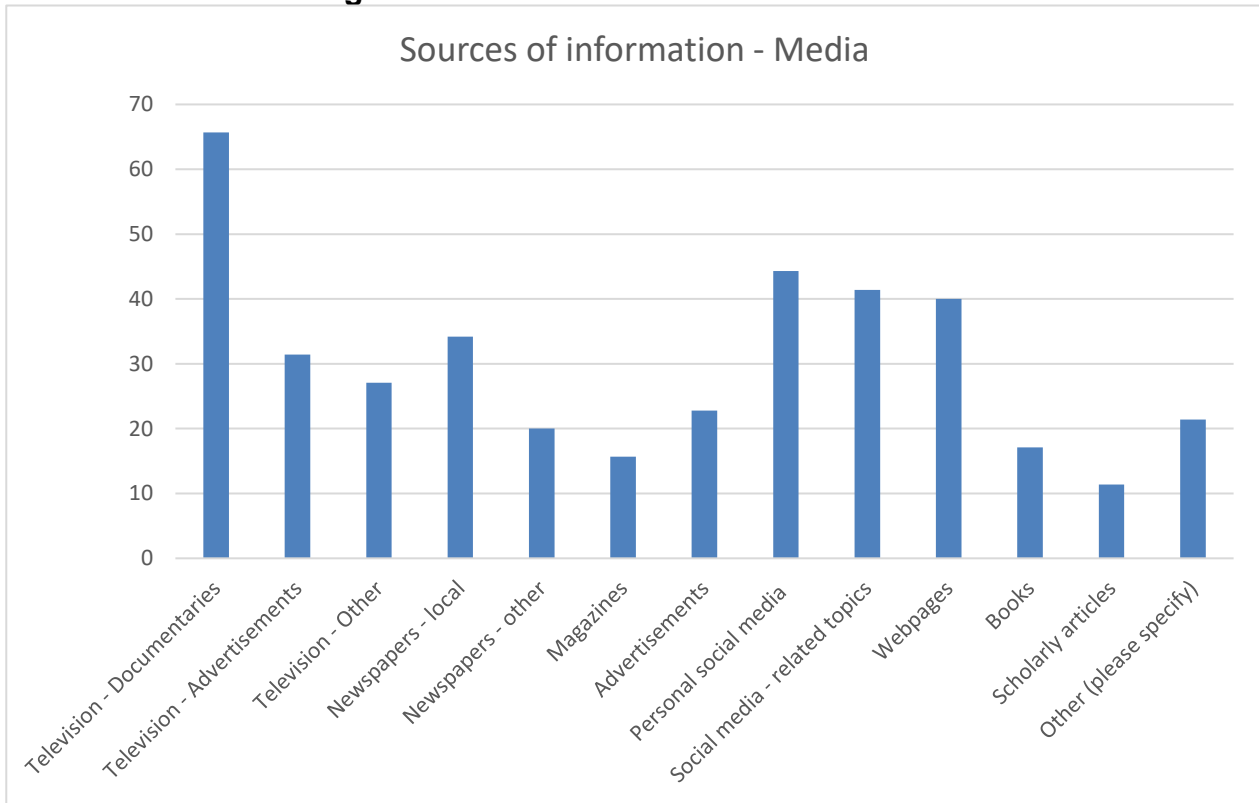
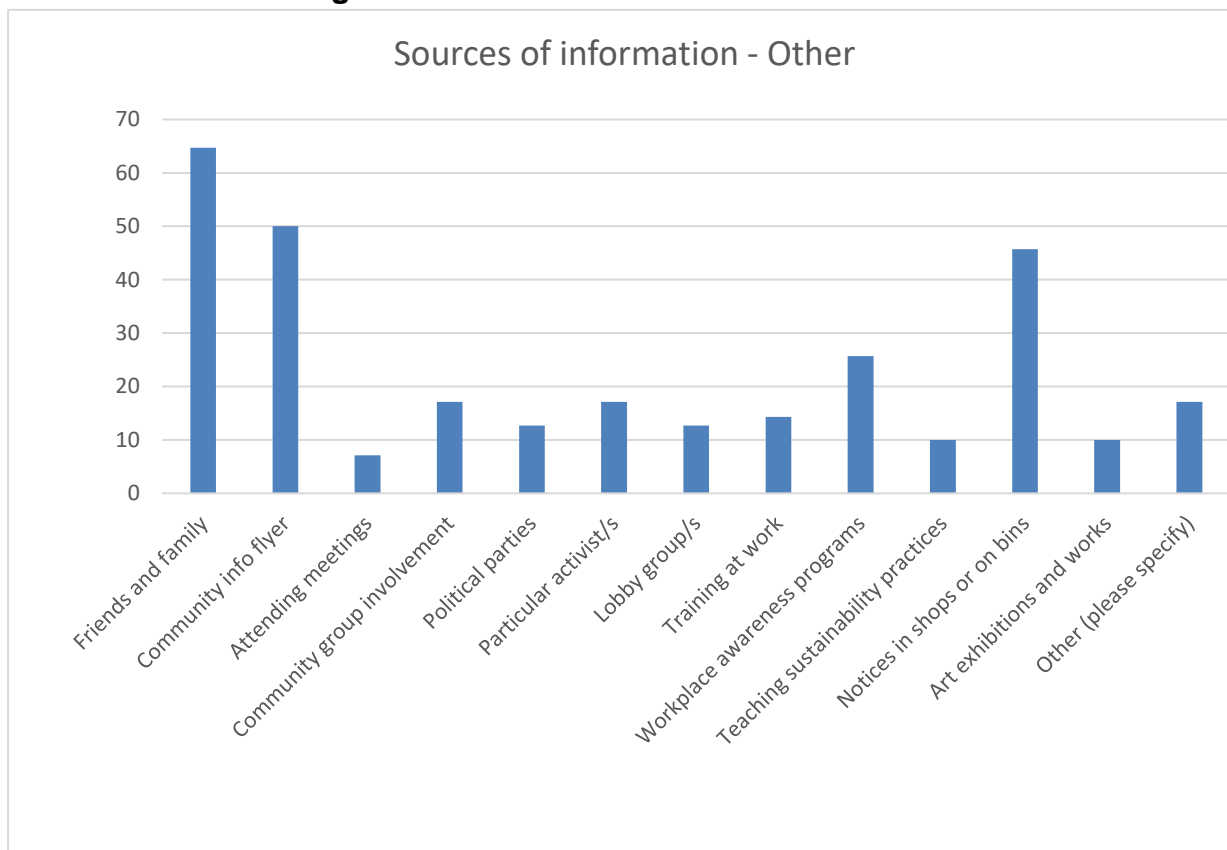


Figure 2: Which of these ‘other’ sources of information have informed you about these changes?



When asked which was the single most important source (Figure 2), ‘television documentaries’ was the most important media source, chosen by 30% of respondents, and with a long gap between that and the next single most important source, which was ‘personal social media’, selected by 11%. There was more diversity among the ‘most important’ sections for other sources with ‘friends and family’ coming first but selected by only 26% of people, and 21% selecting community flyers and materials. The TV documentary ‘War on Waste’, mentioned earlier in this paper, was mentioned specifically by several respondents’.

Respondents were invited to comment on why they had chosen the single most important source that they did. Some typical responses are listed below and illustrate the greater diversity of responses under the ‘other sources’ category.

Media sources

- I think documentaries are more in depth than most other media and they provide a simplistic view of research conducted by experts that might otherwise be out of reach for the average person.
- Unbiased news reports that provide the facts matter more to me than what’s trending or what political parties have endorsed.
- I trust investigative journalism such as *Four Corners*, or science shows like *Catalyst*, or *The War Against Waste*.
- I am time poor and dip in and out of Facebook as a one-stop-shop for personal/news updates. I don’t read the newspapers or watch TV.
- Because I engage with social media every day, and not with the others everyday

One response unknowingly summed up many other responses thus: *'There are pros and cons associated with each that make it too hard to say whether one is better than the other. E.g., documentaries and scholarly articles carry with them a lot of weight, whereas social media may not but can be used to publish information in a more timely manner. One becomes more important for validity, while the other is for timeliness.'*

Other sources

- I believe that contemporary individual activists have the ability to reach many people if they're charismatic and passionate about their cause. I feel that people respect and admire the words of individuals more than politicians and organisations who often have other agendas.
- We spend a significant proportion of each weekday in the office so appreciate seeing good community practice led/modelled by employer/colleagues.
- Yarra council has had detailed useful information on recycling on its newsletters.
- Books always tell me what I need to know, better than anything - as well as living on the land, as I do.
- Our whole community supports and educates each other.
- My studies had several days of focus on environmental sustainability and what you can do at a personal level to preserve resources and reduce waste and its long term impacts on the environment.
- 'Staff news' [workplace e-newsletter] item about change to separating paper recyclables from other recyclables.
- Notices in shops are very helpful to remind you to go back to your car to get bags (assuming you have arrived in a car).

These responses indicate people learning from a huge range of sources: from international activists, workplaces, local councils, studies and their day to day activities.

There was considerable diversity also in the responses to a qualitative question asking for ideas about how other people could be helped to learn about these two issues. Examples of three types of responses are provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Three types of responses to question 'Please list up to two ideas for helping people learn about these specific issues.'

No.	Type of learning idea	Examples
1.	Promulgation of powerful images.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Bins of shame' (Photos of recycling bins with rubbish in them) • Show some images created for ABC TV's War On Waste program to illustrate some simple facts about negative impact of landfill on the short and long term health of the environment

No.	Type of learning idea	Examples
2.	Information at point of sustainability decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sign on a rubbish bin in England was great: "For fish's sake, Don't drop litter" • Stickers on the garbage bins from the council. • Signage knowing where to empty food scraps at the workplace. • A sticker you could put on your bin would give you a chance to decide before you mix up recyclables.
3.	Practical actions aimed at affecting practices or choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more of a financial incentive at cafes for those bringing their own cup. • Reduce the frequency of curbside collections. This will encourage people to think more.

Analysis and conclusion

Our respondents' relative confusion about recycling is in line with the Planet Ark (2017) report. There was much less confusion about the shift to using fewer plastic bags. There was a large shift in practice in relation to taking bags when shopping. This indicates that in fact changes in practice by shops has over-ridden any formal or informal forms of learning. This aligns with 'Type 3' of the learning ideas suggested by respondents (Table 4) – i.e. a change by external actors inevitably affects behaviour. 'Type 2' ideas might assist in education about recycling.

In the Crowther and Mackie study (2015) the internet and social media (both generic and specific) were the most popular source of information, followed by friends and family and then newspapers. Our survey split choices into two lists, and this of course affects a comparison between the two studies. Also, the issues are quite different. But while television documentaries were the most powerful source of information in our study, the relative importance of some of the other courses is similar to the Crowther and Mackie study. The importance of television in disseminating information is interesting list is sometimes seen as waning in its influence. Perhaps this is because of its role in providing powerful images, as with Type 1 of the suggested learning ideas.

In the six months since we first developed this research project there have been continual developments in these two fields. It would be interesting to repeat the project in two to three years' time, when perhaps new aspects of environmental sustainability practices may have emerged.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge Annette Foley, the co-researcher on this project, who assisted with the focus group, interview and survey design. I would also like to thank Morgan Wise, Research Assistant, for his work putting the survey questions into Survey Monkey and undertaking the preliminary quantitative data analysis.

Further information about the project may be found at the web site of Federation University's research group *Researching Adult and Vocational Education* (RAVE): <https://federation.edu.au/schools/school-of-education/research/research-groups/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education> (see 'current research')

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Young people's decision-making as they leave school in non-metropolitan areas in Australia: Insights from those working with young people

Erica Smith & Annette Foley
Federation University Australia

Introduction

This paper reports on the first phase of a research project which investigated how young people in non-metropolitan areas in Australia imagine and navigate their pathways as they leave school and make choices about their future trajectories. The overall research question was: How do, and how could, young people imagine and navigate pathways related to post-school education, training and employment? There were three sub-questions:

1. Who are the influencers and how do they affect the decisions?
2. What could change to provide better post-school outcomes for a larger proportion of young people?
3. What could change for communities and employers to better utilise young people's talents?

The paper involved interviews with relevant organisations in the communities who had frequent contact with young people. This was the first phase of the project. Later phases involved interviews in schools and with young people, both those still at school and those who had left.

Background and literature

Young people in regional, rural and peri-urban communities face particular challenges in 'imagining' and navigating their post-school futures, as choices are affected by industrial and agricultural structural adjustment, distance, and community or cultural pressures. These challenges may be compounded by individual disadvantage caused by low socio-economic status, Aboriginality or recent migrant/refugee status, which may be disproportionately present in such communities. The project aimed to provide a better understanding of the transition process and develop good practice models for wider applicability, as well as assisting communities and employers within them to better retain and utilise the talents of their young people. The project is set against the policy contexts of widening participation in higher education and persisting rural disadvantage in access to both education (Harvey et al., 2012) and employment (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2018).

The literature on transitions from school suggests that young people in Australia are likely to be guided by a range of features such as advice from significant others (parents, careers teachers, peers) (Stokes & Wyn, 2007); gender; socio-economic status (Lamb et al., 2018); rurality (Quixley, 1992); ethnic background or Aboriginality; and family history of progression to further education, higher education or apprenticeship (Osborne & Circelli, 2018).

It is also suggested that transitions have become more complex over time. Te Riele & Wyn (2005) argue that attention to youth transitions gained momentum in the early 80s with the

rise of youth unemployment and the increased retention of young people in education systems: 'As young people responded to these changing social conditions, new patterns of transition and new relationships between education and the labour market for young people emerged' (Stokes & Wyn, 2007 p.496).

For non-metropolitan areas specifically, distance from main centres and vocational interests are cited (Athanasou, 2001). Lack of transport, educational and recreational choices and a lack of arts and culture for young people may encourage movement to larger centres for more opportunities and broader educational options (Victorian Government, 2006). Geldens (2007) describes these refers to depiction by young people of 'success' and failure' where 'the successful leave and do not return' (p.80). These perceptions of rural life and decisions to leave are not necessarily associated with economic decision making but are rather influenced by perceptions of being left behind or 'risk being seen as failures' (p. 80).

Research method

The research was carried out in six communities across the State of Victoria. The locations were determined in conjunction with the funding body, which was the State government. Table 1 describes the locations.

Table 1: Communities involved in the research

No	Town (pseudonym)	Type	Approx. population
1	East-town	Peri-urban	48,000
2	Sea-shore	Post-industrial rural	10,000
3	Wheat-town	Regional	15,000
4	Market-town	Regional	14,000
5	Fruit-town	Regional	46,000
6	West-town	Peri-urban	64,000

Three were regional towns, each being two to three hours' drive from Victoria's capital city, Melbourne (population 4.5 million); two were peri-urban areas on the outskirts of Melbourne with rapidly growing populations with high migrant diversity; and one was a post-industrial rural town, isolated yet just beyond the city limits of outer Melbourne. Only one location (no. 6) had higher than the Victorian average household income; and only two (nos. 1 and 6) were around the State average for progression of school-leavers to further or higher education.

Ethics approval was obtained from Federation University's Human Research Ethics Committee before commencement, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews with representatives of the relevant organisations were almost all completed by the end of 2018, with a few straggling into January 2019. A total of 57 interviews were completed, an average of 9.5 per site. Significant stakeholders were selected according to a defined protocol. These included organisations working with young people, including intermediary apprenticeship providers, local and nearby higher and further education providers, employers of young people, and indigenous and/or migrant organisations where appropriate. Table 2 shows the interviewees by category and site. Almost all interviews were carried out face to face, with a few undertaken by telephone when the personnel were not available on the days of visits. All sites involved two or three visits to undertake the interviews. Some types of respondent were particularly difficult to access, the most

difficult being the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers, which were privatised, and often national or Statewide with no local offices.

Table 2: Interviewees at each site

Job Role	East-town	Sea-shore	Wheat-town	Market-town	Fruit-town	West-town
TAFE CEO or delegate	X	X	X	X	X	X
TAFE Teacher	X	X	X	X	X (2)	X
Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Private Training Provider	X	X	X	X	X	X
Group Training Organisation (GTO)	X	X	X	X	X	
Apprenticeship Support Network Provider (AASN)			X	X	X	X
Indigenous/Multicultural organisation			X	X (2)	X	
Employer # 1	X	X	X	X	X	X
Employer # 2		X	X (2)	X		
University	X	X (2)	X	X	X	X
Other		X			X	

Notes: TAFE (Technical and Further Education) is the public VET provider; LLENs are regional organisations servicing young people, with a particular remit for disadvantaged young people; GTOs employ young people as apprentices and trainees, 'lease' them to host employers and provide support. AASNs are funded organisations which 'sign up' young people to apprenticeships and traineeships and provide a certain, restricted, amount of support to apprentices/trainees and to employers.

Case studies for each site, of around 8-10 pages, were written up under a number of headings which were devised by the research team based on the project research questions, the interview questions and some issues which had arisen during the interviews. A cross-case analysis was then undertaken.

Findings

What are the imagined futures for young people?

The respondents talked about four main pathways from school:

- University;
- Apprenticeships;
- Employment (meaning non-apprenticed employment); and
- Unemployment.

Very few respondents mentioned vocational education and training (VET) study, except as part of apprenticeships. The Diploma of Nursing, a VET qualification, was mentioned in a small number of interviews as a possible VET-study pathway, as were aged care qualifications. Other pathways apart from the four above were not mentioned, except for an occasional mention of 'gap years' before entering university.

In some of the case study sites, the choice of pathways was very much linked to the dual options of either staying in the locality or leaving home. This was the case in the three regional case studies: Wheat-town, Fruit-town and Market-town. Naturally, socio-economic circumstances were particularly important in the viability of preferred choices in these locations. In the peri-urban case studies of West-town and East-town, pathways were not necessarily tied up with leaving home, although they could be. Sea-shore had particular accessibility issues, despite being near to the city.

Who and what are the influences on young people?

The comments about the influences on young people as they made decisions about their futures were insightful, complex and often varied. As well as the factors described below, some interviewees also mentioned that personal factors such as self-efficacy, resilience and confidence were important factors affecting young people's choices.

The most common theme across all of the case studies involved the influence that parents had on young people's aspirations for their futures. Parental and family influence was identified as being consistently important across all regions, cultures and backgrounds. Cultural background, socio-economic status, parents' education status, and parents' views about schooling and/or further educational options, were all important influences on what parents wanted for their children and what the young people wanted. There were reported gaps in the knowledge of some parents about options and pathways, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those recently arrived in Australia, some indigenous families, and parents who had little to do with the school community. These gaps were reported to impact on the knowledge and options available for young people. Intergenerational unemployment (e.g. Sea-shore) was also identified in the data as a strong factor influencing some young people when making a decision about their futures. In these situations, aspirations for further education beyond secondary school or getting a job were said to be rare.

For migrant families, parental influence was seen as particularly significant. Respondents across most sites (n=4) cited migrant families as being critically important to the decision making of their children. In some cases, this influence was associated with aspirational influence; but for others it involved a lack of knowledge about options for their children. Indian families were cited as being particularly aspirational for their children's futures (e.g. West-town and East-town). Aspirational families, it was said, often encouraged their children to enrol in university degrees in occupations such as medicine, law or

engineering. This was seen by the families as not only providing a secure future for their children, but also had value in terms of status for the families themselves. However there was also some disadvantage associated with migrant status, because of their lesser knowledge about education and job opportunities. These families were those who were new to the country, had limited networks in the community, limited language skills and some cultural challenges. This was particularly notable in Fruit-town and to a lesser extent in West-town.

Managers of apprenticeship agencies and training providers, along with the CEOs of LLENs (which are funded primarily to deal with more disadvantaged young people) were particularly vocal about parental influence and family background. They said that young boys in particular had a tendency to want to undertake trade training, generally in apprenticeships, in order to join a family business, or to be trained in the same trade as their fathers, family members or friends.

Older siblings were influential for their younger siblings, in relation to the occupation they aspired to, and also whether the older sibling enjoyed schooling or not. Peers and social networks, for example through sporting clubs, also affected decision-making. There were some reports that friends would follow each other into trades or enrol in similar courses at University.

In addition to parents and families, a common theme was the significant influence that schools and teachers had. The greatest influencers identified in the interviews were careers teachers and careers advisers, but it was also said that favourite subject-teachers might have the greatest influence. This could be linked to the subjects that students either liked or liked because of the teacher. While careers advisers and careers teachers were generally felt to be doing as well as they could (with many respondents aware of, and mentioning, scarce resources in schools for the function) it was also said that some schools, careers teachers and advisers were seen as ill-informed about skills gaps in the area, or showed bias in favour of university over jobs and/or VET training as options for young people.

Finance was reported to be an important determiner for young people's decision-making. Financial considerations could affect the ability of young people to either stay locally or move away. This was particularly notable for those interested in a trade, which offered the chance to earn while learning, in an apprenticeship. Opportunities varied among sites; in the East-town area, for example, the housing and construction industry was growing rapidly, with skill shortages. Going to university was not possible for young people in some locations because of the costs of moving away from home or of long commutes. It was said in Wheat-town that indigenous young people found moving away particularly difficult because of their attachment to home and family. For some young people, previous experience with employment during school was a factor that influenced them. The importance of 'having money' and some financial independence was said to have an influence on some young people to stay local and employed, rather than moving away to university or TAFE, or to continue working while studying.

Careers expos, University and TAFE open days, job search web sites and other pathways information were identified as information sources for young people used to inform their decisions and their parents. Proximity to a local TAFE institution or university, or availability of appropriate and easily accessible jobs, were all factors identified as important. Young people might, however, make the decision to bypass a local university campus for what was seen as a more desirable university, or a campus offering courses in

a particular discipline. One example was West-town where data indicated students were prepared to travel into the city rather than attend the local University campus, either because of a limited range of courses offered or for a 'higher ranked' university.

In regional areas, transport was a significant factor that influenced young people's decision-making. Regional isolation, lack of direct train links to larger regional cities or to Melbourne was a problem particularly for young people who could not afford a car. Sometimes distance appeared to be apparent rather than real. It seemed to be more routine for young people in the more remote communities (Market-town for example) to travel quite long distances, compared to Sea-shore, for example, which was quite near the city but presented seemingly greater transport difficulties. Accessibility and also perceived accessibility, in other words, were major influencers for young people's decision-making regarding staying local or moving away.

A perceived lack of resources and entertainment was also said to induce young people to move away from regional Victoria to a larger regional city or to Melbourne. Others said that some young people simply wanted to move away from home to experience something different.

What could change to provide better post school outcomes?

Interviewees all asserted that more could be done in the system to improve support for young people. While many services were available, there was a general view that they were in need of a more coherent structure and better co-ordination to better allow access for students.

Some respondents felt that the system was simply too overburdened with programs, agencies and services. These interviewees proffered the view that there was a need to reduce the volume of services and streamline the system to lessen what was seen as confusion about what was available, and the risk of overwhelming students and their parents. There was often said to be a disconnect between employers, schools and training organisations which needed to be addressed.

There was some concern about the quality of advice being given to students by careers teacher and careers advisers. There was a general view that schools were trying to do a good job of assisting students, but that incomplete advice was letting students down. Some suggested better outcomes could be achieved if there was a greater focus on the younger school years such as years 7 and 8.

Classroom teachers' important role when advising students should be explored further and supported.

There seemed to be a need to cater better for indigenous students with more indigenous teachers in the system.

There was support for the idea of work experience, 'tasters' and certificates such as Certificate I in Vocational Preparation for students to better understand working in industry.

There was a general view that parents and grandparents could benefit from education programs and other easily accessible information to better inform them about what was available for their children. This could be particularly helpful for recent migrants.

Simple practical ideas, such as suggestions from several Sea-shore interviewees of the need for a bus service to higher education sites, and the use of maps to show young

people that options were in fact accessible, would assist.

Ultimately, the data indicated that services being offered to students needed to be properly resourced to enable students to receive the best advice and service possible. For example, more careers advice funding in schools would enable more time to be spent with each young person, further down the school. A model in Sea-shore was being implemented by a national charity with national government funding, preparing young people for work and gaining them three-month paid placements with the major industrial employer in the town. This would require a great deal of funding but it could be useful for the most at-risk students in other locations.

Analysis and conclusion

To some extent the findings support the existing literature. Family background, socio-economic status, and family histories were all common themes in the interviews (Stokes & Wyn, 2001; Lamb et al., 2018; Osborne & Circelli, 2018). We also noted the reported influence of part-time working on post-school pathways, as reported by Stokes and Wyn (2007), and by Smith and Green (2005). Rurality and disadvantage had significant effects (Quixley, 1992). Availability of educational services, jobs and, to a lesser reported extent, cultural activities were found to affect decisions about 'staying or leaving, as reported by Athanasou (2001) and the Victorian Government (2006).

Some features less often discussed in the literature have been uncovered, including the influence not only of distance but also of transport availability and perceived distance; the actions of outreach activities or targeted recruitment strategies by significant employers and training providers; the lack of connectedness among agencies; and the importance of, rather than simply social-economic status, inter-generational unemployment. We also uncovered the presence of accepted and well-known pathways (university or apprenticeships) which we have called 'sheep tracks' (Harrison & Smith, 2017). Apprenticeships, almost always involving staying locally, were seen as a valid track. Thus the findings did not support Geldens' (2007) contention that 'success' in rural areas was linked to moving away. We also noted the pressures imposed on young people by an over-emphasis on the need to choose the right career, linked to the over-abundance of information.

These new findings, and divergences from the accepted literature, are among the contributions to knowledge made by the paper, which also include insights into school-leaver aspirations in peri-urban areas which have not been specifically studied previously in the 'transition' context. The paper also identifies implications for national, State and local government policy, and for the operations of the organisations working with young people, and for employers. The greatest limitation of this paper is that it does not report directly the voices of young people, nor of school staff, as that came later in the project.

Next phases

Subsequent phases of the project have involved focus groups of young people in government schools in each community, interviews with school principals and careers advisers at two schools in each community; and interviews and focus groups of young people who were 'one year out' from school. These findings will be integrated with the community interview findings, in future publications.

Acknowledgments

The research was funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training Strategic

Research Seed Funding. We would like to acknowledge Tim Harrison and Helen Weadon, who participated in early stages of the project.

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