Welcome

The Victorian Government’s five year reform agenda for early childhood services and schools identifies collaborative partnerships with parents and communities as a key action area. The development of local networks as a means of strengthening local service planning, coordination and delivery is a feature of this issue of the Research eLert.

New School Ties: Networks for Success is a research report developed by the Education Foundation Australia (now the Foundation for Young Australians) in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It identifies examples and characteristics of collaboration amongst and between schools and other agencies, both locally and overseas that aim to support improved outcomes for students.

Victoria has a strong tradition of supporting and valuing the role of families in schools and early childhood settings. Building and strengthening collaborative partnerships and networks between schools and the broader community enhances the quality of student support and ultimately benefits students, families and the community. The Department is currently implementing its Regional Network Leaders initiative which aims to attract educational leaders who will play a key role in the next phase of the education reform agenda in Victoria. Also, a new resource called Beyond the School Gate: a guide to effective partnerships will soon be made available to all schools to further support you in your endeavours.

I trust you will find this report a useful tool in generating discussion and as a catalyst for developing new ideas that build meaningful, productive and sustainable partnerships and networks.

We are keen to receive your ideas and contributions and encourage you to continue to provide feedback to: <research@edumail.vic.gov.au>.

Dr Dahle Suggett
Deputy Secretary
Office for Policy, Research and Innovation
Feature article

New School Ties: Networks for Success

The Education Foundation Australia conducted this research project in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The project investigated how collaboration amongst schools and between schools and other agencies, in Australia and internationally, is leading to improved educational outcomes for students in the compulsory years, particularly for disadvantaged students, and how these approaches could be more widely put into practice in Victoria. The report found that Victoria, and DEECD, is already the focus of numerous collaborations operated by, with or for schools. The diversity of networks operating in Victoria highlights a key characteristic of effective networks: the capacity to be responsive to specific local needs. The report explores the challenges involved in collaborative practice while recognising that formal networks can be beneficial in the provision of learning and developmental services.

Please note: this report examines the general aspects of networks in school education and is independent of DEECD’s Regional Network Leaders initiative and the role of Regional Networks in school improvement.


Related research

Why networks and why now?

The authors explore the concept of network, how networks perform a variety of roles, and the potential of networks to bring together the policy, resource and practice dimension of educational reform. Networking is relevant to 21st century thinking about the nature of learning and the flexibility required for workers in the new information and knowledge-based economy. The paper asserts there is a need for a progressive research program to study and evaluate networks and suggest what might be included in this program. The authors conclude that networks will provide policy makers, educators and community members with the opportunity to contribute in innovative ways to the achievement of the international goal of making lifelong learning a reality for all.


Emerging issues in school, family, and community connections

This literature review examines key issues in the field of family and community connections with schools. It discusses the challenges that arise when there are different types of connections and different perceptions about the roles of stakeholders. It describes the variety of outcomes associated with different types of connections and the implications for various stakeholders. It also highlights the need for more research into the connections between schools, families and communities in areas including: cultural diversity, school reform, developmental approaches and integrated services,
student transitions and the development of process-based approaches to making connections. Another area to be explored is preparing educators and other school personnel to make connections between schools, families, and communities.


Lessons from the extended school

In Extended schools: access to opportunities and services for all, the UK government pledged that by 2010, all children will have access to a variety of activities beyond the school day. Extended schools are intended to ensure improved access to a range of services to support children and their families, and reflect a philosophical move towards a focus on the needs of the whole child. These changes have significant implications for school leaders. At one level, they require them to further develop a range of skills and approaches to support these changes in focus. On another, schools need to reconsider the way they operate, and require a greater focus on collaboration with partner agencies and the local community to identify and address the specific areas of local priority. This publication summarises the key emerging lessons for leaders of extended schools.


Policy tensions being played out in practice. The Specialist Schools initiative in England

Specialist Schools in England are automatically recognised as being different from other schools, but are also expected to work closely with neighbouring schools to raise educational standards and spread innovative practice. The author argues that while schools compete for students and continue to be publicly judged by their ability to outperform other schools, the apparent lack of ‘partnership’ based work is not surprising. The paper concludes that if the government is seriously interested in schools operating in the context of new learning ‘networks’ or ‘communities’, then those networks or communities, need to be the reference points for any target setting or judgement of progress, not individual schools.


Networked Learning Communities: setting school-to-school collaboration within a system context

In this paper, the author considers some of the findings from the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) program which sought to generate evidence about how ‘networked learning’ can contribute to raising student achievement; the leadership practices that hold most potential for collaborative learning; and the new relationships emerging between networks as a ‘unit of engagement’ as well as with their local authority and community partners. In conclusion, the author suggests that barriers to effective collaboration lie not in lack of knowledge about successful practice, nor in any lack of will or capacity amongst frontline actors, but in the ability of national agencies, intermediate systems and organisations to adapt their own roles and practices.
Getting our heads together: shared leadership of a collaborative school improvement project

This paper reports on a study conducted in a small collaborative of five secondary schools. The study identified a number of factors which enable successful collaboration, which conversely become the barriers when they are absent. While leader behaviour is a significant factor, the relationship between personal, structural and contextual conditions is the key to sustainable collaboration.


Pulling together: transforming schools through a collaborative learning network

This research captures the learning from the South East England Virtual Education Action Zone, a networked learning community of nine secondary and ten primary schools committed to raising standards within each school while sharing a collective responsibility to the collaborative as a whole. Member schools pursue capacity to improve as well as the processes which identify what works best and why. The paper identifies five axioms essential for effective collaboration and concludes that principals and teachers in a successful collaboration know that sustainable school improvement is not merely about providing resources to address deficiencies. It is about building the capacity within individual schools and recognising that education is about continued learning and that educators do not learn in isolation.


More than an education: leadership for rural school community partnerships

The focus of this project is on the relationship between school and community leadership and building community social capital. The report presents case studies of partnerships in five very different rural communities. Each case study outlines the nature and extent of the partnership, and analyses the influence of leadership and other factors on the development and sustainability of the partnership. The report then develops a model of the leadership process for developing school-community partnerships, and identifies a number of indicators of effective partnerships and effective leadership. The report concludes with lessons to assist schools and communities to develop effective partnerships which will not only deliver positive and tangible outcomes, but also increased individual and community capacity to influence their own futures.

Successful school-business partnerships

Schools have always been involved in their communities in some way or other, but for most schools, relationships with businesses have been traditional transactional customer arrangements. Partnerships involve a much longer-term relationship and the benefits that result from them can include a skills transfer or a resource exchange. Then there is fundraising support, and positive media coverage driven by the partnership, which can promote both the school and the business. The long-term benefit is community connectedness when partnerships build a broader sense of community for schools and businesses beyond their immediate surroundings. The author acknowledges that school-business partnerships do not go smoothly all the time. The important thing is to communicate openly, learn from mistakes, modify the approach and keep trying.

For further information contact the Education Policy and Research Division at: research@edumail.vic.gov.au

Linking schools and early years services

Emerging evidence shows that the best outcomes for young children and their families are achieved when local communities become the focal point for service delivery. Where local communities (including schools) are the driving force in striving for improved outcomes, there is a much greater chance of improved co-ordination and integration of services. The development of partnerships between different levels of government, parents and community agencies will result in services that are flexible and responsive to community needs. Schools are increasingly being seen as the core or hub of these important initiatives. This project includes four components: an exploration of directions from the evidence, a review of policy directions in early childhood services and schools across Australia, a review of international and Australian community school models and an overview of recommendations for the way forward.

Centre for Community Child Health 2006, Linking schools and early years services, Final report prepared for the RE Ross Trust, CCCH, Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. Available at: http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources.cfm?doc_id=10544

Engaging parents in raising achievement: do parents know they matter?

Research shows that when schools, families and community work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more. This research project focused on the relationship between parental engagement and raising achievement. It was part of the Engaging Parents to Raise Achievement (EPRA) project funded by the UK Department for Education and Skills. The project trialled new ways of engaging parents in schools, particularly those parents seen as ‘hard to reach’. It focused on one or more of the following strands: supporting parents to help their children learn; personalising provision for parents themselves as learners; intelligent reporting; and enhancing pastoral care. The data showed that there was a positive relationship between increased parental engagement and positive learning outcomes.

Harris, A & Goodall, J 2007, Engaging parents in raising achievement: do parents know they matter?, A research project commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, Department for Children, Schools and Families, UK. Available at: http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW004.pdf
Home, school and community partnerships in numeracy education: an Australian perspective

In this paper, the authors examined partnerships in numeracy education. They found that the practice of family and community involvement in education does not always match the intent of policy documents. There were different ways of initiating partnerships, different perspectives of stakeholders, different numeracy practices, and different ways of responding to cultural diversity. The authors found that parents genuinely care about their children’s education, but that not all parents want to be actively involved in all aspects of schooling and many see their role as primarily a supportive one. They conclude that the most productive way forward may be to focus on what each participant – parent, teacher, community member – can bring to the partnership that will make best use of their diverse expertise, backgrounds, and interests in supporting the child’s numeracy learning.


For further information contact the Education Policy and Research Division at: research@edumail.vic.gov.au

School-community links focussed on learning in the middle years

This research project in Sydney investigated how existing school-community links support schools serving low SES communities to more effectively engage students in the middle years. The study found that most key participants (students, families, teachers and community workers) have a limited understanding of the value of school-community links. While concerns about disengagement and learning difficulties in the middle school years were acknowledged, the main focus remains the teacher-student relationship, and the student-parent relationship. The resources and organisational structures of schools, compared to parents and communities, will ensure that schools remain the drivers of school-community links. The challenges for schools are to identify and reach diverse communities; to embrace cultural difference; recognise the views, concerns and interests of various stakeholders; support a broad understanding of learning; and recognise the opportunities for learning beyond the school fence.


A full report on the Granville Schools Collaboration Project, and more reports from the work undertaken in the area of community-school relationships by the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology, Sydney are available at:

Cross-sector partnerships in the community

This report examines how the use of community infrastructure (e.g. schools, community centres, libraries, sporting facilities, open spaces, small businesses, parks, hospitals etc) to strengthen communities reflects a new approach to addressing disadvantage. It shows how infrastructure might provide access to learning and support services for people often marginalised in the broader community. Infrastructure can engage and assist youth by providing pathways to employment, particularly when designed and delivered in partnership with local business and industry. The report looks at a number of case studies which demonstrate collaboration between business, state and local government and community sector agencies.
Resources

*Shared facility partnerships: a guide to good governance for schools and the community*

The Victorian Government is encouraging schools to join with community and business organisations to combine funds and resources to build facilities such as halls, libraries, performing arts spaces, technology and recreational centres and children's centres for all to use and enjoy. The Shared Facility Partnerships guide has been developed to assist schools, communities and local and state government agencies in planning for and maintaining successful partnerships through the establishment of effective governance arrangements. It describes recommended governance processes and structures for the three key phases of any shared-facility partnership (planning, development and management), with a particular focus on issues that relate to the operational management of the facility. The guide also provides links to tools and other sources of advice that can assist those involved in the development and management of partnership projects.

*Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau*

The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau was launched on 11 August 2008. The Federal Government has commissioned the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC) to operate the Bureau - initially for a period of four years – and work with school communities across the country to assist them in establishing closer relations and achieve the proven benefits of working in partnership. To support this work, ACSSO, APC, the Australian Government, and other key stakeholders, including State and Territory government and non-government school authorities, and school principals’ associations have developed the *Family-school partnerships framework a guide for schools and families*, a resource for school communities intended to encourage and guide schools, school systems, parent groups and families to support family-school partnerships.

The website for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau is: [http://www.familyschool.org.au/](http://www.familyschool.org.au/)

*Upcoming events*

Below is a list of upcoming conferences which may be of interest. For a comprehensive list of conferences, workshops and events, visit the Education Network Australia site at: [http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/go](http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/go)

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iNet: Learning spaces for 3–19 year-olds
20 – 31 October
Online
This online conference will explore the development of learning spaces of the future. Questions include: If students had their own private learning spaces, what would they look like? What learning tools would students need in their spaces? In schools today, students sit on the same furniture for all lessons; if this could be changed, what furniture would be needed for which learning activities? Should teachers have a desk? If not, why not? What might classrooms look like physically in 2020?

http://www.sst-inet.net/default.aspx

Professional game development and 3D animation industry experience day
5 November
Melbourne
This one day program provides a chance for Victorian teachers and careers advisors to experience first hand what it takes to work in a professional game development studio.


2008 Curriculum Corporation Conference: C21st learning: acting (inter)nationally
10 – 11 November
Melbourne
The 2008 Curriculum Corporation conference will explore how education contributes to a more socially inclusive Australia. Speakers will explore Australia's place in the world, a National Curriculum, innovation and next practice, retaining and attracting quality teachers, the power of assessment data to lift performance and participation for all. Master classes will provide opportunities for in-depth exploration of these themes.


Linking schools and early years
12 November
Melbourne
Presented by the Centre for Community Child Health with funding from the R.E. Ross Trust, this seminar will focus on linking schools and early years services, looking at the research evidence, and putting the research evidence into practice.


Australian Bureau of Statistics Professional Development Workshop – Census At School
13 November
Melbourne
Free Professional Development workshops will be held at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne office. The workshops are designed for a general stream consisting of Primary and Secondary SOSE & Maths classroom use of CensusAtSchool data. Teachers can expect a hands-on session using MS Excel to analyse data from the CensusAtSchool random sampler. The sessions provide an opportunity to learn more about CensusAtSchool and pose questions.


Making Links 2008: Community responsibility and sustainability
11 – 13 November
Melbourne
In 2008, Making Links focuses on how technology can enhance and support social inclusion. The conference will include practical skills-building sessions and networking opportunities for workers and volunteers in community organisations who work with and/or are interested in web development, multimedia, Web 2.0 and mobile technology.


Children, communities, connections conference
UniSA Mawson Lakes Campus
13-14 November
South Australia is developing some key initiatives in terms of a place based culture that offers integrated services and community support. This conference aims to further build on these initiatives and equip practitioners in some of the more challenging areas of developing a culture of integrated place based service delivery and community support.

Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood: Young citizen, new citizenship  
13-15 November  
Melbourne  
The conference will explore the practices, principles and processes of children's participation on policy making, education and pedagogical practices.  
http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/.../conferences/conf08/index.html

QEC 5th Biennial International Conference: Reaching out to vulnerable families: achieving better outcomes for children  
20 – 21 November  
Melbourne  
The conference aims to bring together professionals from a wide range of disciplines, sharing a common interest in child and family wellbeing.  

iNet: Student leadership  
24 November – 5 December  
Online  
Many schools are exploring how the development of student voice and student leadership is the key to personalisation, with students becoming active partners in the construction of their education. Questions include: What is student voice and leadership and what does it mean to be a student leader? How are schools enabling all students to be leaders? What difference can co-construction between students and teachers make? Describe a 'school' of the future which has been transformed through innovative approaches to student leadership?  
http://www.sst-inet.net/...ference_topics/student_leadership.aspx

AARE 2008 International Research Conference: Changing climates: education for sustainable futures  
30 November – 4 December  
Brisbane  
The conference will explore how this current social concern applies equally well to education and the various policy, funding, institutional and social domains that shape the work of teachers and educational researchers.  

Intensive IWB training  
6 December  
Melbourne  
Interactive White Board (IWB) is important to teaching and learning process. The training intends to develop participant’s skills to provide students with the educational opportunities and specific training to use IWBs skilfully, proficiently and imaginatively in the classroom.  
http://www.iwb.net.au/training/

World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPC:E)  
7 December – 11 December  
Melbourne  
It is a triennial conference of international significance that attracts peoples from around the globe to celebrate and share diverse cultures, traditions and knowledge with a focus on world Indigenous education.  

Challenging Behavior in Young Children: Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively  
8 December – 10 December  
Melbourne  
Presented by Barbara Kaiser, this workshop presents in-depth background information and effective strategies to help educators understand, prevent, and address the behavior problems found so often in today’s primary schools and child care centers. The workshop is designed for Preschool and Kindergarten Early Elementary (grade 1-3) teachers.  
http://www.sanguineconsulting.com/...allengingbehaviourMEL08.html
Research eLert feedback

- Do you have or know of a research topic or paper that you think would be worth considering for inclusion in Research eLert?
  - Are you currently undertaking education research that you would like to share with our readers?
  - Is there a particular topic or theme you would like Research eLert to cover?
  - Do you have information on new publications, upcoming events or interesting websites that would be of interest to education researchers and practitioners?
  - Would you like to provide feedback – including suggestions to improve Research eLert?
- If you answered yes to any of the above – then we’d love to hear from you. Please forward your information, suggestions or comments to: <research@edumail.vic.gov.au>.

Reflections & action

- Below are some questions to assist in reflective practice and to explore future actions.
  - How can I promote reading and discussion of the New School Ties: Networks for Success report and the related research in my workplace?
  - What are we currently doing that supports collaborative partnerships and networks?
  - What new knowledge have I gained in this area? How can this learning be used to inform and support school and network transformation?
  - What research information would I like to share with others? How will I do this?

Next edition

We are keen to include information on how schools and other learning organisations are using research to inform and guide their practice and would like to include some of this work in the Research eLert. If you are interested, please contact the Research Branch at: <research@edumail.vic.gov.au>.

The Extra is part of the Office for Policy, Research and Innovation’s knowledge sharing initiative. The Extra provides information on the Department’s research forums and keeps you up-to-date with the latest news about education research. Back copies of the Extra are available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/research/researchpublications.htm#H2N4001E4>.

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