NSW GOVERNMENT Education & Communities

Public Schools NSW

# Teachers Researching Communities

## Final Report

A project funded by

Schools in Low SES Communities and Equity Coordination

NSW Department of Education and Communities

and conducted in collaboration with

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# Exectutive Summary

## 1. Rationale

The rationale and motivations for the Teachers Researching Communities project (TRC) stem from examinations of research relating to school-community relations, along with related policy and social development, including

- new levels of complexity in the linguistic and cultural settings for Australian education
- new extremes in socio-economic status
- the clear, dramatic, and ongoing shortfall in quality educational provision to Aboriginal students and communities
- heightened expectations arising from the increasing complexity of curriculums and the extension of the school-leaving age
- schools' and individual teachers' increased accountabilities in terms of standardised test-scores
- increased expectations on teachers for innovation and the local adaptation of curriculum goals and processes.

The project aimed to contribute to our understanding of school-community relations. It involved a review of literature, an extensive set of interviews, and the conduct of small-scale practical initiatives aimed at improving school-community relations. A premise, based on available research, was that such improvement would also benefit the learning of students and the wellbeing and satisfaction of students and teachers. The specific objectives of the project were to:

- draw together a coherent picture of the various views on school-community relations from the available research
- assemble the understandings of, and aspirations for improving school-community relations from school personnel and community members
- engage in systematic, collaboratively planned intervention projects, with teachers and school leaders, aimed at enhancing school-community relations on a variety of sites
- distil the main lessons learned from these interventions.

## 2. Participants

Nine schools participated in the project. They are situated in a wide range of geographical, socio-economic and cultural settings, from very small remote schools in rural areas, in the midst of a generally Anglo English-speaking community, to very large suburban schools in communities that are culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse.

## 3. Design of the Project

The project was conducted in two phases.
Phase 1:

- interviews were conducted with teachers, school leaders, communities, parents, and students concerning current school-community relations and how they may be improved
- classrooms were observed

- Community Inquiry Framework (CIF) that is based on current relevant Priority Schools Programs (PSP) materials, and the results of this research, was developed and trialled.

Phase 2:

- collaborative plans were developed for practical ways for teachers and school leaders to engage in systematic community inquiry
- the effects of these interventions on student outcomes, parental and community engagement, and teacher satisfaction were monitored.

## 4. Summary of Findings

### 4a. Phase 1: General Conclusions from the Interviews

This is a summary of the main points that arose in many of the interviews with school personnel, parents, and other community members. On each site there were also specific issues that arose in response to local conditions and events.

- Rapid change is now normal and teachers report needing some systematic way of coming to understand the communities they work in.
- Almost all schools have no formal policy on community relations, but they are all engaged in activities around that issue. They all see it as important but challenging.
- In the talk of school personnel and most community members, 'community' tends to equal 'parents'. The exception is in the case of some community groups including Aboriginal communities for which the term means the local Aboriginal community and family members elsewhere.
- Surrounding some schools are identifiable 'communities', but school personnel in other sites report a sense that they serve the relatively undifferentiated area that happens to be the school's catchment.
- Schools have different kinds of relationships with their communities: Degrees of trust, collaboration, inclusiveness, and practical support vary substantially across sites and across time.
- Community-school involvement differs in amount and in terms of the kinds of support communities give and/or asked to give – material support, time and manual effort, cultural resources, time to learn about how they can help with homework, visit and help in the classroom, put the school in touch with contacts they have that can help in some specialist areas, (e.g., ICTs, health support programs, etc.). Schools in turn see themselves as offering some access to social services, specific and useful skills such as Internet use, and occasionally, food and sustenance to students.
- In terms of their involvement with schools, parents tend:

  i) to want enjoyment and social contact
  ii) to want academic achievement for their children
  iii) to give short-term, one-off 'help'
  iv) to help as a volunteer generally in logistic or manual tasks.

- In terms of parents' involvement with schools, teachers and school leaders tend to want longer-term involvement, project-based commitments, educational input (e.g., homework and, sometimes, helping in the classroom).

### 4b. Phase 2: General Lessons from the school projects

For the most part the design-based research interventions, while small-scaled, were successful and had some abiding effects on local school practice and policy. Below, conclusions are drawn out for the Community Inquiry Framework, the conduct of Design-Based Research projects (DBRs) in schools and the activities of the PSP, and for our understandings of school-community relations in general.

#### *Lessons for the 'Community Inquiry Framework'*

- The school based-interventions indicated that the CIF was useful but not necessary for a systematic inquiry into the community's needs.
- On every site in which the CIF was used it was adapted in some way to respond to local contexts.
- Even when the CIF was not formally applied in the inquiry, most participants reported that it was useful in leading them to think through their knowledge and preconceptions about their communities.
- Some participants reported that they had revisited the CIF at various points over the course of their DBRs and had found it informative, sometimes resulting in a modification of their DBR or a change in the way they envisioned the usefulness of the CIF.

#### *Lessons for Design-Based Research in Schools*

- As intended, the DBRs worked as 'proof-of-possible-existence' rather than as fully established field experiments. Many of the schools built a version of their DBR into their future plans, indicating that, for most, the project constituted a positive step forward.
- The changes effected through the DBRs were almost unanimously strong and in the hoped-for directions. There were in addition several unanticipated positive bi-products of the studies.
- In the case of the one site on which the DBR 'failed' dramatically, subsequent research by the school indicated that the parents had not taken part because they were extremely happy with the school's work. This indicates a potential issue for school-based research: If participants interpret the planned intervention on the school site as a symptom of a problem to be fixed, rather than as an opportunity for improvement, engagement may be difficult to secure when the school is well regarded.
- The key to the success of the DBRs was the close collaborative relationship among and between the researchers, the school personnel, the departmental officers, and community members. This collaboration allowed the application of systematic research to a genuine problem/initiative that was locally recognised.
- Over the course of the DBRs it became evident that many of the school personnel needed guidance on the collection and presentation of data, including the development of assessments that were at the same time locally defensible and systematic.

#### *Lessons for the Priority Schools Programs*

- The part played by the Priority School Partnership Officers was critical to the success of the project. They mediated system policy, the researchers' requirements, and the schools' needs, making the organisation and completion of the project possible and giving it cohesion across the sites.
- It is clear from how school personnel planned and executed their projects that they knew that community involvement was best thought of as one element in a raft of improvements in curriculum, pedagogy, teacher capacity building, and leadership, rather than as a stand-alone lever for change.

### *Lessons for Communities and Schools*

- The term 'community' had different meanings on different sites, sometimes referring to the members of Aboriginal families in the area, sometimes to culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse groups that make up the a sizeable proportion of people in the area, sometimes to groupings and agencies other than parents, and sometimes to the undifferentiated and culturally amorphous collection of inhabitants in a randomly-drawn catchment area. In this study, each of these meanings led to a different approach to the development of better school-community relations.
- Most parents saw their involvement with the school as involving pastoral care, staying in touch with news and events, and volunteering manual or logistic help. Most teachers wanted parents to help more in decision-making, homework support and, in some cases, classroom help.
- Current economic and labour-market conditions are hurting some families and communities. One consequence of this in some places (a minority of sites in our study) was that families and communities were internally divided and competitive. This sometimes had effects on the school. These forces together meant that some schools and some communities saw themselves as not ready to take part in close, broad-ranging collaborative activities. They may, rightly or wrongly, have not seen school-community as having the urgency of other priorities. As shown in two sites in our study, however, even the implementation of a project such as this can have the salutary effect of focusing a shared good will on the improved learning of students.

### *Final considerations*

The school staff participating in this project showed that they understood that:

- schools are only one front in the struggle for a more educated, equitable and cohesive society, and cannot be taken to be the only front. There is a need for a co-ordinated array of education initiatives in this regard, including improved resourcing, curriculum, pedagogy and organisational leadership. School-community relations are one element of this array
- there is an important distinction between the amount and kind of community involvement in schools. Achieving changes in the kind of commitments community members are prepared to make is more challenging than achieving changes in the amount of involvement
- parent and community involvement must not be seen as a pre-condition for the provision of strong and innovative education, but rather as part of what a relevant and forward-looking educational system helps to bring about. But it is not something good school systems require it to function well.

A premise of an education-led movement is that schools and communities can come to know one another better, and thereby work better together to counter the forces contrary to their interests. So research and development initiatives that aim to clarify and build more authentic and realistic relations between schools and their communities have a central part to play in the building and maintenance of fairer and more cohesive societies.

# TEACHERS RESEARCHING COMMUNITIES

## 1 Aims, goals and objectives

The project summarised in this report takes place at a time when the relations between schools and the communities they serve have become a significant focus of educational research and policy. As communities become more diverse, curricula becomes denser and more complex, and societies put more and more of their aspirations for socio-economic and cultural equity on school outcomes, the ability of schools to connect productively with their communities can be seen to have important consequences for students, teachers, school leaders, and the broader community. This in turn puts increased pressure on school personnel and community members to know about one another in ways that are actionable and productive.

This project aims to contribute to our understanding of these issues by reporting on how some schools undertook initiatives to improve their relations with communities and, thereby, the learning of their students and the wellbeing and satisfaction of school students and staff. The project is motivated by an interest in improving: i) students' learning in school, ii) the active, effective engagement of their parents in that learning, iii) the productive involvement of community members and agencies, and iv) the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment experienced by teachers and school leaders in their daily work, and, thereby, the retention of quality, experienced teachers in schools serving disadvantaged and/or marginalised communities.

This report contains a review of some research literature on school-community relations, a summary of interviews conducted with school personnel and community members, and a series of case reports that detail how 9 public schools in New South Wales developed and implemented small-scaled projects aimed at increasing the engagement of parents and community members in the service of improving students' learning.

A central overall aim of this project was to give teachers and schools the resources and confidence to conduct research on their communities in educationally productive ways. To that end, the project set out to develop, evaluate and refine a framework that teachers can use to conduct systematic research on the communities that their schools serve.

Specific objectives of the project were to:

- conduct semi-structured interviews with teachers, school leaders, communities, parents, and students
- systematically observe and analyse classroom practices and practices relevant to school-community relations and to examine and scrutinise relevant school policies
- develop and trial a Community Inquiry Framework (CIF) that is based on current relevant Priority Schools' Programs (PSP) materials, and our collaborative research.
- illustrate effective and practical ways for teachers to engage in systematic community inquiry
- apply the results of such inquiry to the design of classroom practice

- monitor the effects of these classroom practices on student outcomes
- implement a systematic whole-school approach to community inquiry based on these processes.

The Teachers Researching Communities (TRC) project aimed to explore these challenges with teachers, schools and communities. It aimed as well to provide opportunities for increased student engagement, and to give teachers and schools the chance to enhance their relationships with their communities. In this way the TRC project set out to align its goals and outcomes with The Office of Schools Plan[1] of the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities concerning the priority of community engagement, particularly for the work of schools in disadvantaged areas[2].

As we summarise below, research on school-community relationships has shown that improving teachers' knowledge about students' lives outside the classroom can lead not only to improvement in students' results but also to their improved engagement in their learning. Research also suggests that for many teachers it is not easy to come to an understanding of the communities they serve or to make connections with key community members.

A premise of this project, one which was borne out as the project developed, was that teachers and school leaders need specific strategies for finding out about, and becoming part of, the communities in which their students live. Because of this, one outcome of the TRC project was the development of the CIF. The CIF aims to be a tool that helps teachers to improve their understanding of the communities that they serve, and to use that understanding to build and maintain more effective school-community links.

[1] New South Wales Department of Education July 2008 *The Office of Schools Plan 2009-2011*

# 2 A brief review of research and theory

## 2.1 Four key ideas

The project reported here forms part of an ongoing research tradition that reaches back over 40 years. It is based on four central ideas. The first is that, for a variety of reasons, *teachers and school leaders should become familiar with and understand the communities and families whose youngsters they teach*. The research summarised below supports this idea, showing clearly that familiarity with and understanding of these communities and families is not just a matter of teachers' comfort or an added bonus; rather it relates strongly to their own and their students' success.

Following from that is a second idea on which this project is based – that *systematic, first-hand knowledge among educators, schools and regions of the social and learning conditions in which their students live is critical educationally, socially and economically*. The review presented here summarises attempts to develop educators' knowledge in a variety of community settings and presents a range of ways in which school-community relations can be strengthened. The report goes on in later sections to describe a set of original case study summaries that add specificity and range to the body of available research.

The third idea on which this project is based is that the current generation of Australian educators faces *unprecedented levels of diversity among students and their communities*, and that these developments matter educationally. The focus of the project reported here is on supporting a continuous, routine process of developing teachers' capacities in researching and understanding the communities and families they serve, in building their school's capacity to work with communities and families, and, in turn, in building their communities' and families' capacities to work with the school.

The diversity of communities is increasing in ways such as:

- increasing proportions of students speak or regularly encounter languages other than English at home and in their immediate communities, and currently spoken in Australia are over 100 migrant/community languages
- increased proportion of Aboriginal students
- increasing proportions of students and their parents were born outside of Australia
- extremes of wealth and poverty appear to be intensifying over the last 10 years (Vinson, 2007) and
- the combination of these factors appears to be differentially impacting on the lives and aspirations of Australians aged 15-25 in serious and unprecedented ways (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2008).

At the same time school curricula expect students to develop increasingly complex and sophisticated knowledge and learning processes (LoBianco & Freebody, 2001). Communities and jurisdictions also expect increased performance by students on standardised tests. These combine to put pressure on individual teachers, schools, support services and educational systems in general to maintain and improve levels of educational attainment among young Australians and on their efforts to learn about and cater to students' increasingly diverse needs.

The fourth idea driving this project is that *teachers can be and need to be researchers of their communities*. Central to this project is an understanding of the importance of teachers as researchers. For over 25 years, there has been a growing interest in the importance of the teacher's role in connecting educational research, practice and policy. Educational authorities and policy makers have recognised that standards of teaching and learning are unlikely to improve unless policies relate directly to the classroom as a work site for teachers and learners (Hargreaves, 1999). Schools are complex systems that operate within larger, even more complex systems (Senge, 2000), and the critical interface between those systems and the students' educational experiences is embodied in teachers' day-to-day work.

In Freebody and Freebody (2011) we outline the development and rationale of the teacher-researcher model, a product of the recognition of these features of systems and teachers' work. The model aims to provide a platform for a better understanding of the relationship between research, public policy and professional practice. Further it is aimed at more than transforming practice and improving teaching and learning: Teacher research is seen by many educational practitioners, theorists and researchers as *a way of giving voice to the policy silences that exist* in educational work (Donald et al., 1995, p. 272).

Kincheloe (2003) outlined the three key imperatives associated with the teacher-researcher model:

1. the need to protect teachers' professional autonomy
2. the need for teachers to have a voice in their workplace
3. the need for teachers to take an active role in the production of knowledge from which experts and policy makers ground their authority and make their decisions.

His emphasis goes beyond a focus on test scores or student achievement toward the deepening of teachers' and the public's sense of teacher professionalism. It has been claimed by some that a gap exists between educational theory and practice because they are seen as drawing on two contrasting kinds of knowledge – two qualitatively different ways of describing and explaining the world that are, in some important ways, in opposition. McIntyre (2005) has suggested three strategies to bridge this gap between research and practice in education:

1. have teachers conduct critical trials of research-based suggestions by teachers in the context of their own practice
2. make sure that the choice of research strategies reflects particular areas of interest or concern within the school
3. develop 'knowledge-creating schools' located near the middle of the theory-practice continuum, to draw on the complementary strengths of both ends.

For the purpose of this project, the development of schools as 'knowledge creating' operating between and within both theory and practice is an attractive prospect, but as McIntyre (2005) claims, it can only be reached via the first two strategies above.

Importantly for this project, teacher-research has also been found to increase practitioners' understanding of the complexities of the school community and learning

environment (Gray & Campbell-Evans, 2002). This is regarded as a key factor explaining the long-term positive effects of teachers engaging in research.

There are, however, potential practical and contextual issues that arise when teachers undertake a program of research. Researchers have cautioned that there can be difficulties associated with maintaining changes brought about by a teacher-research project after the project has been completed. They have directed attention to the need for ongoing support in school settings for teachers to engage in and sustain such activities (Bonne et al., 2007).

To summarise these general findings, Kyle & Hovda (1987) outlined several important factors that facilitate teachers' experiences as researchers:

- the importance of addressing initial and emerging perceptions of the nature of research
- the significance of a support group
- the need to pay attention to the appropriate pacing of activities
- the public identification and justification of beneficial activities
- contextual constraints in schools that can inhibit teachers' efforts to study and resolve problems, including a lack of adequate time to dedicate to the research
- the willingness of teachers to overcome some of those constraints when they are committed to instructional improvement.

Involvement in teacher research calls upon teachers to extend their definition of their role. Teacher-researchers seem to be most successful when they are involved in a school-wide initiative, or have access to communities of inquiry. Therefore there is a need for schools and systems to support a culture of research among their teaching communities, and to provide visibility and incentives as due recognition of the value of the teachers' research work (Elmore, 1996). The TRC project summarised here is an attempt to advance these goals.

## 2.2 The NSW context

Improving students' achievement and engagement are key priorities for the NSW PSP within the Department of Education and Communities (DEC). The project points to, among other things, the importance of the cultural skills and dispositions that students bring to school and continue to develop out of school. It is clear that teachers and educational systems take these cultural skills, knowledges and dispositions into account as they address DEC's goals for equity initiatives. The growing area of research around these considerations makes it clear that teachers' understanding of in- and out-of-school life has special importance for students living in disadvantaged communities (Gunn, Forrest, & Freebody, 1995).

In its publications, the Department has developed a set of principles to emphasise fundamental ideas about schools, learning and communities:

> *In many low SES communities, there is a clear cultural gap between the backgrounds, strengths and sometimes aspirations of professionals, who work in schools and other human services agencies, and the people they serve. (NSW DET PSP, 2004, p. 10)*

> *A major difference between effective and less effective teachers of students from low socio-economic communities lies in their belief in their own ability to make a difference. (NSW DET PSP, 1999, p. 14)*

Key to the Department's position is the need for schools, parents and communities to develop partnerships:

> *a relationship in which members of families, schools and communities develop mutual respect, understanding and ways of working together to improve students' learning outcomes (NSW DET PSP, 2003, p.5)*

With regard to parents, the Priority Schools Programs have developed a model with three levels:

- Parent involvement: The school keeps parents informed and parents play traditional volunteer roles, but do not help to make educational decisions.
- Parent participation: Parents begin to take part in making educational decisions as well as playing traditional volunteer roles. Notable in this is the school's continued control of the parents' participation.
- Partnerships of home, school and community: All partners share responsibility of decision making by way of a two-way process (NSW DET PSP, 2003).

An important element informing all three levels is that, while all parties need not have the same values, goals or beliefs, all are respected and common goals are identified.

An initiative that many NSW schools have adopted is the Quality Teaching Framework developed by Gore and Ladwig, University of Newcastle, (see NSW, DET, 2003). Of particular relevance to this review is the *Significance* dimension of this framework. This dimension focuses on the importance and relevance of knowledge, and highlights the importance of connecting classroom learning and students' background knowledge. This framework generally emphasises high quality intellectual content in increasingly diverse educational environments. Two factors mediate intellectual quality and student diversity:

- the breadth and responsiveness of the individual teacher's repertoire for engaging, developing and sharing valued knowledge
- the continuity and coherence of students' experiences in school over time and across curricular sites.

The need for these to be informed by actionable, valid knowledge of the communities, families and individuals served by schools and teachers is clear. So a number of aspects of the policy setting lead to the concerns of this project – the diversity and changeability of the characteristics of students and communities, the push for parent, family and community participation in more aspects of the schools' activities, and the need to continue to enhance teachers' capacities and confidence to engage in researching their communities.

The summary of the research literature presented below falls into two sections. Under the heading 'broad-scale research' we have included a selection of studies that have generally involved large numbers of participants, along with focused and measurable academic and social outcomes. Under the heading, 'ethnographic studies' we have included a summary of a selection of more site-specific, fine-grained inquiries into

various kinds of community involvement in a sample of settings. (A fuller report of these latter studies is presented in Freebody & Freebody, 2011).

The relationship between what happens in schools and what happens in other important settings in which youngsters live has been a longstanding preoccupation of educators. A century ago Edmund Huey, reviewing the research available on the teaching of reading in schools, concluded that "reading and writing are learned in the service of what the children are doing as a social community" (1908, p. 300). So the idea that students' experiences prior to school and their ongoing out-of-school experiences are related to what, how and how well they learn in school is not new. But one feature that is new is the increased range of support services, both in and outside of schools and educational systems, on which schools can call to support the engagement of students, families and communities in school life.

One potential consequence of this, combined with the rapidly changing diversity of students and communities, is a rapidly increasing knowledge gap among educators–school leaders, policy-makers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, and, most crucially, classroom teachers–about those students, families, communities and systemic services in the environment around them and how best they can draw on the resources these offer.

## 2.3 Summaries of broad-scale research

Numerous reviews of the research literature on the topic of the nature and effects of enhanced relations between schools and communities and/or families have been conducted over a period of about 40 years. One such review that is both recent and relatively representative in its conclusions has been conducted by Anfara and Mertens (2008). Here we summarise and expand on their selection to draw out five significant and supportable findings that are directly relevant to the interests of this project.

### 2.3.1 The involvement of parents positively affects students' achievement.

This is a key claim that seems well supported (e.g., Comer, 1984; Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Hickman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995; National Middle School Association, 2003). Further, Henderson and Mapp (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of 51 studies and showed that students with above average parent involvement had academic achievement rates that were, on average, 30 per cent higher than those students with below average parent involvement. Henderson and Berla (1994) found that the most accurate predictors of student success in school were the ability of the family (along with the help and support of school personnel) to (a) create a positive home learning environment, (b) communicate high but realistic expectations for their children's school performance and future careers, and (c) become involved in their children's schooling.

Some years earlier, however, White, Taylor and Moss (1992) summarized studies that showed small or even non-existent relationships. The explanation seems to be that the studies reviewed by White and others related to the recruitment of parents into very specific and structured early intervention programs, programs with which they may have had little familiarity.

The other studies cited above incorporated studies with interests in general parent involvement in schools across a range of fronts, many of them outside of specific,

pedagogically structured activities. This raises the question of the specific nature of parental, family and community involvement.

Approaches to the roles of community members in schools are presented in a later section, but it is worth noting here that the specific kind of involvement of community members in the life of schools is a key concern of both the educators and community members who participated in this project.

### 2.3.2 The involvement of parents and community members in school life positively affects student attendance and in-school behaviour.

While receiving less research attention than academic achievement, this relationship is nonetheless well supported (e.g., Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001;Hickman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995 National Middle School Association, 2003).

### 2.3.3 The involvement of parents and community members in school life positively affects students' self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, and their formulation of productive life goals.

The research that supports this conclusion (e.g., Burke, 2001; Epstein, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994) points to the durable, sustainable effects of positive school-community relationships. As cited in the review by Anfara and Mertens, Henderson and Berla summarised the data reported in their *New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* in these terms:

> *The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1)*

The strong implication here is that the more seamless and co-operation-based the relationship between the settings of schooling and domestic and community life, the broader the range of benefits to wellbeing, learning and a more general sense of belonging that encourages realistic life plans, that embeds the youngster in a network of social resources, and that encourages the competence and confidence to draw on those resources in productive ways.

### 2.3.4 These positive outcomes have been found to apply across a range of family income and parent education levels

Few studies have had the scope, or have been sufficiently longitudinal to deliver entirely supportive findings relating to this question (Funkhouser, Gonzales, & Moles, 1998; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Young & Westernoff, 1996 all offer well-designed support but do not establish the breadth of the pattern). It is made more difficult still by changing patterns among the demographic predictors that have traditionally predicted academic success.

### 2.3.5 Researchers have found a variety of forms of school-community relationships.

Parental, family or community 'involvement' and 'participation' and 'partnership' with schools are terms that can potentially cover a broad range of collaborative activities. The empirical base that has developed in this field has allowed researchers to build a variety of taxonomies to describe the nature of these activities and the

differing kinds of relationships they build between schools and their surrounding communities. Table 1 presents an adaptation of a commonly used taxonomy[3].

[3] Other comparable versions include Davies (1987), Berger (1991) and Rutherford (1993).

**Table 1:** Six types of parent involvement

(adapted from Epstein et al., 2002 and Agabrian & Millea, 2005)

| | |
|---|---|
| Type 1:<br>Pastoral | Educators assist families with parenting skills, family support, with understanding the youngster's developmental stage, and by suggesting and supporting home conditions that support learning at different grade levels. Community members assist school personnel in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children. |
| Type 2:<br>Communicational | Educators communicate with families about school programs and students' progress. Two-way communication occurs between school and home. |
| Type 3:<br>Volunteering | Educators design the school's recruitment, training, activities and schedules to allow the involvement of families as volunteers and as audiences. Community members enable educators to access and work with volunteers who can support students and the school. |
| Type 4:<br>Learning at home | Educators encourage and support the involvement of families and their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Community members encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss tasks with parents that are relevant to their interests and cultural background. |
| Type 5:<br>Decision making | Educators include families as participants in decisions about school governance, and in advocacy activities through school councils and committees, and parent organizations. |
| Type 6:<br>Collaboration and co-ordination | Both educators and community members co-ordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, government agencies, employment companies, NGOs, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges and universities. |

The research shows varying kinds and levels of collaboration between school personnel and community members across these six types. Community members have been documented as dedicating many hours to helping repair schools' fences, paintwork and plumbing, all the way to offering advice on recruitment and curriculum issues and on the financial aspects of schools' management.

While each type within the taxonomy emphasises two-way collaboration, the research indicates that in the majority of cases to date the communications have been from the school to the community and have been focussed on how community members can help the school do better the work it has chosen to do. In recent years, however, the educational value of the community's skills and understandings and social and

professional networks have become better understood and worked more explicitly into policy statements.

The effects of these developing policy orientations and understandings among educators will be reflected in part in the data reported in later sections of this report. To preview a general point, it is clear that some educators and community members have strong views about the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the various types of school-community collaboration shown in Table 1, and that these perspectives vary by region and community. Part of a school's history is the history of the kind and extent of community involvement. It becomes clear that, with changing demographics, curriculum demands and regional labour market opportunities, many schools and communities alike are experiencing the need to rethink the current appropriateness of those histories.

## 2.4 A sample of ethnographic approaches

### 2.4.1 Teachers knowing about families and communities

#### *2.4.1.1 Families*

This project is about giving schools and individual teachers the opportunity and means to conduct small-scaled projects aimed at expanding and enriching the relationships between their schools and the communities around them. There is a body of ethnographically-oriented research that supports this goal (see Freebody & Freebody, 2011, for a fuller discussion of the studies reviewed in this section). In the first section of our review of this research we give examples of studies that have generally interpreted the notion of 'community' in terms of 'families' – parents, siblings and members of the extended family. In the following section we collect some studies that have taken a broader view of 'community'.

From their lives outside of school students bring knowledge, in the more traditional curricular sense, to the classroom, but they also bring understandings and dispositions related to learning, social and peer relationships, and cross-generational ways of relating. A long-standing program of research that has provided a coherent, concerted set of responses to these questions is that led by Luis Moll. Studies undertaken by Moll and his colleagues have focused on bridging the gap between schools and communities in the particular lived context of working class Latino students' lives in the USA. Here we summarise a few examples from Moll's program of research and development. The aim has been to improve students' participation in school by drawing on their home and community resources (see, e.g., Gonzalez et al., 1993 & 2005; Moll & Diaz, 1987). The longer-term objective is to 'validate' home-based knowledge as an important aspect of the school's resource base and therefore as an important matter for teachers:

> *In classrooms … teachers rarely draw on the resources of the "funds of knowledge" of the child's world outside the context of the classroom.* (Moll, Armanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 134)

Funds of knowledge are taken to be built up historically and developed culturally as bodies of useful knowledge and skills essential for the household and for individual functioning and well being (p. 133).

Conclusions from the studies of Moll and his colleagues include the following:

- teachers can research communities in systematic ways and use their findings to improve their teaching. They can also develop collaborations with parents, community members and other teachers aimed at developing and trialling new teaching methods and materials. They can test the effects of these new methods and materials on students' participation and learning, and this entire process can grow a fund of knowledge for local teachers and community members (Moll et al., 1992)
- the active recruitment of minority home language (in this case, Spanish) into schoolwork can help youngsters learn to read in the language of instruction. Even though some children had internalised the negative societal attitudes toward Spanish, toward bilingualism, and toward their ethnic groups, regardless of the teachers' efforts and even though Spanish seemed to retain its status as the 'secondary' language within these programs, sometimes diminishing the schools' commitment to developing their students' Spanish literacy, with continued encouragement, support, and instruction in both languages, children will soon control the writing systems of Spanish and English (Moll, Sáez, and Dworin, 2001)
- these studies were built on the assumption that every household and community comprises elders who pass on knowledge and dispositions that can enhance the survival and wellbeing of their youngsters. That teachers can benefit from studying the histories of the communities in which they work and their students live, as well as their approaches to learning, and the ways in which they pass on practical skills such as language (Gonzales et al. 2005).
- there have been a number of studies that have applied Moll's work to aspects of the Australian educational setting. As an example, Watson and others (2006) explored achievement in numeracy for Aboriginal school students. They found, among other things, that in those schools and communities where there was a shared set of values and a common focus on aspirations, numeracy achievement and school success more generally were higher (see Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Among the factors that were found to contribute to successful school-community relations, and therefore that helped improve numeracy achievement among Aboriginal students were i) an insistence that the community has real influence in decision making, including purposeful recruitment, and ii) the ongoing commitment of teachers (including Aboriginal teaching staff), who knew their students and therefore their communities:

> *... the best schools and teachers care enough about children and communities to involve parents/carers in schools, school decisions and teaching; learn about and respond to their needs and reflect this in their practice.* (Watson et al., p. 116)

The research program of Eve Gregory and her colleagues also provides valuable insights into school-community relations. Conclusions from the studies of Gregory and her colleagues include the following:

- in comparing the home reading practices of low socio-economic-status Bangladeshi-British and Anglo-British students, and with the school reading activities they experience, older siblings were found to play a crucial part at home. Differences between the groups were found in their views of 'childhood'. In the Anglo-British homes, the view of childhood as predominantly 'a time for play' prevailed, so literacy activities in these homes included reading stories, telling

jokes, reading comics and magazines, writing cards and letters, and so on. For the Bangladeshi British children, out-of-school literacy involved formal literacy activities such as learning to read and write Standard Bengali either in the local community centre or in neighbours' homes, attending Qur'anic classes in the mosque or reading the Qur'an and related books in Arabic at home, and attending after-school clubs or homework clubs run by the school or the local community centre. Attitudes to literacy incorporated strong views about adherence to family values and respect for religion. Both schools involved took serious notice of the value structures they observed in their surrounding communities, but both also aimed to balance these with attention to the other orientation, the 'counter-weight'. It was also the case that for all of the children, the older siblings acted as intermediaries, interpreting the language, values and practices of the school and helping the youngsters to combine home and community practices to build up the repertoire of resources on which the children could draw in their play activities (see also Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004)

- in several studies of siblings and grandparents reading with youngsters in homes, Gregory and colleagues have found that, although the teachers listen to individual children's reading, the firm scaffolding and security that the siblings and grandparents provide is usually missing during teacher/child reading sessions in school. In contrast to the reading 'lessons' that take place between siblings, the teacher does not provide words and phrases for the children to repeat and echo; instead she questions them on phonics or the text or requires them to relate a text to their own life experience whilst reading, resulting in a lack of the rhythmic flow that takes place between siblings (Gregory, 1998)
- Gregory (2005) found that in the home, older siblings acted as teachers to their younger siblings in both their action and their talk. Gregory argued that children need to enact these experiences, so that when they encounter them again they can automatically link the appropriate language with the objects and feelings associated with those experiences. Gregory argued that in order for schools and teachers to understand and build on the resources of home learning, playful talk at home needs to be observed and understood, and teachers need to attempt to find out how school talk is mediated in home environments.

Many of the factors mentioned in the research summarised above – cultural knowledge, family practices, cross-generation and gender relations, and linguistic diversity – were brought together in a study by Marshall & Toohey (2010; and see Smyth & Toohey, 2009). They documented a cross-generational project conducted in a Canadian Public school in which the majority of students were Punjabi Sikhs. In an attempt to bring useable funds of knowledge from the families into the classrooms the Sikh students recorded, translated and made into books the stories told by their grandparents about life in India before their families migrated to Canada.

The motivation for this work was high among families and students. One significant finding that emerged was that the children often incorporated the grandparents' stories into "a multiplicity of ancestral, globalized, and westernized discourses" (p. 221), as shown in the translations and the images with which the children accompanied the language in the books.

Secondly, however, Marshall and Toohey found that this exercise often introduced what Pitt and Britzman (2006) called "difficult knowledge" – knowledge about

violence, religion versus secularity, religious or ethnic intolerance, sometimes tragic loss of life and property and the like:

> *Why was this project seen as something extraordinary? Was it because the knowledge represented in the texts was not official knowledge, or because of the presence of so many adults other than teachers in the classrooms, or because it involved the production of a potentially socially useful product, or because the project was not graded? What happens when the funds of knowledge that children bring to school challenge the curricular and institutional practices of the classroom? … We speculate that such knowledge might become the impetus … for productive dialogues among community members, children, and teachers about how these matters might become resources for children and teachers and community*. (Marshall & Toohey, p. 237)

We can see that 'funds of knowledge' and their use to construct 'school-community relations' may not always be a 'safe' or neutral' matter. The effort by teachers to research communities and recruit new community-relevant knowledge, understandings, dispositions and values into classroom life and learning may present particular challenges and open up unique opportunities for schools to engage communities in otherwise impossibly difficult or confrontational ways.

For many educators and educational researchers the family, with all its forms in culturally diverse societies, is the educational focal point of 'the community'. It is families who are most physically present community members in schools (apart from educators), and it is largely in the family that young children learn about the world and learn how to interact.

We also see from the study by Marshall and Toohey that families draw on larger cultural matters as they frame their 'knowledge' and that this knowledge is not quarantined from issues of history, disenfranchisement and sometimes violence. The sample of studies outlined in this section has shown the value of a wide range of family-oriented activities and strategies that educators are using and that they could use, but the following section extends the notion of 'the community' to include both general cultural/ethnic orientations and social services and organisations.'

#### 2.4.1.2 Communities

Some educators have argued that teachers need to research the communities in which they teach so that they can come to understand the particular skills and knowledge with which their students enter school. This is important because of the prevalence and general acceptance of negative and inappropriate conceptions about certain categories of students.

- For instance, from a 2-year qualitative investigation into the views of teachers, parents and students Howard (1998) found that there is an urgent need for teachers to be aware of and seek out the views of Aboriginal students, parents and educators, and to reflect on how their own beliefs may have an impact on the learning in their classroom and the ways in which interactions between the school and community are facilitated.

- The relevance of schoolwork is a common element in research focused on education, pedagogy, and student achievement in minority or marginalised

communities. Nichol and Robinson (2000), for example, found that pedagogical strategies used by teachers of Aboriginal Australian students should:

- allow for focus on social aspects of schooling, such as joint projects and peer tutoring
- encourage students to feel responsible for their own learning by using research projects and self-paced learning
- allow students to move around the classroom to explore or observe
- use assessment methods that students understand and with which they are comfortable
- encourage students to negotiate content, tasks, and classroom housekeeping
- emphasise modelling rather than explaining, using multimedia where resources when possible.

These studies attempted to embody an important theoretical and practical point about our understandings of the notion of "community" as it relates to effective schooling. Classrooms do not simply exist and operate inside communities or next to neighbouring communities; they are themselves communities in which students must learn how to function as learners – that is, their individual and social practices need to be characterised by agency and efficacy. In that regard, the goal of an effective classroom teacher is not merely to mimic surrounding community or family practices or norms, but both to build on them in the pursuit of academic knowledge and to validate them in that process. At the very least, such an orientation directs attention to teachers' systematic knowledge, or lack of it, of the communities that they serve, and to the resources they can call on to enhance that knowledge in ways that are productive for students.

## 2.5 Conclusions from the research

The research converges on a number of points:

1. the involvement of parents and family members in schools has been shown to have a range of short- and long-term positive effects, including the increased academic success of students, their sense of belonging in the school, the relevance of parents' specific strategies for helping homework or other supports, and the trajectory planning of students
2. the involvement of parents and family members in schools has also been shown to have potential positive effects on the families and communities, including language learning, community cohesion, and a sense of efficacy and agency among community members
3. various forms of reciprocal involvement between parents, families, communities and schools have been found: pastoral, communicational, volunteering, earning in the home, decision-making, and collaboration and co-ordination of more general community resources
4. research indicates that the significant funds of knowledge, understandings, dispositions and values that youngsters can and do bring to school are changing and increasingly diverse in some settings. These have been found to include diverse ideas about the experiences and material from which children should be protected, inter-generational and –gender relations, and more general notions of what 'childhood' is

5. specific family practices have been found to be educationally consequential, as have broader cultural ideas about what schools are, the relations that should obtain in them, and what they are for.

Finally, it is clear that the relations between schools and communities make up a rich, ongoing and contested field of research and policy. Schools in Australia and elsewhere are doing many things and the topic of schools' relations with specific community members and with communities in general is one that continues to exercise educators in schools.

The durability of this as a research field seems due to factors that include the changing demographic features of many communities and the practical challenges and opportunities that this presents to school leaders and teachers, and the development of different, more focused, ethnography-based research methodologies for studying communities and the previously unnoticed, or at least unremarked, educational work they undertake.

## 3. The Design of the project

### 3.1 The participants

Initially, 12 schools opted to become involved in the project and participate in the initial data collection. The 12 schools included: 6 urban schools, including one secondary school and five public schools; 3 rural schools, including two public schools and one 7-10 school; and 3 remote schools, including one central (K-12 school) and two public schools. Two of the schools had high Indigenous enrolments (one school over 90 per cent), and one school was a single sex boys' school. Two of the public schools had high concentrations of students from language backgrounds other than English. All schools were government schools with access to either Priority Schools Programs or National Partnership funding.

Of the 12 schools involved in the initial data collection, one urban public school, one remote public school and two rural schools were unable to continue their involvement in the project. While there were various causes for this, time management and resourcing were contributing factors. After the initial data collection phase, one additional remote public school became involved in the project.

At the conclusion of the project, 9 schools had participated in their own Design-Based Research studies.

### 3.2 Initial data collection

The initial data collection phase consisted of a visit from the university research team and PSP partnership officers and consultants to the schools to observe lessons and interview principals, teachers, students and parent/community members. The results of this data collection were used for two purposes. Firstly, to ascertain the nature of the individual schools' current school and community relationships and particular needs the different schools may have. Secondly, the initial data from all schools was analysed and contributed to the development of a draft Community Inquiry Framework (CIF) to assist schools in the planning of their Design Based Research (DBR).

The lesson observations were aimed at developing an understanding of how classroom practices were influenced by teachers' understanding of students' background, prior

knowledge, and experiences. The observations also helped to develop a well-rounded understanding of the individual schools – including routines, student-teacher relationship, and curriculum. Teachers were made aware that the purpose of the observation was not critical analysis, but rather to develop a better understanding of how they do their work and, for the later phase, if there are ways in which they would like to modify their work for the better.

The interviews were semi-structured, in that there was a series of core guiding questions to be covered but that the sequence was naturally varied and issues particular to a school could be covered. The purpose of these interviews was to establish the formal and informal ways in which the schools and individual educators have gone about gaining systematic information about educationally relevant aspects of the community, and how this might be done better.

Specifically, the interviews sought to understand the ways in which:

- teacher and school currently interact with their community
- knowledge about the community is disseminated and used to inform school policy and practice
- teachers believe community and school relationships could be enhanced.

Some examples of core interview questions include:

- Does the school have a policy on school-community relations? If so, what is it?
- What are the main features of how this school relates to this community?
- Can you give some specific recent examples of school-community events, issues, problems, successes, etc?
- What do you think are the main features of this community that are important for the school staff to know about?

The interviews took place over a one-day visit to the school and were generally 30-60 minutes each. This initial data collection took place in Term 4, 2009. In Term 1 and 2, 2010 the research team made a second visit to each school to discuss the results of the initial data collection and assist in the planning of the individual Design-Based Research projects.

## 3.3 Design Based Research

A relatively new research method, Design-based research (DBR) is informed by both action research practices and experimental laboratory research and was developed by Brown (1992) and Collins (1992) in order to ‘make learning research more relevant for classroom practices’ (Reimann 2011, p. 37) by linking theory and practice more strongly to educational research. This linking is achieved in DBR through the development of research projects with local relevance and the implementation of research in authentic settings.

Informed by broader educational theory, but emerging from local issues, DBRs in the field of education are generally teacher-led, with teacher learning central to the design (Bannan-Ritland, 2008), and supported by a community of educational leaders and researchers. Often, a DBR focuses on a single issue that has local relevance to the

research site, as well as broader relevance to the educational research and practice more generally.

DBR can be "characterised as an inter-disciplinary mixed method approach conducted 'in the field' that serves applied and theory-building purposes" (Reimann, 2011, p. 37). Whilst each project is unique, the DBR process consists of four elements: Informed planning and implementation of a project; continual trialling and 'taking stock' where the project is modified or redesigned according to ongoing data collection; evaluation of local impact upon completion of the project; and evaluation of the potential for broader impact in the education field more generally. In accordance with this, the teachers and schools participating in the DBR phase of the project were asked to:

1. plan, in collaboration with the research team, an intervention in their school; it was suggested that they use the CIF to inform this planning process.
2. undertake the project, continuously evaluating and refining as they went.
3. evaluate the success of their intervention – the particular way they did this depended on the nature of the intervention and was planned in collaboration with the research team.
4. explore the potential for broader impact in other schools, other areas, and other systems.
5. keep systematic data such as journals, work sample collection, focus group interviews with students, and interviews with staff and parents.

Pivotal to the collaborative planning process is the clarification of goals (Reimann, 2011). In the case of this project, many of the schools referred to the Low SES School Communities National Partnership Reform 6 (COAG, 2010) to explicate the areas and issues to be addressed in their study. Once the goals had been outlined, schools collected baseline data in order to document the starting point and establish the school's current level of achievement of the goals. During this time, the experiment or research plan was developed and finalised.

It is common for DBRs to continue for an extended duration, weeks or months, and rather than having one fixed data collection point, evaluation is continual over that time. The individual DBR projects in the 9 participating schools continued for 1-2 terms between Term 2 and 4, 2010. On average, the research was conducted over about 10 weeks.

The university research team and PSP partnership officers and consultants visited each school at least twice during this time, once at the planning stage, and again at the end of the project. Some schools requested additional visits during the project. While DBRs have a framework or philosophy of on-going data collection rather than a specific method (Reimann, 2011), schools were asked to collect data at mid-points during the project in order to establish success, modify or redesign the project as needed.

The following section of this report outlines the findings for each individual case in detail, as well as drawing together main conclusions relevant to school-community practices in Australia more generally, and a final draft of the CIF, developed from both initial data collection and feedback from schools.

# 4 Phase One Findings

## 4.1 Phase One

Prior to the development of a design-based project on each school site, the research team conducted interviews and focus groups in each of the participating schools. The purposes of these interviews were 1) to develop a sense both of the uniqueness of each site and of the commonalities across sites in terms of school-community relations, 2) more particularly to develop a shared understanding of the basis for the collaborative projects to be developed, and 3) to provide some data that could assist in the development of the Community Inquiry Framework.

Interviews were conducted with parents, other community members, school leaders (generally principals and/or deputy principals), teachers, and students. The core set of questions that guided these interviews is provided in Appendix 2. For the most part, however, these were semi-structured interviews (Freebody, 2003). That is, while the core questions were covered, they were not necessarily covered in the original order, discussion ranged back and forth between these considerations in various ways, and unforeseen topics that arose that were considered relevant to the interests of the project were pursued.

The findings that applied broadly across the school settings are summarised in this section. Findings from Phase One interviews that applied specifically to the school site are summarised under the Case report for that school. We proceed here to enumerate the broadly applicable conclusions from the interviews, with a brief explanation of each and occasionally a direct quote that encapsulates or best represents the statements of a large majority of the interviewees. As the discussion proceeds, and in later sections, we draw where appropriate on the various kinds of school-community involvement as outlined in Table 1 on page 20 – pastoral, communicational, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration/co-ordination.

### 4.1.1 General findings from the interviews

#### *4.1.1.1 No formal policy, but considerable activity*

Almost none of the schools visited reported having a formal, written policy or strategy concerning the maintenance and development of school-community relations. Nonetheless all reported activity that kept the parents in touch with the school's activities and that encouraged them to take part or support these activities in particular ways. Often these took the form of social events aimed at fund raising (fetes, barbecues, and so on) or excursions of various kinds.

All of the schools visited reported sending regular information sheets newsletters home with students, a few had developed a website or emailed out, and most in the smaller rural and remote communities reported maintaining high levels of face-to-face contact at least on a weekly basis. P & C meetings also occurred regularly to allow parents and community members not only to keep informed but also to have input, where appropriate, into decisions made by the school executive.

The types of involvement described in the 'informal policy/activity' section of the interviews included for the most part communicational and volunteering. Also several school personnel mentioned that, while 'open-day' style events in the school were

conducted for communicational purposes, there was also a hope that parents would gain some guidance on how they might support learning at home.

#### *4.1.1.2 Important, but challenging*

All of those interviewed – including parents, community members and students – indicated that they regarded school-community relations as crucial to the functioning of a good school. Many outlined a number of reasons for this, some of which went beyond the focus of the discussion on informal policy and activities: the importance of pastoral care on matters such as nutrition and physical and emotional safety, and the need for the school to know, have access to, and co-ordinate the various resources in the community.

The constant changes interviewees noted in the demographic composition of communities, especially with regard to language, cultural norms and socio-economic conditions, but also in terms of changing curriculum and pedagogy, meant that building school-community relationships was a never-ending challenge for both school personnel and community members. It was also noted by the majority of interviewees that at the present time the dangers of cultural and socio-economic fragmentation was greater than before and the changing nature of the labour-market in Australia meant that it is harder than before to feel reassured about the relevance of schooling to a student's future trajectory.

#### *4.1.1.3 'Community' tends to equal 'parents'*

Most of the educators interviewed discussed parents but not other potential community members. The following were rarely included in discussions about community:

- other potentially helpful government and non-government agencies
- local businesses and
- non-parent individuals or groups.

The clear and persistent exceptions to this were school personnel working in communities with high proportions of Aboriginal students. In these cases discussion about the community also involved Elders, local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) and other significant and influential Aboriginal community members.

#### *4.1.1.4 'Community' and 'school' mean different things*

In some cases, the school is seen to be the hub of the community. In some of the smaller townships, in the more remote areas in particular, the school is a focal point for gatherings and events. It is also a place where there is knowledge of potentially helpful public services, and access to those services. It is a place, in some cases the only place, where community members can find out about events, and obtain other social, economic and cultural information and advice. In other settings, schools are more peripheral to the mainstream activities going on around them, and, even though they may be large and complex institutions, the range of their activities within the community may be more restricted. This is a difference that is the product of the history of schools and the individuals currently or previously employed there, and it

does not relate only to size or remoteness. It is a feature that cannot be assumed in advance of a close examination of each setting.

#### *4.1.1.5 Surrounding some schools, but not others, are identifiable 'communities'*

Some school staff told the research team that they did not have a clear sense of serving a cohesive or even clearly identifiable 'community', but rather a collection of potentially overlapping cultural and socio-economic groups. The term 'community' was used on some sites to refer to the diffuse clientele of the school generally, in some cases to a vague notion of the geographical region that made up the catchment area or the feeder schools. In others, it was clear that 'community' referred to known groups.

Many schools see themselves as drawing on multiple communities. In some cases the interviewees described multiple communities in terms of ethnic/racial groupings, religious groups, groupings based on socio-economic status, groupings based on the longevity of the community members on the site (e.g., 'established' families versus transient families), or grouping based on the families' places of residence (e.g., 'town' versus 'country'). It is clear from the interviews that each of these variations on the term 'community' has grown into a shared understanding, and a way of talking, among the on-site school staff at least, and often among parent groups as well, on each specific site.

#### *4.1.1.6 Schools have different kinds of relationships with their communities*

The assumption that school-community contact is always a good thing and more of it is always even better is not supported by the interviews we conducted with school staff and community members. Some schools go through periods in which their relationships with individual and collective community members are troubled. Sometimes this trouble arises from misunderstandings about clear lines of professional roles and responsibilities.

The research team encountered strong differences in the levels of trust between school staff and community members (expanded in II.4 below). Sometimes these differences arose from perceived factionalism between parents or other community groups (discussed again in Point II.2.6 below). In other cases the school staff was urgently trying to increase the strength and breadth of their community relations.

#### *4.1.1.7 Students behaving in school*

Many participants in the interview study connected 'good' and 'bad' behaviour in schools with cultural practices. On that basis, interviewees connected better student behaviour with better school-community relations. Often educators related this to the differing ways that diverse groups bring up their children with regard to:

- gender relations
- deference to adults
- the questioning of adults
- religious tolerance and sensitivity
- the kinds of knowledge, from in and out of school, that are valuable and useful.

#### *4.1.1.8 Community-school involvement differs in amount and in kind*

Interviewees, school personnel and community members alike, reported that they were not getting involved in the school for reasons relating to particular cultural customs. For example, members of some cultural/ethnic groups reported particular cultural norms about communication and cultural hierarchy to the effect that 'one should not question teachers', or even be seen to be implying some questioning by being involved in the school beyond volunteering.

In parents' and community members' decisions about becoming involved with the school, and about the extent and type of involvement, the following were said to be important:

#### *4.1.1.9 Enjoyment*

Some parents want their involvement with school to be fun. They get involved because they think it is part of sharing and enjoying their children's lives.

#### *4.1.1.10 Their children's academic advancement*

For some parents the only rationale for school involvement is their children's academic advancement, and the only activities in which they will become involved are those that directly relate to this.

#### *4.1.1.11 Short-term commitment*

Some parents get involved with teachers and schools on the basis of attending one-off events (e.g., NAIDOC week). These may relate to the academic advancement of their children (e.g., parent reading or homework help nights), and/or they may be socially enjoyable. But these parents may not seek out more in-depth or long-term involvement with the school.

#### *4.1.1.12 School personnel want long-term, project-based community involvement*

Teachers and school leaders report being generally dissatisfied with parental or community involvement that is sporadic or 'one-off'. They see such events as useful mainly to the extent that they create settings for contact and open up the possibility of more extended engagement–communication, collaboration. With regard to the other ways in which parents and other community members could become involved, continuity was regarded as important especially in divided or struggling communities. Some parents reported that they understood this but that their work and family commitments made extended involvement difficult.

#### *4.1.1.13 What school personnel think about parents' home lives is important to parents*

Parents, and some school personnel, were concerned that some teachers and school leaders took the view that parents 'do basic parenting' and that is all; that is, that no educative work is happening in homes or other community sites. Further, it became clear that many teachers see students' home lives as lacking, even though they

acknowledged that some parents may try to instill high expectations of students' learning. The research team found these perceptions of students' homes specifically relating to:

- valuing education
- motivating student to learn
- supporting literacy and numeracy
- providing general care for children.

#### *4.1.1.14 The borderlines need to be more flexible*

School personnel reported to the research team that the activities least likely to attract community involvement relate to academic work, the curriculum, and work in the classroom. This they attribute to a lack of confidence on the part of parents and other community members on these matters. The research team was also informed that many teachers feel uninformed about community customs, events, services and ongoing interests and activities. Many teachers reported that they wanted schools to provide them, more specifically and formally, with information about the local community (including, but not exclusively, services), for example, via handbooks, organised talks, and induction programs.

#### *4.1.1.15 Rapid change is now normal*

The large majority of the school personnel and the community members who were interviewed told the research team that the local communities around them were experiencing unprecedented degrees of change – that education itself was changing in its forms and its value, and in the extent to which it adequately prepares young people to be workers and citizens. A sense of 'movement' characterised much of the talk: movement of community groups, movement of curriculum, and movement of teachers into, out of, and within the school system.

### 4.1.2 Summary

To summarise, findings most relevant to this project from the Phase 1 interviews across the full range of schools are these:

1. the schools visited are engaged in a wide range of activities relating to the improvement and maintenance of school-community relations

2. school-community relations are of general concern to both school personnel and community members; that is, participants interviewed took seriously the educational and social consequences of good versus poor school-community relations

3. school personnel and community members alike indicated high levels of commitment to the improvement of school-community relations, but this commitment took different forms on different sites

4. for the most part, pastoral, communicational and volunteering forms of involvement were the most commonly discussed

5. each school site has developed its own way of talking about the actual and preferred ways in which schools and communities and should be involved with one another, and the moral aspects of this involvement

6. similarly, community members on each site have developed distinctive discourses about school-community relations

7. the notion that teachers should have some systematic way of researching their communities, preferably soon upon their arrival in a community, was supported by the school personnel and community members interviewed

8. a set of explicit guidelines such as those envisaged for the Community Inquiry Framework was regarded as potentially useful; these could include guidelines regarding the need to know and understand current practices and attitudes in the community, recommended 'guiding questions' and strategies for finding out answers

9. interventions for these sites will need to vary considerably from site to site in light of variations in the history of school-community relations on that site, the demographic of the community, the needs of the students, and a number of other factors that arose on each site

## 4.2 The case summaries

This section contains the major elements of the findings of the project[4]. It contains brief case reports for each of the sites.

The reports are organised under the following headings, the:

1. setting of the school and its community is described, including data drawn from each school's 'situational report analysis' to the NSW Department of Education and Communities
2. conclusions from the Phase 1 interviews specific to that school and community are summarised
3. process by which the Design-Based Interventions were developed are described, including the key question/s guiding the inquiry, and the more general goals and aspirations of the participants
4. method of implementation is provided, summarising the key activities, including ongoing review processes
5. main findings are described: What did they find? Did they modify and/or regroup as they went along? What were their conclusions about the school and

[4] Three of the original 12 schools dropped out of the project at various points for a variety of reasons, and one school began its involvement late in the project, resulting in a 4- rather than a 6-week intervention period.

the community? What other outcomes or by-products were derived from the research
6. recommendations and implications are summarised, the "ways forward"
7. conclusions specifically relating to the use of the CIF are presented.

### 4.2.1 DD High School

#### *4.2.1.1 The school and its community*

DD High School is located in the western suburbs of an urban centre. At the time of this project it had a student enrolment of about 350. The school is growing, with Year 7 the largest cohort in the school and the expectation that this growth will continue in the coming years.

In 2009, the school became partially selective, with one Year 7 selective class of 25 students. The plan is to enrol about 30 selective students each year. It is estimated by the principal that by:

> *"2015 nearly one third of students will be in the selective stream" (School case notes)*

The school consists of 30 staff across 5 faculties. 30 per cent of teaching staff come from Indian and South African backgrounds. The school receives National Partnership funding from the 'Low SES School Communities' Australian Government scheme and Priority Schools Programs funding from NSW State Government. Over 50 per cent of students enrolled in the school have language backgrounds other than English.

#### *4.2.1.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

One result of the school's current growth in student numbers with the addition of the new selective stream and gifted and talented program is that the school is now drawing from a much larger catchment–43 public schools. Interviews with school staff revealed that this had the potential to place increased pressure on teachers to know more about the community/ies these catchment schools represented. Teachers reported that the school is welcoming to parents and has positive relationships with non-parent community groups in the community including police, local industries, ABN (Australian Business Network), Rotary, Toastmasters, and others. The parents interviewed, however, appeared anxious about what they could contribute to the school. The P&C, although active, is small and has little parental involvement in school life.

Both community members and school staff referred to the cultural diversity among the student population. A number of educationally relevant issues were seen by interviewees to relate to ethnic customs and cultural norms. In particular, curriculum and assessment were discussed as less relevant to parents than they should be, and the school's expectations concerning behaviour were seen not always to match expectations from home and community.

#### *4.2.1.3 Development of inquiry*

The school personnel decided to focus their design-based research (DBR) on the selective class (7S). This contained students identified as having exceptional academic potential, but language diversity presented obstacles. Two teachers, their English and geography teachers, became involved in the project with a focus on improving reading comprehension, an area identified as a weakness for these particular students. The

teachers were interested in whether the introduction of community texts would improve students' motivation, ability to relate, and comprehension skills. Such texts also raised the possibility that parents might take part in reading support, along with the prospect of teachers' finding out information or attitudes in the students' community lives. The research question for the project was finalised as: *What are effective ways teachers can find out about the home literacy practices of their students? How can they recruit such findings, and the texts relating to them, into their classroom activities*?

#### *4.2.1.4 Method/Intervention*

The research questions were concerned with the ways teachers can find out about home literacy practices. The actual intervention developed was more focused on classroom practice and student literacy skills. The baseline data were collected in the form of the Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies, which identifies reading levels for individual students. After these assessments were collected, each student developed a literacy goal and a plan for achieving this. The English teacher then conducted a survey with the students to identify their preferred method of sourcing community information and the kinds of community texts the students engage with. Over 50 per cent of students regularly used the newspaper as a source of community information and over 50 per cent preferred to use the Internet to access information.

Based on these findings, and on the common curriculum between English and geography, the local newspaper website was chosen as a focus community text for the term's work. It allowed the teachers to

> *"deliver literacy strategies in the given time frame*" and
>
> *"for students to engage with events in the local community" (School case notes).*

Activities incorporating the community text included:

- a blog that required students to read articles from the newspaper website and comment on the blog
- the newspaper website was the basis for reading lessons
- the English teacher liaised with a representative from the newspaper and the students entered a design-an-ad competition; the winning student had their advertisement published in the newspaper
- newspaper articles dealing with geographic issues in the human and physical environment of the local area became the focus of the geography lessons.

In order to establish how the intervention was proceeding, the students participated in a 'words in context' activity using two articles from the local newspaper. At the conclusion of the unit of work, students were re-assessed using the Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies employed to collect the baseline data.

#### *4.2.1.5 Findings*

Findings from the midpoint and completion data demonstrated that many of the students in 7S were still not performing to the levels expected of selective students. Comprehension of words in context was seen as an area requiring extra attention and

this was still the case at the completion of the project. Student motivation, however, seemed to be increased with the use of community texts. The students' participation in the blog produced a lot of writing and engaged students in both local events and literacy practices. Reflections from the teachers involved in the project indicated that the activities using the local newspaper

> *'allowed students to engage with material relevant to their own lives' (School case notes),*

which led to increased participation and motivation.

Significantly, and in response to the research question, the teacher participants of this project found it useful as it broadened their thinking about classroom resources. Through their participation in the project, they looked outside the school to find solutions to problems in their classrooms, in this case relating to motivation or weak literacy skills. In the case notes compiled by the teachers, they stated:

> *A challenge for [the school] will always be the diverse nature of our school community. It is also a challenge to interact with the parents of our students, in particular our selective class'.*

Using a common community text during class work was successful for these teachers as it allowed them to conduct their work in more relevant and inclusive ways.

The English teacher also indicated that through her engagement in the project she had come to know more about what is happening in the local community. She lived some distance from the school and in the past had relied on the principal or community notes for information. Using the community text not only gave her more information, but also allowed her to discuss stories with her students and gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives of their community. The geography teacher reflected on a deeper understanding of research-led teaching as a result of the project. He also became more aware of his students' reading habits and expressed the hope that he could use this information to improve motivation in reading.

It became clear to the participants that the data collection methods for this project were not necessarily appropriate to answer the original stated research question, which was less about student achievement and more about teacher inquiry and practice. The interview and case notes, however, demonstrated that the participating teachers did find effective ways to link students' out-of-school experiences with classroom activities. However, the planned intervention did not provide many opportunities for teachers to explore students' home literacy practices.

At the completion of this project the school project team led a professional development session for the whole school. In response to this, four teachers have sought (and been given) permission to use blogs in their classrooms. By the completion of Term 4, 2010, 6 of the 30 staff members in DD High School had begun regularly using blogs and other community texts as teaching and learning tools in their lessons.

#### *4.2.1.6 Conclusions and ways forward*

Despite not meeting target improvement in comprehension skills, it was felt by the participants at DD High School that the increase in student motivation in the lessons using the local newspaper

> *"increased the likelihood that continuing the use of community texts, whether in the same form or different forms, will assist with the growth of literacy skills" (School case notes).*

The school expressed the intention to continue planning to use community texts in English and, where possible, across curriculum areas.

The school opted to use the Community Inquiry Framework as a general guide only. They felt the guidelines it currently contained were too broad to be used in their setting, and that the time constraints placed on the participating teachers for this project did not permit them to modify it to suit the school's needs.

### 4.2.2 DU Public School

#### *4.2.2.1 The school and its community*

DU Public School is located in South Western Sydney. It has an enrolment of about 850 students. At the time of the project, there were 62 staff members, 35 of whom are early career teachers. 98 per cent of the students come from language backgrounds other than English. The major language group was Arabic. Other significant groups included Chinese, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders. There were 30 more language groups represented, with some students being the only representative from their country of origin. Five Aboriginal students were enrolled in the school.

DU was classified as eligible for both National Partnership and Priority Schools Programs funding due to the low socio-economic status of the area. More than 65 per cent of families received financial assistance from the government. There was also an increasing number of single-parent families involved in the school.

#### *4.2.2.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

Initial data collection found that the school was establishing an increasingly positive reputation in the community. Parents were generally positive about the school, believing that the teachers were effective and, more specifically, that the school achieved pleasing results in standardised reading assessments.

At the commencement of this project the school was already highly active in offering development/support programs for parents such as workshops in literacy, numeracy and parenting skills. As a result, parents expressed the belief that the many parents who choose not to be involved in the school do so because they trust that the school is doing 'the right thing' regarding the education of their children.

Teachers in the school, however, expressed a desire to see more open days for the community to see what goes on in classrooms and, as a possible consequence, more parent participation in classrooms. There was a belief that many parents do not get involved in the 'core business' of the school in the classroom because of language or cultural barriers. School staff wanted to use the TRC project to strengthen their understanding of what parents want and to increase parents' abilities to communicate clearly and more often with the school.

#### *4.2.2.3 Development of inquiry*

The school project team viewed the TRC project as an opportunity not only to explore the strengths and issues concerning current home, school and community relationships, but also to provide the high percentage of early career teachers at the school with opportunities to deepen their understanding of the community. 'The school's focus was to identify strategies that would support teachers, new to DU school, to gain knowledge of the culturally and linguistically diverse wider school community and then use this knowledge to: a) identify the parent/community needs and expectations of the school; b) further develop strategies for increasing parent/community participation in school life' (School case notes). The school project team included an early career teacher, new to the school, the school leaders (principal and deputies), the community languages teacher, a parent, and the PSP partnership officer and PSP consultant.

The research questions developed for the project were: *How can the Community Inquiry Framework (CIF) support a teacher, new to DU PS, to find out about the wider community? How can this knowledge of the community be used to: a) identify parent/community needs and expectations of the school; b) inform the development of strategies for increasing parent/community participation in school life?* These questions were modified slightly as the CIF did not become available to the school until after the project had started. As a result, the school used Element 7 of the Institute of Teachers Professional Teaching Standards (*Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community*) to inform the development of the project and their data collection tools.

Alongside the need for new teachers to find out about the wider community, initial data collection suggested that the parents of the school wanted a greater understanding of the curriculum and how it was taught within Australian schools. The Community Languages teacher discussed this in her case notes:

> *'Upon reflection, it has become evident that the educational standard within countries of origin is substantially different from the expectations and curriculum within Australian schools. Based on these findings, [the school] has endeavoured to implement programs which will both assist the parents in understanding the way the curriculum is developed and implemented within our school and also support them in assisting their child with their learning. Our findings have also suggested that some parents feel reluctant to communicate their concerns with teachers as they are hindered by the language barrier and their lack of knowledge about the curriculum' (Teacher case notes).*

As a result of these findings, the school used a series of school-led activities or programs both to encourage parental involvement and to increase communication between new teachers and the wider community.

#### *4.2.2.4 Method/Intervention*

The school project team felt that many positive programs and strategies were already being implemented by the school, but that many members of the school community (including staff, parents, and the community more broadly) might not be aware of them or know how to access them. Prior to making decisions about the implementation of new programs, the school felt it important to use the DBR to

establish deeper understanding of the programs already running and their effect on parent involvement, student learning, and teachers' curriculum decision-making. In order to achieve this, the school held focus group interviews with a range of people from the community, ensuring diversity in language and cultural backgrounds.

The early career teacher involved in the project also developed a teacher survey to "gather some information about what the current teachers already know, their feelings and attitudes toward community involvement and about their feelings toward the level of professional development and support provided by the school about the community" (survey analysis). Finally, the school conducted an audit of current programs and activities that took place in Term 3 2010 and that included community engagement. The results of these activities were used to implement new programs, to refine or extend current successful programs, and to develop new programs for 2011.

#### *4.2.2.5 Findings*

The findings for this study fall into two categories: 1) identification of parent/community needs leading to increased parental involvement with and understanding of school practices, and 2) the development of teachers' deeper knowledge and understanding of the community.

According to the school project team

> *'The major success of the TRC project is that it has confirmed the range and quality of programs currently offered to support parent participation and has also confirmed that more opportunities need to be provided for parents and the wider community to share their experiences and culture with the [school] staff" (School case notes).*

Table 2 on page 39 outlines many of the programs audited by the Community Languages teacher, including participants and outcomes.

| Workshops | Number of workshops | Number of parents attending | Outcome for parents | Outcome for students |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents English Classes | 1 hour class per week | 30 parents | Better understanding of the school culture. Improved communication between teachers and parents | Better communication ensures parent/child concerns are addressed |
| Literacy Workshops | 5 | 40+ parents | Good understanding of the literacy teaching and learning at our school. | Receiving the support needed at home |
| Mathematics workshops | 4 | 40+ parents | Improved understanding of mathematical concepts and teaching strategies. | Receiving the support needed at home |
| Parents excursions | 1 per year | 78 parents | Positive perception of excursions and the benefits of the learning experience for their children | Better chance to participate in excursions/camps. |
| Early Literacy classes | 1 hour class per week 6 students/parents | 77 children and 77 parents | Parents will be able to identify the importance of language teaching and learning from an early | Familiarisation of school activities before starting school |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | in each session | | age. | |
| Play Groups | 2 hours per week | 5 parents per week | Improved parental involvement in their child's learning. | Develop social skills |
| Kindergarten Transition | 4 sessions<br><br>(1 hour and 30 minutes each) | 88 students<br><br>Most parents attended parent information sessions | Improved parents' expectations and involvement in their child's learning.<br><br>Exposed the parents to all stages of the learning process that their child will encounter during their Public school life. | Will have a smooth transition from preschool to Kindergarten |

**Table 2: Audit**

**of DU School's Community Activities**

Table 2 demonstrates the large numbers of parents undertaking programs in the school or volunteering their time for activities such as excursions. Not included in Table 2 are one-off cultural activities in which the school is also involved. These include a video of school staff discussing their own cultural backgrounds and how their families came to Australia, and the development of a school cookbook, involving both students and parents, and incorporating recipes from different cultural groups. During the audit, the scope of the school's additional programs and strategies was realised. In order to maintain these programs, the school decided to allocate a position of Team Leader–Parent Participation whose role included development and maintenance of community programs.

The staff survey provided strong evidence for a more formal and detailed induction process that would introduce new teachers to the wider community, its needs and expectations. Although "the results of this survey indicate that whilst most teachers feel confident communicating with parents and the community" (Survey analysis), most teachers suggested that they did not use the resources of the community and almost all respondents agreed that they would like more information as to how to involve the wider community in their teaching practices.

The combined findings from the survey and audit identified a range of strategies that would support a teacher new to the school in coming to know and understand the wider school community. The following strategies were successfully implemented as part of the TRC intervention:

- organising and conducting a cultural orientation program including visits to the mosque, Pacific community church, Vietnamese temple, local restaurants, local library and Youth Association
- matching new teachers with a mentor who has a deep knowledge of the richness and diversity of the community
- providing access to a community directory.

The following strategies were identified through the data collection, particularly the staff survey, and were developed for implementation in 2011:

- inviting community groups to address staff and students: Islamic Council, Pacific and Aboriginal community leaders, religious and community leaders
- providing more opportunities for class open days
- creating an orientation booklet/DVD for new teachers
- employing a Community Liaison Officer
- instituting "training sessions" for classroom volunteers
- meeting parents in venues other than the school.

According to the school project team, critical to the success of the TRC project and community participation in general, was the willingness of all members of the school community to take the already strong participation even further.

> *"The TRC has also enriched the concept of "community partnerships", recognising that community is broader than just parents, students and teachers: local businesses, places of worship, sporting clubs are all part of the wider concept of community" (School case notes).*

#### *4.2.2.6 Conclusions and ways forward*

The school identified several 'next steps' that had been made possible by the increased knowledge and understanding of community needs and participation in the school. First, the project findings would be shared with all staff for discussion and action. Second, the community directory would also be made available to staff and parents. Third, staff will explore the possibility of meeting parents in venues other than the school.

With regard to ways forward in staffing, the Team Leader–Parent Participation role implemented during the project would be maintained throughout 2011. The possibility of an additional Community Liaison Officer position for the school would be explored.

With regard to ways forward in programs, in consideration of the findings from the survey and forums, the school will develop a program for classroom helpers, ensuring they understand the requirements of being a good helper in the classroom, their role in discipline, and knowledge of Child Protection and the school's OH&S policies. Also, due to the success of the early literacy program (77 parents and 77 students meeting for one hour per week), this model would be used to develop an early numeracy program for pre-schoolers.

As the Community Inquiry Framework was not available in time to develop the survey, the Professional Teaching Standards of the NSW Institute of Teachers was used as a guide for the questions. The school project team, however, provided the following feedback on the CIF:

> *"The TRC Community Inquiry Framework could be used to develop a thorough and detailed induction/training manual or program that would assist teachers to build their knowledge and understanding of the culture of the school and the community. The guiding questions could be used to provide a structure to the information included in such a manual or program. It could also help to scaffold the understanding of new teachers about what type of*

*information may be relevant and how to find, gather and use this information to inform and improve teaching and learning" (School case notes).*

### 4.2.3 VG Public School

#### *4.2.3.1 The school and its community*

VG Public School is situated in an area made up of 60 per cent of families in public housing with no other income besides government unemployment allowances. Of the remaining families, 25 per cent are in private rental housing and 15 per cent in purchased homes. According to school records, 50 per cent of enrolled students live in high-density housing. More than half of the students in the school live in single parent or carer homes.

55 per cent of the students in VG PS have a first language other than English. The school has 60 enrolled students and 3 full time teachers and a teaching principal, 1.2 full time administration staff and 1.30 FTE support staff. The school also has a Schools as Community Centre (SACC) on the school grounds, with one fulltime facilitator. Although not directly employed by, or responsible to, the school, the SACC facilitator works closely with the principal and has been actively involved in school affairs.

#### *4.2.3.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

Initial data collection in the school included interviews with the principal, 3 teachers, and a large group of parents. The initial interviews highlighted the positive relationships between the principal and parents/community members. The teachers, on the other hand, felt they had less connection with parents or the community.

Teachers were aware that the school has strong links with a number of community service providers but they themselves had minimal knowledge about these and had little or no contact with any of them. The teachers interviewed suggested that they would welcome a handbook about the service providers in which they could use to gain greater understanding of the area for parents' reference.

The parents interviewed were very positive about the school, indicating that:

- it has strong community links
- it is a very caring place, partly because of its small size
- its small population results in smaller class sizes and greater opportunities for their children.

But both parents and teachers were aware that the school had a 'bad name' in some sections of the community. They were trying ways of improving its 'image'. Parents particularly expressed concern that VG PS needed to hold or increase enrolments because

> *"it would leave a real hole in the community to lose this school" (School case notes).*

The parents suggested that positive media stories may help this, as well as parent word of mouth.

There was the perception that the area was changing, essentially becoming more gentrified, and the parents considered that the school might benefit from more focus on community languages and thus engaging specific cultural groups. In particular, a stated goal was to connect productively with the increasing number of Korean and Chinese families moving into the area.

#### *4.2.3.3 Development of inquiry*

The principal had been involved in the school and community for many years and as a result was both trusted and known in the community. She was also considered to know a lot about the local community, including available services, families, and other related issues. There was a perception held by the principal, however, that the teachers at the school may be struggling to get to know the community and to develop the community's trust. A possible reason given for this was the recent high turnover of staff and the consequent prevalence of temporary staff.

The school became involved in the TRC project to:

- develop stronger links with the SACC, particularly in light of a recently appointed full time facilitator

- form an official community group that included services, community representatives and the school to advocate for the community in order to promote a positive image and celebrate the achievements

- encourage the teaching staff to become more familiar with and involved in the community, so that they can inform parents of community facilities and make stronger connection with the students in their classrooms.

It was decided that the DBR in this school would focus on the community group working together to produce a community directory for the families in the area. It was also hoped that this would aid teachers understanding of what is available in the community and how they may access these as resources in their classrooms or otherwise for their students.

The school's research question for the TRC project was finalised as *How can [The School] strengthen community relations through interagency connections?* The project was led by the principal and the SACC facilitator, who collected the data to support the development of the 'VG Connected' directory through interagency collaboration.

#### *4.2.3.4 Method/Intervention*

The project had two central elements. First, the principal initiated and became involved in a community working group called 'VG School Connected' which is a joint project between a local municipal council, a local community building team, a local Community Drug Action Team, VG Connection, and the school. This group consisted of representatives from local families, the police, the library, the school, local churches, the local municipal council (who also provided funding) and the SACC facilitator. The second element of the project was focused on one new teacher to the school who used the resources of the community group in conjunction with the CIF in an attempt to understand the community and students better.

At the commencement of the project, there was a need to identify what services the community were aware of, what services they saw as relevant, and specifically why they felt knowing more about the local community would be beneficial. Surveys were conducted with all school staff, 7 parents from the school, 4 parents from a local Korean parent group (who are not part of the school community), and 12 parents from the playgroup run by SACC, some of which were Defence families who rely on the SACC to link them into community services.

Among the key findings from the surveys was that parents and teachers felt they would get more involved in community programs if they had deeper knowledge of what was available. It was also evident that parents and teachers felt their students/children would be more active and involved in the community, more motivated and less bored if parents knew about suitable community events and if teachers were more involved and knowledgeable about community services.

From these survey results, The "VG Connected" decided to develop a directory of services in the area. The group met regularly at the school and canvassed more than 90 organisations to be involved. The 'VG Connected' directory was 'a directory of local organisation, businesses and relevant emergency services telephone numbers. It

aims to improve connection between organisations and residents in the local suburb and highlights the many positive attributes of VG' (Launch pamphlet). The directory was completed during the school's involvement in the TRC project and launched in November 2010 at a local Community Hall.

#### *4.2.3.5 Findings*

The participants summarised the main findings of the project in these ways:

- teachers increased their awareness of student out-of-school activities and local contacts for family support services

- an increased number of families, particularly newcomers, accessed the SACC, with the hope that this connection will raise the profile of the school and increase student enrolment in the school. The SACC facilitator began working with the Priority Schools Programs partnership officer to improve the transitions into school

- more than 100 community members and workers became involved in the directory. Through this, the principal gained greater awareness and access to community activities. An example of this was the Scout Outreach program, which was offered to students and held on school premises after hours. Over half of the students enrolled in the school attended the 10 week program. Teachers noted that an additional benefit of this was a change in students' improved behaviour and increased motivation

- local youth groups noted increased participation from students in the school

- more parents became involved in the school, generally as volunteers to organise and distribute the directory, and spread information about enrolment processes.

A further success of the project, according to the participants, was the general ability of the community group to become advocates for the community and become involved in community needs. There was a concerted effort by all participants to promote the area and dispel the perception that "there were social problems among residents" (Article in local newspaper, May 2010). Throughout 2010 the school made stronger links with the media and three positive articles about either the school or the VG Connected directory (see appendix for article *Best Foot Forward: Proud residents of VG fight back; Scouting For Skills;* and *Small Community Full of Delights*). This has led to more positive perceptions of the school and community more generally.

Alongside the success of the directory, a new teacher at the school used the CIF to develop deeper understanding of the community and her students. She used the guiding questions to write detailed profiles of her students, including their lives outside of school. Using the school's connections with community, she invited local community members such as the Member for Parliament, the librarian and a youth worker to visit her class and talk to her students.

*'By using the framework as a guide I got to know the community more quickly and could see the reason why the principal involved the school in many community projects' (School case notes).*

#### *4.2.3.6 Ways forward*

The VG Connections interagency group is now, at the time of writing, an established part of the school and community. It is a key group, used by local government to keep the community informed of issues and projects. For the principal of the school one of the most important outcomes of this project is that it is now a formally established role of the school principal to be part of this interagency community group. This means that for future principals of the school, there will not only be an expectation that they will participate in the interagency community group, but the group will provide them with information about and access to issues, people and places important to the community the school serves. In addition to this, the directory will be integrated into new principal and staff induction kits. There is a commitment to keep the directory updated for the community.

### 4.2.4 NC Public School

#### *4.2.4.1 The school and its community*

NC Public School is in a culturally diverse suburban community and 94 per cent of students are from language backgrounds other than English, with Vietnamese being the largest cultural and linguistic group in the school. At the time of the project it had a total student enrolment of about 660. The school has 8 non-teaching staff and 48 teaching staff, 30 of whom are experienced teachers. The school enjoys high staff retention rates with, on average, two thirds of the staff staying at the school until promotion leads to a transfer.

#### *4.2.4.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

Initial data collection at the school involved interviews with the principal, 4 teachers (2 early career and 2 experienced) and a large group of parents, many of whom were active members of the school's P&C. The initial data collection generated generally positive views of the school's commitment to strengthening school-community relationships. Among the parents and teachers, there was particularly strong support for the current principal, who is considered to be aware and responsive to student and parent needs. This is evident in the high participation of parents in weekly assemblies, P&C meetings and school-organised courses/forums for parents.

Despite this positive rapport with the community, language is seen by both school personnel and parents to be a significant barrier for communication between parents and teachers, and for parental involvement in school. Parents also discussed cultural issues as a barrier at times, including concerns about their rights to contact the school or approach a teacher, regardless of the availability of the school's interpreters.

There was high parent participation in activities that were considered fun and celebratory. As a result, assemblies and awards days were well attended. There was also high participation rates at P&C meetings. The feeling among staff and school leaders is that the parent group was extremely keen to advance the school's wellbeing. But a concern was also expressed that, as valuable as the school leadership's guidance was, the P&C could be more proactive. This is potentially attributable to language or confidence issues.

The school personnel had the goal of involving parents more in the classroom. The benefits of this were expressed to be exposure of parents to the happenings of the classroom so they gain a greater understanding of their child's education and connecting children's school and home life more successfully. Teachers made the suggestion that involving parents in numeracy rather than literacy activities may lessen the language barriers and give parents confidence.

#### *4.2.4.3 Development of inquiry*

The school became involved in the project in an effort to increase the participation of parents in classroom work. Despite regarding their relationships with parents and the wider community as good, the school wanted the community to be involved more deeply in the pedagogical processes of schooling. It was hoped that this would lead to greater understanding of what happens in classrooms, and also allow parents to gain confidence in their ability to successfully communicate with school personnel. The CIF was used by the project team to help assess the appropriateness of their planned intervention. A parent survey was undertaken to establish parents' levels of confidence in working in the classroom in a variety of areas (e.g., reading, maths, sports, etc), and general attitudes towards schooling (e.g., whether they had positive school experiences). The school's research question for the TRC project was: *How do we build a team of parents who have the confidence, language skills and commitment to assist in classrooms and resource making ventures?*

#### *4.2.4.4 Method/Intervention*

The project team identified three areas that parents felt they were confident in or wanted to learn about. The school then developed a 'Classroom parent helper training program' in these three areas–mathematics, speech/articulation and reading. For their training, parents participated in all three areas, plus a child protection forum. The program consisted of 6 2-hour sessions in Term 2, 2010. Approximately 25 parents participated in the training program. At the completion of the program the school organised a graduation ceremony for parents to acknowledge their commitment and success.

In Term 3, 2010, 12 of the 25 parents opted for or were allocated one specific area in which they became a parent helper in the classroom. All three areas (Mathematics, speech and reading) had parent helpers, and interviews were conducted with all parent helpers and participating teachers. Because a significant number of students had been identified as 'at-risk' of failure in reading after two terms of school, assessments for data collection focused mainly on reading levels. Parents attended lessons 3 days per week and worked one-on-one with students in the library. 20 students identified as 'at-risk' were chosen to receive help from parents in reading. Parent helpers were allocated a 'resource box' which included classroom resources, information about student learning and records of the students with whom they worked. These resources were funded in part by the P&C who contributed $3000 for new children's books.

#### *4.2.4.5 Findings*

At the conclusion of the project, eight of the twenty students receiving parent help in reading were no longer considered 'at–risk' of failure. A further six students had improved significantly, and if they continue to progress at the same rate, would no longer be 'at-risk' of failure going into Year 1. Six students remain in the risk of failure category and will be included in specialist support programs in Year 1.

Although these students had not made the same gains, they have all improved in sight vocabulary. The teachers also noted that all the students

> *"have made many gains, particularly in the affective domains of confidence and attitude" (teacher case study notes).*

Midpoint evaluation of the project consisted on regular meetings with the project team, and a parent meeting was called to

> *highlight, address and respond to concerns. Parents' suggestions were incorporated into ongoing practice' (teacher case study notes).*

Parents expressed the need for one single contact person in the school, with time available, to meet with the parent helpers to address any concerns or operational issues. The deputy principal took this role.

One of the key successes of the project, according to the principal, was the response from parents. The majority of parents who participated in the project have expressed a wish for the program, not only to continue, but to expand. The parents have volunteered to take a more leadership role in the program if new parents are introduced in 2011. The school project team has also noted a significant increase in confidence among the parents. Two of the parents have decided, because of their involvement in the project, to enrol in TAFE courses in order to expand their ability to contribute more meaningfully to the workforce (Interview notes). One grandparent involved in the project has recruited retirees in the community, some of whom do not have any connection to the school, to become involved in the program in 2011. This response demonstrates the ability for a school to become part of a wider social movement within the community.

#### *4.2.4.6 Conclusions and ways forward*

The TRC program was regarded as a success and, as with other sites, its positive outcomes were not always restricted to those predicted at the outset. There was strong support from school leaders, parents and teachers to continue the program into 2011. The training program was to be re-run for new parent helpers, and there are plans to expand the program into other areas for parents who have already been involved in 2010. After seeing the success of this program, many other teachers in the school expressed interest in working with parent helpers.

One significant challenge has been the increased workload for the school leaders involved, particularly the deputy principal (Timperley & Robinson, 2000). The plan is that National Partnership funding be used to employ a community liaison officer, and it is hoped that this program will be incorporated into their role.

### 4.2.5 OG Central School

#### *4.2.5.1 The school and its community*

OG Central School is situated about 75 kilometres from the nearest mid-sized town in the central western region of New South Wales. The community serves a mixture of low SES families and wealthier landowners. Local industries comprise various forms of agriculture and more recently a timber mill. At the time of the project drought and limited employment opportunities had affected the local community, with many residents relying on welfare.

The school is the largest employer in town. Other services in the community include a Returned Services League Club, a Lions Club and a bowling club, all which have provided various forms of support to the school. In this small isolated community, access to support agencies is limited. For instance, there is only a weekly visit from a doctor and 3 week waiting period for services such as those provided by the NSW Department of Community Services. There are also no public transport services available in the community. Many teachers live outside the community. The school is a central school that has only recently begun servicing students from Kindergarten all the way through to Year 12. At the time of the study, there were 120 students enrolled and 12 teaching staff across all year levels.

Most of the teachers have taught at the school for a long time, while on the secondary program there are a number of new-scheme teachers as well as a few more experienced teachers.

#### *4.2.5.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

Initial data collection at the school involved interviews with 3 teachers, a group of students and 16 parent/community members. The interviews with the community members generated a generally positive response about the school and the experience of living in the community. Concerns were expressed, however, about the number of new teachers in the school and the lack of 'local people' working in the school. Parents and community members expressed a belief that, if teachers wanted to connect with students and parents, they should live in the town and make an effort to understand the 'social world of the local community' (Initial data report).

On certain points there was disagreement between teachers and parents. Parents expressed concerns that many teachers do not understand their students' lives outside school. This, some parents argued, was particularly the case for those students' who live on farms; they may be required to work or be absent from school for extended periods, in particular during the shearing season. Several teachers, for their part, expressed disappointment at the lack of parental involvement in the school, particularly from lower SES parents and local famers.

Teachers expressed a preference for a more formalised school policy on school-community relationships. They indicated that they thought this would be particularly beneficial for teachers new to the school. The new teachers interviewed felt ill equipped to engage with the community, often relying on the views of staff who had been at the school for a long time. There was also a suggestion that teachers would benefit from a 'skills and resources audit' of the community, to discover local resources that they could draw on in their classrooms.

An issue discussed by most interviewees concerned the lack of broad experiences available to the students in this isolated community. Some teachers and parents worried that this led to a lack of ambition. Members of communities–both immediate and broader–were seen as needing to connect more with the school in order to inform students about future opportunities and the various careers they could pursue after school.

In interviews with parents and community members, this issue was tied to the teachers' need to connect more fully with the community. There was a concern expressed that the school was not capitalising on the community's resources and that

the school was accessing the community only for material or volunteering support rather than as potential educational resources. Community members indicated that they wanted to see the local electrician, hairdresser, beautician, and so on, become more involved in show-casing the career potential of their work to the students.

#### *4.2.5.3 Development of the inquiry*

When the school became involved in the project, their initial focus was about improving learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. In the planning phase of the DBR, the school used CIF to gather baseline data on current perceptions and understanding of the school and community. All 12 teachers and 15-20 community members were surveyed or participated in a parent forum. The school found the results 'startling' (School case notes):

> *'It became apparent that this [the learning outcomes focus] was not appropriate. What the community wanted was a more generalised approach to learning – specifically more learning and opportunities around CAREERS' (School case notes).*

The parents were positive about the teachers' work in the senior years but felt that the school needed to raise its public profile so community members were more aware of the opportunities in the school and, as a result, would keep their children in the school until Year 12 instead of sending them to the town 75 kilometres away.

As a result of this finding the school decided to focus the DBR on ways to improve school community relationships and, more specifically, on ways to integrate community expectations and requirements, especially around career education, with school expectations. The results of the CIF analysis also demonstrated the need to increase the expectations and understanding of the community among staff, particularly new staff.

The school's research question for the TRC project was finalised as: *How do we better utilise local knowledge and resources in our community to improve learning outcomes and to make school more relevant for our students?*

#### *4.2.5.4 Method/Intervention*

This research project can be seen in two phases: First, data collection was important to begin to answer the research question; and second, strategies and programs that use the improved understanding of local knowledge and resources were put in place to make school learning more connected with the students' lives outside school and post-school.

Once the baseline data were collected, the school developed a stronger idea of current staff perceptions of, and knowledge about the community. This made the school leaders

> *'realise that one of the key improvement outcomes for the next few years for the school have to be raising expectations and understanding around low SES families and students' (School case notes).*

In order to begin to develop strategies for this, the school used the parent and community member surveys and forums to develop a skill and resources audit of the

community. The school also made commitments to more professional learning for staff in the area of raising expectations of low SES students and families.

The baseline data collected from parents and community members gave the school a stronger indication of community perceptions of the school and the particular needs of families and students whom the school serves. This information changed the nature of the research to focus more on educating local students about future opportunities. The intervention planned by the school revolved around the introduction of a whole school integrated 'careers education' initiative. This included four separate events from Term 3, 2010 to Term 1, 2011:

1. Term 3, 2010: The school held a Parade Day that emphasised the careers that would be a focus of Education Week. All students were asked to attend the parade dressed as their future career.
2. Term 4, 2010: Year 8 goal-setting and values day was held at the local Returned Services Club.
3. Term 1, 2011: The school planned a whole-school Careers Day with local professionals, career mentors and guest speakers from outside the area discussing different careers. The plan is to have presentations, musical events, and workshop sessions. Students will be able to opt into a variety of sessions depending on their interests. The entire community, particularly parents, will be invited to attend.
4. Term 1, 2011: Staff will attend professional learning around careers education. The school is developing a matrix to help teachers plan, monitor and evaluate careers education within their curriculum area or year group. This matrix will be introduced at this session.

The introduction of a whole-school approach to careers education is the core outcome of the DBR on this site, but it is also hoped this will develop deeper connections between the teachers in the school and the local community.

#### *4.2.5.5 Findings*

As this is an ongoing intervention, final data is yet to be collected. However, mid-point data, provided by surveys, a parent forum and a situational analysis conducted by school staff, have led to a deeper understanding of student and community needs. The situational analysis of school-community relations conducted by the school noted that there was a

> *'lack of professional presence in town' (the school profile acknowledges teachers, shop owners, bee keepers, farmers and timber mill workers as the only professional role models). This understanding has resulted in 'changed practice at the school to include much more careers related and vocational education in the curriculum' (School case notes).*

Feedback from staff, students and the community regarding the careers parade and careers focus in Education Week was positive and school leaders have noted an improved communication between the community and staff.

#### *4.2.5.6 Ways forward*

The second phase of the project, in which the school's increased knowledge about community expectations and resources is applied, is ongoing. As outlined above, a careers day has been planned for Term 1, 2011. The school also aims to continue developing and refining the career matrix to monitor and evaluate more comprehensively the career education effort across the whole school. The school has also committed to two main areas of professional learning for staff in 2011: career education, and raising expectations around low SES families. The project team considered the CIF to be

*'the most useful piece of data we used/collected/analysed' (School case notes).*

The use of the CIF to guide data collection among staff and in the community led to deep and useful understanding of the school's current position in the community and the ways the school could do better in meeting the needs of the community it serves. It was noted that the CIF was edited to specifically suit the school's situation. The suggestion was that it would be necessary for most schools to modify the CIF to meet their specific needs.

### 4.2.6 VT Public School

#### *4.2.6.1 The school and its community:*

VT Public School is in the far western suburbs of an urban centre. At the time of the project the school had about 380 students, 17 full time classroom teachers and 3 non-teaching executive staff. The school was in a low socio-economic area and received both National Partnerships and PSP funding.

The staff participants in the TRC study included two Stage 1 classroom teachers who had been trained in Reading Recovery and oversaw the training of the parent tutors. These teachers' Year 1 and 2 classes were involved in the study. The acting Deputy Principal was responsible for the planning, liaison and co-ordination of the project. The principal was supportive of the project, and involved in many of the project team meetings.

#### *4.2.6.2 Phase 1 interviews*

Initial data collection at the school involved interviews with the principal, the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, 3 teachers and parent/community members. A generally positive account of school-community relationships was expressed by all interviewees on this site.

Initial interviews with teachers identified a need for community members to work alongside them in their classrooms. Parents interviewed supported this idea but reported difficulties due to time and travel constraints. This demonstrated the reciprocal relationship that the school enjoyed with the community. It showed a desire to move beyond the notion of parents as useful to schools for pastoral and volunteering functions, and acknowledges the communities' funds of knowledge and their potential contribution to student learning.

An ongoing challenge evident in the initial interviews was the schools' need to combat the negative stereotypes that often accompany the demographic pattern of their community. Features such as inadequate public transport and difficulties accessing services can make school-community involvement challenging. The school had previously been a site for a NSW government funded 'Schools as Community

Centres', but funding had ceased in 2007. The loss of this funding makes it difficult for new teachers to access community knowledge and for community members to gain access to the school.

#### *4.2.6.3 Development of the inquiry*

The school became involved in the TRC project because staff wanted to improve their partnerships with the parent body within the context of literacy and numeracy learning. The school is involved in the new National Partnerships funding scheme for low SES school communities, and this informed their decision to participate in the project. An extract from a teacher's journal describes the development of their research focus:

> *'We developed a reflection and planning matrix to use as a starting point for our research. We chose five strands (communication between home school and the community, school and classroom practices, how parents help their children to learn, parents learning about children's learning, and lastly, working with the community) Our matrix informed us where we believed we are now with each strand and how we can move to the next step.' (Teacher Journal)*

The project team went on to use the CIF to begin to develop a research plan. The research team sought information from staff, parents, and community members. The matrix developed by the project team was presented to a whole staff meeting, and the staff completed a survey to assist the project team assess the effectiveness of current school practices.

A parent forum was held with 13 parent and community members in attendance and a similar survey was conducted. It was evident from these surveys that parents wanted to be more involved in the school. The findings informed a meeting with the university research team, PSP partnership officer, and school research team. There was concern that a focus on literacy and numeracy was too broad and so a literacy focus was decided. The school's research question for the TRC project was finalised as: *How does working in partnership with parents improve student learning in reading at VT Public School?*

#### *4.2.6.4 Method/Intervention*

To answer the research question the team decided to involve parents more in the classroom. Stage 1 (Years K-2) was the focus and two Reading Recovery trained teachers were recruited as the main teacher participants. These teachers led training sessions for interested parents to become parent tutors. The sessions were aimed at increasing fluency and phrasing in early years readers. Fluency and phrasing were chosen because 'many children were lacking these skills. Often they were pointing when reading and focusing on one word at a time' (teacher journal). These skills were also identified as easy to develop and implement. As part of the training, teachers simplified the Reading Recovery materials for parents to use, in particular the materials relating to recording student achievement, to make them more accessible.

12 parents attended the training sessions in the last week of Term 2. From week 1, Term 3, parents began attending morning reading sessions in their allocated class and working with individual students nominated as needing support. The program was

organised so that at least one parent was in the classroom every morning (there were more often 2-3) to support the 1-hour reading program. The program ran for the whole of Term 3, 2010. At the conclusion of the program participants were issued with certificates and public thanks. Two parents expressed interest in continuing the program and were still working with the classes at the time of data collection. As one parent commented,

> *'you can see stars in the kids' eyes; they are so enthusiastic' (interview notes).*

School personnel and community members expressed the hope that this program would continue and expand in 2011.

#### *4.2.6.5 Findings*

Data was collected at three points during the program: 1) before the program commenced, to establish baseline data, 2) at the midpoint of the program, week 6 of Term 3, and 3) at the completion of the program. Data included information about student reading levels, parent and teacher surveys, and videos of implementation.

Students involved in the research showed more significant gains in Terms 3 and 4 (midpoint and completion data) than in Terms 1 or 2. Reading results also demonstrated that students involved in the project in addition to the Reading Recovery program made greater gains in Term 3 than non-Reading Recovery students. Results for Year 1 students showed that, in Terms 1 and 2, the average growth in reading levels was between 3.35 and 3.69. In Term 3 the growth in reading levels increased to 5.92. Reading Recovery students in Year 1, on average, improved 8 reading levels between Term 3 and Term 4.

Results for students in Year 2 showed that in Terms 1 and 2, before the commencement of the study, the average growth in reading levels was between 1.86 and 1.95 per student. In Term 3, while the program was running, reading levels increased on average 4.45 per student. Therefore significant larger gains were made in Term 3 than prior to the commencement of the project in Terms 1 and 2. It is important to note that, in addition to the program, the time allocated to reading was increased from 40 to 55 minutes in Term 3. This suggests that increasing reading time and one to one attention combined can have a significant impact on students' reading levels.

The mid-point data collection served to affirm the success of the project. Additionally, it gave parents the opportunity to express why they believed the program was or was not working, and to offer suggestions. Two substantial suggestions were made. First, make a large progress chart to be displayed in the classroom that allows students to see their continued improvement; second, give students recognition for their achievements in the form of stickers or treats. These two suggestions were made by the teachers, but their implementation was organised and brought about by the parents. This demonstrates the ownership and commitment felt by the parent tutors.

Additionally, the teachers were concerned that the program was not operating as well as it could, possibly because parents were still a bit unsure of what was expected of them. A video was taken of one of the class' reading program to explore how parent tutors were interacting with students. A progress meeting with parents was held in week 6. At that meeting the project team "chatted with the parents, asked them questions and got their feedback. It all seemed very positive with some great ideas"

(teacher journal). The survey also provided parents the opportunity to reflect on the progress they and their students had made, establishing the value of their contribution. All parent responses to the survey question 'How do you feel the program is going' were positive and focussed on students' improvement and motivation.

Beyond student reading improvement, there were project outcomes around school community engagement more generally. The teachers involved developed greater confidence in working alongside parents. This spread beyond the two teachers involved as the outcomes were shared and celebrated at whole-school events. One of the teachers was working towards providing professional learning for staff who expressed an interest in undertaking similar programs.

As mentioned above, 2 parent tutors expressed interest in continuing their involvement in the program in Term 4. This was agreed and was going on at the time of data collection. Parents expressed personal gains from the project. Important to them, they felt more equipped to help their own children with their reading at home:

> *and even what we can take home, I have a daughter in 1 L and when she comes home and reads Dr Seuss books and says 'I am Sam', and I say 'now you need to use your expression' and she says 'Sam I am'. I have my other boy who starts next year and he doesn't want to read but he loves hearing me read (interview notes).*

Parents also felt they had developed more confidence to participate in school events:

> *I am more confident now. It is good to see what was happening on the other side of the fence. I learned so much from the students, the way they talk about book, the way they communicate to me, and their life (interview notes).*

There was a strong sense of collegiality expressed among parents and teachers, as stated by one teacher who commented:

> *'we are all part of our kids' education' (interview notes).*

Parents felt more ownership of and belonging in the school, noting that students knew them and were receptive to them as authority figures in the school. Parents showed support for each other in their involvement. This was evident when the parent tutors took it upon themselves to inform one of the casual relief teachers how it worked:

> *'we had to help her out, she didn't know what to do' (interview notes).*

This also demonstrated that the project was able to work independently of the classroom teacher. The parents worked together for the success of the project.

Finally, teachers expressed a belief that students' engagement in reading has improved as a result of their involvement in the project:

> *'kids loved seeing the parents involved. They are more confident and motivated to read more book' (interview notes).*

#### *4.2.6.6 Ways forward*

There is strong support from the school executive, the school Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer, the teachers and the parents, to continue and expand the project. Decisions were to be made after the conclusion of the project regarding the program's

possible extension to Years 2 and 3 and to continue involvement with the same students, or to focus on a new group of Year 1 students. Parent surveys also indicated that they would like to further their training to include more aspects of reading instruction.

One significant challenge for the program was the need to rely on parents' consistent attendance at classes. It was recognised that parents were being asked to self-fund their travel costs to the school and that, it could present challenges in this community. One projected change in the expanded project in 2011 will be to reimburse parents for any out of pocket expenses due to their involvement. The hope is that this will not only take away any financial pressures caused by the program, but will also serve to acknowledge the work being done by the parent tutors.

The project team considered the Community Inquiry Framework to be a valuable planning tool helping them to initiate questions and elicit information about their community. The initial parent surveys were informed by the CIF–the need to ask questions and find out answers about the community, its needs and current relationships with the school. The CIF reaffirmed the need for school to know about their community before planning an intervention.

### 4.2.7 YG Public School

#### *4.2.7.1 The school and its community:*

YG Public School is in a mid-sized country town in the Western Region of NSW. The school has about 530 students at the time of the project. The school has 23 classroom teachers most of whom live in the town. About half of the school's students are Aboriginal. The community that the school serves comprises a large number of unemployed people and many families of low SES. There is also a significant proportion of students who are in foster care. Related to this is the significant number of support agencies in the community (WACS, Red Cross, Rotary, etc.), resources that "are not being utilised to their full potential" by the school" (school case report).

The school reports that a large number of teachers are involved in community activities (sports, charities, local clubs, church groups, and so on). While a large number of teachers have been teaching for between 10 and 15 years there is also a spread of levels of experience (from 1 to 25+ years) that is unusual for a school of this size and in this setting.

#### *4.2.7.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

With regard to school-community relationships parents and community members felt that the biggest concern was getting the parents to feel comfortable in coming to or working with the school. School personnel and community members expressed the view that a lot of parents attend special events at the school but are reluctant to attend any event that is about education. Aboriginal parents and community members indicated the view that this is especially the case for the Aboriginal community, because many children in the school were being raised by grandparents and other extended family members who may have had unfavourable school experiences themselves.

Almost all of those interviewed pointed out that new teachers needed to learn about and understand the "kinship of Aboriginal families" – who in the community is related, who are the elders and what potential issues exist in different families.

Teachers also needed to be well versed in the complex nature of working in low SES communities, including issues concerning local support services, custody issues and students' backgrounds more broadly.

Suggestions for improved school-community relationships included the development of a community centre where both parents and teachers could meet and be comfortable, and the school could consider holding events in more "neutral territory", off the school grounds. More vocational links with local businesses were also suggested, along with more connections with local community groups and services.

With regard to parents helping in the school and in the classroom, confidence and low literacy skills were seen to be possible barriers. It was suggested that community members could help in other subjects or in the school more generally rather than in the classroom.

#### *4.2.7.3 Development of the inquiry*

The staff of YG Public School began with a focus on improving home-school relations by encouraging parents to become involved in their child's reading at home. The belief was that this was a way of helping the children's reading achievement and their overall motivation for schoolwork. The focus was on Kindergarten students and, more particularly, 5 of those students who had already been identified as struggling with reading. Some of these students had already begun to display behavioural difficulties and a lack of engagement in classroom activity.

The school personnel systematically planned to seek advice from the researchers, the regional consultant and local education officers on the strategies for the project, the design and content of the parent survey, and knowledge about aspects of the community and the families. Funding from the school and the National Partnership program enabled timetabling that was sufficiently flexible to allow family visits and the purchase of materials to be distributed to the families. It also enabled sufficient release time from teaching for one teacher to be appointed 'mentor' for the project. The research question for the project at YG Public School was: *How can the school involve the community to improve the significance and relevance of reading for students at YG Public School?*

#### *4.2.7.4 Method/Intervention*

The families of the 5 target students were contacted, and arrangements were made for the teachers to visit each home 6 times over a period of about 6 weeks.

Note: While this activity worked for this project, Departmental policy states that home visits are only to be carried out by Home School Liaison Officers (HSLOs)

The teachers involved administered reading assessments at the end of Term 2, 2010. The school's newsletter informed the parents about the results on reading assessments. Parents were then surveyed regarding their children's attitudes to school and specifically toward reading. The goal was to determine how each of the parents regarded the current state of their child's learning and reading at that point, and how they believed the home and school could co-operate around this issue.

#### *4.2.7.5 Findings*

The school decided that the success of the project would be evaluated under three headings: student outcomes, teacher understandings, and community understandings.

With regard to student outcomes, a pre and post-test of students' reading was conducted and teachers kept 'anecdotal records of reading levels, changing attitudes and behaviours in class' (teachers' case report).

In general, the teachers indicated that the target children had become noticeably more enthusiastic readers in the classroom following the commencement of the home visits. Teachers were also interested in any effects of the home-visits program on:

1. reading ability
2. participation in classroom discussions
3. the asking of questions
4. attentiveness of listening
5. expressed interest in reading
6. borrowing from library
7. predicting of contents of texts
8. displays of control over other reading strategies.

Table 3 on page 57 reports the results on these measures.

| **Student ID>** | **St** | **KU** | **St** | **YK** | **St** | **DT** | **St** | **MC** | **St** | **DQ** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **measure\/** | **pre** | **post** | **pre** | **post** | **pre** | **post** | **pre** | **post** | **pre** | **post** |
| Reading Recovery level | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Classroom participation | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Asking questions | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Attentive listening | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Interest in reading | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Predicts textual content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Control of strategies | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Borrows from library | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

**Table 3 Average (rounded) daily observed instances for 5 target students**

The small number of participants means that no generalisable conclusions are available, but it is clear that, borrowing from the library aside, the effects of the home visits on the 5 students were clear and substantial. 4 of the 5 students involved attained acceptable levels on Reading Recovery measures over only 6 weeks, with no other apparent pedagogical changes to confound the interpretation. The student who did not make comparable gains on Reading Recovery, KU, did show some improvements on other measures: 'He is calmer and participates better in reading sessions' (his teacher's comment).

With regard to the effects of the TRC program on teacher understandings, the school reported that teachers have become more aware of how it is that links with the home site 'can positively impact on educational outcomes' (school case report), and have become aware of how some specific strategies can be part of that process. School personnel generally were struck by the significance of their 'making the effort to go to them' (school case report), that is, out to homes and to meet parents and caregivers on other off-school sites.

For the families involved, the school case report indicates that the visits were 'greatly received' and that the families appreciated the provision of additional reading materials and of some guidance for the parents on certain strategies to improve reading:

> *"Towards the end of the project they were actually calling us first to let us know if they weren't going to be there and asked if we could come at another time so they didn't miss out." (school case report).*

#### *4.2.7.6 Ways forward*

The School Case Report indicated that school leadership was, as a result of the TRC project, more keenly aware of how critical is "the need to reach out to parents by going out into the community rather than rely on them coming to us". The school planned to continue to engage in that reaching out and to broaden its scope within the community. Also indicated was the view that a program such as this needs to involve interagency activity and support, in particular, in this case, "community groups that support new mothers" (school case report) to begin reading activities at a very young age. The overall judgement of the school participants on the TRC project was:

> *We are pleased with the overall positive outcomes generated through our participation in this project and intend to ensure that aspects of it become part of the school's strategic plan over the next five years. (school case report)*

With regard to the use of the CIF, school staff report having used it to develop the survey for the staff, but made some modifications according to the specific setting of the school. Modifications included the addition of questions concerning the staff member's professional plans and aspirations, and extended questioning about the services and supports staff knew about in the community, in light of the extent of such supports. The report indicates that the results of the staff survey gave everybody in the school a clearer view of "the patterns and/or issues in staff understandings and perceptions of the community".

### 4.2.8 NA Public School

#### *4.2.8.1 The school and its community:*

NA Public School is a small rural school located in the central tablelands of NSW. The population of the local town and the surrounding district that the school serves is about 600, and very limited services are available in the town. The school, at the time of the project, has an enrolment of about 30.

The school has a teaching principal, 1 permanent teaching staff and 1 permanent part-time teacher who have, on average, been at the school for about 3 years. The current principal was appointed to the school early in 2009.

The district is characterised by a high proportion of long term, inter-generational residents. There are many families in which both parents work, and a range of low-mid SES. Community involvement is described in the school's Situational Analysis as entailing: an active and supportive P & C; regular visits from a community scripture teacher and a community public speaking coach; support from community members for sporting events and various other 'working bees'.

#### *4.2.8.2 The Phase 1 interviews*

Interviewed were the school principal and the other 2 teachers. These school personnel indicated that the school had a prior history of poor community school relations, but this has been improving in recent times with changing conditions, people, and more community focused policies. The strong sense from the school personnel was that generally the parents were happy to leave their children in the care of the school (*they trust us*). The development and maintenance of trust is explicitly stated as an ongoing priority for the school.

The P&C was described by the school personnel as strong but unpredictable, to some extent reflecting factions within the community. These factions seemed to be based on friendship groupings, sometimes developed over very long periods of time, and on the perceived difference between long established families and 'newcomers'. Sometimes community issues were brought into the school in inappropriate ways, and that new teachers starting at the school would need clear guidance on long standing community issues and the appropriate position of the teachers in that situation. These issues taken together meant that the establishment and acceptance of clear guidelines and professional parental demarcations of rights and responsibilities were ongoing priorities at the time the project began.

#### *4.2.8.3 Development of the inquiry*

School personnel felt that the appointment of a new principal at a time of considerable unrest in and around the school meant that the focus of this TRC needed to be on a very specific and obviously useful issue to do with students' learning, rather than on a more general involvement of community members. In that regard they were concerned that some members of the community were seen as not having a clear idea of how teachers teach currently, the uses of resources, including digital resources, and so on. Many parents had indicated unsuccessful experiences in school, and this may have led to unwillingness to give support for learning at home.

With such small numbers enrolled in the school, it is difficult to determine literacy and numeracy comparisons between the school and the state averages or across the years within the school. With, for example, 3 students sitting the national literacy and numeracy assessments for Year 3, the school can be substantially above national averages one year and below the next. Nevertheless school personnel felt that the school seemed to have stronger performance in Mathematics and writing than in reading. With these issues in mind, school staff developed the following research question for the TRC: *Can the school strengthen the school/community partnership by offering to assist community members to support the literacy of their children at home?*

#### *4.2.8.4 Method/Intervention*

There were 3 aspects of the school staff's plan for responding to this question throughout Term 3, 2010 to:

- offer literacy workshops and 'homework support sessions'
- encourage parents to visit the library and to access the school's computer facilities, with support and, where necessary, coaching from school staff
- have the Priority Schools Partnership Officer provide information mornings to parents (school case report).

The plan was to monitor and improve the reading of students with state reading benchmark data to be collected at the end of Term 2, the middle of Term 3, and the end of Term 4, 2010. The students would also be assessed on a standardised spelling test at these 3 points. Finally the school aimed to administer surveys to both students and parents/caregivers at the end of Term 3.

#### *4.2.8.5 Findings*

Most of the planned events for the project were cancelled due to a lack of attendance on the part of the parents. No event held attracted more than two parents. From the point of view of parent involvement, the project seemed to have failed comprehensively.

However, two additional outcomes were observed on the matter of parent involvement. First, there was a distinct increase in inquiries to the school concerning possible enrolments for 2011, some evidently explicitly generated by the increased reading emphasis.

Second, most parents responded to the parent/caregiver survey. In that survey, parents were asked, among other things, 7 questions concerning their child's experience of the mathematics teaching at the school (interest, enjoyment, progress, appropriate materials etc) and 17 similar questions about their child's experience of the literacy teaching at the school. The questions were accompanied by 4-point Lickert scale responses, and were all phrased in the positive direction (e.g. from literacy section: *I think the school is always looking for new ways to improve what it does*). Using the value 4 as the "strongly agree" value (i.e. the strong positive response), the average values for these responses across all parents was 3.85 out of a possible maximum positive of 4.

Further there were no negative comments from parents on matters to do with school-community relations. Comments included strong statements of support such as:

- *very happy*
- *very caring with children and parents, above and beyond*
- *I absolutely love this school and value strongly the teachers and support staff we have, and after experiencing other schools, I know that this one does have the interests of each and every child*
- *strong working partnerships with parents*
- *love the school, love the teachers*
- *good team spirit*
- *thanks to all the teachers at NA PS for making the school what it is, and what it is, is great.*

Suggestions for improvement included logistic issues such as a calendar of school function dates, a clearer statement of procedures and protocols for teacher and parent duties, and the construction of a set of swings (the latter described on the parent survey as *my son's suggestion*).

The school staff's conclusion that the apparent failure of the parent involvement aspects of the TRC project at NA Public School was due to working parents and a deep satisfaction with their and their children's experience of the school seems to be supported by the parent data.

The school also hoped for student outcomes from the TRC project as indirect benefits from the joint parent teacher focus on reading. On this count the success of their project over Term 3 was clear: Benchmark assessments on reading showed clear improvements across the year levels, and teachers recorded increased levels of engagement in reading related activities in classrooms.

#### *4.2.8.6 Ways forward*

The TRC project was taken to reflect a general endorsement of the school's activities by the parents, but at the same time a resistance to direct educational involvement on the parents' part. The project also suggested to staff that, even in light of this latter point, there was some evidence that an intensive educational focus over a short period of time, in this case, on reading, could have achievement and engagement effects on the students.

Following the TRC project, the School Plan for 2011 was modified to further *strengthen school community partnerships, particularly with parents and assist them to support the education of their children at school and at home* (General Target #5, NA School Plan). Specifically in the Priority Area: Literacy, the plan emphasises *identify and train parents who are interested in assisting staff in the classroom, and strengthening the home reading program.*

### 4.2.9 JC Public School

#### *4.2.9.1 The school and its community:*

JC Public School is a small rural school located in the western region of NSW. It is about 35 kilometres away from the nearest mid-sized town. At the time of the project, there were 27 students enrolled in the school (9 from one family).

The school has a teaching principal, 1 full-time and 1 part-time classroom teacher, a part-time school administration manager, and several part-time learning support officers. The current principal has been a teacher at the school for 19 years, and as principal for the last 2 years. Staff retention is very high. Until a transfer occurred at the end of 2009, the teaching staff at JC PS had been constant for 15 years.

The community served by JC PS consists of a high proportion of single-parent families, a considerable proportion of residents who are renting, a large number of unemployed people. The community is formally classified as mostly low SES, with some mid low. The school profile describes the school as having a highly supportive P&C group and as being a focal point for the local community.

#### *4.2.9.2 Development of the inquiry*

JC PS joined the project late, after another school withdrew. The focus for the DBR at JC PS was therefore developed through less formal discussions between the PSP staff, the research team and the school personnel.

The beginning of the school's involvement with the TRC project coincided with a regional focus on a new Mathematics program (GM). This program places special emphasis on mental computation and several other Mathematics strategies that had received less emphasis in the earlier programs used in the school. The school decided to focus their project for TRC on engaging parents to support their children's learning in mathematics, using the GM program as a vehicle. So the research question was: *How can parents and teachers work together to support students' learning in mathematics*?

#### *4.2.9.3 Method/Intervention*

The research team together developed a shared view of the central purposes of the project and its essential elements. Six parents (which represented one-third of the families who had children in the school) agreed to participate in the workshops. The workshops were conducted by the PSP Partnership Officer and outlined the key elements and strategies in the GM program and the ways in which parents could support children at home. Prior to the conduct of the sessions the parents completed a survey concerning their knowledge of the mathematics curriculum, the GM program (*what do you know? what would you like to know?*), and their attitudes toward helping with homework in mathematics (confidence, strategic knowledge, and so on). Parents and teachers were also interviewed before and after the workshop sessions.

#### *4.2.9.4 Findings*

A key finding of the DBR related to the parents' knowledge of the structure and expectations of the GM program, and thus their confidence in becoming involved in supporting their children's mathematics learning at home. Prior to the workshop sessions, parents had indicated that what they knew about the GM program was:

- *[Author's name] wrote the program and there are different strategies in place*
- *it appears to be simpler and the children are enjoying it*
- *not a lot – compared to reading where we see the home reader each night*
- *nothing, [K-2 teacher's name] mentioned it at the beginning of the year*
- *I didn't realise that Kindergarten children did maths*
- *[K-2 teacher's name] mentioned that she would be using a different approach to maths this year*

And what they would like to know was:

- *an outline of the program for each stage and more examples*
- *more information on what the children are learning*
- *what the children actually do – an outline*
- *overview of the program K-6*
- *the concepts used and the development from stage to stage*
- *how to do the activities the children are doing*

They expressed their confidence in helping their child with mathematics in these terms:

- *as he's only in Kindergarten - quite OK at this stage but as he gets older I probably will need some help to learn new ways*
- *fairly confident*
- *not confident at all – the new strategies throw me*
- *OK until it comes to multiplication and division*
- *my younger children I'm OK with but it's more difficult with my eldest (Year 5)*
- *I can't, they have to manage themselves.*

Parents also related their inclinations not to help to the ways in which the mathematics their children now do at school are different from the mathematics they did:

- *totally different*
- *very different*
- *different strategies – the children talk about things called split strategy, jump strategy, etc*
- *I can't remember what I did in Kindergarten*
- *different techniques – no borrow, pay back*
- *subtraction is different – we used borrow/pay back*
- *they seem to use number lines to work things out.*

Following the GM mathematics workshops run by the PSP Partnership Officer in Term 3, 2010, the parents were asked if they felt more confident to help their children:

- *yes definitely. The workshops were fantastic, very relaxed and informal and I now know what the kids are talking about with the different strategies they use*
- *absolutely. The workshops were fun, even though I was really apprehensive about coming*
- *[PSP Officer's name] immediately made us all feel relaxed. I was hopeless at Maths at school and I was worried about how I would help my kids as their homework got harder, but now I think I'll be able to manage some parts anyway*
- *I'm pleased you talked me into coming. We had great fun – especially cutting up the pikelets. What a great way to explain fractions*
- *I can see why [child's name] now enjoys Maths. Thanks [PSP Officer's name] for making some parts of Maths now make sense*
- *yes. It's good to know what the kids are talking about when they say "I need to use the jump strategy or the split strategy"*
- *yes I thoroughly enjoyed both the workshops and hope we can have some more next year. I found the games you gave us really useful and we have played them at home. Thanks for giving us this opportunity.*

These comments represent all of the evaluation statements written by the participating parents on the post-session survey.

After the workshops the 2 participating teachers were asked: *Do you think the parents who attended the workshops are feeling more confident to assist their children with their maths?* The following represent their entire responses:

- *definitely. Prior to the workshops some parents would come in and ask regularly about the maths homework and how to do certain things. Since the workshops, they do not have to ask how to do parts of the homework nearly as much. A few parents have said how much more comfortable they feel with it. It probably has made my job easier in that the students are able to complete their maths homework more successfully. I feel very comfortable informing the parents about their child's learning now, however earlier in the year I felt less confident and reluctant as it was a new environment and I felt they wouldn't be accepting of my opinion in relation to their child's learning. Throughout the year I have gained much support from staff and parents, which has increased my confidence. (T1)*
- *Sometimes some of the Maths homework (Stage 3) was not finished because the children had forgotten how to do things but this has improved since the workshops. (T2)*

#### *4.2.9.5 Ways forward*

JC PS is planning to continue with the parent workshops in 2011 and to plan for such a program for other subject areas. The involvement of the parents in these ways was now considered a routine part of the continued implementation of the GM Mathematics program in this school.

# 5 Key Lessons

## 5.1 Reviewing the aims of the project

To reiterate, the overall aims of the Teachers Researching Communities project were to:

- investigate the relations between schools and communities in a range of low SES communities sites
- inquire into ways in which those relations could be strengthened and improved according to both school personnel and community members
- test the possibility of strengthening and improving those relations through the conduct of on-site, collaboratively planned intervention projects
- produce a useable, accessible set of guidelines for teachers and school leaders to help teachers learn about their local communities in ways that would be educationally productive.

The general point of this process was to use the results of such research activities to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for students, to help teacher retention in schools that serve low SES communities, and to enhance teachers' sense of professional self-efficacy.

## 5.2 Lessons for the 'Community Inquiry Framework'

The extent to which the participants used the CIF in the conduct of their projects, and the ways in which they used it, varied considerably. Further, the use of the CIF did not relate to the success or scope of the project. So first, it is clear that, taken overall, participants found the framework *useful but not necessary*. The extent to which the CIF was followed explicitly seemed to depend to some extent on how familiar and knowledgeable about the community school personnel felt beforehand. For more locally experienced school participants the CIF tended to be used as a rough guide, perhaps providing a few fresh lines of inquiry, whereas participants less familiar with the community at least began with the CIF as it stood.

Second, on a number of sites *school personnel adapted* the CIF, generally through additions or the grouping of questions, rather than through deletions, to suit specific aspects of the local conditions. This points to the notion that the CIF, regardless of its specifics, may have the general benefit of orienting school personnel to a conscious analytic approach to the communities in which they work – their diversity, complexity, features that may unite and divide them, their varying aspirations and anxieties, and so on. In the process of adapting the draft forms of the CIF participants are led to 'reflect under guidance' about the linguistic, social, cultural and economic features of communities that may bear in different ways on the ways in which students, parents and community members more generally experience schooling.

Third, it became clear in interviews over the course of the project that some participants had read and considered the CIF and not made their responses 'public' or shared them professionally in any direct way. That is, the effects of engaging the analytic framework that the CIF offers may at times have been on *individuals' reviewing their own preconceptions* and thereby motivating and sustaining their involvement in the project.

Finally, the use of the CIF may vary over time on any given site. NA Public School provides an example. The school-community relations changed quickly and significantly, and the schools' responses to the CIF inquiries would have become very different over a short period of time. The CIF, therefore, could be a document that could be *revisited over time* while a school is attempting to change the extent and/or nature of its relations with a community. Similarly, school personnel new to a community could revisit the CIF, and reflect on their answers to the questions, as they 'settle into' the site.

## 5.3 Lessons for Design-Based Research in Schools

The case reports summarised above indicate that certain connections between focused activities, over a limited period of time, and educationally relevant outcomes are or are not plausible. So a first point to be made is that, while, for the most part, the 9 case reports generally support the original goals of the participants, they remain *'proof of possible existence' studies*, not proof of the efficacy of the interventions. The numbers of teachers, students and community members involved is generally small, the interventions locally motivated and constructed, and the criteria of success, while defensible from site to site, variable and not always consistently applied.

Second, and keeping the point above in mind, *many of these DBR projects were successful. They yielded strong results, in the intended directions on key outcomes*. School personnel often expressed surprise at the change observed over such a short time. Further, as suggested by the DBR literature (Reimann, 2011), there were unintended consequences of the DBR in a number of cases. The overall sense, supported by almost all participating schools' intentions to persist with and perhaps expand the scale of the activities generated by TRC, was that conducting intervention projects in schools and in communities has the potential for high levels of impact on individuals, communities and institutions.

Third, at the heart of interventions such as these is an idea about *collaboration between researchers, school practitioners, departmental officers, and community members*. In turn, a central element of that idea is that research in schools works better when the 'problem' addressed is not a problem only for the researchers, or only for another category of participant. The problem studied needs to emerge from the daily practice of the educators, but the design of an intervention, the selection of all relevant data, collection and analysis of data, and the interface with policy initiatives, together provide the levers for a project that has conceptual coherence and some potential for innovation in addressing that problem.

The DBR projects summarised in this report worked best when they provided a focal point, accompanied by some material and conceptual resources, around which the teachers and the school leadership could re-evaluate their response to a challenge that had presented itself, a challenge that the research team, and perhaps the departmental officers, might not have foreseen. DBR is aimed at helping educators and researchers to conceptualise real problems more effectively and more consequentially; it is about insisting on the relevance of the relationship between professional experience and theory.

Fourth, it is clear from the studies summarised here that educators are calling for *guidance on the matter of 'evidence'* – on what does, could and should count as evidence in educational settings. At the time of this project, the results of students'

performances on standardised national tests of literacy and numeracy are published by the Australian Government on the MySchool website. Schools and individual teachers are being held accountable on the basis of these scores. Potentially at stake are not only enrolment levels at each school and promotion and transfer possibilities for individual teachers, but also support funding at school and state levels. Regardless of the debate this situation has occasioned, school leaders and teachers have become highly familiar with the data descriptions produced by these tests. They can conceptualise both their students' learning trajectories and the efficacy of their own teaching in the terms of the tests, and are under some pressure to accommodate planning and teaching in that light. School personnel have been acculturated to this particular kind of data and the analyses provided on the MySchool website.

A question that participation in these DBR project raises is: are teachers and school leaders inclined and able to develop assessments of their local practices that are rigorous and defensible but also site-sensitive? (taking account of all variables including language and appropriate tools to assess, e.g., ESL scales). A suggestion is that national test results may become surrogate measures of the local efficacy of educational efforts in schools, a function they clearly have not been designed to perform.

## 5.4 Lessons for the Priority Schools Programs

The involvement of the NSW PSP in this collaboration between researchers and school personnel was pivotal. In particular *the work of the Priority Schools Programs partnership officers and consultants was consequential*. Each of these officers was, in a sense, a lynchpin, mediating the policy position of the PSP on school-community relations, the needs of individual schools and the activities and intentions of the research team. These officers capitalised on their position at the nexus of this network in proactive and distinctively effective ways to the benefit of the other participants. They were able to broker the views and needs of each group across the entire team in a way that would have been difficult for members of any of the other groups of participants. They also simply provided material, organisational and conceptual resources to the activities in the schools that turned out on several occasions to be critical to the completion of the projects.

A second lesson learned was that the PSP policy interest in the strengthening of school-community relations is best seen in the context of its other emphases – on the ongoing review and renewal of curriculum, pedagogy, school leadership, and teacher capacity building. *Alignment and co-ordination among these policy emphases* enabled all of the participants on each project to feel confident that the interventions were defensible both locally and in terms of region and system-wide policy efforts.

Maintaining such alignment is important, as it guards against the unmooring of 'community engagement' as an aspect of the transformation of educational inequalities from broader curricular reforms. This in turn can lead to the kinds of transfers of 'educational blame' onto families and communities that further entrench inequalities (the 'responsibilisation' process described by Bottrell, 2007, and others).

Third, most of the participating schools indicated that they planned to continue some part or all of the activities and processes begun in the TRC project. This, and the prospect of broadening the scope, timeframe and scale of the DBR illustrated here,

points to the opportunity to pursue projects such as these in other places and with different emphases.

As indicated above, the projects summarised here need to be seen as offering 'proof of possible existence', as *just a promising beginning*, offering support for a larger, more extended and concerted approach to the exploration of school-community relations. What could follow from this beginning are benefits for practitioners, policy makers and researchers alike.

## 5.5 Lessons for Communities and Schools

Australia is made up of *many very different kinds of communities*. The typical demographic categories of 'urban', 'suburban', 'rural town' and 'rural remote' do little to capture the complex and, in some places, rapidly shifting configurations of the labour market, SES, ethnicity, mobility, educational, cultural and linguistic background, and so on, that characterise contemporary Australian society.

Over the course of this project we saw the educational and social effects of these configurations. We saw communities that differed in obvious and non-obvious ways, ways that were associated with powerful differences in their relations to schools and to schooling in general. Communities are best seen as evolving: they are becoming more online, more or less faith-based, more or less economically dynamic, more or less ethnically and linguistically diverse, and so on–for different reasons and at different rates. Their different forms of evolution bring with them different kinds of possible and desirable school-community relations.

In considering the current state of play, at least on the basis of the 9 schools involved in this project, we can usefully revisit Epstein's model of the different kinds of school-community relations: pastoral, communicational, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration and co-ordination. Through interviews and observations of DBR interventions, this project found both school personnel and community members claiming that *pastoral, communicational and some aspects of volunteering were prevalent.* Volunteering included logistics, manual labour around the school, and so on.

In some schools *teachers wanted more learning at home and more educational decision-making from parents and community members*. School leaders were interested as well in community members' generally *untapped capacity to access and co-ordinate human and material resources in the community* and to mediate in collaborations between school personnel and community members not otherwise connected to the school.

Elsewhere we have described some aspects of communities in terms of how remoteness, socio-economic, and employment uncertainty stability, civility, and co-operation among community members and groups (Freebody, K., Freebody, P., & Maney, in press). School-community relations do not always take place in circumstances in which schools and communities are ready for educationally productive communication and mutual support.

Schools and communities, for a variety of reasons, can find themselves in difficulties that may be the products of long standing conditions or of unforeseen, temporary disruptions. There are times, as we found, that professional judgement needs to be exercised in the when and how an intensive focus on school-community relations can

be introduced, just as there are times when such a focus can become an additional factor in the deterioration of those relations. We found instances when the sure-footedness of the professional judgment of the educators on a site was critical to the value of the project to that site.

Even when schools and communities were in the midst of disruptive circumstances, or in disagreement about how things should be done, however, the project became a focus for the expression of good will between educators and community members. It became an arena in which each could affirm, even if only as a 'bottom line' in their relations, the deep significance of the others in the lives of the youngsters around them.

## 5.6 Final considerations

Many of the research projects we summarised in Section 2 indicate the need for educators to develop more detailed and sophisticated understandings of their communities and then ways in which features of those communities can be recruited in teaching and learning in schools. In that light, it is significant that the school personnel participating in this project indicated a practical awareness of a number of important concerns regarding school-community relations.

One idea that school staff clearly understood is that factors relating to disadvantage and their effects on educational success cannot be overcome by changes in the activities of schools alone, with or without close relations to their communities. Schools cannot bear that load: material disadvantage, and the processes by which it is systematically converted to educational disadvantage, are held in place by economic and cultural factors, sustained over time, and sedimented in the institutional routines of schools, classrooms, policy committees, and funding authorities.

A second assumption on which participants clearly operated is that enhancing community involvement cannot substitute or compensate for reforms in curriculum, pedagogy, or the resourcing of schools in economically disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Several school projects reported here attached community or parent involvement to curricular innovations or to a response to some aspects of students' or the school's performance on a publicly available measure of some sort. Teachers and school leaders generally used curricular or pedagogical initiatives to focus community involvement, rather than attempting to instigate this involvement for its own sake.

Third, participants showed an appreciation that enhancing the *amount* of community involvement is not the same as enhancing or changing the *kind* of community involvement. Community members may have been prepared to increase the amount of school support they gave, but a change in kind of support, in particular a change from volunteering material support to core teaching and learning support, clearly required more time and a different set of preparatory experiences.

More contentious, but generally accepted by these participants, was the idea that those parents who declined to be involved in the school in the ways the school personnel had hoped for, did not thereby disqualify their children from the benefits of a transformed, more intensive and more equitable education. The danger of not appreciating the significance of this can lead to parent and community involvement programs that end up intensifying educational disadvantage for certain groups.

Regardless of the research regarding the positive educational effects of parent/community involvement in schooling, at the heart of public education, and specifically the agenda of NSW PSP, is the assumption of responsibility for the educational aspirations for every child, family and community. The involvement of parents and community members must be seen as itself an accomplishment of the educational institutions of a society; the participants in this project knew that it must not be seen as a precondition for the success of a school or a measure of 'educational deserving-ness'.

In many countries schools face increased challenges and increased community expectations. Similarly, many schools themselves expect more from the communities they serve. There are currently no signs that communities will soon find it easier to achieve economic certainty, or a belief that the future will be materially and culturally predictable. That is, there are no signs that the community's beliefs about the significance of schooling in the lives of their children will diminish or become a more straightforward matter.

Finally, the enthusiasm and optimism of the school personnel was a striking feature of this project, a project that essentially presented them with yet another challenge of engaging and putting to work the resources of the community in their teaching. While they might not have formulated the issue in these terms, the ways in which teachers and school leaders rose to this challenge indicated that they knew they occupied a distinctive position in the development and maintenance of the communities they served. Compatible with the intent of this project, Anyon (2005) has argued for the development of a social movement that is led by schools and that would involve educators, community residents and community organisations. Anyon went on to claim that school reforms often failed simply because they did not secure the support of their communities, not because they were poor *educational* reforms. Change, for Anyon, needs to be led by research into what local communities need:

> When educators work with community residents as equals and as change agents to organise for better education, movement building is taking place; and as a not inconsequential outcome, schools typically improve and student achievement increases. (Anyon, 2005, p.181)

Research from various sources is beginning to expand educators' understandings of communities. This may make clearer the idea that educational policy needs to move beyond the school and educational bureaucracy, and "must join the world of communities, families, and students; it must advocate for them and emerge from their urgent realities" (Anyon, 2005, p. 199).

A premise of an education-led movement is that schools and communities can come to know one another better, and thereby work better together to counter the forces contrary to their interests. So initiatives that work to clarify and build more authentic and realistic relations between schools and their communities have a central part to play in the building and maintenance of fairer and more cohesive societies.

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# 7 Appendices

## 7.1 Appendix 1: Schedule of visits

A total of 12 schools across NSW were visited during late 2009. The table below includes the names schools/ regions, dates of visits, and the number of participants interviewed.

| School/Region | Date of Visit | Participants |
|---|---|---|
| **YG Public**<br>*Western NSW* | Wed 21 Oct | Principal 1 Teachers 4<br>Students 17 Community/Parents 7 |
| **OG Central**<br>*Western NSW* | Thurs 22nd Oct | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 15 Community/Parents 7 |
| **NA Public**<br>*Western NSW* | Mon 26th Oct | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 9 Community/Parents 0 |
| **OC Public**<br>*Western NSW* | Tues 27th Oct | Principal 1 Teachers 1<br>Students 12 Community/Parents 3 |
| **VG Public**<br>*Western Sydney* | Tues 3rd Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 20 Community/Parents 8 |
| **OS Public**<br>*New England* | Mon 9th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 7 Community/Parents 5 |
| **OU 7-10**<br>*New England* | Tues 10th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 6 Community/Parents 4 |
| **DP Public**<br>*Western NSW* | Thurs 12th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 4<br>Students 11 Community/Parents 2 |
| **DU Public**<br>*South Western Sydney* | Fri 13th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 10 Community/Parents 6 |
| **DD High School**<br>*Western Sydney* | Wed 18th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 4<br>Students 3 Community/Parents 3 |
| **NC Public School**<br>*South Western Sydney* | Thurs 19th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 4<br>Students 6 Community/Parents 16 |
| **VT Public School**<br>*Western NSW* | Fri 20th Nov | Principal 1 Teachers 3<br>Students 7 Community/Parents 2 |

## 7.2 Appendix 2: Guiding questions for the interviews

Semi-structured interviews/focus groups means that there are a series of core, guiding questions that need to be covered but that the sequence of these can be naturally varied, and various unexpected issues that arise can be pursued.

### Questions for interviews/focus groups

- Does the school have a policy on school-community relations? If so, what is it?
- What are the main features of how this school relates to this community?
- Can you give some specific recent examples of school-community events, issues, problems, successes, etc?
- What do you think are the main features of this community that are important for the school staff to know about?
- How well do you think they know about these things?
- What do you think are the main features of this school that are important for members of the community to know about?
- How well do you think they know about these things?
- What cultural knowledge do you think the youngsters of this community do/could bring to school experience?
- Do you think this is well enough used in school?
- Are there resources in this community that the school could bring into classrooms?
- Are there key ways in which school-community relations could be improved?
- Can you suggest 2-3 concrete ideas for this to happen?

### Questions especially for Parents:

- When your child wants to learn about something, what does s/he do?
  E.g., does s/he approach an older brother or sister, or you, or grandparents?
- Do the older siblings teach your child about school?
- Are there things you teach your child that you think the teachers could support or use?
- What kind of contact would you like to have with school staff? How often? About what topics/issues? In what sorts of events?
- Do you think your child's school grades are a good reflection of what s/he knows and how well s/he can learn new things? Why?
- How do you think you can support teaching literacy and numeracy i.e. problem solving in numeracy and/or spelling/reading in literacy?
- What are your views on the accessibility of staff of the school to you and your family member?
- On what issues do you make contact with the school?
- What do you believe staff at your school need to know about the community you live in?

## 7.3 Appendix 3 Community Inquiry Framework

Included here are two versions of 'key guiding questions' here in the draft CIF: the first is an extended version based more completely on the findings from the interviews and the second is an abridged version. These are included in order to secure feedback from stakeholders as to the relative importance of various issues covered and the possibility of multiple forms of the CIF aimed at different kinds of communities.

### Before you start, some basic principles

1. Remain aware that communities are made up of parents, but also many other individuals and groups who can contribute to the life of the school. Parents' involvement may be more focused on the achievement and well being of their children, whereas non-parent community members may engage with the longer-term, more general needs of the school.

2. Keep comments, running notes about your reactions to the findings that you come up with but also your reactions to what you expected to find but didn't.

3. Be aware that communities are diverse and are made up of many different kinds of groupings and networks.

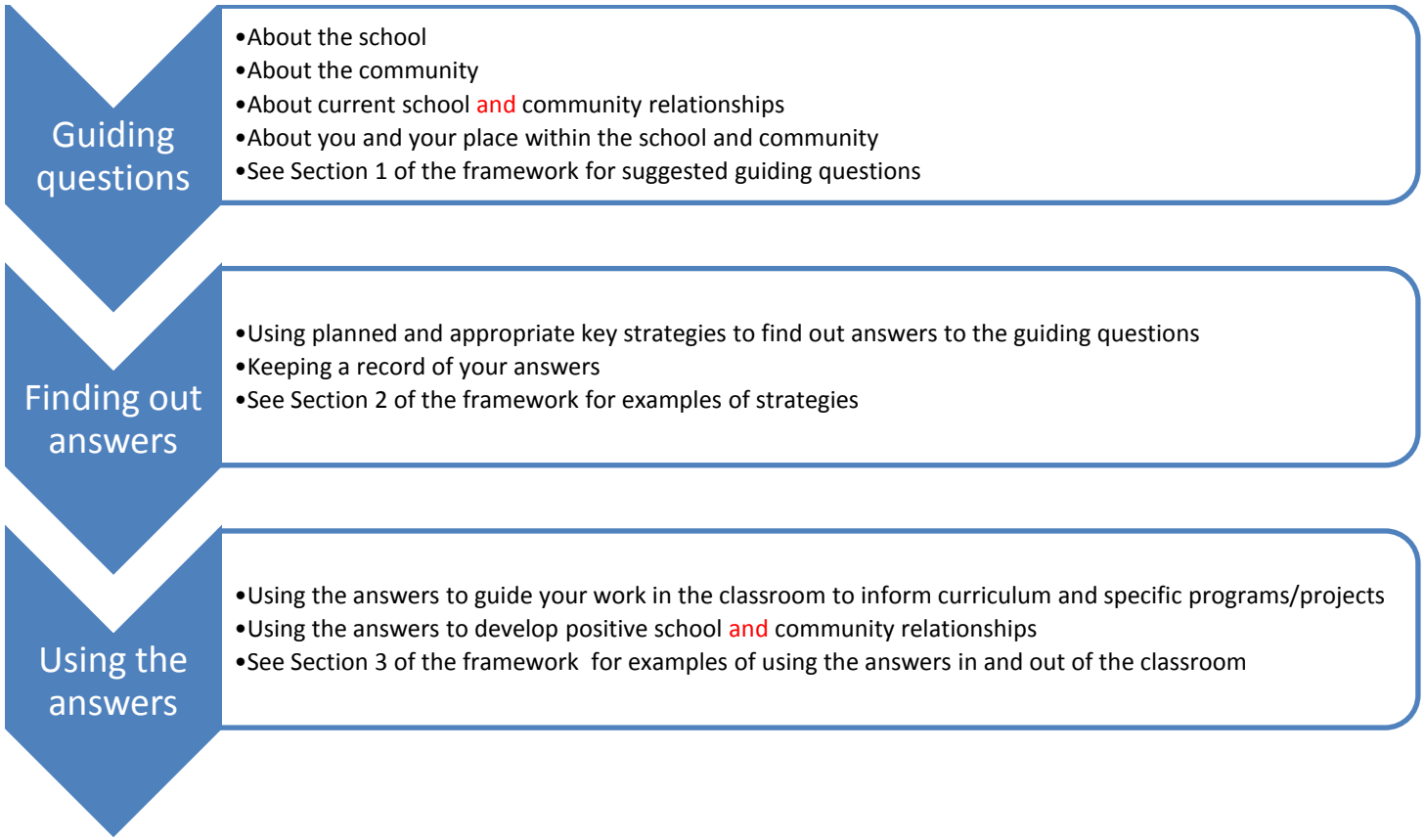
4. Some community groupings have harmonious relationships among themselves and between themselves and the school, and some do not.

5. There are different levels and types of community engagement with schools (academic, sporting, working bees, P&C, etc).

6. There are aspects of community members' lives that make it difficult for them to devote energies to supporting local schools.

7. Remain open-minded when you hear conflicting opinions or stories from different parents, community members, or school personnel.

# COMMUNITY INQUIRY FRAMEWORK



## The longer version

### *Section 1: Key guiding questions*

The data that will help have been divided into 4 topics: 1) finding out about this school; 2) finding out about this community; 3) finding out about this school's community relationships; and 4) reflecting on me, my experiences, interests, abilities and plans, and this school in this community.

### Topic 1: Finding out about this school

- Who are the students?
    - achievement levels,
    - socio-cultural background (ethnicity, religion, gender balance etc),
    - future pathways and aspirations,
    - recent changes in school's student intake,
    - standing on standardised test results ("like-schools")
- Who are the staff?
    - Length and nature of previous teaching experience,
    - time at this school,
    - involvement in community relations activities,
    - training/specialisations of colleagues,
    - degree of morale and collegial relations,
    - gender balance
    - co-ordination, collaboration and planning
- Who are the executive and key institutional/support personnel?
    - level and kinds of support (e.g., special needs, literacy/numeracy, etc)
    - school's key change-agents in or around the school (maybe different people for curriculum, sport, arts, etc)
    - access to these
    - additional learning support, community contact support,
    - departmental/regional support, community centres
    - curriculum range, additions such as LOTE, Voc Ed, etc
    - contact with/input from other higher/further education institutions

### Topic 2: Finding out about this community

- Industrial/occupational/labour market features of environment
  - Mixture of farming, light industry, etc
- Socio-economic levels
  - Long term poverty, un-under-employment, transience
- Ethnic groups and their SES?
- Competitiveness among community members
  - if so, along what lines, e.g., casual friendship groups, worksites, race, established versus new
- Local community facilities (e.g., library, rotary-style clubs, health clinics, mental health and counselling support, youth services)?
- If not, where is nearest service provider or where do locals go for such services?
- Eminent graduates of the school/community members
  - What is the area of achievement of these eminent people (e.g., sport)?
  - Their contact with school?
- Online
- Local groups or agencies/industry partners putting funding or in-kind support into the school or using the school's facilities?

### Topic 3: Finding out about this school's community relationships

- Community perceptions of school?
  - Overall positive/negative
  - What are seen as the school's strengths and challenges?
  - What are the community's priorities for their children's involvement in school?
  - What are the parents' priorities for their children's involvement in school?
- School perceptions of community?
  - Main ways of talking about groupings in the community (race, SES, established vs. new, etc?)
  - Trust, social contact, professional contact
  - Agencies providing professional development in school for teachers or learning activities in school for students (e.g., rehabilitation etc)?

- What is the nature of the relationship?
    - What is the mixture of events- (morning teas etc) or process-based approach (active P&C) to collaboration
    - Use of cultural brokers
    - Do the school and the community communicate online? If so, for what purposes and to what extent?

### Topic 4: Reflecting on me, my experiences, interests, abilities and plans, and this school in this community

- Do you live in the community?
- What connections do you have with the community (where, how, when, constraints, social or other clubs/organisations?)
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
- What are your medium-term professional plans (i.e., over the next 5-8 years)?
    - In what ways could stronger links with this community help you advance these plans?
- What were your main motivations in becoming a teacher?
    - Do school-community relations relate to these motivations?
    - Are you a member of a professional association? If so, which one/s?
- What are the main extra-curricular activities you are involved in?
    - Are any of these linked to this community?
- How does this community compare with the community/ies in which you were brought up?
- How does this school compare to the school/s you attended as a child?

### Topic 5: Reflecting on classroom work and how it intersects with school-community relationships

- Do you use community places, events or knowledge as content in the classroom? (local newspapers, local events as stimulus for classroom activities, excursions to local places in science, geography, history curriculum etc)
- Are classroom activities structured to allow students to utilise local knowledge?
- Are community members involved in the planning of curriculum or classroom activities?
- Are local, community relevant examples used in classroom activities?

- Are there connections that you could make with local businesses or community initiatives that would aide and integrate with various units of work?

Before engaging in strategies that research schools and communities, it is important to be aware of the need for respect of the religious and cultural values of the communities you serve. When working in Aboriginal communities please read the following documents:
*Working with Aboriginal Communities: A guide to community consultation and protocols*
DET.http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/pdf_doc/work_aborig_comm.pdf

*Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A practice resource*

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/working_with_aboriginal.pdf

*What Works: Forming partnerships*

http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=353

*Raising expectations: Achieving quality education for all*.

NSW DET Priority School Programs, (1999). Sydney: New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

*Developing home, school and community partnerships: A working paper*.

NSW DET Priority School Programs, (2003). Sydney: New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

*Strengthening interagency collaboration: Towards a learning community – a milestone in school and community collaboration.*

NSW DET Priority School Programs, (2004). Sydney: New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

*NSW Department of Education and Training Anti-Racism Policy*

*https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/equity/antiracism/PD20050235.shtml*

*NSW Department of Education and Training Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy*

*https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/equity/comm_rela/PD20050234.shtml*

## The abridged version - *Section 1: Key guiding questions*

### Topic 1: Finding out about this school

- Who are the students?
    - achievement levels e.g. standing on standardised test results ("like-schools")
    - socio-cultural background (ethnicity, religion, gender balance etc),
- Who are the staff?
    - Length of time at school,
    - involvement in community relations activities,
    - specialisations of colleagues,
- Who are the executive and key institutional/support personnel?
    - level and kinds of support (e.g., special needs, literacy/numeracy, etc)
    - school's key change-agents in or around the school (maybe different people for curriculum, sport, arts, etc) and access to these?

### Topic 2: Finding out about this community

- Industrial/occupational/labour market features of environment
    - Mixture of farming, light industry, etc
- Ethnic groups/Socio Economic Status?
- Competitiveness among community members
    - if so, along what lines, e.g., casual friendship groups, worksites, race, established versus new.
- Local/regional community facilities (e.g., library, rotary-style clubs, health clinics, mental health and counselling support, youth services)?
- Local groups or agencies/industry partners putting funding or in-kind support into the school or using the school's facilities?

### Topic 3: Finding out about this school's community relationships

- Community perceptions of school?

  - Overall positive/negative
  - What are seen as the school's strengths and challenges?
- School perceptions of community?
  - Main ways of talking about groupings in the community (race, SES, established vs. new, etc?)
- Agencies providing professional development in school for teachers
- What is the nature of the relationship?
  - what is the mixture of events- (morning teas etc) or process-based approach (active P&C) to collaboration

### Topic 4: Reflecting on me, my experiences, interests, abilities and plans, and this school in this community

- Do you live in the community?
- What connections do you have with the community (where, how, when, constraints, social or other clubs/organisations?)
- What are your medium-term professional plans (i.e., over the next 5-8 years)?
  - In what ways could stronger links with this community help you advance these plans?
- How does this community and school compare with the community and school/s in which you were brought up?
  - What is the effect of this knowledge on your own teaching and learning?

### Topic 5: Reflecting on classroom work and how it intersects with school-community relationships

- To what extent does the community become involved in your classroom work?
  - planning of curriculum
  - connections with local businesses or community initiatives
- To what extent is the community drawn on a as resource for content in the classroom?
  - Local newspapers, events, excursions

classroom activities structured to allow students to utilise local knowledge

### *Section 2:Finding out answers*

- The importance of regular records while the memory is fresh,
- Talk and listen in as many different kinds of sites as you can (staff meetings, parent interviews, community meetings, assemblies, special school activities)
- Start a daisy chain: Once you get to know a parent or community member ask them to introduce you to another parent or community member (and another, and another).
- Read local newspapers, listen to local radio, go to any local theatre and music performances.
- Take photos of print in the area (billboards, shop fronts, posters etc). This gives you a great sense of what your students are reading, what the community thinks is important, what products or advertising are popular in the community and what languages the community speaks.
- Start talking and listening to your colleagues. Does anyone in the school have strong links with particular members/organisations in the community? Are other staff members doing or interested in doing practical community-based projects?
- Visit the local schools – Public and secondary – to get a sense of where your students have come from and where they're going.
- Listen to your students – find out whether they are members of clubs or sporting activities. Find out what particular interests your students have. If your students have sporting games/music/events outside the school and you are invited (or it is an open community event) make an effort to attend.

### *Section 3: Using the answers to help in your work in and out of the classroom*

Many of these suggestions will not only incorporate community links and understanding into your work but will also provide you with a more in-depth understanding of the community and its relationship to the school.

- Develop curriculum that reflects, is responsive and respectful to your community. For example, use the community as a resource for students' project work (for example: interviewing community members; geography of the town; using photos from the community as stimulus for story telling, drama or artwork).
- Develop your school and classroom as a community and part of a community: have members of the school community (groundsmen, ICT helpers, cleaners etc) come and talk about their work and perhaps students volunteer to help. Bring the outside community into your classroom (photos of our favourite places on the walls, posters to support local sports teams, talk about local news in your classroom etc).
- Arrange for staff meetings/parent teacher interviews to be held at local community agencies.
- Include opportunities for staff to attend local art exhibitions, visits to community agencies, museums etc.

- Invite artists in-residences – local artists working with students to create murals or totem poles that are displayed around the school.
- Initiate or seek information about professional development resources – This may include professional development at a state or regional level, or utilising staff and/or school community members to run professional development specific to the school environment (e.g., requesting key community members to be involved in new staff induction programs, including tours of the town/community; or getting staff to share strategies and projects with each other).
- Develop specific projects that link with businesses or community organisations. These projects can be quite short or more sustained. Successful examples of such projects include Bunning's donating plants and running 'planting lessons' for students to start a school garden or initiating mentoring programs for students with organisation such as the Australian Business and Community Network http://www.abcn.com.au
- Develop careers expos and excursions focusing on different kinds of work in and out of the community for public students (for example local hospital).
- Address cultural communication issues in your classroom. Remember that some students are expected to behave or communicate differently in cultural events outside of school (for example, not asking direct questions to adults, not giving eye contact, secret men's business, sorry business etc). In your classroom, develop explicit, shared understandings of what communication is appropriate. For example, posters on the wall that state "In this classroom, we like it when students ask questions!" Develop classroom management policies with students. Make them succinct and display them clearly in the classroom. Ensure the policy is aligned with any whole school policies.
- Implement a planned approach to community engagement and scope and sequence the work to be undertaken

NSW GOVERNMENT Education & Communities

Public Schools NSW