

Towards a New Methodology for Engaging Disadvantaged Families in Children's Learning

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Project Overview

- To develop a methodology to work with school leaders to empower disadvantaged families and community to share leadership for children's learning with schools;
- To engage the wider community to collaborate with schools and families to improve children's development, wellbeing and educational outcomes, over the longer term.

Why is parent & community engagement important?

Families, schools and communities contribute in unique ways to children's learning processes. **Understanding** and **measuring** how the stakeholders might want to work together collectively, ultimately will strengthen children's development and achievement especially in disadvantaged communities.

Emerson, Fear, Fox, Sanders, (2012); Henderson & Mapp (2002).

Why do we need a new methodology?

There is little empirically generated evidence to guide *collaboration* between diverse families and schools to achieve authentic engagement to support children's learning.

What are the Essentials of a Contemporary Methodology?

1. School Leaders' Critical Reflection on the Status Quo
2. A Theory of Change
3. Shared Professional Learning
4. Participatory Action Research

1. Critical Reflection on the Status Quo

All stakeholders should be given the opportunity to reflect on how relationships between, families, the school and the community are represented; and consider:

- What are the factors shaping those representations?
- Do different stakeholders have different views?
- How will reflections be generated?

A Critical Reflection Tool

School leaders use prompts to reflect on their perspectives of working with parents and community, before and after implementing an initiative designed to strengthen relationships.

Sample prompts for school leaders' critical reflection

- My goal is to **empower** families to identify mutual goals for children's wellbeing and success.
- I encourage families and teachers to **work together as full partners** to support children's learning
- I believe community groups can partner fully with schools to enhance children's learning.
- I strive to build authentic relationships with school, families, and community groups, engaging them in a two-way partnership about children's learning.
- I value the ideas of children, staff, parents and community groups about improving the learning experiences for children.

2. A Theory of Change (ToC)

A ToC is an evidence-based plan for enacting, implementing and evaluating change in complex environments.

It enables change to be mapped and in a qualitative manner along the pathway to change.

(Laing & Todd, 2015)

3. Shared Professional Learning

In the main professional learning is something schools do. There is little evidence of their knowledge sharing with families and communities.

A new methodology makes space for sharing evidence about learning about key models of parental engagement with families and community.
Johnson & McKenzie, (2016).

Traditional Models of Parent *Involvement*

Focused on the schools telling families how to be involved with the school and in children's learning, i.e., How to parent; when to volunteer; when to communicate with schools; when to engage in decision making in schools; what to teach kids at home (e.g., see Epstein, 1995; 2010).

Marginalised families are often treated as deficit in this model.

Recent Models of *Engagement* (e.g., Auerbach, 2012)

Schools that engage in authentic relationships with families and community:

- acknowledge the strengths that all families bring to a partnership with schools;
- share leadership as relevant to stakeholders;
- empower all families to support their children's learning inside and outside school
- co-construct plans for action *with* families and community.

4. Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Key questions for Schools and Families in planning, implementing and evaluating change.

What are we going to do to make changes?

Why are we going to do it? (use data as evidence)

How are we going to do it?

Who is going to lead it at what points?

When is it going to be done?

What will be the outcome?

How will we measure success?

Going Forward

The methodology outline above is being employed in two current projects:

- (2018 – 2020) ARC Linkage Scheme: LP170100480. Homel, Johnson, McGee, Flückiger et al., *Creating pathways to child well-being, prosocial behaviour, and school achievement in disadvantaged communities*.
- 2018-2020 Johnson, G. & Flückiger, B. *Indigenous family –school engagement pilot*. Department of Education (Queensland).

Key References

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- Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., & Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*. Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau.
- Epstein, J. et al., (2002). *School, family and community partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Henderson, A. & Mapp, K.(2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. Austin, Texas. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) .
- Johnson, G., Dempster, N., McKenzie, L. Klieve, H., Flückiger, B., Lovett, S., Riley, T., & Webster, A. (2013). *Principals as literacy leaders with Indigenous communities: Leading reading 'both ways.'* Report to Australian Primary Principals Association.
- Johnson, G., & McKenzie, L., (2016). Capacity Building for Parental Engagement in Reading: A Distributed Leadership Approach between Schools and Indigenous Communities. In Johnson, G. & Dempster (2015) (Eds.). *Leadership in Diverse Learning Contexts*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Klieve, H. & Flückiger, B. (2015). Towards an evidence base: Exploring the impact of community-based literacy programs in remote Indigenous communities. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 40(2), 89-98.
- Laing & Todd, L. (2015). *Theory-based methodology: Using Theory of change in education development, research and evaluation*. Research Centre for Learning & Teaching, Newcastle University, UK.

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