

Primary schools as community hubs: A review of the literature

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1. Background to the Literature Review

'Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is a success.' (Henry Ford, as quoted in Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007).

Considerable work has been undertaken over several years to establish primary schools as community hubs in the City of Hume through the Hubs Strategy Group for the Hume Communities for Children Initiative and, more recently, the Supporting Parents Developing Children project. This work has highlighted the need for a primary school community hub toolkit. The purpose of this review is to inform the development of a resource (e.g. a toolkit) that can be used by other schools so that they can also establish themselves as community hubs.

An agreed definition of schools as community hubs within the literature has not been reached. Rather, the notion of schools as community hubs seems to be understood in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this review we will draw on the definitions provided by Black (2008) and the Hubs Strategy Group for the Broadmeadows Communities for Children Initiative (2009). Black (2008) describes hubs as involving,

“collaboration between school education systems and the other sectors (community, business, local government and philanthropy) to support the learning and wellbeing of young people, especially those facing disadvantage” (p. 6).

These collaborations can range from sharing, co-locating or joint use of physical facilities, through to schools as the centre of a hub or precinct that offers multiple services for the whole community.

In the City of Hume, the Hubs Strategy Group have conceptualised a hub as, a welcoming place for families that engages key service providers to work collaboratively. A hub can be a single location or a network of places working together to provide services, such as schools, kindergartens, maternal and child health, and other relevant agencies. Hubs facilitate connections between key services and professionals and represent a paradigm shift in the planning and practice of service provision. Services and their staff are required to rethink existing practice to move to an inclusive practices framework at a professional and community level.

2. Scope, aims and outline of the literature review

The Primary Schools as Community Hubs Literature Review focuses on evidence and best practice in establishing and operating primary schools as community hubs. The review seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What are Schools as Community Hubs?
- What are the benefits, challenges and effectiveness of these partnerships?
- What schools in Victoria currently are established as community hubs?
- What information is available on how to develop and maintain school-community hubs?

The review begins by discussing the broad concept of school-community partnerships (school-community hubs are only one of the models of school-community partnership currently in existence in Australia). School-community partnerships have a range of benefits and there is evidence to indicate that they are effective at improving outcomes for children, young people, their parents, schools and communities.

This is followed by a discussion regarding school-community hubs specifically. The benefits and risks of community hubs are discussed. The effectiveness of school-community hubs is considered. Contemporary examples of schools that currently operate as community hubs in Victoria are then provided.

The final section of the review explores the literature regarding how to develop and maintain school-community hubs. Some key lessons from literature that explores best practices for school-community partnerships and the literature that investigates the challenges of school-community partnerships is combined as a means of identifying some preliminary 'how to' lessons for developing and maintaining school-community hubs. This is followed by a consideration of some of the key themes likely to be of relevance to schools seeking to operate as school-community hubs.

The conclusion to the report looks at the key issues emerging from the review in order to inform the next steps of the Primary Schools as Community Hubs project.

3. Methodology

Systematic searches were undertaken using Medline, Cinhal, ERIC, Informit and PsychInfo. The following search terms were used:

- School- community partnerships;
- School-community hubs;
- Neighbourhood hubs;
- Primary schools as community hubs;
- Community schools/schooling;
- Extended schools/schooling; and
- Extended service schools/schooling.

These particular search terms have the greatest association and relevance with school-community hubs and aided in finding necessary literature to conduct this review.

Subsequently a search for grey literature was undertaken using Google using the same keywords to identify literature and research arising from practitioner and non-government agencies.

4. School-Community Partnerships

There is a range of different type of school-community partnerships. The following section discussed as school-community partnerships as a broad concept focusing upon: why build school-community partnerships and who is involved. This is followed by a description of

different models of school-community partnerships and a discussion about the benefits, challenges and effectiveness of school-community partnerships.

4.1 Why build school-community partnerships?

The rationale outlined by Black, Lemon & Walsh (2010) begins with the recognition that there are many children who have complex social, emotional and health needs that must be met before their learning can be effective. These needs cannot be met by agencies or institutions on their own, and it is not surprising that conventional school systems are not able to do so.

It is clear that schools and health, education and community sectors can no longer continue to function parallel to one another, rather they need to work collaboratively to facilitate connections. The concept of “the moated school that is physically walled off from the community that surrounds it” (Black, 2004, as cited in Black 2008, p. 24) is now obsolete. It is necessary for schools to develop links and take a collaborative community approach to facilitate child development and also community development by providing opportunities for children and families to achieve better outcomes (Black 2008).

This can occur in one of two ways, co-locating services in a centralised location where everything is accessible from one designated place, namely a school. In contrast, it can occur as virtual web of organised networks, whereby a central point is still the school but services although integrated remain in different localities.

4.2 Who is involved?

The partners and sectors that constitute school-community partnerships are diverse and varied and dependent on the local neighbourhood. It is a shared responsibility and the following groups (although not limited to these) play a key role in developing a partnership (Lonsdale 2011):

- *parents*: parents play a critical role in school-community partnerships through facilitating their child’s learning/education through encouragement, support and ensuring attendance. Research has indicated that greater parental involvement induces a more positive outlook on school (Department of Early Education and Childhood Development 2009)
- *private sector*: from local small businesses through to large multi-national corporations
- *educational institutions*: such as universities, TAFEs, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), and apprenticeship centres also provide further opportunities for partnership;
- *community organisations*: including health-related organisations (universal and secondary services), such as community or regional health centres; sporting clubs; charities; community support services; youth, family and disability services; and local community environmental groups; and
- *governments*: including local government, state or federally funded partners such as research organisations and Government departments.

Irrespective of the nature and duration of the links, the primary focus is working together to achieve positive outcomes by overcoming practical and structural barriers (e.g. ease of access) through integration.

4.3 Models of school-community partnerships

A recent review of the relevant literature by Black, Lemon & Walsh (2010) found that various forms of school-community partnerships have been implemented under a range of titles, for a wide variety of purposes, and under a wide range of governance arrangements.

There are the following models of school-community partnerships operating both in Australia and internationally:

- 1) *Schools as community hubs*. This model serves to provide an answer to the practical and structural barriers by providing a range of social services either in a school or in collaboration with a school. The hub calls on services to ensure access to necessary support and services are readily available to all, with a focus on children who are at a disadvantage and at risk.
- 2) *Schools as community learning centres*. These centres seek to establish connections and links with educational institutions as well as with corresponding social supports. It provides access for everyone in the community, not just children and their families, with opportunities to pursue further learning.
- 3) *Schools as centres for learning excellence*. These centres facilitate the provision of support systems and services with the objective of high performance. As with the community hubs model, the collaborative provision of supplementary services enhances educational participation but differs from the community hubs model as it focuses on all students, not simply those who are disadvantaged and at-risk (adapted from Simons, 2011).
- 4) *Early childhood schools model*. Another model currently in place in the ACT is the ‘early childhood schools’ model (ACT Government, 2008). ACT early childhood schools are regional hubs that provide integrated services for children (birth to 8) as well as their families (ACT Government, 2008). Services (in addition to preschool to grade 2 classes) could include: child care, family support services, and other services to support children’s learning, health and wellbeing (ACT Government, 2008). The early childhood schools model shares many of the features of the school-community hub except that it is only for children aged 0- 8 years and is not targeted at disadvantaged students.
- 5) *Extended service school model*. Another model of school-community partnership that has attracted some attention in the Australian context is the extended service school model (see for example O’Donoghue & Davies, nd). O’Donoghue and Davies (nd) define the extended service school model as approaches which:

“work in partnership with Government, local providers, community members and each other to offer a range of extended services to students, their families and the local community. They are a model for engaging students, parents and community to complement that already experienced inside the classroom” (p. 4).

This model is prominent in the United Kingdom (referred to as the 'Full Service Extended Schools program'). In the UK, the extended schools model was introduced in 2003/04 as an approach to service children, their families and the wider community. It provides children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with services and activities that will assist in them achieving their full potential. It is delivered at a single site, and the services provided include, but are not limited to, health services, adult education and community activities. The underlying principle behind the concept of full-service or extended schools is "founded on the recognition that schooling, for many, can only be approached once a range of welfare and health services are in place" (Wilkin, Kinder, White, Atkinson and Doherty, 2003, p.3). Formation of partnerships, networks and collaborative relationship are at the centre of this initiative and the school is the focal point, and works to integrate these connections.

This model was further developed in Australia and represented in Victoria by the 'School Focused Youth Service (SFYS)'. SFYS strives to work in much the similar way by working at a local level with vulnerable young people aged 10-18 years (Black 2009).

- 6) *Full service Community schools*. Another model that exists in the United States is the 'full service community school'¹ model described by Dryfoos (2002) as:

"A community school, operating in a public school building... open to students, families and the community before, during and after school, seven days a week, all year long. It is jointly operated and financed through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. Families, young people, principals, teachers, young workers, neighbourhood residents, college faculty members, college students and business people all work together to design and implement a plan for transforming the school into a child-centred institution."

- 7) *Toronto First Duty model*. Canada also run a similar program, namely 'The Toronto First Duty (TFD) Project'- The goal of TFD is to develop a universally accessible service that promotes the healthy development of children from conception through primary school, while at the same time facilitating parents' work or study and offering support to their parenting role:

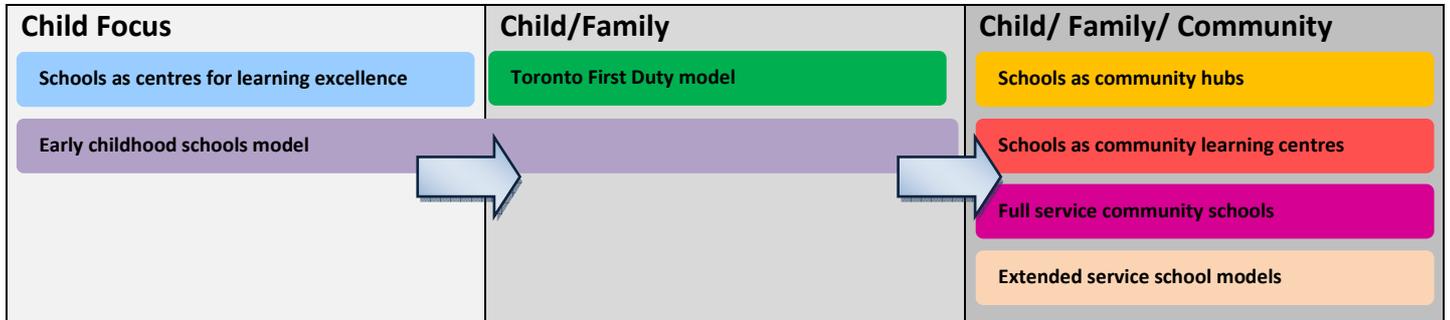
"TFD envisions regulated child care, kindergarten and family support programs consolidated into a single, accessible program delivery platform that is located in primary schools and coordinated with early intervention and family health services" (Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with Hume Early Years Partnership 2010).

These models differ on so many dimensions that it is difficult to classify them in any simple way. However, it is possible to identify the dimensions on which they vary, and then to plot, approximately at least, where each of the above models sits on each dimension. The following conceptual diagram shows the models on five major dimensions or continua.

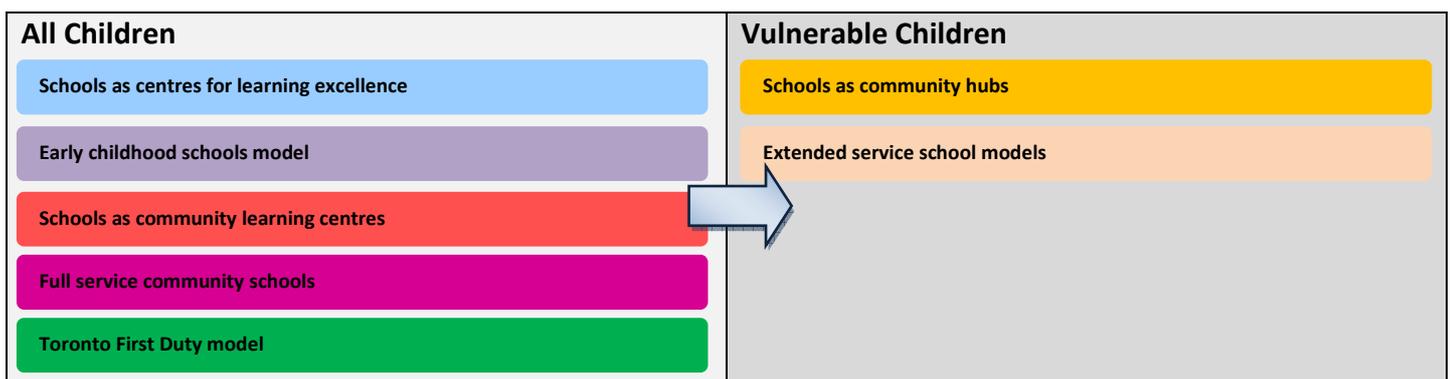
¹ Smith (2004/2005) claims that the extended schools model in the US is based upon full-service schooling models in the UK. In the UK, the extended schools model has strong policy backing, with the UK government announcing that they want "all schools and children and families to be able to access a core of extended services which are developed in partnership with others" (Smith, 2004/2005). In the US, the development of full service community schools appears to emerge more from the efforts of individual schools and communities and a group of concerned advocates (known as the 'Coalition for Community Schools'), with support in some states from state government (e.g. California, Florida and Missouri and non-government organisations (Dryfoos, 2002).

Diagram 1: Continuum of Service Models

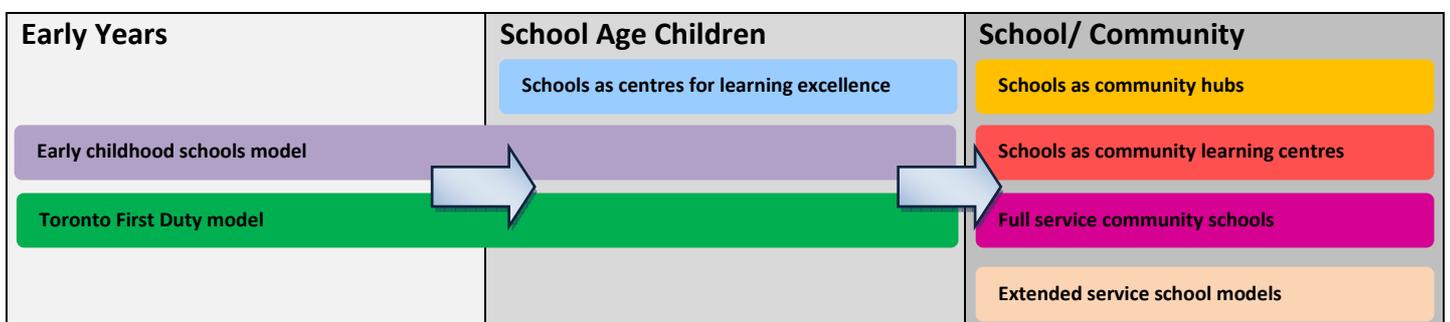
- **Dimension 1:** Programs vary in their focus, some addressing the needs of children only, some having a child and family focus, and still others having a broader child, family and community focus



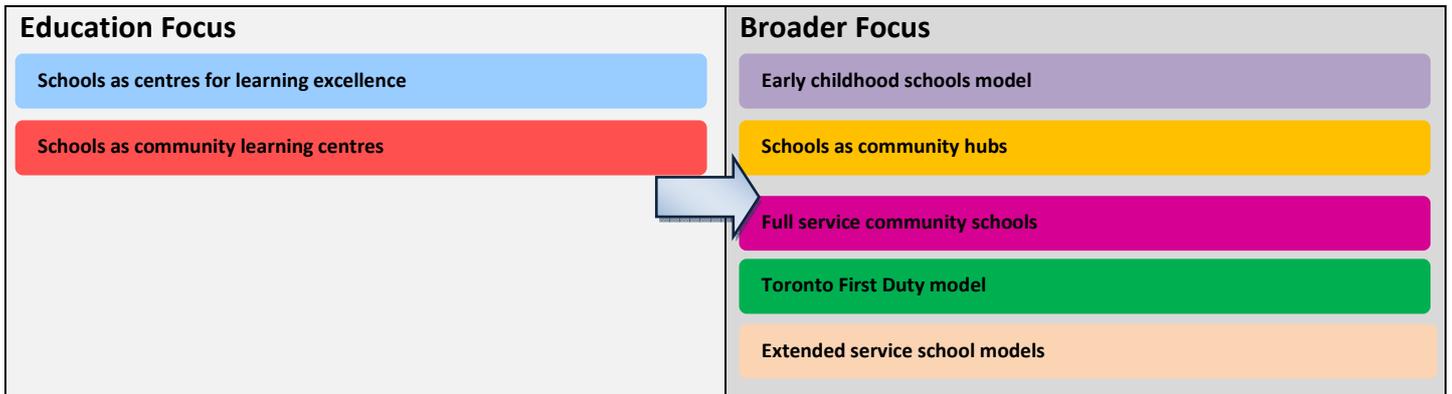
- **Dimension 2:** Some programs are tailored to target children from all backgrounds whereas others are structured to target specifically those considered to be disadvantaged or at risk



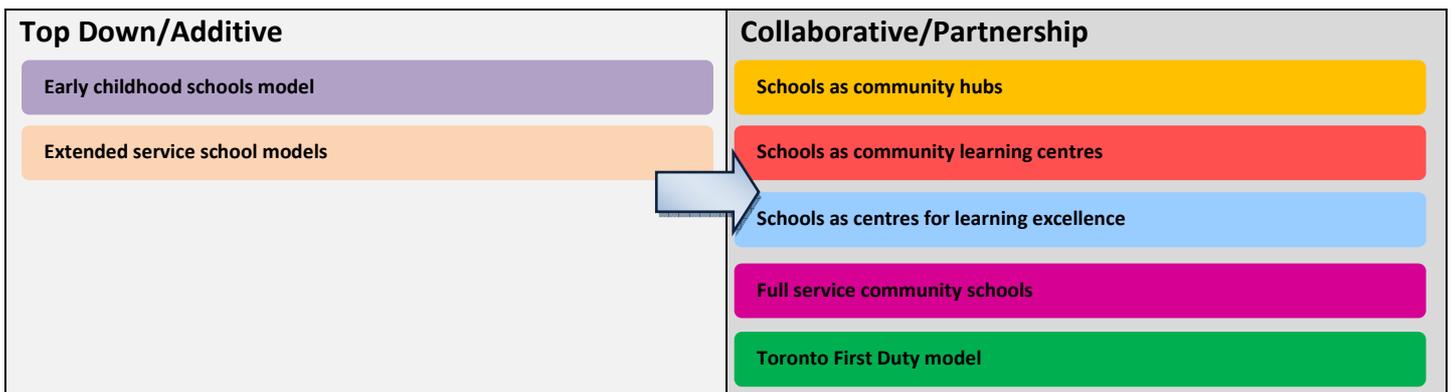
- **Dimension 3:** Programs vary in the targeted age range, some including early years services, some school age children only, and some extending further to adult education



- **Dimension 4:** The programs can be set up to focus primarily on education or have a broader focus incorporating issues such as health.



- **Dimension 5:** Programs vary in how they are established, with some being initiated by schools or schools systems in a top down or additive fashion, while others are developed in a collaborative fashion in partnership with community stakeholders and families.



Regardless of the term used to describe them, all school-community partnerships are intuitively attractive because of the benefits they can facilitate. These benefits include availability and access to services for school students and their families and opportunities for continuing learning and skill development for parents and others in the community. However there are a number of practical challenges with the development of effective and sustainable school-community partnerships.

Key messages:

A range of different types of school-community partnerships exist in Australia and internationally, including school-community hubs. School-community hubs differ from other models because they focus upon disadvantaged and at risk children.

4.4 Benefits and challenges of school-community partnerships

There are a number of benefits and challenges of school-community partnerships. These benefits and challenges pertain to the general school-community partnership model as well as specifically to co-location and the sharing of facilities. Each of these areas is addressed below.

General benefits and challenges

The evidence demonstrates a wide range of general benefits from school-community engagement (Lonsdale and Anderson, 2012; Lonsdale, 2011). Students, teachers, schools, partners and the wider community can all benefit from these types of partnerships. The benefits include:

- positive outcomes as a result of improved engagement of both the family and child the school's ability to respond to their needs;
- improved collaboration between services involved;
- improved or new knowledge of early childhood development for parents, community/business partners;
- tangible products, such as community gardens, take effect;
- children and young people may feel more connected to their communities;
- children benefit when there is parental involvement;
- social benefits including stronger or more diversified networks of support;
- financial benefits in the form of funding activities associated with the relationship or a by-product of the relationship; and
- psychological benefits for community/business partners, such as improved wellbeing, morale and feelings of making a difference (adapted from Lonsdale and Anderson, 2012; Lonsdale, 2011).

In addition to the benefits of school-community partnerships, there are multiple challenges. Some of the challenges emerging consistently in the literature about school-community partnerships include:

- *lack of training and professional development issues*: school and social care staff may not be trained in pursuing and establishing partnerships and, as such, initial resources may need to be expended in order to develop this capacity (O'Donoghue and Davies, 2010; Dryfoos, 2002; Smith (2004/2005).
- *challenges associated with working together across sectors* (Dryfoos, 2002; O'Donoghue and Davies, 2010; Smith (2004/2005): this can be especially difficult for schools, as Smith (2004/2005) notes:

“Schools have tended to be little fiefdoms, isolated to a significant extent from the direct interventions of other professionals outside the schooling system. Where schools have had to work with other agencies their relative size, statutory nature and high degree of control over what happens within their walls have often made them difficult partners.”

- *evolving needs and resourcing on an ongoing basis*: ongoing resources to maintain the partnership are required (O'Donoghue and Davies, 2010; Dryfoos, 2002);

- *low levels of support and funding*: schools in Australia and the UK report a lack of government support for developing partnerships (O'Donoghue and Davies, 2010; Smith, 2004/2005);

Key messages:

School-community partnerships have multiple benefits for children, families, services and communities, including improved engagement of families, improved connections between services and increased feelings of connection. They also pose multiple challenges, especially relating to partnership and collaboration, funding and support.

Benefits and challenges of co-location and sharing facilities

Co-locating services in schools has obvious advantages—most notably convenience for children/young people and families. But research on school-based services has convincingly shown other, perhaps more powerful, benefits as well (Grossman and Vang 2009). Co-location and at least partial integration of services in schools produces powerful synergies affecting both what happens during school hours and outside of them, including (Blank, 2003 as cited by Grossman and Vang 2009):

- Improving access to and participation in services for both youth and families;
- Improving the youth's connection to school;
- Improving attendance, academic achievement and behaviour; and
- Increasing family involvement in children's schooling.

There are also specific benefits emerging from sharing facilities within schools (Department of Early Education and Childhood Development 2010). The possible advantages of sharing facilities include:

- One focal point delivering a range of quality services with easy access
- Community development through stronger networking, greater involvement in school activities and student education.
- Community/business partnerships within a local neighbourhood endeavour to enhance local morale and community wellbeing through their individual contributions
- Increased use of school premises outside of school hours (adapted from Department of Early Childhood Development, 2010)

In addition to the benefits of co-locating services and sharing facilities, it is also important to consider the challenges. O'Donoghue and Davies (2010) identify a number of these challenges including:

- *building design*: where early childhood services are provided, the building design of the school may not align with children/families' needs (e.g. ramps for pram access);
- *network access*: it may be difficult for professionals from other sectors to access their own agency's network online;

- *working within school open hours*: where non-school staff are working at the school outside of traditional school opening hours (i.e. when teachers/students are not present) there may be safety concerns and, more importantly, potential feelings of isolation; and
- *managing community access*: where community resources are held on school grounds (e.g. a community pantry) there may be issues regarding appropriate restriction of access to particular areas within the school.

One of the main disadvantages in this concept is “that it attempts to build a comprehensive health and social service delivery strategy within a single institution whose mandate is to provide academic instructional services” (Walker, Smithgall & Cusick, 2012, p. 3).

Key messages:

Co-location has clear benefits for children and families, including improved access to services. Co-location and the sharing of resources can also pose challenges such as inappropriate (school) building design and the management of community access.

4.5 Evidence regarding the effectiveness of school-community partnerships

The empirical evidence, both national and international, demonstrates a range of positive outcomes for children and family and also at the school and community level as a result of school-community partnerships (Weiss, 2000; Epstein, 1995 as cited in Simons 2011).

In Australia, school-community partnerships are recognised in government policy as important and worthy of investment. For example, the Victorian Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, “articulates the Government’s commitment to promote schools and children’s centres as community hubs, through the co-location and integration of services and increased community use of school facilities” (Department of Early Education and Childhood Development, 2008, p. 1).

Research in the area of school-community partnerships is still in its infancy (Department of Early Education and Childhood Development, 2008). A review of evaluation literature about extended schools in the UK found that:

“the research evidence [is] characterised by major shortcomings - not least that it tended overwhelmingly to be generated by small-scale evaluations of short-term local initiatives. There was, therefore, much enthusiastic description of 'extended' activities and many claims about their potential, but very little evidence as to their longer-term impacts which might support those claims” (Dyson, Millward et al, 2002, p. 6).

In Australia, the evaluation of school-community partnerships has been, according to O’Donoghue and Davies (2010), “ad-hoc” and the Foundation for Young Australians (2010) note that extended service schooling in Australia has not been adequately evaluated:

“Effective practice in extended service schooling, as in any other educational practice, includes the thorough monitoring and measurement of its actions and outcomes and the capacity to respond to the evidence that this yields. Yet this kind of practice is relatively uncommon. Instead, the collection and analysis of data in

relation to extended service schooling is frequently overlooked” (Black, Lemon & Walsh, 2010, p. 11).

As a result of this, the evidence of effectiveness of school-community partnerships in the Australian context is fairly limited.

Despite the limitations of existing evidence, multiple researchers have used the evidence that does exist to identify the effectiveness of school-community partnerships, both overseas and in Australia (Black, Lemon and Walsh, 2010; O’Donoghue and Davies, 2010).

According to a review by Black et al. (2010), effective models of extended service schooling have shown the following benefits:

- improvements in young people’s educational outcomes, self-confidence and well-being;
- greater family engagement in school and improved communication between schools and families;
- more positive school environments;
- greater community capacity;
- earlier identification of children and young people’s needs and quicker access to services; and
- widening schools’ external contacts, networks and partnerships

O’Donoghue and Davies (2010) note the following outcomes of extended service schooling in Australia, based upon anecdotal and observational methodologies:

- an improvement in student behaviour;
- improved social development of children;
- an improvement in educational attainment;
- an increase in the number of parents who are linked to services;
- improvement in levels of integration of school within the community;
- improvement in school reputation; and
- improvement in teacher morale.

O’Donoghue and Davies (2010) also noted the economic effectiveness of the extended school service model in Australia (also based on anecdotal and observational data):

- the extended service school model is a cost-efficient model of addressing social issues in the long term;
- improved potential career opportunities for students as a result of them not ‘slipping through the net’ and a subsequent potential reduction in social inequality and welfare dependency;

- benefits for local business (as a result of a better-skilled workforce);
- increased skills and employment of parents who volunteer at the school as part of the extended service model;
- greater connections with the community leading to improved business performance; and
- generation of income for the school.

Lonsdale (2011) undertook a study of the impact of 801 discrete school-community partnerships in Australia and reported similar outcomes including: improved student engagement; improved academic outcomes; enhanced wellbeing (students); and broadened vocational options and skills.

As noted previously, evidence from international research and evaluation appears to be similarly limited to Australian evidence (Dyson et al, 2002). Despite these limitations, Dyson et al (2002), reporting upon the impact of the extended service school model in the UK, used the “best available evidence” to identify the following impacts of school-community partnerships:

- high levels of participation in extended activities;
- potential impacts upon levels of attainment of students (e.g. exam results);
- the creation of a culture of learning both within the school and in the broader community; and
- engagement of disaffected students and community members in learning.

In a search for evaluations of full service community schools in the US Dryfoos (2002) identified 49 evaluation reports, 46 of which reported some positive outcomes. Dryfoos notes, however, in keeping with the aforementioned authors that “only a few programs can produce what would pass as ‘scientific’ results” (p. 397). Common gains for these full services community schools included:

- educational achievement;
- improvements in school attendance;
- reduction in suspensions;
- reductions in high-risk behaviours (e.g. substance abuse);
- improved access to services;
- increases in parent involvement; and
- lower rates of violence and safer streets in local communities.

Despite the limitations of the existing data, Dryfoos argued that:

“the weight of the evidence suggests that community schools are beginning to be able to demonstrate the positive effects on students, families and communities.”

Key messages:

The existing evidence of effectiveness for school-community partnerships is limited; most evidence is based upon small-scale evaluations and 'ad hoc' evaluation approaches.

The best available evidence suggests that school-partnerships are effective in improving outcomes for children and parents and there is some evidence indicating positive outcomes for schools and surrounding communities.

5. Schools as community hubs

As noted previously, schools that operate as community hubs are one of the models of school-community partnerships currently existing in Australia. Gunning and Andre (2011) state that:

“The community hub strategy is based on evidence that in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, coordinated approaches across sectors can improve social and educational outcomes for children in the pathway to school and families can receive more comprehensive parenting support within a ‘one stop shop’ approach” (Gunning and Andre 2011).

The aim of school-community hubs is to provide disadvantaged students and their families with supports that include:

- (1) Complementary support to enhance student learning and achievement (e.g. programs to assist in increasing attendance rates, literacy and numeracy programs, parent education programs); and
- (2) Supplementary services that address barriers to learning (e.g. before and after school care, schools buses, community links to allied health services) (adapted from Gunning and Andre, 2011).

The range of services offered by schools as community hubs varies considerably. According to Black, Lemon and Walsh (2010), core services offered by extended service schools include literacy and numeracy programs, online learning options, individual case management and referral services, open access to school and community facilities, and recreational activities and vocational learning. However, there are many additional services that have been offered, including onsite health services, speech pathology services, psychology services, childcare and preschool programs, TAFE and VET programs and evening classes for adults.

In the following discussion, the benefits and challenges of schools operating as community hubs are described along with evidence regarding the effectiveness of this model.

5.1 Benefits and challenges of the schools as community hubs model

The benefit of community hubs are that they have the capacity to address practical and structural barriers (e.g. accessibility, language barriers) and, ultimately, provide a service that builds positive relationships. In addition, school-community hubs offer a public space where the whole community can be engaged. Community partnerships with schools can also mobilise the community before school entry (West-Burnham et al., 2007).

Black et al (2009) notes that: “collaboration between schools and community sector agencies in itself is a challenge, but is the single most important cross-sectoral relationship in improving outcomes for children and young people, yet these relationships are fraught with challenges” (p. 54). For example, one of the challenges of these relationships is that the training received by teachers is so different to that of community sector professionals that they can struggle to understand one another's basic priorities, posing issues when working collaboratively (Black et al, 2009). When collaboration between professionals from these sectors does happen, it tends to be driven by individual relationships between committed teachers or community agency staff rather than by organisational or system agreements (Black et al, 2009). This presents a clear barrier to sustainability. Commitment from both the school and community sector is key to good partnership practice.

The danger of schools providing supplementary services that address barriers to learning, is that in disadvantaged communities welfare support takes precedence over the provision of quality learning opportunities (Black et al, 2008). Black et al (2008) notes that collaborative networks among schools and with other agencies can help deliver both of these goals, but they are most likely to be effective if their primary purpose is better learning. However, Smith (2004/2005) notes that there is an unresolved tension in UK government policy regarding measuring the success of extended schools – should they be seeking to improve educational outcomes or should they focus upon the overall happiness of students? This tension is likely to also emerge in relation to school-community hubs in Australia.

Key messages:

School-community hubs are one of the existing models of school-community partnerships in Australia. They provide complementary support to enhance student learning and supplementary services to address barriers in learning.

One of the key challenges of school-community hubs relates to the challenges associated with cross-sectoral collaboration.

5.2 Evidence Regarding the Effectiveness of Schools as Community Hubs

The literature suggests that community hubs offer a new way of working with families, with agencies and schools working collaboratively. There is considerable interest in strengthening the role of schools as hubs within the community and as a natural focus point for coordination of the provision of services to children and their families (Best Start Broadmeadows Action Plan, 2006).

The Hubs Strategy Group (2007) relates the effectiveness of school-community hubs to the logic of the various elements that comprise the school-community hub approach (Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007). They note that research demonstrates, for example, that families receive more comprehensive support from integrated service due to the ‘one-stop-shop’ nature of these services and that factors such as family violence and poverty can be reduced via an integrated approach to service delivery. In other words, school-community hubs *should* deliver positive outcomes considering that the various elements that comprise school-community hubs (most notably an integrated approach) have been shown to be effective at improving outcomes, especially for vulnerable children and families.

Research regarding school-community hubs specifically appears to be relatively uncommon. An evaluation of the Setting the Hubs Humming Strategy in the City of Hume (Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007) found a number of positive outcomes including:

- increased access to Early Years programs for children's services and schools;
- increased access by families to preschool and child care;
- improvement in service collaboration and coordination;
- introduction of bilingual workers in hubs; and
- increased levels of participation by parents in activities.

Although evidence of effectiveness specifically about school-community hubs is uncommon, evidence of the effectiveness of school-community partnerships provides an insight into the potential effectiveness of school-community hubs. That is, as an 'offshoot' of school-community partnerships, school-community hubs are likely to have similar levels of effectiveness and similar types of outcomes.

Key messages:

There is limited evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of school-community hubs specifically.

5.3 School-Community Hubs: Existing Models

'The "Setting Hubs Humming" strategy in the City of Hume reports that it has been successful in its aim of "developing local places for active community engagement" (Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007). Seven local hubs have been sent up over four years. Each of the hubs are sustainable in their continued contribution by organizations (Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007).

Local primary schools have developed various services and activities as a strategy to ensure their schools operates as a hub (Waters-Lynch 2008). Moreover, to eliminate language barriers, hubs have established adult English classes and therefore assist parents to aid in the education of their children (Waters-Lynch 2008).

In Hume, there are five hub projects operating across seven sites and each is different in its approach to service delivery. The sites are located in primary schools. The key sites are:

- Campbellfield: Campbellfield Heights Primary School and Hume City Council Preschool
- Broadmeadows: Broadmeadows Valley Primary School (formerly Jacana Primary School, Broadmeadows West and Meadow Fair North Primary School which amalgamated in 2009) and Hume City Council Meadow Fair North preschool
- Broadmeadows: Meadows Primary School and Early Learning Centre (formerly known as Meadowbank Primary School and Early Learning Centre)Coolaroo:
- Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten

- Dallas: Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten.

Another local example is the Doveton Learning College; this is discussed in further details in section 7.2.2.

It is important to state that this information is based on published evidence and the list of school community hubs may be less than exhaustive in terms of the current status of schools acting as hubs.

School-community hubs in Broadmeadows

The Victorian initiative, the Hubs Strategy Group for the Broadmeadows Communities for Children Initiative (2009) involves six schools as community Hubs. They define a 'hub' as a *welcoming place for families that engages key service providers to work collaboratively* (Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with Hume Early Years Partnership 2010)

A snapshot of the challenges faced by the Broadmeadows community (Adapted from (Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with Hume Early Years Partnership 2010):

- Broadmeadows is regarded as socio-economically disadvantaged
- In order to provide a secure family/home environment families face many challenges
- Increased number of families from CALD backgrounds
- The population is considered transient and ever changing
- Poor social support networks
- Families will have faced difficult and traumatic situations prior to arriving in Australia, for example family violence, teenage pregnancy, isolation, etc
- High levels of unemployment
- A considerable proportion of families rely on subsidised housing

The schools as community hubs in Broadmeadows focus on early childhood (birth-5 years) and are planned to service local needs. Hubs can be located at a single site or it could simply be a collaboration of services working together to offer programs, services and events to families and children. 'A number of early-years services are now co-located on, or next door to, primary-school sites in Broadmeadows' (Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with Hume Early Years Partnership 2010). By creating a local set of hub specific for this particular community it eliminates barriers early years services and informal family support at a neighbourhood level.

Hubs use a range of mechanisms to raise awareness of the services provided and engage with hard-to reach families, for example posting large signs outside schools, school newsletters translated into languages appropriate to the local community, hosting large event days to draw in new community members and families.

There is a sense of community effort, where parents with specific skill sets are identified and encouraged to assist, for example running playgroups, similarly Hub coordinators actively

seek to link parents to services and other families. Staffs at the hubs are alerted to particular needs of the child/family/community and programs such as playgroups and parenting groups are adapted and offered in specific languages, rather than having an interpreter assigned. English language programs have generated a lot of interest and subsequently each hub set up English classes which were taken up enthusiastically, reinforcing the notion that parents play a key role in shaping activities and programs.

6. How to develop and maintain school-community hubs

This review has explored the concept of the school-community partnerships and school-community hubs, along with the benefits, challenges and their effectiveness.

In the final section of this review we will consider the literature regarding how to develop schools as community hubs. This discussion is designed to inform decisions regarding the focus and content of the aforementioned school-community hub resource.

This section begins with a consideration of best practice principles for developing and maintaining school-community hubs and then goes on to explore critical areas for consideration for schools seeking to develop and maintain a community hub.

6.1 Best practice principles for developing and maintaining school-community partnerships

There appears to be relatively little information available regarding how to develop a school-community partnership. This is most likely a result of the fact that school-community partnerships are most effective when they are individually tailored to meet the specific needs of schools and communities. In other words, how a school-community hub is developed will depend upon the unique context of the school and community in question.

The aforementioned challenges of developing and maintaining school-community hubs provide some insight into what to be aware of/avoid when developing school-community partnerships. For example, lack of training appears to be a fairly common issue therefore professional development for staff involved is likely to be an important factor in how to develop a school-community partnership.

In addition to using the identified challenges as a means of developing some 'how to' messages, it is also useful to consider the existing literature on best practice principles for developing and maintaining school-community partnerships, especially that literature that pertains to the Australian context (O'Donoghue & Davies, 2010; ACT Government, 2008; Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008).

The following is a summary of some of the 'how to' ideas for school-community hubs. This list is based upon the best practice Australian literature and the literature regarding the challenges of school-community partnerships:²

- **Consult with hub stakeholders at all critical stages of the development of the hub.** It is especially important to consult with members of the partnership when identifying the needs and opportunities in the local community.
- **Establish a passionate, committed, multi-level leadership team.** The leadership team consistently emerges as a critical part of any school-community partnerships.

² The list is not exhaustive and is based upon common issues (rather than *all* issues) emerging in the literature.

Commitment at multiple levels (e.g. school, central agency, government) appears to be especially important.

- **Ensure genuine collaboration within the partnership.** This can be challenging, however meaningful collaboration also appears to be especially important for school-community hubs.
- **Allow for an evolving, flexible model with a balance between formality and informality.** The model needs to be able to adapt to the changing needs of the students, their families, the school and the community. Formal processes need to be in place in order that all key stakeholders are clear on their roles, however there needs to be enough informality to allow for growth and flexibility of the model.
- **Establishing regular monitoring and review processes** emerges as a critical aspect of any school-community hub. The importance of data is noted consistently in the literature regarding school-community partnerships.
- **Accept that it will take time for tangible results** because school-community hubs involve complex relationships, changes in the way institutions traditionally operate. It is important to celebrate 'small wins' whilst also understanding that best practice involves the setting of long-term objectives that will take time to realise.
- **Establish adequate resources and make use of existing resources.** Resources will be required to support the development and maintenance of school-community hubs. Resources may include: professional development, funding to support partnership co-ordinators, time for partners to invest in partnership activities, funding for new infrastructure (e.g. ramps for prams). It is important also not to reinvent the wheel and make use of existing resources within the community.

Key messages:

Overall, the literature indicates a number of key 'how to' messages for schools wishing to operate as community hubs. The list of 'how to' factors above are likely to be important for any school that seeks to become a community hub. It is these 'basic ingredients' which will form the basis of a tailored, place-based approach that meets the unique needs of individual schools and communities.

6.2 Critical areas of consideration

As noted above, there is some literature available on best practice principles for school-community partnerships and these principles provide an insight into how to develop school-community hubs within the Australian context. However, it is important to note that there are various other bodies of evidence that, although not pertaining specifically to school-community hubs, are still highly relevant to these types of initiatives.

In the following discussion these areas are addressed, with a specific focus upon evidence of effectiveness (e.g. what works):

- *Working in collaboration:* collaborative relationships will be a central feature of any school-community partnership;
- *Building integrated service systems:* evidence regarding the integration of service systems is important to the development of school-community hubs;
- *Engaging vulnerable families:* when seeking to engage parents, some families will be easier to engage than others;

- *Family friendly service systems*: schools that operate as community hubs typically seek to become more open, welcoming places for families;
- *Family involvement*: family involvement is critical to school-community hubs; and
- *Building community strengths and capacity*: as they expand their reach beyond the school walls and develop a more holistic view of their role in the community, schools that operate as community hubs have an important role to play in building community strengths and capacity, especially in significantly disadvantaged communities.

In reviewing the literature regarding effectiveness in each of these specific topics, it is hoped that a more holistic, in-depth understanding of the 'how' of school-community hubs will emerge.

Working in collaboration

As noted above, genuine collaboration is one of the common factors identified as a best practice principle in school-community partnerships. What does 'genuine collaboration' actually mean and how is it achieved in practice? The following discussion investigates best practice and evidence of what works in regards to collaboration in general and then in regards to two more specific bodies of literature that are relevant to collaborations within school community hubs:

- parent-professional partnerships and collaborations; and
- cross sector collaborations.

Collaboration: What works?

Collaboration is distinct from cooperation and coordination, involving higher levels of interdependence, risk, reward, contribution and commitment (ARACY, 2009). It requires participants to challenge business as usual and is not merely a mechanism but a state of mind involving significant cultural change (ARACY, 2009; Flaxman et al, 2009). A key question for this review is what works in collaboration?

Einbinder, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic and Patti (2000) analysed data drawn from participants in eight family services collaboratives in California and subsequently identified four prerequisites to effective inter-organisational collaboration:

- incentive to collaborate;
- willingness to collaborate;
- ability to collaborate; and
- capacity to collaborate.

Each of these prerequisites is positively related to collaboration effectiveness (Einbinder et al, 2000).

Focusing more on the underlying qualities essential for collaboration, The Australian Research Alliance of Children and Youth (ARACY) identified the following three key elements for successful collaboration:

- *trust*: the "lubricant" to collaborative action, reducing complexity and leading to more information and resource sharing and a willingness to commit to the objectives of the partnership;

- *reciprocity*: a process of give and take where members anticipate a return of equal value on their contribution; and
- *mutuality*: takes place when members replace their own interests (or the interests of their agency) with collective interests and activities (ARACY, 2010).

Johnson, Zorn, Tam, Lamontagne and Johnson (2003) also investigated factors related to successful and unsuccessful collaborations and identified seven factors related to successful interagency collaboration:

- *commitment*: commitment entails the sharing of goals and visions and the establishment of a high level of trust and mutual responsibility for goals held in common. Commitment is a critical factor and the foundation of successful interagency collaborations but is often missing in unsuccessful collaborations.
- *communication*: open lines of communication are a critical component of successful collaboration. Enhanced communication is one of the most effective ways of overcoming barriers to collaboration.
- *strong leadership from key decision makers*: It is critical that upper management be involved and committed to the collaboration. The success or failure of an interagency collaboration is dependent on the commitment of key decision makers who are truly representative of the collaborating agencies.
- *understanding the culture of collaborating agencies*: Each agency has its own organisational culture, including language, values or priorities, rules and regulations, ways of doing business, and even definitions of collaboration. It is important for individuals within agencies to understand the culture (i.e., rules, values, communication patterns, structure, etc.) of the agencies they are attempting to engage in an interagency collaboration.
- *providing adequate resources for collaboration*: Maintaining successful collaborations can be difficult. It is important that the leadership in collaborating agencies recognise the difficulty of the collaborative process and provide individuals with adequate resources and support needed to be successful
- *minimising turf issues*: It is important to address turf issues for interagency collaborations to be successful. People embarking on an interagency collaboration must recognise that turf issues are likely to occur and cannot be ignored. The best way to minimise these issues is to anticipate their appearance and to develop a plan for addressing them as they emerge.
- *engaging in serious preplanning*: The danger of "turf issues" highlights the need for preplanning. Interagency collaboration is difficult and it is important that effort be directed at building a foundation that enhances the chances of successful collaboration

Based on a survey of the research literature and focus groups with service providers in rural South Australia, Munn (2003) explored factors that facilitate and inhibit service coordination. Factors seen as facilitating coordination are:

- informal networking; and
- the support given by management.

Important triggers of service coordination were the:

- efforts of key individuals in providing leadership of the coordination process and
- keenness of human service workers to reduce duplication.

'Professional elitism' was identified as a major inhibitor to service coordination.

Key messages:

Effective collaborations are founded upon 'hard' features, such as structural and workforce characteristics (e.g. resources, capacity) and 'soft' features that pertain more to relationship and social characteristics, such as trust and reciprocity.

Parent-professional collaborations

Collaborations between schools and parents and schools and families will be critical to any school community hub model. In a literature review about the extended service school model, Black, Lemon & Walsh (2010) points out that initially one of the most important tasks for schools seeking to engage parents and families is to ensure that services are adequately directed to their needs and priorities noting that:

“There should be a clear synergy between the aims of the school and the community it serves, and... the school should be willing to engage in innovation to address the specific needs of the community” (p. 23).

The process of engaging parents is a prerequisite for collaboration. In addition to knowing how to engage parents, it is important that schools also know how to develop collaborative relationships with them. Research undertaken by Blue-Banning et al (2004) in regards to early childhood intervention demonstrates that many of the aforementioned features identified by Johnson et al (2003) and ARACY (2010) as essential for effective collaboration are also important for parent-professional partnerships (i.e. commitment, communication, trust). Other characteristics that are of critical importance in any parent-professional partnership are:

- Equality: The members of the partnership feel a sense of equity in decision making and service implementation, and actively work to ensure that all other members of the partnership feel equally powerful in their ability to influence outcomes for children and families.
- Skills: Members of the partnership perceive that others on the team demonstrate competence, including service providers' ability to fulfil their roles and to demonstrate recommended practice approaches to working with children and families.
- Respect: The members of the partnership regard each other with esteem and demonstrate that esteem and through actions communications.

Similar themes emerge in Leiba and Weinstein's (2003) work which identifies a number of key principles for practitioners who are collaborating with service users. Other principles Leiba and Weinstein identify that have not been previously discussed include:

- Acknowledge and respect difference and diversity;
- Involve service users in assessment, care planning and reviews;
- Share records with users and carers, while taking care with necessary permissions;
- Pay users who are helping with strategy, planning, evaluation or research; and

- Ensure venues for meetings are accessible and appropriate.

These principles are also reflected in research that has investigated effective means for engaging vulnerable families.

Scott, Salvaron, Reimer, Nichols, Sivak and Arney (2007) reviewed the elements of effective partnerships with parents. Based upon this analysis, they made the following key conclusions:

- Partnerships between practitioners and parents can be complex, influenced by the relationship each has with the child, and by what the practitioner and the parent mean to each other, psychologically and socially.
- Key elements in effective working relationships are the practitioner's empathy, respect, genuineness and optimism (often referred to using the acronym 'ERGO').
- The worker-parent relationship is embedded within an organisational context which influences the relationship through the nature of the physical setting, its resources, the service role and mandate, and agency climate and morale.
- The worker-parent relationship and the organisation are embedded in a broader social environment which can facilitate and/or inhibit the potential for positive partnerships. In this respect culture and class are important dimensions, and rural settings have particular challenges and opportunities.
- Organisations can enhance positive worker-parent partnerships through:
 - creating a culture of inquiry and reflection
 - selecting the right staff
 - supporting staff through good supervision and training
 - giving staff enough time to develop relationships

Key messages:

Parent-professional collaborations are founded upon an understanding of the needs and priorities of parents. All of the factors that facilitate effective collaborations generally (see above) are relevant to parent-professional collaborative relationships, however factors such as equality and respect appear to be especially important in parent-professional relationships.

Cross-sector collaborations

In addition to collaborations with parents and families, school-community hubs will need to develop cross-sector collaborations. For example, collaborative relationships may need to be developed with welfare agencies, health services and local volunteer associations. Black et al (2010) notes that cross-sector collaborations can be difficult and demanding. Cross-sector collaborations between schools and the social care sector can be especially challenging in Australia considering the sectors have typically functioned in parallel to one another, rather than in partnership.

In a study of an initiative to build collaborative partnerships between community-based organisations and schools, Bodilly, Chun, Ikemoto and Stockly (2004) identified the following factors as important in developing these types of collaborative relationships:

- *Inclusion of stakeholders integral to the local context and able to contribute to the collaborative's goals:* for example, inclusion of teachers and principals in collaborative planning proved to be a useful strategy to gain school-level buy-in to plans for improving professional development and other activities.
- *The perceived legitimacy and authority of the lead organisation:* For example, collaboratives with the central office acting as the lead lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many stakeholders.
- *How collaborative members worked together:* Those collaboratives that employed a top-down or non-inclusive style of decision-making made less progress toward joint goals and joint activities.
- *The characteristics of and action by the collaborative leadership:* actions by the collaborative lead, especially those encouraging open discussion and inclusion, played a crucial role in several sites in creating joint commitment.
- *The fostering of the collaborative's legitimacy and reputation over time:* a strong lead with recognised legitimacy was not enough. Eventually, the collaborative was judged on its own record. Those collaboratives that relied solely on the lead for authority stumbled; those that paid attention to developing collaborative recognition in their own right made progress toward influence in the community.
- *The matching of goals to the local context:* collaboratives that took the time to understand the needs in the community and the assets and programs already available produced value-added activities, as opposed to redundant or unneeded programs.
- *The adept use of data to inform theories of action and activities and the habit of continuously reflecting on work and of using data to alter strategies as necessary:* several collaboratives did not match activities very directly to the outcomes they desired, nor did they track data to understand whether they were having an impact. Others made a concerted effort to do so and, as a result, could reflect on data and recommend improvements to programs.
- *Early attention to a plan for institutionalising systemic change, including strategies for sustaining the collaborative as well as sustaining and scaling-up the reform agenda:* some never really addressed this function, assuming it would take care of itself. It did not. Others took this function quite seriously and made it an important part of the work from the very beginning of the effort.

Literature that is not specific to the education sector but may be useful when considering what makes cross-sectoral collaborative relationships effective includes Billett, Clemans and Seddon's (2005) work. Focusing on partnerships in communities, Billett et al (2005) explore the principles and practices that build and sustain partnerships between a range of organisations including community groups, education and training providers, industry, and governments.

Billett et al (2005) demonstrate that social partnerships are established and maintained because participants engage in an interactive and collaborative process of working together to identify, negotiate and define goals, and to develop processes for realising and reviewing those goals. In keeping with Black et al's (2010) point regarding the complexity of cross-

sectoral collaborations, a key finding of Billett et al (2005)'s research is that social partnerships are complex and demand significant skills in cross-cultural and interpersonal communication.

Valentine and Hilferty (2012) identify some of the areas around which challenges emerge in multi-agency initiatives in the child welfare sector. Although some of their findings are more relevant to child welfare (i.e. child protection, especially child deaths) than universal services (e.g. schools), they provide important insights into the nature of cross-sector collaborations. They include:

- *communication*: problems with communicating and exchanging information;
- *power differentials and power struggles*: differences in employment contracts and conditions, professional training, occupational status and power can all lead to power struggles within cross-sector collaborations;
- *staff turnover*: high staff turnover can impact upon the effective functioning of a collaboration;

Scott (2005) provides a framework assessing sources of conflict within collaborative relationships which includes five specific levels: (i) inter-organisational; (ii) intra-organisational; (iii) inter-professional; (iv) inter-personal; and (v) intra-personal. While yet to be systematically tested, this conceptual framework may assist schools to enhance collaboration across organisational and sectoral boundaries.

Key messages:

Cross-sector relationships can be challenging for schools. Some of the key factors that appear to support cross-sector relationships include a good understanding of the local context, the meaningful involvement of stakeholders and bottom-up rather than top-down model of decision-making.

Building an integrated service system

Whereas collaboration involves two or more stakeholders working closely together in an intense way, with a focus upon “challeng[ing] business as usual”, integration involves the merging of services to create a new entity (ARACY, 2009; Moore & Skinner, 2010). Integration can occur at a number of different levels:

- *policy (or whole of government) integration*: working across government departments, portfolios or levels of government;
- *regional and local planning integration*; involving the establishment of regional or local interagency planning groups or partnerships that take responsibility for local integrated service systems;
- *service delivery integration*; integration at the direct service level; and
- *practitioner or teamwork level*; professionals working together, often with members of different disciplines (Moore & Skinner, 2010).

There are examples of integrated service systems operating within schools in Australia at all four levels listed above. At the policy level, there are 48 ‘schools as community centres’ operating in NSW which involve schools and interagency partners working collaboratively to “develop capacity in young children” (0-8 years) (NSW Public Schools, 2010). Families,

communities, schools and human service agencies work in partnership to deliver SaCC initiatives (NSW Public Schools, 2010). The 'Setting the Hubs Humming' initiative (described on p. 15) is an example of a regional integration that centres around schools.

There are other existing examples of schools that operate according to an integrated model of service delivery both within Australia and internationally. For example, as noted previously (see p. 8) the ACT Department of Education and Training (2008) has developed an early childhood schools model. These schools were designed as regional hubs, providing integrated services for children (birth to 8 years) and their families. In addition to preschool to year 2 classes, these include:

- child care,
- family support services and
- other services that support children's learning, health and well-being.

Another model of integrated service delivery model within an Australian school is the Doveton Learning Centre. The Doveton Learning Centre opened in 2012³ and is located in an urban area of Victoria that experiences significant levels of disadvantage (e.g. high levels of mobility, low levels of education, high levels of unemployment).

The key components of the Doveton Learning Centre service model are as follows:

- recognition of learning support, including the early years, as an integral part of the school infrastructure, including space, staffing and budget allocations for its maintenance and growth;
- an on-campus high quality early learning program, supported playgroups, early literacy and other specific programs with an early years focus;
- adult education, study support groups and additional adult education opportunities at community sites and through distance learning;
- availability of Centrelink staff to discuss education, employment opportunities as well as family payments and entitlements;
- partnerships with the local Community Health Service and Early Childhood Intervention provider to deliver on-site health and well being services from vaccinations, general well being consultations, therapy and other early childhood intervention programs;
- various allied health services will be available as well as the opportunity for students and families to make appointments with a paediatric fellow, social worker or a special education psychologist;
- transition support services which aim to ease the difficulty of starting school for parents and children. New students and parents are given an official welcome and orientation by staff and other parents;
- mental health services provided by partners;
- an integrated and shared case management system, including a collaborative referral review process;
- strong community outreach, including parent and community volunteers;
- after-school and weekend tutoring programs; and

³ When it opened in 2012 the Doveton Learning Centre was open to children enrolling in Prep to Grade 6. In 2013 the school will also be open to children enrolling in Years 7-9.

- extension of opening times for the school beyond the normal school day including evenings and weekends (New & McLoughlin, 2011).

Evaluation of the Doveton Learning Centre will provide important lessons for other schools wishing to operate as community hubs.

In the Toronto First Duty delivery model (see p.8), a professional team of kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, family support staff and teaching assistants plan and deliver the program. Space and resources are combined. There is a single intake procedure and flexible enrolment options. Children and families are linked to specialized resources as required.

Five elements identify a Toronto First Duty program:

1. *Integrated governance*: the partners combine resources in order to plan and deliver the program.
2. *Seamless access*: There is a single enrolment process allowing parents to access the range of activities offered. Participation is flexible so that parents can attend the program at any time with their children.
3. *Staff teams*: The program is delivered by a teaching team which includes early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, parenting workers and assistants. A common approach is used by the teaching team and resources and space are shared.
4. *Integrated early learning environment*: The premises are licensed as child care facilities and as preschool facilities. Merging these facilities provides a better learning environment for children throughout their day, and removes the many transitions that children typically experience at this age as they move from child care to kindergarten and back again.
5. *Parent participation*: Parent participation is recognized as vital for children's success. Parents are welcome to participate in all the Centre's activities at all times. This could include, for example, eating lunch with their children, joining in classroom and outdoor activities and participating in programs designed for parents/caregivers on their own and with the children (Toronto First Duty, 2008).

Toronto First Duty states the following major findings from Toronto First Duty Research:

- Successful systems change involves the meaningful engagement of stakeholders at all levels, informed by expert knowledge.
- New investments should complement existing services rather than adding new program layers.
- Service integration can be accomplished within current staffing requirements but requires a realignment of job responsibilities.
- Integrating early childhood services requires clear goals and expectations that can inform frameworks for early learning, child care, and parenting supports and that outline the vision, policy, and practice.
- A new policy framework should be accompanied by a single funding envelope and infrastructure to support program and professional development.
- Integration promotes more intensive use of existing community facilities, but does not negate the need for service expansion.

- Building parent/public support for systems change requires the development of programming which is accessible and responsive to community need.
- Regular assessment and evaluation provide accountability. Shared with practitioners, they support program quality and contribute to improved child outcomes (Toronto First Duty, 2008).

Evidence from sectors beyond the primary school education sector regarding integration may also be useful to consider when thinking about schools that operate as community hubs. For example, focusing specifically on the early childhood sector, Halfon, Uyeda, Inkelas and Rice (2004) identify 10 key strategies that states and local communities can adopt to achieve their integration planning and implementation goals. The strategies are grouped into three areas of the strategic engagement process: planning, services, and infrastructure:

Strategies for Collaborative Planning

- Strategy 1: Create a common vision.
- Strategy 2: Ensure or provide leadership within and across sectors.
- Strategy 3: Build relationships and partnerships with agencies representing the sectors necessary to establish an integrated, comprehensive child and family service system.

Service-Related Strategies

- Strategy 4: Devise strategies that focus on the assets and needs of the entire family in the context of a community-building approach.
- Strategy 5: Support community-building activities that enhance local capacity to sustain an integrated system for children and families.
- Strategy 6: Support activities that address public opinion and the views and priorities of opinion leaders and key government leaders.

Infrastructure-Related Strategies

- Strategy 7: Focus SECCS planning on filling gaps in infrastructure, and not exclusively on service expansion.
- Strategy 8: Consider financing strategies that enhance sustainability through making better use of existing resources, maximizing public revenue, creating more flexibility in existing categorical funding, and building public-private partnerships.
- Strategy 9: Facilitate accountability through results-based planning and the use of data for continuous quality improvement with regard to both process and outcome measures.
- Strategy 10: Utilize promising practices in early childhood service systems to shape the design of integrated systems.

Key messages:

The integration of service systems suggests that some schools in Australia are already operating according to an integrated model of service delivery. However these models appear to be relatively new in the Australian context.

Evidence from international integrated service models within schools and evidence from outside the primary school education sector suggests that factors such as meaningful

engagement, clear goals, expectations and a common vision and the development of positive relationships and partnerships are important to integrated service delivery.

Engaging vulnerable families

The Foundation for Young Australians (2010) identifies the critical importance of the cooperation and involvement of children, young people and families to effective extended service schools, noting that:

“There is little differentiation in the literature about which extended services are particularly dependent on this cooperation and involvement: instead, the implication is that all services require it. There is evidence, however, that many schools do not succeed in engaging the hardest to reach groups” (p. 23).

Many child and family services experience challenges when seeking to engage ‘hard to reach’ groups (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010; McDonald, 2010; Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth & Nelms, 2004). Schools also experience challenges when seeking to engage parents from vulnerable families in school-community partnerships (FYA, 2010; Black, 2007).

The FYA makes a number of important points regarding engaging children, young people and families in extended service schools. Importantly, they argue that services need to be directed to children, young people and families’ needs. Every community is different and as such will have different needs. It is important to consider also what services already exist.

Although some existing literature focuses upon engagement of vulnerable families in the school context (Black, 2007; FYA, 2010), there is a broader body of evidence regarding engaging vulnerable families that is also important to consider. This research is limited; partly because most studies of effective interventions and support services have focused only on their effectiveness for those who actually used them. There are relatively few studies that have sought out those who do not make use of services or who drop out of programs and asked them what was it about the services offered that put them off.

Nevertheless, the evidence that does exist indicates a number of key issues that appear to be especially important for engaging vulnerable families in any type of service. They are:

- *providing practical help*: Providing practical help is identified as an important factor in engaging vulnerable families. For vulnerable parents, the first priority is to ensure access to secure, high quality and affordable basic necessities including housing, food, health care, transport and recreation options (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007; Jack & Gill, 2003; Centre for Community Child Health, 2010).
- *providing crisis intervention*: Reviews of intervention practices that are known to be essential for effective work with parents identify responsiveness to family needs and circumstances, beginning with the provision of crisis help prior to other intervention aims, as a key factor in effectiveness (Barnes, 2003; Barnes and Freude-Lagevardi, 2003; Berlin et al., 1998; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Dunst and Trivette, 2009).
- *a non-judgemental environment and approach*: vulnerable families want services that are non-judgmental (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Winkworth et al, 2009; Attride-Stirling et al, 2009). A non-judgemental, non-threatening, non-expert approach

(i.e. avoid the “I know what’s best for you” stance) acknowledges that parents are the experts of their own life and children and have coped to their best ability. (Ghate & Hazel, 2009).

- *convenient, accessible location*: multiple studies indicate that one of the key factors that make it difficult for families to engage in services is lack of private transport and poor public transport (McDonald & Rosier, 2011). Carbone et al (2004) argues that features such geographically accessibility, the provision of free transport to sessions and/or a central, convenient location are key features of inclusive early childhood services.
- *a non-stigmatising venue*: many families will be sensitive to the stigma associated with the concept of “charity” or “welfare”. Delivering services in a universal venue, such as a health clinic or a school, may reduce the potential for stigma because these venues are not associated with a specific type of “problem” (McDonald, 2009; Soriano, et al 2008; Centre for Community Child Health, 2010).
- *empowering families*: Attride-Stirling et al (2001) report that parents want to feel capable, competent and empowered. They want to overcome the impotence caused by their inability to cope, to learn new ways of managing the difficulties, and to be treated with dignity. Ghate and Hazel (2002) note that parents define ‘good’ support as “help that... allow[s] them to feel ‘in control’ of decisions and what happened to them and their families.”
- *strengths-based approach*: a strength-based approach focuses upon the existing strengths of both child and family, and on deliberate efforts to build upon these to increase child and family competencies (Trivette and Dunst, 2000).
- *empathy, respect and honesty*: parents want opportunities to talk to a professional who can provide guidance and advice, and who would listen to them and show empathy for their situation (Attride-Stirling et al, 2001). An Australian study by Winkworth et al (2009) of services to vulnerable families found that they can be important sources of social support if they are respectful, flexible and honest.
- *continuity of care*: parents value the sense of security that comes from having a long-term relationship with the same service provider (Ghate & Hazel, 2002; Winkworth et al, 2009; Attride-Stirling et al, 2009).
- *cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence*: not all culturally and linguistically diverse families in Australia will be vulnerable, however those that have low level English language skills or have recently migrated to Australia are likely to be experiencing some level of vulnerability. For this reason, it is important that service providers seeking to engage vulnerable families are culturally aware and culturally sensitive (Sawrikar & Katz, 2008; Carbone et al, 2004).
- *attending to relationships*: the relationships between parents and professionals are the most critical factor in determining the success of an intervention (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010). These relationships need to be family-centered, that is, based on a partnership between parents and professionals, with

parents making the final decisions regarding the focus of the work and the methods used (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010).

- *strong links with other services*: Strong reciprocal links with other relevant services (both universal and specialist) have been identified as important to engaging vulnerable families in services (Carbone et al, 2004; McDonald, 2009). Services working in isolation may not be able to meet the needs of families as effectively as services that have relationships with other agencies, this is especially the case where a family has complex needs.
- *family centred*: A family-centred approach is based on a mutually respectful partnership between professionals and parents, in which family members are empowered, and both the format and focus of services are based on family preferences and priorities, and take account of the needs of the whole family.
- *relationship-based*: Relationship-based practices are aimed at supporting parent-child relationships (Edelman, 2004). Relationship-based early intervention has been described as intervention that is primarily concerned with fostering growth-producing parent-practitioner and parent-child relationships (Kelly in Edelman, 2004).
- *physical environment*: Weeks (2004) highlights the importance of the physical environment in service delivery. Factors such as a welcoming entry and availability of outdoor space are important for creating services that are comfortable, safe, friendly and attractive for people who are facing family difficulties to attend (Weeks, 2004).

It is also important to consider the skills and qualities of the professionals who are working with families. According to Davis and Day (2010), the following qualities are needed for effective helping:

- *respect*: this is the foremost attitude, and refers to the helper trying to suspend judgemental thinking; valuing parents as individuals; thinking positively about them without imposing conditions, and regardless of their problems, status, nationality, values all other personal characteristics.
- *genuineness*: this involves being open to experience, perceiving it accurately, and not distorting it with defences, personal prejudices and one's own problems. People who are genuine are not acting a part or pretending, deliberately or otherwise. They are real in appearing to be what they are, and are flexible and prepared to change.
- *humility*: this is closely related to both respect and genuineness. It involves the helper not having an inflated sense of his/her own importance in relation to parents.
- *empathy*: this refers to a general attempt by the helper to understand the world from the viewpoint of the parents. What is particularly important is that helpers demonstrate their understanding to parents.
- *personal integrity*: this refers to the capacity of the helper to be strong enough to support those who are vulnerable, to tolerate the anxieties of the helping situation, and take a reasonably independent viewpoint.
- *quiet enthusiasm*: this involves taking pride in what one does and enjoying that the attempt to do it well for the benefit of parents.

- *technical knowledge and expertise*: this includes technical or specialist knowledge, service knowledge, and an understanding of the helping process.

Evidence from the field of psychology indicates what skills and personal factors in therapists influence the likelihood of developing a good therapeutic alliance with the client, leading to improved outcomes (Horvath, 2001). These skills and personal factors are also likely to be important for professionals who work with vulnerable families:

- communication skills have a positive impact, e.g. the therapist's ability to convey understanding or the appreciation of the client's phenomenological perspective
- empathy, openness, and flexibility are all important, especially in early phases of treatment. On the hand, when therapists take charge of sessions, the alliance is undermined.
- experience and training - though the relation between the therapist's level of training and the quality of the alliance is inconsistent, it is likely that the more trained therapists are able to form better alliances with severely impaired clients.
- collaboration is one of the key features of the alliance concept, and there is some preliminary evidence linking collaboration and better alliance.

It is important to note that vulnerable families are not a homogenous group. Depending on the make-up of their local community, schools may need to consider the specific needs of the following groups. Some examples of the unique needs of some specific communities are as follows:

- *Indigenous families*: as a result of historical and ongoing dispossession, marginalisation and racism, service delivery to Indigenous families and communities needs to be culturally competent and delivered according to a 'working with' rather than 'working on' model (Flaxman et al, 2009; Scougall, 2008; Higgins, 2004);
- *culturally and linguistically diverse families*: CALD families experience barriers to service delivery such as language barriers, lack of knowledge or understanding of services that are available and culturally inappropriate models of service delivery (Sawrikar & Katz, 2008);⁴
- *refugee families*: recent refugee arrivals to Australia may be wary of distrustful of 'authorities' (or any institution they view as an authority) and are highly likely to have experienced severe trauma (Arney & Scott, 2010; NSW Refugee Health Service & STARTTS, 2004; Lewig et al, 2009);
- *families with multiple and complex problems*: families with multiple and complex problems experience serious, chronic, inter-related problems such as mental illness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse along with social exclusion and significant levels of disadvantage (e.g. housing instability, poverty) (Bromfield, Lamont, Parker & Horsfall, 2010). Particular attention may need to be paid to the parent-child relationship and dealing with adult trauma (Bromfield et al, 2010).

⁴ The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse' refers to groups of people whose culture and/or language is other than the dominant Anglo culture and/or English language (Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008).

There is also diversity *within* these groups. The ability to recognise differences within groups is important for service delivery and is known as 'cultural sensitivity'.⁵

Key messages:

Services can implement a number of different approaches and strategies, such as a strengths-based, empowerment approach that enhance the likelihood of engaging vulnerable families.

The skills and qualities of the professionals are especially important when working with vulnerable families and it is important to take into account the unique needs of specific groups within the population (e.g. Indigenous families, CALD families etc).

Family friendly service systems

One of the key features of many school-community hubs is the friendly, welcoming nature of the school environment. Rather than existing as closed off institutions, schools that function as community hubs are typically more open to the local community; for example, sharing resources with local community groups, providing spaces for parents to meet and welcoming parents into the classroom. Literature regarding family friendly service systems may be useful for schools that are seeking to become community hubs.

Weeks (2004) reviews the literature on the importance of the physical environment in service delivery, and what it can teach us about creating services that are comfortable, safe, friendly and attractive for people who are facing family difficulties to attend.

Building on the literature that analyses the importance of the physical environment, Weeks proposes the following nine principles as a basis for achieving user-friendly services:

- **Accessibility:** location is a key factor in making family services accessible. Accessibility is a key principle and includes geographical, physical and psychological accessibility.
 - *Geographic access* refers to locations which are readily reached, for example, through proximity to public transport.
 - *Physical access* refers to the capacity to enter the building, for example, in a wheelchair, or with a pram.
 - *Psychological access* refers to an absence of features which might stimulate stigma or a sense of fear about the entry. For example, domestic violence services cannot name themselves with this focus or people will fear visibility on entry.
- **A 'neutral' doorway:** an entry which is non-stigmatising. The overall principle refers to the physical way a service is presented and located within the community.

⁵ Although referring to CALD groups only, the concepts of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity that Sawrikar and Katz (2008) refer to could be viewed as relevant to all different types of diversity. Cultural awareness is an awareness of the cultural norms, values, beliefs and practices common to a cultural group, whereas cultural sensitivity is a familiarity with how individuals and families within a group differ from the norms, beliefs, values and practices typical of that culture.

- **A welcoming entry:** a 'neutral doorway' is one step in a 'welcoming entry', however, a welcoming entry is put forward as a separate principle because it refers to the full experience of entry: ease of access; presentation of the waiting room; and practices of reception. The reception or waiting area is often the first point of contact and is as important as the telephone manner for first-contact telephone calls.
- **The provision of information** that is readily available (e.g. in a waiting area).
- **Cultural diversity:** racism and ignorance about the cultural practices of others is reflected and embedded in individual workers' practices, as well as systemic arrangements.
- **Availability of outdoor space:** an important principle, according to research on the effect of the physical environment. Finding beautiful and peaceful outdoor areas can promote a sense of well-being and welcoming.
- **Safety** which may be a challenge if one a service does not resort to security guards and electronic barriers. One entry gate and door is necessary, and reception staff may require a mechanism, such as a counter bell or buzzer, to alert others to assist in the event of a violent incident.
- **Community and group work space:** associated with the principle of service user participation, services need meeting space and open space for activity sessions, community meetings and lunches, and space in which to run groups.
- **Co-location of services** an essential element of the framework proposed. Co-location of interrelated services can be a very useful resource to service users, without the difficulties of amalgamation of services.

Sobo, Seid and Gelhard (2006) sought to understand barriers to care as experienced by health care consumers. Focus groups were conducted in San Diego with English- and Spanish-speaking parents of children with special health care needs. Participants were asked about the barriers to care they had experienced or perceived, and their strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Parent-identified barriers were grouped into the following five categories:

- necessary skills and prerequisites for gaining access to the system; for example, trying to make an appointment by phone and trying to secure an appointment at a time that is compatible with a family's schedule;
- realizing access once it is gained; for example, actually getting to the appointment can be difficult when parents have a number of responsibilities to balance;
- front office experiences; for example, encountering uncaring front office staff and overt prejudice by front office staff;
- interactions with physicians; for example, intimidating behaviour by physicians, physicians who do not listen to what the parent is saying, or a poor bedside manner; and
- system arbitrariness and fragmentation; for example, rules that change from visit to visit, inconsistent fee structures and delayed referrals.

The authors argue that the key to the successful navigation of the system was parents' "functional biomedical acculturation"; in other words, they view the health services system to a cultural system within which parents must learn to function competently. It is likely that the educational system is also a cultural system within which parents need to function competently.

Key messages:

Family friendly services have a number of key physical features such as availability of outdoor space and a welcoming entry. Parents face barriers when attempting to access institutions such as health services and may face similar barriers attempting to access schools.

Family Involvement

According to Lopez, Kreider and Capse (2004/05), family involvement in education predicts children's school success. Developmental and education research confirms that parental attitudes, styles of interaction, behaviours, and relationships with schools are associated with children's social development and academic performance.

Home-school relationships are difficult to change. These relationships are often focused upon school priorities and initiated by the schools, at the expense of families' concerns and expertise regarding their children.

On the basis of a series of evaluation studies, Lopez et al identify five key dimensions of home-school relationships that engage families and support effective parental involvement in children's learning:

- 1. Responding to family interests and needs**
- 2. Engaging in dialogue with families:** trust and mutual respect are key ingredients to meaningful home-school relationships
- 3. Building on family knowledge:** draw on the school's expertise but build on the wealth of information and ideas that families impart to their children.
- 4. Training parents for leadership:** families, schools, and communities need to work together to shape the changes that ensure children's success. In a system where schools hold power, parents must acquire the skills to become effective advocates for change.
- 5. Facilitating connections across children's learning contexts:** children grow up in multiple social environments, and families can be involved in their learning and development in the home, school, and community. In particular, parents act as central managers of their children's time out of school, time that offers opportunities for enrichment that are not ordinarily available from home and school.

Westmoreland, Bouffard, O'Carroll and Rosenberg (2009) from the Harvard Family Research Project believe that family involvement is a core component of a complementary learning system, in which an array of school and nonschool supports complement one another to create an integrated set of community-wide resources that support learning and development from birth to young adulthood. In such a system, family involvement is one of several pathways for supporting young people in the many places and contexts in which they grow and learn. Three elements in particular combine to form a pathway of interactive and ongoing family involvement:

- First, family involvement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development.
- Second, family involvement is continuous across a child’s life and entails an enduring commitment but changing parent roles as children mature from birth to young adulthood.
- Third, effective family involvement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn—at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in after school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

Key messages:

Home-school relationships are difficult to change however a number of guiding principles and models are available for securing family involvement in schools.

Building community strengths and capacity

In the process of building a relationship with the local community, schools that function as community hubs may play a role in building community strengths and capacity. This role may be especially important in areas that are experiencing significant levels of disadvantage because the local community may be feeling powerless and lacking in confidence.⁶

The following discussion reviews the literature regarding effective means for building community strengths and capacity.

Howe and Cleary (2001) identify five key success factors which drive a wide range of community building initiatives taking place in vastly different sets of circumstances. These success factors tend to be mutually reinforcing and suggest that the process of community building is as important as the outcomes. These five key success factors are:

- *Capacity building*, focussing on education and the development of human and social capital and increased connectedness.
- *A linked approach*, involving co-ordination across government portfolios, partnerships between spheres of government (local, State and Commonwealth), and partnerships between government, business, community and philanthropic sectors.
- *An emphasis on local democracy*, whereby bottom-up initiatives take priority over solutions imposed from outside, and the importance of local identity, leadership, knowledge and management are recognised as critical components.
- *Flexible service delivery* approaches that take regard of the multifaceted nature of the problems that face particular communities and which emphasise the importance of continuous reflection and development.

⁶ Vinson (2009) suggests that effective interventions with the most disadvantaged localities are based on one fundamental principle: *in order for services and infrastructural interventions to be effective in the long run, they must not only be useful in their own right but simultaneously serve the end of strengthening the overall community.* It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that in order to be effective in the long-term, schools that operate as community hubs will also need to strengthen the overall community.

- An *emphasis on sustainable strategies* rather than one-off projects, and which recognise the ongoing interdependency of social, economic and environmental considerations.

These success factors are reflected in some of the existing school-community hubs. For example, some school-community hubs offer training and education programs for parents (Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative, 2007). Moreover, school-community hubs typically involve collaborative partnerships with a range of different sectors (see section 7.2.3).

Beresford and Hoban (2005) synthesised findings from seven key UK and Irish community building initiatives which have sought to involve people with direct experience of poverty.⁷ Their aim was to identify from existing experience what factors may help and what factors may hinder people's effective involvement in participatory schemes and initiatives relating to poverty/disadvantage and place/regeneration.

Beresford and Hoban (2005) identified a series of 'key lessons' that the studies highlight:

- People are often stifled and frustrated within existing participative processes: it was generally felt that participation was more often used as a tool to achieve largely pre-decided outcomes.
- Powerlessness is at the root of poverty and disadvantage.
- Start the process by listening to (local) people and engaging directly with the issues of specific concern to them in their own lives and localities.
- The creation of self and collective forms of autonomy are essential to overcome feelings of powerlessness and to challenge and change existing power structures.
- Agree on a number of key principles and practices for working together: a number of studies stressed the importance of being able to work together. They also made it clear that it could not be assumed that this would happen automatically.
- People's capacity is the primary element of effective participation. Poor and excluded people will need access to political power, resources and the skills to participate in a process of change.
- There needs to be improved, more equal and open relationships between people and workers. Residents want community workers who are more 'enablers' than 'doers', workers who would 'help' but who would not 'interfere'.
- Efforts to initiate meaningful participation take time and patience, and can put great demands on all those who are involved. A number of additional forms of support were identified for this purpose and felt to be important.

⁷ Edmans and Taket (2001) also refer to a UK based project (the Community Health Project) in a multicultural deprived area in London that was set up to tackle health inequalities. They have developed a framework for supporting the involvement of local communities in social and economic regeneration programs in ways that are empowering, giving local communities greater control over their lives and local resources, and enable the development of community capacity. The framework includes nineteen principles for community involvement in health and regeneration and is available at: <http://www.iacglobal.org/files/edmans.pdf>.

- If the community is seen as homogeneous then only the most powerful voice will tend to be heard. For all voices to be heard, some will need to be helped to speak.
- People with experience of poverty need to have more influence and impact on policy and practice. Local people with direct experience, grass-roots activists and workers are the primary experts and could usefully critique and shape the philosophy, policy and practice of 'regeneration' and anti-poverty programs.
- Making long-term change / follow-up: most of the studies stated that opportunities for follow-up were limited because of lack of funding and capacity.

Beresford and Hoban's (2005) work provides further guidance for schools that are seeking to build community strengths and capacity, especially schools that are located in disadvantaged areas.

Mugford and Rohan-Jones (2006) report on an Australian study of the ways in which communities provide support to people with a mental illness. The project explored how communities are resilient and how resilience can be further developed. The project focused on regional and rural communities. In many regional areas, mental health services are so rare that they can't form an integral part of the fabric of regional communities. Instead, these communities are drawing inspiration from local leadership who seem to have a catalytic ability to draw together people and resources to make good things happen and, in the process, contribute to their community's mental health.

Mugford and Rohan-Jones (2006) combined their findings with international literature to generate ten principles which should underpin future investment in resilient communities:

- Start with what is right, not with what is wrong—look at assets not deficits, wellness not illness—and trust local judgements about assets and needs;
- In defining a community, use the boundaries that people 'know' and recognise—this maximises the chance of a shared sense of place, a shared vision and a commitment to neighbours;
- Communities best understand their own needs and what is right and wrong for them;
- Work out how best to use experts—in general, they are not best used in top-down design and didactic teaching which would tend to stifle local efforts and regiment models. Instead, use expertise in a catalytic fashion that promotes self organising and self sustaining efforts. Specifically, don't try to teach resilience—help people to create it;
- Do not seek to develop in a community a neat, simple, rational system with clear and well defined boundaries between the groups and institutions that are providing local help, support and initiative and defined links to centralised, integrated projects at the next level 'up' (e.g. State). While such systems look good on paper they are too rigid and not 'redundant' enough to allow for emergence and adaptation. Instead, redundancy, fuzziness, overlap and multiple feedback loops are optimal;
- Nurture and build trust and try to catalyse engagement;
- Where possible, have local volunteers helping and supporting other locals. Not only do they understand them better, this also builds trust and generates civic engagement;

- Diversity in communities—diversity with regard to skill utilisation and option creation—is vital;
- Help to create and sustain committed leadership in local communities; and
- Take the time it needs to make things happen. There is no quick fix.

Mugford and Rohan-Jones (2006) principles have much in common with the aforementioned strategies for engaging vulnerable families (e.g. a strengths-based approach, the importance of empowerment).

In a project regarding community interventions for vulnerable families Katz (2007) identified the importance of the following principles in community development. These principles reflect many of those identified by Mugford and Rohan-Jones (2006):

- start from communities' own needs and priorities rather than those dictated from outside;
- on tap not on top: giving leadership to people in the community and acting as a resource to them;
- work with people; don't do things to or for them;
- help people to recognise and value their own skills, knowledge and expertise as well as opening up access to outsider resources and experience;
- encourage people to work collectively, not individually, so that they can gain confidence and strength from each other (although this experience often benefits individuals as well);
- encourage community leaders to be accountable, and to ensure that as many people as possible are informed and given the opportunity to participate;
- recognise that people often learn most effectively by doing – opportunities for learning and training are built into everyday working;
- support people to participate in making the decisions which affect them and work with decision-makers to open up opportunities for them to do so;
- promote social justice and mutual respect.

Vinson (2009) identifies what characterises effective interventions in disadvantaged communities and again, these characteristics reflect many of the principles identified by Mugford and Rohan-Jones (2006) and Katz et al (2007). Some of the other issues that Vinson (2009) identifies include:

- *Maximum practicable engagement of disadvantaged communities* in decisions of all kinds is a key to community strengthening. A local coordinating or 'steering' group needs to operate on a basis of authentic community participation.
- *Cultivation of community capacity* is not a given but requires nurturing and the investment of time and resources. The more disadvantaged and run-down a community the less practised it frequently has become in working in a focused, collaborative way;

- *Attention to the characteristics that differentiate markedly disadvantaged from other areas.* An intervention plan would need to give priority consideration to:
 - Education and training/retraining,
 - Work opportunities and placement,
 - Health promotion and treatment,
 - Parenting skills,
 - ‘Problem solving’ law enforcement,
 - Developing local leadership capacities;
- *Identifying possible sources of community strengthening funding.* Wherever practicable government contributions to meeting the varied costs of community strengthening projects needs to be facilitative investment to attract private sector funding, and ‘priming the pump’ to stimulate local initiatives. However, because of the limited private investment opportunities they present, the strengthening of disadvantaged areas inevitably requires substantial government outlays via a Community Strengthening Fund.

Key messages:

Building community strengths and capacity has much in common with the process of effectively engaging vulnerable families. Many of the principles for engaging vulnerable families can be applied at a group level (e.g. a strengths-based approach to the whole community, rather than just individual families).

Two key issues emerging in relation to building community strengths and capacity in disadvantaged communities are: the importance of a bottom-up model of meaningful participation and the fact that the process will take time. A key message emerging from the literature is that disadvantaged communities are characterised by feelings of powerlessness, therefore it will take to build these communities’ trust in a process that aims to empower them.

7. Conclusions

School-community hubs are a model of school-community partnership that involve collaboration between schools and other sectors in order to support the learning and wellbeing of disadvantaged children and their families through the provision of multiple services available in a single location or network of places in an integrated way.

The case for school-community hubs rests partly upon the inherent logic of school-community partnerships in general, partly upon an emerging support for school-community partnerships in policy (both within Australia and internationally) and upon some evidence which indicates that school-community partnerships are effective in bringing about improved outcomes for children, families, schools and communities.

In regards to evidence of effectiveness, it is important to note that difficulties in evaluating school-community partnerships have been noted by multiple researchers/evaluators and, within the Australian context especially, much of the evidence of effectiveness is not based upon ‘scientifically rigorous’ methodologies.

This does not mean that school-community partnerships and school-community hubs are ineffective; rather, that the evidence base requires further development before the model can be considered effective according to traditional understandings of 'scientific rigour'. In some contexts, scientifically rigorous evaluation results will not be important (e.g. schools may be willing to adopt a school-community focus if the evaluation data shows improved outcomes for students based upon a less than gold-standard methodology); however in other contexts, these results will be very useful (e.g. funding opportunities). A question remains regarding whether school-community partnerships can be evaluated according to a gold standard methodology or whether these methods (e.g. RCTs) are inappropriate for these particular initiatives

In terms of the school-community hub model in Australia, the amount and type of information indicates that the concept of the school-community hub is relatively new in the Australian context; however it is gaining traction and a number of new and emerging policy initiatives and resources focus specifically upon this issue. Therefore, it is important that any new resource that is developed aligns with existing and emerging policy initiatives and takes into account what new and emerging resources are already offering schools.

On the other hand, although the concept of the school-community hub appears to be relatively new in the Australian context, there are 'pockets of innovation' in some areas, for example, ACT public schools and the 'Setting the Hubs Humming' strategy operating in the City of Hume (Victoria) (described in section 6 above). These existing models could provide valuable information in the development of a 'how to' resource for school-community hubs. Indeed, considering the paucity of Australian-based resources on this particular topic – and the importance of locally relevant resources – advice from those involved in these particular models should be considered vital in the development of an Australia school-community hub 'how to' resource.

It is important to remember that schools operating as community hubs go 'against the grain' in terms of how schools have traditionally operated. School-community hubs require schools to enter into collaborative relationships and partnerships that can be challenging – especially when there are significant 'cultural' differences between those involved in the collaborations and partnerships (e.g. schools and the community sector). Considering that this is a new way of working and that significant challenges may arise, the issue of collaboration and partnership – especially with other sectors but also with parents and families – would appear to be an apt area of focus for any school-community hub resource.

In terms of a specific school-community hub resource for the Australian primary school sector, content or themes that would appear to be especially apt include:

- **Consultation:** how to consult with multiple stakeholders, resources for consulting with parents and families around community needs;
- **Leadership:** how to establish and maintain a passionate, committed leadership team; how to garner the support of multiple levels of leadership (e.g. school principal, central Departments, government);
- **Evaluation:** how to evaluate school-community hubs, tools for evaluation;
- **Funding:** how to apply for funding; how to harness funding opportunities; where to look for funding opportunities;

- **Engaging vulnerable families and family involvement:** what works in which context, case studies of effective practice;
- **Family friendly service environments:** what do they look like, how to establish them; and
- **Building community capacity:** how is it done, what works in which context.

As noted in the toolkit review, resources that are based upon a ‘one-way’ linear principle of communication (e.g. fact sheets) are unlikely to change practice. Moreover, multiple organisations and agencies are involved in these types of initiatives already therefore the need for another type of communication resource is questionable. In order to change practice, this resource needs to enable an interactive, collaborative approach around these themes (rather than simply providing information about the themes). This not only appears to align more with the needs of the primary school sector but also fills an apparent gap.

The combined findings from the literature review and the toolkit analysis suggest that a hard copy toolkit or a ‘static’ website will be insufficient for bringing about effective, sustainable school-community hubs.⁸ Most toolkits designed for schools focus upon specific, clearly defined goals (e.g. sun safe policies, safe school policies). It is reasonable to assume that this is because specific, clearly defined goals can be more easily achieved via a hardcopy toolkit or a static website. On the other hand, more complex and less tangible goals (e.g. developing partnerships with parents, building collaborative relationships with multiple sectors) are likely more appropriately addressed via a comprehensive approach.

Multiple methods for sharing expertise amongst professionals in regards to school-community hubs could be effective. Although initially this project focused upon a resource such as a toolkit; other more interactive, collaborative methods for sharing expertise may be more effective and appropriate for this particular purpose and in this particular context (e.g. coaching, collaborative consultation). It could be that multiple methods (rather than one single method) will be most effective. However, each method has resourcing implications. A decision will need to be made regarding the purpose of this resource (e.g. communicating information, advocating for change at the policy level, supporting schools who are wanting to develop school-community hubs) before the precise methods are decided upon.

⁸ A ‘static’ website is defined as one which is not regularly updated and/or includes only a list of downloadable documents with little other information. Static websites function in a similar way to hard copy documents in that they are ‘point in time’ resources. They are not (or cannot) function as dynamic resources, responding to changing and emerging needs (e.g. feedback from users regarding what works).

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