

Educationism: The hidden bias we often ignore

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The first time Lance Fusarelli set foot on a university campus, he felt surrounded by people who seemed to know more than him – about society, social graces and “everything that was different”.

He attributes these differences to his upbringing. While he didn’t grow up poor, it was in a working-class town in a small rural area in Avella, Pennsylvania. He was the first in his family to go to university – his mother got pregnant and had to drop out of school, while his father went to work in a coal mine in his mid-teens. He lived in an environment where few stayed in education beyond high school.

It worked out well for him. Fusarelli is now highly educated and a professor and director of graduate programmes at North Carolina State University. Occasionally he’s reminded of how he felt in those early days, when a colleague innocently corrected his imperfect grammar. “He wasn’t being mean, we were good friends, he just grew up in a different environment,” he says. “Sometimes I will not always talk like an academic. I tend to use more colourful language.”