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Bridging the Divide to Close the Gap

Partnerships and Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students

Dissertation submitted by

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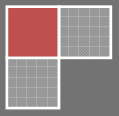

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis of
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entitled
'Bridging the Divide to Close the Gap: Partnerships and Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students'

being a minor thesis for the degree of
Master of International and Community Development

a) **Satisfies** / does not satisfy the requirements of the Rules on the Preparation and Submission of Minor Theses for Masters Degrees as established by the Faculty of Arts and Education; and

b) **I recommend** / do not recommend that this thesis be submitted for examination.

Signature: Date: 17 / 05 /2011

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CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATE

I am the author of the thesis entitled
'Bridging the Divide to Close the Gap: Partnerships and Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students'

submitted for the degree of
Master of International and Community Development

I certify that it is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award to any other university or institution.

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EXPLANATION OF TERMINOLOGY

There are a number of terms used to refer to Australian Indigenous people in the literature. The use of the word 'Indigenous' as adopted in this dissertation refers to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians. This decision was made in order to ensure it encompasses Indigenous Australians from a range of language groups. It will, at all times, use a capital 'I' in doing this. In quoting from others' work, however, the language of the original text will be used.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The two years I spent in a remote Indigenous community were invaluable in many ways. In terms of this dissertation, they provided me with a first-hand experience of the context as well as the impetus to write. Since leaving over a year ago, I have had time to reflect on the experience including my own perception of it and develop the distance necessary to write a more objective dissertation. This has been aided by academic readings on the subject of Indigenous education. Apart from providing me with words to explain the thoughts I had whilst there, the readings have challenged me to think and look at the situation through different lenses and given me a greater insight into the working of my own and others' minds.

Here I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the people who allowed me to live and learn in their environment and that their culture and customs have an incredibly long history. From them I learned many things including patience, the beauty of silence, the importance of an enthusiasm for detail and of persisting in what can be trying times. For this, I thank them very much.

I would also like to acknowledge the constant support of my husband Ben who has shown his usual care, patience and interest throughout the completion of this dissertation. It was the fact that he would be joining me on this journey that made it possible.

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In addition to these special people I would also like to acknowledge the support of a special organisation, Australian Volunteers International, which has provided me with both financial and in-kind support towards the completion of this dissertation. Like me, Australian Volunteers International has recently embarked upon a learning journey by developing a Reconciliation Action Plan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Summary of dissertation submitted for the degree of Master in International and Community Development:

This dissertation seeks to extract learning from theory and practice around why partnerships have only recently emerged in relation to Indigenous education, what they are including their strengths and limitations and the factors that enhance their effectiveness in improving attendance and outcomes for Indigenous young people. The literature indicates that partnerships have emerged due to three primary reasons; continued inequality in educational outcomes, a growing awareness of the complex nature of the issue and recognition of the need for a collaborative approach. It also outlines that partnerships are, essentially, longer-term processes whereby two or more parties collaborate for the purpose of maximising their capacity to achieve a common goal. Factors that enhance the effectiveness of a partnership, that is its ability to improve attendance and outcomes among Indigenous students, emerge through the examination of the literature and a case. In particular, there are a number of key processes throughout a system that need to be present for an effective partnership to be possible such as dialogue, participation and leadership. These processes help to 'Bridge the Divide to Close the Gap' and improve attendance and outcomes among Indigenous students in Australia thus working towards a fairer and more equitable society.

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GLOSSARY

COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program on Literacy and Numeracy
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In 2008 I moved to the Northern Territory to live and work as a teacher in a remote Indigenous community. The community (which will not be identified here) was situated approximately 350km from Alice Springs on an unsealed road connecting the Northern Territory with Queensland. The school had approximately one hundred students on the roll ranging from four to eighteen years of age, all of whom were Indigenous Australians. The teaching body was made up of approximately six non-Indigenous Australians as well as international teachers with at least one Indigenous teacher assistant at any one time. The school itself was located at the northern edge of the community.

This was an extremely interesting time to be living in a Northern Territory Indigenous community. Months earlier, in June 2007, the Howard Government had responded to the "Little Children are Sacred" (Wild and Anderson 2007) report on the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse by approving an intervention in seventy-three remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities – the Northern Territory Emergency Response (Cox 2010). On the ground, the visible aspects of this were alcohol and pornography prohibition signs at the entrance to communities, BasicsCards intended to manage income, Australian Defence Force personnel accompanying medical staff on child health checks as well as a Government Business Manager for each community. This intervention was seen by many, including the United Nations, to be 'incompatible with Australia's human rights obligations' (Anaya 2010; 35).

One month into my stay, newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made the "National Apology" to the stolen generations for past governments' wrongs in supporting their removal from their families. This was received with a standing ovation in Parliament that day and celebrations around the country. During the apology the Prime Minister reconfirmed the Government's commitment to 'Closing the Gap' between the life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Rudd 2007). In the Northern Territory, Closing the Gap education initiatives delivered $17.7 million (Scrymgour 2008) in funding to, among other things, recruit and train extra teachers to work in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. These extra teachers arrived at the beginning of 2009.

In the same year (2009), the students I worked with received results in the national assessment of reading and writing skills that were substantially below the average for all Australian schools

(Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2009). In this community, a major contributor to the students' below-average educational outcomes was low attendance levels. In 2009, their attendance rate for the year was sixty-five per cent (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2009) meaning that on average students would come to school six and a half days out of a possible ten in a fortnight.

School staff seemed to accept a certain level of non-attendance without question. However, when attendance levels dropped to a point that they were uncomfortable with, they took action. This would involve the principal driving around the community in a four-wheel drive troop carrier looking for children who weren't at school and attempting to convince them to give it a try. Teachers would also walk around the community with the students who had come to school of their own accord before the start of the day in the hope of picking up a few extras along the way. Some teachers were even known to use a megaphone to announce their presence. When this happened, some parents would look the other way while others yelled out for their children to go to school and then shrugged their shoulders in a sense of hopelessness when their orders were not followed. For its part, the community's general store would continue to serve children during school hours, further discouraging them from attending school. There was not a sense of individuals and organisations working together for improved educational outcomes for these young people.

Having studied community development for some years prior to moving to the Northern Territory, I sensed that a more collaborative approach to education in the community was required. While having this sense, I had not engaged with the literature sufficiently nor had enough practical experience to be able to identify what was required in this situation. Thus, I took great interest when partnerships began to be discussed at school meetings around the time of the development of the 2010-2014 National Indigenous Education Action Plan. While not being familiar with the concept of partnerships, I began to wonder whether they would be an effective way to begin to re-establish the relationship between families, school and community for the benefit of the students, that is; a way to bridge the divide to 'close the gap'.

Unfortunately, the discussions taking place about partnerships coincided with the end of my stay in the community. Hence, gaps in my knowledge persist and, as it is my intention to one day teach again in one of these communities, the following research was instigated. The research begins with a basic key question: 'How did we get to this idea of partnerships?' in an effort to understand

why partnerships have only recently emerged in relation to Indigenous education, before moving on to a second question: 'What are partnerships (including their strengths and limitations) according to the literature?' It then asks a final question: 'What enhances the effectiveness of partnerships in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students?' This last question is asked for the purpose of identifying critical enabling factors that will guide my and others' future practice when working in educational partnerships for the benefit of Indigenous young people. The dissertation as it stands begins with an explanation of the methodology for undertaking the research before looking at three potential explanations for the emergence of partnerships in Indigenous education. From there, it examines the various definitions of partnerships as well as their strengths and limitations as determined from the literature. Finally, the potential of partnerships becomes apparent and this, combined with the fact that they are now required of all schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments, brings recognition that educators need an understanding of the factors that enhance the effectiveness of partnerships in order to maximise their potential to achieve improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Both the literature and a case study are then examined for factors contributing to the effectiveness of partnerships that may be transferable to my own and others' future practice.

CHAPTER TWO THE USE OF UNOBTRUSIVE METHODS

In order to draw insight into how the concept of partnerships emerged in Australian Indigenous education, what they are and the factors that enhance their effectiveness, this research will make use of unobtrusive methods which, according to Kellehear (1993; 160) 'can be undertaken by anyone'. Non-obtrusive methods involve the examination of existing sources. This dissertation will make use of existing sources, which Kellehear (1993; vii) refers to as the 'examples and products of our activities' to undertake both a review of the relevant literature as well as the study of a case. The manner by which each of these were selected and subsequently analysed is outlined below.

The literature review undertaken as part of this dissertation is one that unfolds throughout the text. It supports the description of how the concept of partnerships in Indigenous education emerged, how partnerships are viewed by various authors and also contributes to discussions on what makes a partnership effective in theory. The literature review process began with a search on key words related to the topic including 'Indigenous educational outcomes', 'attendance', 'relationships', 'holistic approach', 'systems thinking' and 'partnerships'. The search yielded numerous titles in the form of books, journal articles, newspaper articles, videos, government reports, policy statements and more. The process of identifying the relevant literature was supported by the University's liaison librarian. From there, an EndNote library was created to manage bibliographic references. With details recorded, the literature was then read, notes were made and, at the same time, connections between different works began to emerge. Ryan and Bernard (2000; 780) explain that 'literature reviews are rich sources for themes'. The final product synthesises the many texts, each section dealing with a different theme in the literature in an effort to address the questions guiding the research.

The review of the literature is complemented by the study of a case. Stake (2000; 436) explains that 'case study is the examination of a case and the results of the examination'. To facilitate the case study, one case, a school-community partnership, was selected. By choosing to study a specific partnership, the case was what Stake (2000; 436) refers to as a 'bounded system', in that it had definable boundaries. He explains that this is important because 'the more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the usefulness' (Stake 2000; 436). The

actual choice of the partnership to be studied was determined by one key criteria; this, of course, was that it provided 'opportunity to learn' (Stake 2000; 447). As such, it had to have been recognised as having been effective in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Due to the fact that this was unobtrusive research, another key determinant was the case's availability in the public domain. The case finally chosen for use in this dissertation includes transcripts from interviews with a range of key stakeholders in the partnership as well as a copy of the partnership agreement and an action plan. In addition, census data, geographical information and internet information about the school, community and partnership were collected to supplement the case. The analysis relied a great deal on all of these data.

The case study analysis was undertaken for the purpose of developing a response to the final research question: 'What enhances the effectiveness of partnerships in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students?' It began firstly by identifying patterns emerging in the examination of the case. The first pattern that emerged was that there were particular factors at the level of the individuals involved that appeared to have contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership in achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous students. From here it became evident that there were a range of factors existing at the organisational and institutional level as well. Once these patterns were determined, themes underneath each were recognised by piecing together the different stakeholders' descriptions of their experiences. The identification of these themes helped to organise their collective experience in a meaningful way. The themes were then reinforced where necessary by references to the related literature.

Using a case such as this for the purpose of ensuring the research was unobtrusive has some limitations. In particular, there is a chance that, being housed on a government-funded website promoting partnerships as a way of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, the original record of the partnership was 'distorted either to hide information or to create a different impression to an outside reader' (Kellehear 1993; 6). Selin and Chavez (1994; 13) refer to a possible 'halo effect' where interviewees, knowing the purpose of the interview, attempt to present their partnership in the most positive light possible. Despite these potential limitations, the themes identified from the interview transcripts are extremely useful in highlighting factors that enhance the effectiveness of school-community partnerships in Indigenous education.

Linked to this limitation are two ethical considerations that need to be taken into account as part of this research. The first is the possibility for its final product to be misused. Kellehear (1993; 12)

explains that it is possible for research findings to be used to 'exploit the vulnerability of some groups'. It is for this reason that the community in which the author worked prior to conducting this research has not been named. The individuals and organisations involved in the case partnership, however, have been named as this information was available in the public domain prior. The second is that, in analysing the case, or conducting the literature review, there also exists the possibility of misrepresenting data, which can occur when quoting from or interpreting others' work. Kellehear (1993; 12) asserts that 'one should not falsify or misrepresent the findings of research' and every effort has been made in this research not to do so.

Advantages of the use of unobtrusive methods such as a literature review and case study are also important to mention here. These include that they are safe and repeatable (Kellehear 1993). Research in Indigenous communities in Australia involves a range of ethical dilemmas for the researcher. It remains a controversial form of engagement due to the historical power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Dunne 2000). According to Walker (2003), Indigenous people are often subject to structurally violent research processes. Research thus has a 'bad reputation' in Indigenous communities (Hunter 2001; 6). Kellehear (1993; 6) promotes unobtrusive research as an alternative, saying that 'unobtrusive measures are usually safe, both for researchers and other people'. He (Kellehear 1993) and Stake (2000), also promote unobtrusive research because it allows the researcher to return to the data for re-examination or further identification of themes. Where something may not have been realised at first glance, a second examination is, at times, able to illuminate other considerations for the researcher. This ability has certainly contributed to the comprehensiveness of both the literature review and case study undertaken here.

CHAPTER THREE THE EMERGENCE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

It has become evident that the idea of partnerships in Indigenous education emerged due to three primary reasons. The first is the persistent inequality in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This is despite over two decades of efforts towards 'closing the gap' both at the system level and within schools. The second reason is the growing awareness of the complex nature of the issue of inequality in outcomes which is linked, in particular, to the phenomenon of non-attendance. Finally, the idea of partnerships seems to also have emerged due to recognition of the need for an approach whereby all stakeholders collaborate to address this common issue of inequality in outcomes. These three reasons for the emergence of partnerships in Indigenous education are interlinked and have common themes throughout but will be explored further under the following three headings: 'continued inequality in educational outcomes', 'growing awareness of the complex nature of the issue' and 'recognition of the need for a collaborative approach'.

Continued inequality in educational outcomes

Despite criticisms following its introduction in May 2008 (Craig 2010), the National Assessment Program on Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), a national testing scheme for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9, has provided useful data on the educational outcomes of students across Australia. This data has helped to highlight the continued inequality in the educational outcomes of Australia's Indigenous students compared with its non-Indigenous students. In the NAPLAN results for 2009, only seventy per cent of Indigenous Australian students achieved the national minimum standards in Year 5 reading, writing and numeracy (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2009). These Year 5 outcomes are representative of those at other years of schooling and, in comparison with the outcomes of non-Indigenous students, are extremely poor. The average number of non-Indigenous students at or above the national minimum standard in Year 5 reading, writing and numeracy was recorded as above ninety-four per cent in the results of the 2009 NAPLAN testing (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2009). This indicates a gap of nearly twenty-five percentage points between the educational outcomes in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy of Indigenous

and non-Indigenous Australians (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2009).

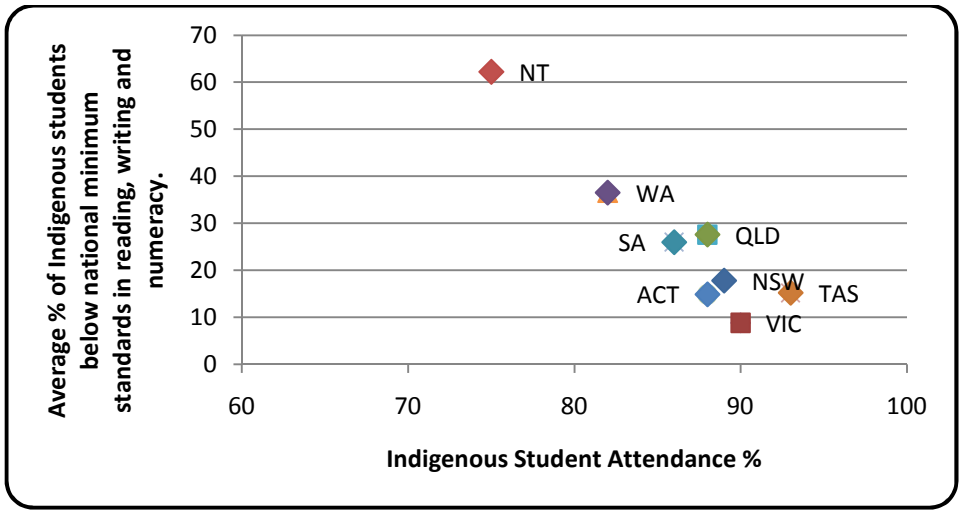
Prominent Indigenous Australian Noel Pearson (2009; 29) describes attempts over recent decades to address this inequality in educational outcomes at a national level as a 'Groundhog Day' situation whereby 'there is a predictable cycle of public revelation and consternation about failure followed by a new policy review, a new policy framework and a new commitment'. Released in 1988, the Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force chaired by Paul Hughes described the situation as 'totally unacceptable' (Hughes 1988; 1) and made specific recommendations for addressing the inequality in educational outcomes experienced by Indigenous people. Shortly after the release of this report, came the publication of the first formal national commitment to improving Indigenous educational outcomes, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP). The NATSIEP, developed jointly by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, had as its objective to achieve educational equality by the year 2000 (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs 2000). Despite the numerous action plans written and strategies employed to achieve this objective, 'the gaps are not closing at anywhere near the rates contemplated or required' (Buckskin 2009; 21) and the objective is yet to be met in 2011.

Many authors in the literature make links between Indigenous students' poor educational outcomes and their attendance at school. According to Gray and Beresford (2002; 27), non-attendance at school among Indigenous students has been recognised as a 'major problem' since the 1980s, having a significant impact on their ability to achieve national minimum standards in education such as those prescribed by the NAPLAN testing scheme (Herbert, Anderson et al. 1999; Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Duffield 2000; Gray and Beresford 2002; Gray and Beresford 2008). The belief that 'attendance is the first and fundamental requirement in achieving success in education' (Duffield 2000; 18) is strongly reflected in reports on and reviews of Indigenous education over the past decade. In 2000, the view that schooling would 'accelerate the achievement of equitable and appropriate educational outcomes (when) attendance rates for Indigenous students across all levels of schooling are comparable to the rates of their non-Indigenous peers' (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs 2000; 19) was expressed in the Report of the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Indigenous Education. In 2006, this view was reinforced by the National Report to Parliament on

Indigenous Education and Training which acknowledged that 'there is a direct link between improved educational outcomes and regular attendance' (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2006; 3).

National data on student attendance was first collected in 2007 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009). This, along with the introduction of the NAPLAN testing scheme in 2008, made the identification of a strong correlation between Indigenous student attendance and educational outcomes across Australia possible. The data indicates that States and Territories with higher attendance among Indigenous students have less of these students below the national minimum standards thereby supporting the link between attendance and outcomes. This is evidenced by Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Indigenous Student Attendance versus NAPLAN Results 2009



Source: (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2009)

Figure 1 provides a visual description of the link between Indigenous students' educational outcomes and their attendance, or non-attendance, at school. The poorest outcomes are evident amongst Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. Over sixty-two per cent of all Indigenous students in the Northern Territory were below the national minimum standards in reading, writing and numeracy in 2009. These results strongly correlate with their attendance at school which averages only seventy-five per cent over a year. Juxtaposed with Victoria, for example, which has less than nine per cent of its Indigenous students below the national minimum standard in

reading, writing and numeracy and ninety per cent average attendance in a year, it is evident that there is a link between a student's days in the classroom and their results in national testing.

Beresford and Partington (2003) report that numerous attempts have been made within individual schools to improve attendance levels over recent decades. Some of the measures trialled include breakfast programs aimed at encouraging children who don't receive breakfast at home to come to school, eat and then stay on (Schwab and Sutherland 2001). Lunch has also been introduced in some communities to avoid the inevitable drop in student numbers when students go home to eat in the middle of the day (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000). Incentive-based systems have also been introduced in some communities for students who have their 'bums on seats everyday' (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2011; 2), which means that they attend school five days in one week. These include the rewarding of sports bags or free mobile phone credit, among others, at the end of the week or the promise of an invite to a sausage sizzle at the end of term (Anderson 2010; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2011). These initiatives are in contrast to punishment-based systems which have been trialled in some communities such as Cape York in far north Queensland (Anderson 2010) and Yuendemu in the Northern Territory (Wellington 2007). Such systems include the quarantining of parents' welfare entitlements when their child does not attend school (Billings 2009) and the 'No School, No Pool' program where children are refused access to the community pool if they do not attend school on a certain day (Wellington 2007).

The effectiveness of these efforts to improve attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students at both the national and school level is 'questionable' (Behrendt and McCausland 2008; 10) or, at best, limited (Beresford and Partington 2003). This is reinforced by NAPLAN data which highlights the continuing inequality in educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Growing awareness of the complex nature of the issue

Beresford and Partington (2003; 151) say that the poor results of efforts to improve attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students are due to a 'lack of detailed understanding about the underlying causes'. They (Beresford and Partington 2003; 146) say that non-attendance and the poor educational outcomes this leads to can be attributed to 'a range of factors' or, in the words of Buckskin, Hughes et al. (2008; 25), 'multifaceted and diverse reasons'. This indicates that

perhaps the rewarding of sports bags or withholding of swims at the end of each week does not recognise the complex nature of the issue of non-attendance.

What Works: The Work Program (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.; 4) recommends thinking of 'poor attendance as a visible symptom of a (complex) situation'. In its literature, the Program represents the complex and interconnecting nature of the factors affecting attendance as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Factors Affecting Indigenous Student Attendance at School

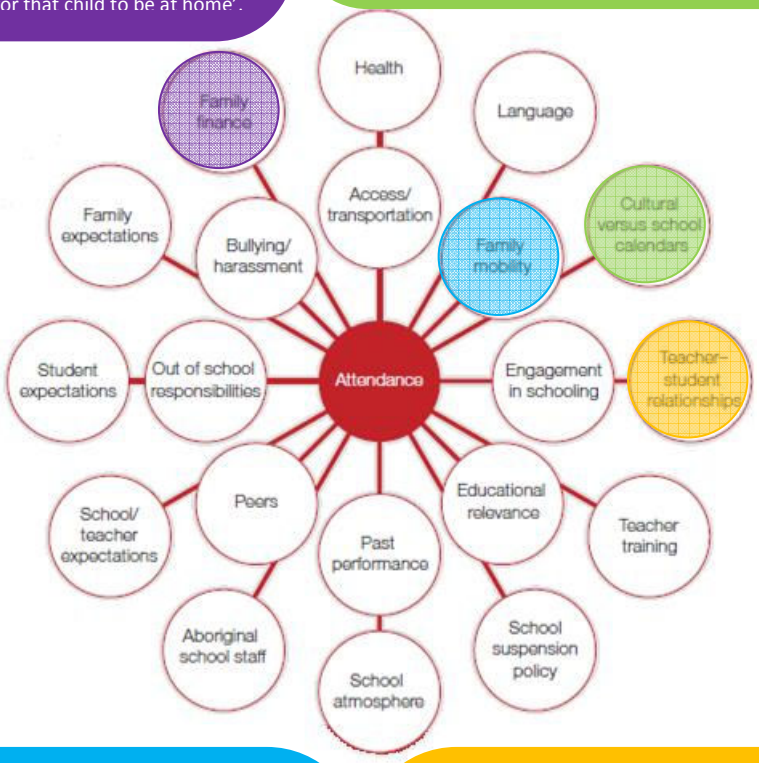
Source: (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.; 4)

Some of the factors outlined in Figure 2 may not be immediately recognisable by stakeholders as affecting attendance and may also be difficult, conceptually, to connect to the phenomenon. As such, four are explained in detail in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Factors Affecting Indigenous Student Attendance explained

Family finance is highlighted in the literature as a factor having a significant bearing on Indigenous students' attendance at school. Gray and Beresford (2002) report that families of Indigenous students often have 'too little money to provide clothes and materials' for school. This is confirmed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) which found when measuring financial stress on Indigenous families in 2008, that over one-quarter (twenty-eight per cent) of Indigenous people lived in households where members had run out of money for basic living expenses in the twelve months prior. A lack of basic requirements for schooling results in feelings of shame on behalf of the students. Schwab (1998; 9) describes shame as a 'prominent cultural theme' that incorporates notions of embarrassment and shyness. With such a sense of shame about their family's financial situation, an Indigenous Education Officer interviewed by Gray and Beresford (2002) concludes, 'sometimes it's just easier for that child to be at home'.

The school year and school day in many remote Indigenous communities reflect the calendar and timetable adhered to in major Australian cities which are assumed to be the norm (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Schwab and Sutherland 2001). As Schwab (2001) illustrated in his study of Maningrida, a remote community in the Northern Territory, the structure of the school year has 'nothing to do with the rhythm of life in that community' (Schwab and Sutherland 2001; 5) in that it does not fit with the community's cultural calendar or the northern climatic zone (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000). Despite the systemic expectation that community life should conform to the school year and day (Schwab and Sutherland 2001), this is not the case and the result is that students are absent from school during times of 'cultural business' (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; 17).



The mobility or transience of their families is widely recognised in the literature as a significant factor influencing Indigenous student attendance at school and subsequently their outcomes (Schwab 1998; Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Gray and Beresford 2001; Gray and Beresford 2002). According to Bourke, Rigby et al. (2000; 1), mobility tends to be more the case in 'traditionally oriented communities' such as those in remote areas. Mobility is often the result of a family's cultural and social obligations in other locations, such as 'sorry business' which occurs when someone dies (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000). However, a number of authors (Schwab 1998; Stanley and Hansen 1998) also attribute families' mobility to seasonal changes, particularly in remote areas 'subject to the Asiatic monsoon cycle, with distinct wet and dry seasons' (Schwab 1998; 2). Schwab (1998; 4) reports that in Maningrida the population swells significantly during the wet season when access to the smaller homeland communities is 'impossible or difficult because of flooding'. At these times, he says, school attendance typically rises (Schwab 1998). During the dry season, however, mobility increases and people 'disperse and become involved with hunting, gathering and ceremonial activities' (Schwab 1998; 5) which impacts negatively on school attendance.

Many Indigenous students do not feel a connection with their teachers (Duffield 2000; Beresford and Partington 2003). Bourke, Rigby et al. (2000) outline that the perception that teachers are unpleasant is one aspect of school life that deters students from attending. As such, Beresford and Partington (2003) refer to positive teacher-student relationships as crucial because many students identify with school through their teachers. Such a view is mentioned frequently in the literature, with 'emphasis on the need for a relationship which is characterised by personal warmth, good humour, friendly supportiveness and an expectation of realistically high academic standards' (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; 25). When such a relationship exists, it is 'a key factor in keeping young people connected to school and learning. The more students like their teachers and feel their teachers care about them, the more they enjoy school and find it interesting' (Russell 2002 quoted in Gray and Hackling 2009; 123).

Figures 2 and 3 indicate the need for a more holistic approach to addressing attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students. A holistic approach is one that recognises and comprehends the range of factors affecting attendance as outlined in Figures 2 and 3 and involves 'inputs from all involved' (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; 33) to address the phenomenon and thereby improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Recognition of the need for a collaborative approach

Historically, both school-based stakeholders such as the principal, teachers and other staff, and those out of school stakeholders, such as families and communities, have engaged in blaming each other for the non-attendance and subsequent poor educational outcomes of Indigenous students (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Harrison 2008). Howard (2002; 8) explains that 'Teachers blame parents for not making their children come to school. Parents blame teachers for not teaching in a way so their children want to come to school'. This culture of blame is attested to by Mills and Gale (2004) and has worked to help each of these parties feel absolved of responsibility for Indigenous students' attendance and educational outcomes but, at the same time, it has resulted in an ongoing divide between them.

Schwab and Sutherland (2001; 19) discuss the visible and invisible 'boundaries' that exist between family, school and community – a situation where, seemingly, 'never the twain shall meet'. These boundaries are evident in a lack of family and community involvement in school but also in a lack of school involvement in family and community life, with visits by school staff members into Indigenous communities typically being for the purpose of complaining about a child's behaviour or lack of attendance (Mellor and Corrigan 2004; Hayes, Johnston et al. 2009; Partington, Galloway et al. 2009) rather than for more pleasant purposes. In many remote communities, these boundaries are reinforced physically with the school situated on a community's outskirts, several kilometres away or, in some cases, surrounded by a high fence (Schwab 2005). Such a situation reinforces 'conditions of mutual distrust and enmity' (Waller 1932; 68) and results in what Muller (2006; 31) refers to as 'a culture in which families and schools (come) to see themselves as parallel but largely disconnected'.

This parallel relationship persists despite these groups sharing what is essentially a common goal. From the schools' perspective, they wish to see the achievement of the COAG targets of halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade (Council of Australian

Governments 2008). From the families' perspective, a common refrain is 'all we want is learning' (Allard and Sanderson 2003; 13) with some aiming for their children to be 'Strong and Smart' (Sarra 2007; 79) and others for their children 'to reach their potential' (Pascoe 2008; 67). From the community perspective, many organisations and individuals also want Indigenous children to 'realise their potential through education' (The Smith Family 2008; 4).

In order to acknowledge the complex nature of the issue and achieve their common goal, these stakeholders need to develop a relationship that enables them to work together. Positive and genuine relationships between families, school and community are described as vitally important by many in the literature (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Colman-Dimon 2000; Schwab and Sutherland 2001; Howard 2002; Martin 2003; Mellor and Corrigan 2004). Their value is that they generate social capital that bridges the historic divide and thus facilitates the collaboration that makes possible 'the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence' (Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1993; 167 quoting Coleman 1990).

There is a current trend towards partnerships as a collaborative framework capable of supporting improvements in Indigenous educational outcomes. In 1999, a major independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory concluded that partnerships were the way forward for improving attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students (Collins 1999). More recently, in 2008, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs 2008), endorsed by all State and Territory Education Ministers, maintained that the establishment of partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities is the primary method by which to achieve highly effective schooling for Indigenous students. This view was reiterated in the Social Justice Report on Indigenous Education published in the same year, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma (2008; 106) said that partnerships between family, school and community are 'a necessity for successful schooling'. The result of these repeated assertions was that the Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) outlined an expectation that partnerships be in place in 'all schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments' by the end of 2011 in the Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft 2010-2014 (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010; 9).

This shift towards recognising the importance of fostering genuine and positive relationships between school-based and out of school stakeholders, still really in its early stages, has the potential to bring these parties together. Coming together and working collaboratively to address the complex range of factors affecting attendance has the potential to improve outcomes for Indigenous students and 'close the gap' between the outcomes of these students and non-Indigenous students in Australia. Partnerships are a currently favoured framework for facilitating collaboration and, as such, the next chapter will explore the range of understandings of partnerships found in the literature as well as their strengths and limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR AN EXPLORATION OF PARTNERSHIPS

As outlined in the previous chapter, partnerships are an increasingly central feature of policy related to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous people in Australia. There are, however, a range of understandings of what partnerships are in the literature as evidenced in the section exploring definitions below. Common to the understanding of partnerships though is their strengths. Foremost, this is their ability to maximise the potential of a group of stakeholders to achieve a desired end. This is possible through the promotion of new understandings and shared responsibility which are indicators of social capital as described in the strengths section below. Limitations, however, are linked to the range of understandings of what partnerships are. The lack of a single definition means that different actors have the potential to interpret partnerships for their own purposes and notions such as shared responsibility – seen as a strength – become contested.

Definitions

A range of definitions of partnership have been encountered in the literature. Tesoriero (2010; 156) confirms that the meaning of partnership 'remains nebulous'. The term itself has been 'borrowed' from the field of business (Morse and McNamara 2006; Tesoriero 2010) but when applied elsewhere, such as in the field of education, is interpreted at will. For some in the literature on educational partnerships (Sanders 2006), a partnership is a short term activity-based interaction that has the student, family, school or community at the centre. Others use the term partnership synonymously with 'involvement', 'assistance' or 'volunteering' (Ashton and Cairney 2001; 146). For the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2005), partnership is an agreement between a school and community that allows the community to use school facilities. Others (KPMG 2010) see partnership as a mechanism for ensuring people take responsibility for their own educational future. In addition to the above, partnerships have also been recognised as 'collaborative relationships' (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008; 2) that 'have at their foundation trust, mutual regard, care and a sharing and recognition of a diversity of beliefs' (Ashton and Cairney 2001; 146).

In some cases in the literature, a partnership is seen as an end to be achieved while in others it is seen as a process that contributes to the achievement of certain desired ends. For example, a

partnership has been described as the signing of an agreement and development of a plan (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.). Elsewhere it is described as 'a collective process during which school and community go about developing and realising shared visions' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2003; 4). Morse and McNamara (2006; 327) emphasise that a 'partnership is the means to the end not an end in itself'. It is for this reason that, for the purpose of this dissertation, a partnership will be seen as a longer-term process whereby two or more parties collaborate for the purpose of maximising their capacity to achieve a common goal.

Strengths

The strengths of partnerships have been consistently advocated by both independent and government sources. This is primarily because, where they are collaborative and equitable, partnerships are seen to have the potential to maximise the probability of achieving a common goal such as improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Morse and McNamara 2006; Lueder 1998 quoted in Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008; Epstein and Associates 2009; Partington, Galloway et al. 2009; Department of Education Science and Training n.d.). Harrison (2008; 119) says that 'the importance of partnerships between parents and teachers cannot be overstated in terms of encouraging Indigenous students to attend school and engage in classes'. In the literature, this is attributed to the development of social capital within a partnership (Field 2008).

The reason for this, according to the literature, is that social capital works to dismantle 'boundaries', either visible or invisible (Schwab and Sutherland 2001; 19), between family, school and community and ensure that these are 'replaced by bridges' (Schwab 2005; 171). The type of social capital relevant to this context is therefore termed 'bridging' social capital. Bridging social capital resides in relationships 'where members have less in common, or even differences' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004; 5) such as in partnerships between family, school and community. An often cited strength of partnerships is that they promote a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility (Ashton and Cairney 2001) which , in turn, is said to help different groups of people form a synergy whereby the result is 'multiplicative rather than additive' (Byrne 2001; 244).

Limitations

It would seem that the biggest limitation of partnerships is the fact that there is no single definition and, therefore, that different actors have the potential to interpret them for their own purposes. Tesoriero (2010; 158) explains that 'partnerships cannot be assumed to be a good thing'. In the past decade, the phrase 'shared responsibility' mentioned above has been used by the Australian government in partnerships that stress individual and community responsibility for their own wellbeing (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000; Brough and Bond 2009). Shared Responsibility Agreements have been the 'cornerstone' of these partnerships (Brough and Bond 2009; 246) and 'are held up as ways of truly and fully engaging Indigenous communities in determining their own futures' (Stanhope 2006; 23). However, in reality, they have seen 'Aboriginal communities (required to) bargain with governments for 'non-essential' services to their community, in return for their compliance with positive social behaviours' (Brough and Bond 2009; 253). An example of this is the numerous Shared Responsibility Agreements that included the 'much heralded' No School, No Pool program (Schwab 2005; 167).

Keevers, Treleaven et al. (2008; 467) refer to this interpretation of partnership as a form of 'new paternalism' which aims to control patterns of behaviour in target groups. Here, they (Keevers, Treleaven et al. 2008; 467) explain, Government acts in a disciplining role as a 'father figure' requiring community members to display appropriate social habits. Such an approach has been said to present a 'grave and immediate risk to the human rights of Australia's Indigenous people' (Stanhope 2006; 24). This is because Shared Responsibility Agreements 'encourage the notion that it is the behaviour of Indigenous people that is the problem' (Stanhope 2006; 24) rather than a complex web of factors. Thus, while expounding the value of social capital, partnerships such as these have the potential to produce the opposite effect and deplete this important resource (Keevers, Treleaven et al. 2008) while, at the same time, causing 'potential damage to the quality of social capital as a concept' (Brough and Bond 2009; 247).

While a partnership may be the result of a range of interpretations or motivations, the potential of such a collaborative framework must be appreciated. The literature suggests that collaborative and equitable partnerships are pivotal to success in achieving improved educational outcomes for Australian Indigenous students. The fact that these are now required of all schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments by the end of 2011 (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010), means that educators need an understanding of

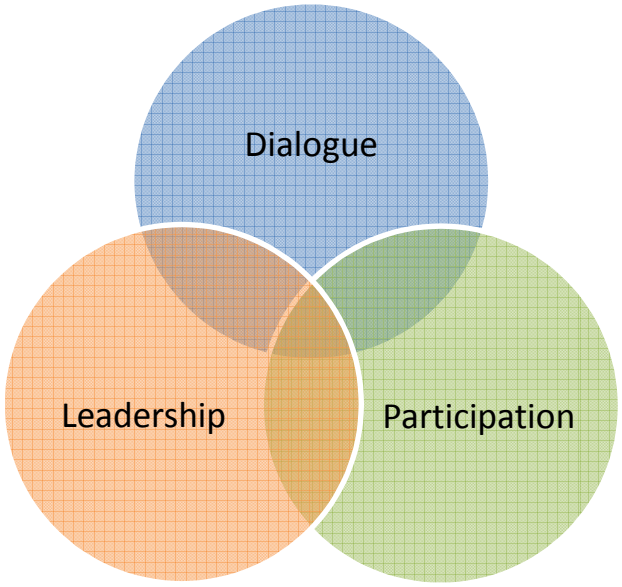
the factors that enhance the effectiveness of partnerships in order to maximise the potential for success. The next chapter will therefore examine the literature to identify factors that enhance the effectiveness of partnerships for the purpose of guiding future practice.

CHAPTER FIVE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: THE THEORY

A partnership not only stimulates the development of social capital but the existence of social capital is a key determinant of the effectiveness of a partnership. As explained in the previous chapter, the literature tells us that bridging social capital brings diverse groups of stakeholders together to increase their chances of achieving a common goal such as improved outcomes for Indigenous students. There are a number of processes identified in the literature as enhancing the effectiveness of partnerships in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Significantly, those that are most prevalent are linked with the concept of bridging social capital.

The effectiveness of a partnership, according to the literature, relies on the interaction of three important processes; dialogue, participation and leadership, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Factors Enhancing the Effectiveness of a Partnership in Theory



Each of the processes illustrated above, in turn results in a range of follow-on effects equally essential to the effectiveness of a partnership. Here, these three processes will be discussed in terms of what they are as identified in the literature and why the authors in the literature consider

them important to the effectiveness of a partnership, which is often linked to the follow-on effects of each.

Dialogue

Dialogue or communication between stakeholders has been identified in the literature as a key process enhancing the effectiveness of partnerships (Balloch and Taylor 2001; Morse and McNamara 2006; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008; Department of Education Science and Training n.d.; Lowe n.d.). Boston (1999; 36) asserts that 'the new story of Aboriginal education will evolve through dialogue'. Dialogue has been described as a 'unique kind of conversation' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12). It is described in further detail here:

> 'Firstly, dialogue is an interaction where people can explore the assumptions, beliefs, experiences and feelings that shape and control the ways they participate in interactions…Secondly, dialogue is a space where people listen deeply to one another'.
>
> (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12)

In the case of partnerships between family, school and community in Indigenous education, dialogue can take place through a variety of different methods or in a range of different places (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008) and can be as simple as asking people 'whether they're sick or well' (Colman-Dimon 2000; 43) or as complex as discussing 'what education seeks to achieve' (Calma 2008; 113). Whatever its nature, engaging in dialogue involves 'making an effort to relate to people' (Winkler 2004; 6).

Dialogue in partnerships is recognised as important in the literature as it helps to 'break down existing stereotypes and cultural divides' (Balloch and Taylor 2001; 288) by offering space for 'deep reflection, personally and collectively' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12). In doing so, it encourages the development of 'new understandings' (Balloch and Taylor 2001; 288), 'new deeper meanings' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12) or 'collective meanings' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12) between stakeholders who historically may have had little in common and 'barriers dissolve' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12).

When barriers such as the visible and invisible 'boundaries' (Schwab and Sutherland 2001; 19) between family, school and community in Indigenous education 'dissolve' (Gorringe and Spillman 2008; 12), the literature indicates that the follow-on effect is that the quality of trust develops

(Putnam, Leonardi et al. 1993). Trust has been referred to as a 'bedrock' of genuine and highly valued relationships (Productivity Commission 2003; XI). This is because it ensures that 'boundaries' are 'replaced by bridges' (Schwab 2005; 171) which can encourage further collective action (Cox 2007) and therefore greater opportunity for realising 'shared visions' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2003; 4).

Participation

The adoption of participative processes is another main determinant of the effectiveness of a partnership highlighted in the literature. Essentially, participation is a situation where all stakeholders have, and are expected to have, an active, meaningful and purposeful role in decision-making processes and activities (Tesoriero 2010). This is seen by many in the literature as a basic human right in a democracy (Ashton and Cairney 2001; Balloch and Taylor 2001; Tesoriero 2010).

The adoption of participatory processes, whereby all stakeholders are expected and encouraged to be actively involved in decision-making, is important because it recognises and challenges historical relations of power between the stakeholders in Indigenous education (Heslop 1998; Harslett, Harrison et al. 1999; Ashton and Cairney 2001; Balloch and Taylor 2001; Tesoriero 2010). This is what is advocated below by a traditional landowner who is telling the Walypala, or non-Indigenous Australians, the following using a black clipboard with white paper on it as a prop:

> 'Now look at this file with the white paper on top. This is the way you Walypala want it all the time. You want to be on top of the Yarnangu. Now look at the file this way [and he held it up sideways or on its edge]. The white paper, that's you mob, and the black file, that's us, are side-by-side pointing the same way [and he held it away from his body]. Now that's how we got to be. We got to be equal together, you know, and going the same way.'
>
> (1997 quoted in Beresford and Partington 2003; 208)

In acknowledging that all stakeholders can make 'equally valuable contributions' (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008; 2) to decision-making processes, participation is 'a powerful change mechanism' (Tesoriero 2010; 147).

According to the literature, the utilisation of participatory processes in a partnership has a range of follow-on effects that contribute to the effectiveness of that partnership. The first of these is that it 'builds individual and community capacity and confidence' (Tesoriero 2010; 147). This then

impacts positively upon their satisfaction and subsequent preparedness to become involved (Harslett, Harrison et al. 1999). The result of this is that 'the new whole will be significantly greater than the sum of its parts' (Tesoriero 2010; 88) and 'better decisions emerge' (Tesoriero 2010; 147), for example about school programs to improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008).

Leadership

Leadership is the third key process highlighted in both the business and educational literature as playing a significant role in the effectiveness of a partnership. Despite this, there seems to be some uncertainty around what actually constitutes this leadership. Some authors (Mellor and Corrigan 2004; Sanders 2006) write about leadership in partnerships as the presence of a school principal, for example. Others go further to say that leadership is a set of individual abilities or qualities such as 'motivation, commitment, enthusiasm, vision, patience, open mindedness, perseverance, and an ability to get other people excited' (Selin and Chavez 1994; 8) evident in an officially-recognised leader. More recently, however, the view that leadership goes beyond these and is actually an 'emergent phenomenon that arises from interactions and events' (Onyx and Leonard 2010; 4) or as 'individuals and groups interact and collaborate' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2002; 12) has become prevalent.

The significance of what has been termed 'enabling leadership' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2002; 14) to the effectiveness of partnerships is linked to the importance of participation in partnerships. This is because this form of leadership 'enables individuals to share in the leadership process' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2002; 14) as participation encourages individuals to participate in decision-making processes in a partnership. This means 'crossing traditional boundaries' (Kilpatrick, Johns et al. 2002; 12) and thus challenging the historical relations of power between stakeholders (Balloch and Taylor 2001).

One of the follow-on effects of leadership such as outlined above is sustainability, or the ongoing life of a partnership. In fact, such leadership has been described as the 'primary engine' of sustainability (Fullan 2005; 27). This is because through the leadership process, a range of stakeholders have collaboratively developed a shared vision and thus feel a sense of responsibility in ensuring it is achieved whether or not a particular stakeholder moves on.

It seems that, according to the theory in the literature, partnerships work best where they focus on the development of social capital through such key processes as dialogue, participation and leadership. Despite this, effective partnerships remain difficult to achieve in practice (Boston 1999; Macgregor 2005; Calma 2008; Partington, Galloway et al. 2009). Calma (2008; 109) says that this is because 'it is considerably more difficult to develop the structures which make partnerships functional' in practice. Others say that the difficulty lies in the fact that there is a lack of evaluation of partnerships that identifies the manner in which they are effectively developed and maintained (Boston 1999; Macgregor 2005; Muller 2006; Calma 2008; Partington, Galloway et al. 2009; Tesoriero 2010). The next chapter will therefore seek to examine a partnership that has been effective in improving school attendance and educational outcomes for Indigenous students and identify factors that have enabled this. In doing so, it is hoped that the learning that emerges supports the development of partnerships in the future.

CHAPTER SIX EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: THE PRACTICE

The Mount Lockyer Partnership

The partnership to be examined as part of this research was provided by What Works: The Work Program (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2010) as an example of effective partnership practice between family, school and community for the purpose of improving Indigenous educational outcomes. A full account of its development and maintenance in the words of a range of stakeholders can be found in Appendix 1, while a brief summary of the partnership is provided below.

The partnership is between Mount Lockyer Primary School in Western Australia, families of its students and the wider community. In 2008, these stakeholders completed a 'months-long process' (Appendix 1) and signed a school-community partnership agreement. This agreement is included in Appendix 2 and states a broad aim of helping Indigenous students to 'achieve their best'. Through the process of developing the partnership, the group of stakeholders involved agreed upon five key themes on which to focus their partnership that together would support the achievement of their stated aim. These are Noongar (local Indigenous) culture, connecting families and teachers, attendance and participation, learning and achievement and behaviour (see Appendix 2). In putting the partnership into practice, each of these five themes is divided into responsibilities that are directly allocated to either school staff or family or community members further driving the effectiveness of this partnership. These can be seen in the Action Plan included as Appendix 3.

In this case it is evident that 'the community's really come together with the staff at Mount Lockyer' (Appendix 1). This coming together increased the capacity of family, school and community to achieve their shared vision in which the Indigenous students at the school 'achieve their best' (Appendix 2). Effectiveness has been demonstrated in both the students' attendance levels and their achievement levels. Mount Lockyer Primary School Principal, Maxine Auguston (Appendix 1), outlines that in one year attendance rose by nearly four per cent and that student achievement in the national testing reflected this rise with more students reaching minimum standards, or benchmarks, in the key areas assessed. This success was recognised in late 2010 by

the Western Australian Department of Education which honoured Ms Auguston with an *Outstanding Leadership in Aboriginal Education* award (Aboriginal Education and Training Council Western Australia 2010).

In order to ensure a comprehensive consideration of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of this particular partnership, the following analysis will take a systemic approach. Therefore, it will look at enabling factors present at each level of the system that make this particular partnership effective as outlined in Figure 5 below. In taking a systemic approach, the analysis recognises that these different levels are interdependent and therefore equally important in contributing to the effectiveness of the partnership. For the purpose of this dissertation, these levels will be referred to as individual, organisational and institutional and will be addressed in that order below.

Figure 5: Factors Enhancing the Effectiveness of Partnerships in Practice

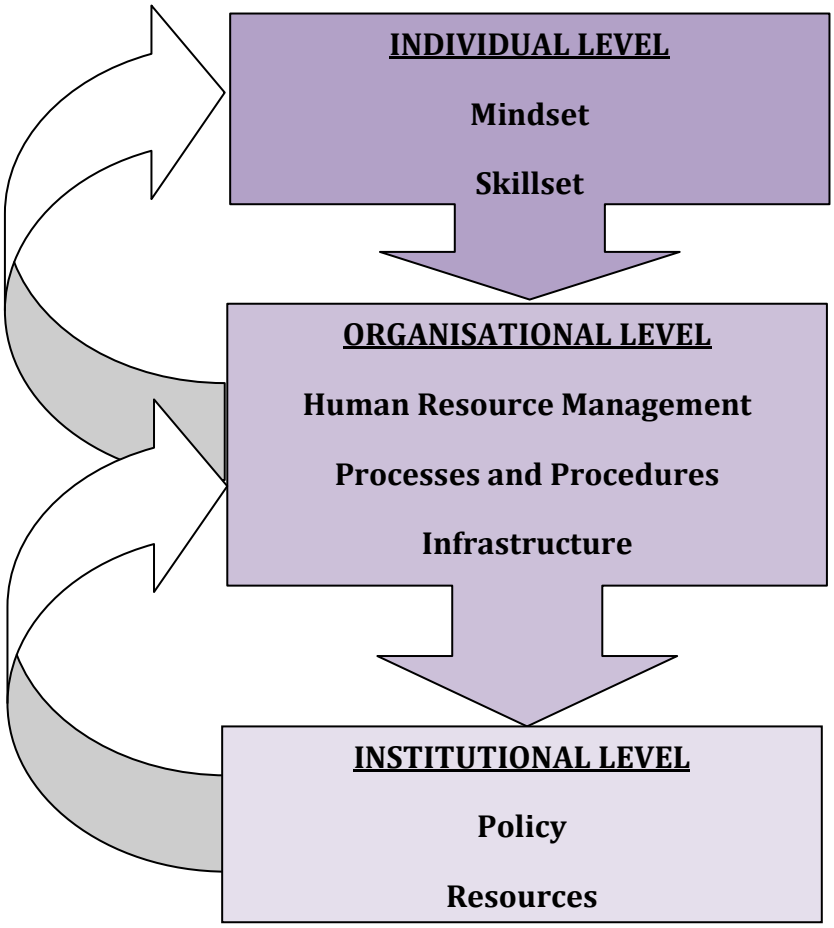


Figure 5 based on diagram outlined in (United Nations Development Programme 2008; 6)

Individual Level Factors

At the level of the individuals involved in the partnership, it is evident that there is one critical enabler present. That is, the mindset of the individuals entering into the partnership. According to Bantham, Celuch et al. (2003), mindset refers to both an individual's awareness of the tensions involved in a relationship and their willingness to seek a common understanding for the purpose of mutual benefit.

Mindset

Awareness

In her interview, the school principal, Maxine Auguston, demonstrates her awareness, prior to the partnership, of the tensions involved in a relationship between family, school and community. In particular, she says, 'If they've had bad experiences, why would they want to bother?' (Appendix 1). This comment indicates that she is aware of the negative experiences that many Indigenous parents, families and community members have had throughout their own schooling that may impact upon their willingness to become involved in a partnership. In addition to this, in discussing the way the school operated within the community, Maxine acknowledges that, prior to the partnership, interactions were 'still very school dominated' (Appendix 1). Being aware that such domination might be a source of tension as it reflects a historical relationship of power between schools and Indigenous people, was also a step towards the development of a common understanding between Mount Lockyer Primary School, families of its Indigenous students and the wider Indigenous community.

Awareness of tensions inherent in the family, school and community relationships in Indigenous education is also evident in the Indigenous community and staff members in the case study. Indigenous community members discussed the fact that 'involvement with parents and teachers (is) something we never had' (Appendix 1). Because of this, Lola, a community member, acknowledges that 'with parents you've got to grab them before they turn around' (Appendix 1). Her comments also indicate that she is aware that some teachers choose not to make efforts to get to know her 'people as people' (Appendix 1).

Indigenous staff members, Cherylene and Dianne, also indicate an awareness of the tensions between family, school and community. Their comments indicate that they are aware that family and community 'worry about the consequences' (Appendix 1) of speaking up and also that a

partnership might not be something families and communities are actually interested in hearing about.

Willingness to seek a common understanding

Perhaps because of or despite their awareness, these stakeholders appear to have been willing to participate in navigating differences through the Mount Lockyer partnership. This was evident firstly in the principal's initiation of the partnership, then in the way the Indigenous staff members worked closely with the community to develop the partnership, and finally in the regular interaction between family, school and community through a range of activities.

Skillset

Following on from an individual's mindset is their ability, or as Bantham, Celuch et al. (2003) call it, skillset, to actually be able to navigate differing perspectives. According to Bantham, Celuch et al. (2003), a skillset is, in essence, a range of communicative behaviours that make such navigation possible. Those communication skills evident in the case of the Mount Lockyer partnership were the individuals' ability to remove barriers to communication, recognise the appropriate method of communication and pay attention to feedback. These things, however, were not possible without prior awareness of the tensions inherent in the relationship between family, school and community discussed above and a willingness to seek a common understanding.

Remove barriers to communication

There were two instances identified in the case study where individuals' skills contributed to the removal of barriers to communication. Both were efforts towards making the conversation between family, school and community more participatory and equitable.

The first instance was in Maxine's initial meeting with Marisa Kelly, the partnership facilitator from What Works: The Work Program. As observed by Marisa (Appendix 1), Maxine 'brought with her a couple of her Indigenous staff members'. In this case, the communication was non-verbal in that it was Maxine's actions rather than her words that had the effect of removing the barriers to communication. She saw the initiation of a partnership as 'a way for the community to have a bit more control' (Appendix 1) and her actions from the outset enabled this. By encouraging these women to attend the meeting she was ensuring that they were able to participate in decision-making processes rather than being forced to hear the outcomes of these second- or third-hand. Lynette, a community member, says that in comparison to those who had gone before her, 'the

difference was that with Maxine they (the community members) knew what they said was going to be taken seriously' (Appendix 1). This meant that they felt more inclined to engage in communication with her.

The second instance whereby it was evident that individuals' communication skills contributed to the removal of barriers to communication was in the effort made by the Indigenous staff members in their interactions with Indigenous family and community members. Indigenous staff member Cherylene describes that they began with 'community meetings without [non-Indigenous] staff there' (Appendix 1). This enabled them to 'say things about education without the normal jargon' (Appendix 1) and, according to Dianne, another Indigenous staff member, 'in our own language' and 'our way' (Appendix 1). Such efforts meant that discussions were more equitable and contributed to families and community feeling able to share 'how they felt' (Appendix 1). It was only once 'the community people were more confident' (Appendix 1) in their ability to change or transform the school that they progressed to meetings with the wider staff group.

Here, Cherylene and Dianne facilitated the development of a 'community linkage' (Collins 1999; 91) on behalf of the school by utilising their awareness of the appropriate manner in which to communicate with families and community. Gladwell (2000; 51) refers to people like Cherylene and Dianne as 'Connectors'. He (Gladwell 2000; 51) says that 'the point about Connectors is that by having a foot in so many different worlds, they have the effect of bringing them all together'.

Recognise the most appropriate method of communication

For the most part, the individuals working within the school were able to recognise the method of communication most appropriate to those they were seeking to engage with. There are a number of descriptions of instances of informal interaction between partners in the case of the Mount Lockyer partnership. Examples include afternoon teas, staff members making visits to families' homes, offering a 'cuppa' and, perhaps the most significant, a football match where 'it wasn't only the Noongar community that was there, it was the whole community' (Appendix 1). In her article on the well-connected community, Gilchrist (2000; 272) says that 'informal processes are just as important (and often not so risky or intimidating) as formal occasions in providing the means and the motivation for networking'. Lynette, a Mount Lockyer community member, concurs, saying that 'if teachers see the kids after school and they're involved in the community they really get to know the people' (Appendix 1). Knowing each other on an informal basis then provides 'the glue for innovative collaborations' as emphasised by Chrzanowski, Rans et al. (2010; 4).

Pay attention to feedback

The ability to pay attention to feedback and be reflective as a partner is also a noticeable enabling factor at the individual level of the Mount Lockyer partnership. At one point, Julie, a teacher at the school, talks about her 'journey of discovery' (Tesoriero 2010; 163):

> 'I think the first thing is that you need to let people have their say without interpreting it to your way of thinking. I think that's the biggest danger that I fell into because I was the person who was taking the notes (at meetings) and I wanted to write it my way and they kept saying 'No, that's not what we mean!''
>
> (Appendix 1)

Here, Julie has obviously taken the feedback provided to her on board, reflected on the nature of her practice and, as a result, learning has emerged about the value of active listening which includes 'accurate summarising of partner communication' (Bantham, Celuch et al. 2003; 267). In addition to that, she's also learned the importance of not making assumptions and that family and community feel strongly about having their voices heard in the partnership process. The learning that has resulted from Julie's ability to pay attention to feedback in communication situations has enhanced her capacity to engage with family and community in the future as well as the opportunity for these stakeholders to participate effectively in the partnership.

Organisational Level Factors

At the level of the organisation involved in the partnership, that is Mount Lockyer Primary School, there appear to be a number of elements contributing to the effectiveness of the partnership. This includes the human resource management within the school as well as the school's processes and procedures as well as infrastructure.

Human Resource Management

Professional development

One factor related to human resource management at the organisational level that contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership is the professional development made available to staff members to support them in developing an awareness of the tensions inherent in a relationship between family, school and community. This is perhaps because some did not have the acute awareness of these that others had prior to the partnership development as alluded to in Maxine's comment that 'we want teachers to have some empathy' (Appendix 1). Lola, one of the community members involved in the Mount Lockyer partnership, explains that 'if teachers just get

to know our people as people, they (would) find that a lot of them have bad experience in the past with schools and that's why some of them are frightened' (Appendix 1). Awareness of the life experiences of members of the Mount Lockyer Indigenous community has been fostered by the school inviting 'different members of the Noongar community…to speak to teachers about when they were at school' (Appendix 1). Julie Hughes, a teacher at the school, comments that she noticed a 'shift in the way staff were thinking' (Appendix 1).

It is also evident that this professional development is not intended to be a one-off event but ongoing as Julie talks about the plans for raising awareness among staff members of local Indigenous culture:

> 'Next year I think we might start to get teachers to understand something about the actual places around Albany. We would visit and see that this is a place of significance for the Noongar community and I guess that's deeper knowledge'.
>
> (Appendix 1)

The What Works: The Work Program initiative says that 'positive working relationships cannot be built without getting to know the local Indigenous community and recognising and valuing their cultures' (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.; 12). A heightened awareness or shift in perception of Indigenous culture and worldview, is likely to improve communication and therefore the relationship between partners (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs 2000; Painter 2008).

Retention

The retention of human resources also appears to be a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the Mount Lockyer partnership. In schools such as Mount Lockyer Primary School, 'non-Indigenous staff tend to be transient' (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.; 11). In this instance, however, Maxine had worked at Mount Lockyer Primary School for four years prior to initiating the partnership process, Cherylene and Dianne's presence within the school was well-established and Julie had been at the school for seven years. This indicates that all feel there is value in staying at the school and are committed to doing so whether through personal or professional motivations. In turn, their retention at the school contributes to the continuity of the partnership in the shorter term as they have had time to develop the necessary climate of trust within their relationships with other stakeholders to make it effective.

Processes and Procedures

A second element at the organisational level in which there exists a number of factors contributing to the effectiveness of this partnership is the school's processes and procedures. It is evident that the school values the partnership, its development and maintenance, as a process rather than an end to be achieved. The principal of Mount Lockyer Primary School says that they are 'not just doing it because it looks good' (Appendix 1). In providing her guidance to the partners, Marisa Kelly had a similar emphasis in saying that while 'the goal (of an agreement)…gives a guide to what we're doing and where we're going…at the end of the day, it's about people sitting down and talking to each other, it's about people getting to know each other, it's about people working together to solve tricky things' (Appendix 1). This working together to solve 'tricky' things is evident, in particular, in the action planning meetings and the development of Individualised Education Plans for Indigenous students.

Meetings

Despite the fact that the individuals involved in the partnership predominantly utilised informal interactions to communicate with one another, the meetings instigated by the school each term also contributed to the effectiveness of the partnership. This is primarily because the school ensured that 'the community is invited' (Appendix 1) to these meetings. Associate Professor Mark Warren of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Warren 2007; 17) says that, in a partnership, 'it shouldn't just be the professionals saying "This is what you should care about". Instead, the starting point needs to be "What do you care about? What do you think can be done?"' The meetings held by the school provided Indigenous families and community members who had, by the school principal's own admission, 'been a little disassociated from the school' (Appendix 1), with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and thus 'have a bit more control' (Appendix 1). Cherylene explains that, before the partnership, Indigenous families and community members did not realise 'how much input they can have towards their kids' education' (Appendix 1). The meetings that took place as part of the partnership encouraged family and community to 'voice an opinion' and thus, 'for the first time a lot of the Aboriginal people had a say or their voices heard' (Appendix 1). By encouraging family and community members to participate in organisational decision-making processes regarding the component of the partnership to be the 'focus across the school' (Appendix 1) over the coming term, the school was allowing them to exercise their rights (Tesoriero 2010). As a result, family and community

members were willing to engage and 'coming to meetings' ('we usually have about six or eight people coming in' (Appendix 1)).

Individualised Education Plans

The Mount Lockyer partnership case provides evidence that all partners feel a sense of responsibility for the educational outcomes of the students at Mount Lockyer Primary School. One of the factors contributing to that at the organisational level is the process, adopted after the completion of the partnership agreement, of jointly developing Individualised Education Plans for Indigenous students (Appendix 1). Individualised Education Plans bring parents or carers together with educators and specialist support staff to consider the student's current level of performance and determine his or her educational needs and future learning priorities (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training 2006).

Infrastructure

Places and spaces for gathering

The school in this partnership has the appropriate infrastructure in place for undertaking informal interactions with partners. In saying 'even when they (the parents) drop the kids off I get them to come in and have a cuppa in the Noongar Community Room' (Appendix 1), Dianne from Mount Lockyer Primary School is not only sharing the fact that the school is open to parents as people by listening to them but that there exists a designated physical place where parents are always welcome in the school. In his discussions with parents, Holmes (2009; 11) identified a consistent theme as being 'the need for schools to be welcoming places for parents'. Having places and spaces for gathering contributes to the feeling of welcome among Indigenous families and community members and hence the possibility of partnership effectiveness.

Institutional Level Factors

The level of the institution refers to the environment in which individuals and organisations such as Mount Lockyer Primary School operate. It can facilitate or inhibit the ability of each of the other entities to operate effectively in a partnership. In this case, however, there were a number of factors at the institutional level that had a favourable impact on the effectiveness of the Mount Lockyer partnership.

Policy

The first factor that had a favourable impact on the effectiveness of the partnership was the existence of a policy supporting partnership development between family, school and community in Indigenous education. With such a policy in place, the education system provided the impetus for the Mount Lockyer partnership but was then also able to provide the necessary support to help make it an effective one.

Resources

Support for the Mount Lockyer partnership at the institutional level came in the form of resources linked to What Works: The Work Program, a national initiative of the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students by providing support for partnership initiatives between families, schools and communities (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.). In support of these partnerships, What Works: The Work Program provides print and online descriptions of effective partnership practice in a range of schools. This allows families, schools and communities such as those in Mount Lockyer to build on lessons learned from past partnership practice in similar contexts throughout Australia thus enhancing the possibility of their own effectiveness.

In addition to the print and online resources, What Works: The Work Program also makes partnership facilitators such as Marisa Kelly available free-of-charge to support and guide families, schools and communities in developing and maintaining partnerships (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2011). With regards to the Mount Lockyer partnership, Marisa helped the partners understand the importance and process of forming partnerships. The school's principal, Maxine, admits; 'I was at a real crossroads when Marisa contacted me…We seemed to have done so much but to me it was still just a little too shallow' (Appendix 1). With guidance from Marisa through face-to-face meetings and correspondence, the Mount Lockyer partnership was able to become something that had meaning for all parties.

The above analysis illustrates the range of factors that have made this particular partnership one that has been effective in improving Indigenous student attendance and educational outcomes at Mt Lockyer Primary School. In comparing the theory discussed in the previous chapter with the concrete practical experience of the Mount Lockyer partnership discussed above, it is evident that the processes of dialogue, participation and leadership need to be supported at all levels of the

system. It is no use, for example, for certain individual stakeholders such as Maxine, Cherylene or Dianne, to have the mindset and skillset to support dialogue, participation and leadership when the key organisation and institution influencing their work do not have the structures in place to support this. In this particular case, however, the processes of dialogue, participation and leadership were strongly supported at the organisational level by the school's human resource management, its processes and procedures as well as infrastructure. The same is the case at the institutional level where there was the appropriate policy in place to allow the necessary support to be provided to aid the processes of dialogue, participation and leadership. In having these supports, the diverse groups of stakeholders involved were able to enter into a partnership that recognised the issue of mutual interest, its complex nature and the need for collaboration to address it. It was this combining of forces that enabled them to be effective in achieving the aim of helping Indigenous students 'achieve their best'.

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION: LEARNING TO SUPPORT FUTURE PRACTICE

Having transpired as the result of studies of community development and observations of the need for a more collaborative approach to education in a remote Northern Territory community, this dissertation has provided an overview of factors that enhance the effectiveness of partnerships as well as their benefits to guide the future practice of educators. The factors outlined have much in common with the foundation principles of community development (Tesoriero 2010). In particular, they emphasise the importance of genuine participation (Tesoriero 2010) whereby diversity is acknowledged and valued and as such a range of stakeholders actively contribute to decision-making endeavours, engage in an equitable dialogue and share in leadership processes. Such genuine participation has the benefit of enhancing the capacity of family, school and community to achieve their desired ends. In the case of the Mount Lockyer school-community partnership, genuine participation contributed to the development of family, school and community capacity to support Indigenous students at Mount Lockyer Primary School to 'achieve their best' (Appendix 1) thus demonstrating that a community development approach utilising participatory partnership practice is a clear way to bridge the divide to 'close the gap'.

This dissertation began by highlighting the continued inequality between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia. On average, Indigenous students are two and a half years behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in the key learning areas of literacy and numeracy (Council of Australian Governments 2009). This is an unacceptable state of affairs and exists despite a raft of measures undertaken to address it both at the national level and within individual schools.

This persistent inequality has led to a growing awareness on the part of academics, policy makers and educators of the complex nature of the issues of non-attendance and poor educational outcomes amongst Indigenous Australian students. In fact, non-attendance and the poor educational outcomes this leads to can be attributed to a range of factors such as family finance, family mobility, teacher-student relationships and the school calendar (Department of Education Science and Training n.d.).

Historically, both school-based stakeholders such as the principal, teachers and other staff, and those out of school stakeholders, such as families and communities, have engaged in blaming each other for the non-attendance and subsequent poor educational outcomes of Indigenous students (Bourke, Rigby et al. 2000; Harrison 2008). This culture of blame has worked to help each of these parties feel absolved of responsibility for Indigenous students' attendance and educational outcomes but also resulted in an ongoing divide between them. In recent years, partnerships have been seen as a collaborative framework by which to bring together these diverse stakeholder groups to address the range of factors causing non-attendance and subsequent poor educational outcomes for Indigenous students. In fact, the Commonwealth Government has outlined the expectation that all schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments have school-community partnerships in place by the end of 2011 (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs 2010).

With partnerships now required in all schools with significant Indigenous student enrolments, this dissertation has examined the literature and a case for the purpose of identifying factors that enhance the effectiveness of partnerships in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students. In the study of the literature, three key processes were identified as enhancing the effectiveness of partnerships. These were the processes of dialogue, whereby stakeholders interact with and listen actively to one another; participation, whereby all stakeholders are expected and encouraged to be involved in decision-making; and leadership, whereby a range of stakeholders are able to share in the leadership process. The study of a case reinforced the importance of these three processes while also highlighting that they need to be present at all levels of the system, that is at the level of the individuals involved as well as within the relevant organisations and institutions.

It was found that these processes result in important follow-on effects. For example, dialogue was found to result in new understandings and trust. This was evident in the case of the Mount Lockyer partnership when teachers participated in professional development activities with members of the local Indigenous community and developed new understandings of the people and culture. Being listened to as part of the process of dialogue also had the effect of developing feelings of trust ('they knew what they said was going to be taken seriously' (Appendix 1)) within the Indigenous community which had not been present before when they were 'disassociated

from the school' (Appendix 1). Participation was also found to have important follow-on effects. In having the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, Indigenous community members were 'more confident' (Appendix 1) and felt a sense of satisfaction that they 'had a say or their voices heard' (Appendix 1). The third process, leadership that enabled a range of individuals to share in the leadership process, was also found to have important follow-on effects. One such example from the case was the principal's approach to including Indigenous staff members in her first meeting with the representative from What Works: The Work Program (Appendix 1). This resulted in a sense of responsibility for making the partnership a success among all of the people involved as well as a shared vision for the partnership which the Indigenous staff members were then able to develop further with the local Indigenous community in community meetings.

All of the follow-on effects outlined above are conduits for the development of social capital. Social capital is an important resource and its development is a key benefit of a collaborative framework such as a partnership. It is a key benefit because it works to bridge the historical divide between family, school and community. As such, stakeholders are more inclined to work together to support Indigenous students to 'achieve their best' (Appendix 1). In collaborating, stakeholders are recognising the complex nature of the issue of non-attendance and poor educational outcomes of Indigenous Australian students and allowing it to be addressed in a holistic manner. With the issue being tackled from a range of angles, there is a greater likelihood of success in closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia. This has been found in the case of the Mount Lockyer school-community partnership where both attendance and outcomes among Indigenous students have improved since the inception of the partnership.

With improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students, we will move towards a more equitable Australia, an Australia where the right to a 'fair go' is not only espoused as the most important national value (Gough 2006), but is also a reality.

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APPENDIX 1 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The following excerpt was taken from the website of the What Works: The Work Program website (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2010). Some video sections have been transcribed for the purpose of including them here.

Mount Lockyer Primary School, Albany, Western Australia: The community has a real reason for coming to school

Coming to agreement

In 2008, the Mount Lockyer Primary School community completed a months-long process and signed a school-community partnership agreement. The Principal was Maxine Auguston and the What Works facilitator was Marisa Kelly. Maxine discusses what happened at that time:

Maxine:

I came into the school in 2004 and it became really evident from our state testing, the WALNA state testing, that…there was a huge disparity between the achievement of our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids. So, that was really concerning. We had lots of programs in place and (they) just didn't seem to be helping at all. So, that was the commitment – that we wanted to improve the achievement of our kids, we wanted to close that gap, and we weren't going to do that just simply by having more literacy and numeracy programs, it wasn't going to work like that. It became really evident that…(for) the Aboriginal kids that were doing quite well, their family, not necessarily their parent but family, were involved in some way, shape or form in the school.

Maxine adds:

I was at a real crossroads when Marisa contacted me to see whether we'd be interested in developing a school-community partnership. We seemed to have done so much but to me it was still just a little too shallow.

Some years ago we had a history where the Noongar community had been a little disassociated from the school, so we put in place a number of strategies that created partnerships with the community. First we had to engage them so we developed an Elders Circle attendance class, because our Noongar attendance rate was really low. That was based on a system where you empower the community to support families where attendance is an issue through work with the Elders of the community. It was successful but it meant that we had to develop very strong relationships with the Elders in the community and then the families. So that started it.

We then focused again on participation and engaging parents, particularly those with children in the 0–3 age bracket, so that they would be able to support their children through the non-compulsory early years and into the compulsory years. What we found was that some of our Noongar parents were signing their kids up for pre-school or community kindy but they weren't attending. The result was that when the kids hit school they were already behind.

We developed very strong relationships with those young mums and in a way that was already a partnership but it was still very school-dominated in that it was more about them doing what the school wanted them to do, rather than them having their say. So the school-community partnership became a way for the community to have a bit more control.

But the beauty of having those other programs in place was we had already done some ground work. So the school-community partnership cemented it and I suppose created a more authentic partnership.

What Works facilitator Marisa Kelly gives her perspective:

Maxine spoke at length about all of the things that they already felt were important and that were in place in the school and she felt that the idea of developing a partnership was quite timely. So I came down and met with her and some of her staff members and, again, that also strengthened my view that it was a good place to work because she brought with her a couple of her Indigenous staff members and they were, right from the very beginning, part of the whole decision-making process on 'How would we do this?'

The goal of signing something or having that physical thing to work towards is good because it gives a concrete reason to meet. It gives a guide to what we're doing and where we're going but at the end of the day, it's about people sitting down and talking to each other, it's about people

getting to know each other, it's about people working together to solve tricky things. You can't write that down. Every relationship has its own timeline, you can't control it and it needs to be given the time. You can't have a working relationship with someone you've just met so if that's what they need to do, if school people and community people need to take the time to meet, to get to know each other, to learn a bit about each other, that's okay.

Making the agreement work

Maxine discusses the outcomes after more than a year:

After we finished the partnership agreement we decided that to keep it alive we needed to continue to meet and plan. So when we have a planning meeting in the first week of each term, the community is invited and we usually have about six or eight people coming in. We develop an action plan and each term we tend to look at a component of the partnership that we want to develop. That then becomes the focus across the school.

So for instance we've really focused on developing relationships between the staff and the families and the Noongar culture side of it. That's written in the partnership and we want teachers to have an understanding about where the children are coming from, their background, their interests, what they do at home and what their parents want. That's been a huge big focus.

Each term every teacher invites the Noongar families into the classroom to talk to them about what's going on. It can take different forms but afternoon teas are popular. We really want the families to be able to be a part of the education of their kids. And when we speak with the staff we stress that the things we do need to be purposeful, that there needs to be a reason behind it. We're not just doing this because it looks good. We said we were going to do it in our partnership but it has to be purposeful: we want to show them something, we want them to share an activity with their kids or we want them to be a part of a whole school program like our footy program or cooking program. There's a reason for them coming in. So we're getting to know one another.

Another thing we've done is to invite different members of the Noongar community (and from our staff as well) to speak to teachers about when they were at school. We wanted teachers to have some idea of the experiences Noongar people have had, so they can start to see why some parents are reluctant to get involved. If they've had bad experiences, why would they want to bother? I always say to teachers that they should keep trying to establish relationships. This term

we're going to ask lots of people from the community and we're going to put them with teachers in groups of two or three, so it will be less threatening and more personal. We want it to be less stressful for parents coming up to school and we want teachers to have some empathy.

If I was to leave tomorrow I know that there are people here who would pick it up and drive it as well. But I think if you're going to have a successful school community partnership agreement in your school it has to be driven from the top. If the leaders don't have 100% engagement and belief in it, I really don't know how it could happen.

At the same time, I think it's been successful here because there's been a huge buy-in from the staff and the community. But I make sure that when we come together and plan it's there, all our other documents, and it's spoken about regularly.

Our Noongar kids are doing better in the national testing, and we're getting more kids over benchmarks. Our attendance is good and we seem to have the parents very much on board with that. When I did the stats at the end of last term for our last year's attendance, we got all 85.5%. A few years ago it was only 78.5% and last year it was 81.7%. So there's an upward trend in both achievement and attendance. All our Indigenous kids are now on personalised plans.

Cherylene Simpson has been involved throughout, as a teacher at the school and a Noongar community member. Here, she and others discuss what happened.

When we signed off the agreement I felt really good because I think it brings the whole school together and gives parents some involvement in decision-making. Before that I don't think they realised how much say they really did have and how much input they can have towards their kids' education.

They also found out how to go about saying things. Sometimes our community isn't very outspoken but with the community partnership they were able to say things and not worry about the consequences of saying it. I think they were more relaxed and they were just able to voice an opinion. They're really cluey about what's happening.

At first we had community meetings without [non-Indigenous] staff there. I was able to say things about education without the normal jargon and they were able to give back information about how they felt. So first we had community meetings without staff but later then we had meetings with the staff, when the community people were more confident.

The Noongar community is quite big here and they should have a say in their school. But at the same time the partnership brought in the other parents as well and they were all able to mix together.

The agreement has made a difference to attendance, because it's all documented and parents are more aware. We keep them informed about kids whose attendance is improving and kids who are going down, so it's all recognised. It works because we act on it straight away. It's important that when you bring attendance to parents' attention you have all the documented statistics there. The school community partnership has definitely helped with that.

Also, since the school community partnership agreement we now have IEPs [Individualised Education Plans] for every Noongar kid in the school and those Noongar kids who need extra help are picked up in small group work in maths and literacy. That's all mixed in with attendance though, because it's all recorded and monitored at the same time.

The parents know what's happening and know all the processes involved. It's all very clear and I think that's why the community agreement is working here.

Cherylene (teacher):

When we started a community agreement, our first goal for us two Noongar workers was to introduce it to the community in our own language so we didn't have any (non-Indigenous) teachers or staff around, we introduced it in our way, to our community, the way we thought they wanted to hear about it.

What I think's happened over the last few months is I think the community's really come together with the staff at Mount Lockyer and I think it's something that has been a long time coming and I think with what's happening it's going to be really, really, really good and I think we're really ready for it at this school 'cause we've come to a place where we need to go further and I think this community agreement is going to be it for the school.

Dianne (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer):

It has changed a lot. I've been out in community more and telling them what's happening with this new partnership that's gonna involve the school and it's great 'cause the parents know what's going on and they're coming to meetings and want to know more too (about) what we're doing.

Johnno (parent):

I reckon it's a good thing because it's something that probably had to be done to help our kids out and involvement with parents and the teachers (is) something that we never had as kids.

Julie (teacher):

I think the first thing is that you need to let people have their say without interpreting it to your way of thinking. I think that's the biggest danger that I fell into because I was the person who was taking the notes (at meetings) and I wanted to write it my way and they kept saying 'No, that's not what we mean!'

Johnno (parent):

At the end of the day, our kids need to get a future and have a job, go to school, get an education and by having this partnership, it's a good thing where we can all communicate with one another.

Community perspectives

Lola, Brenda and Lynette are community members and Dianne is an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer at the school. Their discussion here is about the way the school and community relate.

Dianne:

We're welcoming to the Noongar community because our people meet them and greet them at the school office. But sometimes you also have to go out to their homes, just to encourage them to come in to the school. Even when they drop the kids off I get them to come in and have a cuppa in the Noongar Community Room, and listen to them. The room was set up to support the women and kids and support the community.

Lola:

I think with parents you've got to grab them before they turn around!

Dianne:

A lot of young mums will have little children with them too and sometimes they feel a bit of shame because the kids are playing up. So if they come here we've got toys in the room and the kids can have a play and the mums can play with them too if they want to.

Brenda:

We encourage parents to get involved with the school, to get involved and know where their kids are at and where they're going. If you don't encourage the parents to come to the school they usually won't.

Lynette:

It started really when Maxine became principal. She used to teach here before that too. She got a lot of parents involved. Before that they might come for meetings but they felt nothing much happened after that. Some of them thought that the only time they were asked to come was when the kid was in trouble. The difference was that with Maxine they knew what they said was going to be taken seriously.

Lola:

I reckon if teachers just get to know our people as people, they find that a lot of them have bad experience in the past with schools and that's why some of them are frightened. They feel intimidated by teachers.

Lynette:

But if teachers see the kids after school and they're involved in the community they really get to know the people. I don't say 'oh school, that's school stuff, leave it there'. No, it shouldn't be like that. But schools simply can't work for Aboriginal kids without Aboriginal workers here, because no one other than an Indigenous person can really understand another Indigenous person. So we're really grateful to the two Aboriginal teachers here and the other Aboriginal workers.

Lola:

When the agreement was signed we had a big day and there was a football match and cars parked everywhere.

Dianne:

And there was food and drink and it went very well. It wasn't only the Noongar community that was there, it was the whole community.

Brenda:

With the partnership agreement we don't go back to it all the time and say 'oh we have to do that', but it's there all the time. Like with attendance we do follow it.

Lola:

Attendance is picking up. We really do go around and check on the kids, and encourage them to come in to the school. And we can ask the parents whether there's anything that we can help them with to get the kids to school.

Lynette:

One Noongar group we have here on Fridays is when Year 7 kids show them what they're doing at school. The parents feel that this is their room and they're comfortable in it and they look around and they can see all the children's photos. It's great to have that feeling. The kids are finding they feel at home at school. The Noongar kids never used to feel comfortable at school.

Embedding the agreement

Julie Hughes has been at Mount Lockyer for seven years and has been in the role of Behaviour Intervention teacher since 2009. Here she discusses the changes she has observed:

I was asked by Maxine to be the secretary of the group, so I basically typed up all the things and kept in contact with Marisa Kelly.

My thought was that for the first time a lot of the Aboriginal people had a say or had their voice heard. I don't think they wanted to come in and take over but they just wanted to know that people were listening to them. We already had a culture of inclusion but the process made it more effective I suppose.

This year [2010] I was away at another school in first term and when I came back I particularly noticed a big shift in the way staff were thinking about what's happening. I guess I had to go away

to see that. The agreement says ‘these are the things that we’re going to do’ but when we go to the staff we say ‘how can we fit that in?’, rather than saying ‘you will do this, and you will do that’. That’s what I mean by coming to it from a partnership idea: it’s not telling them what to do, it’s involving them in a partnership with the community. As long as teachers are part of it and see other people willing to contribute they will take it on board. It doesn’t happen overnight, but it’s a process just like it is with parents.

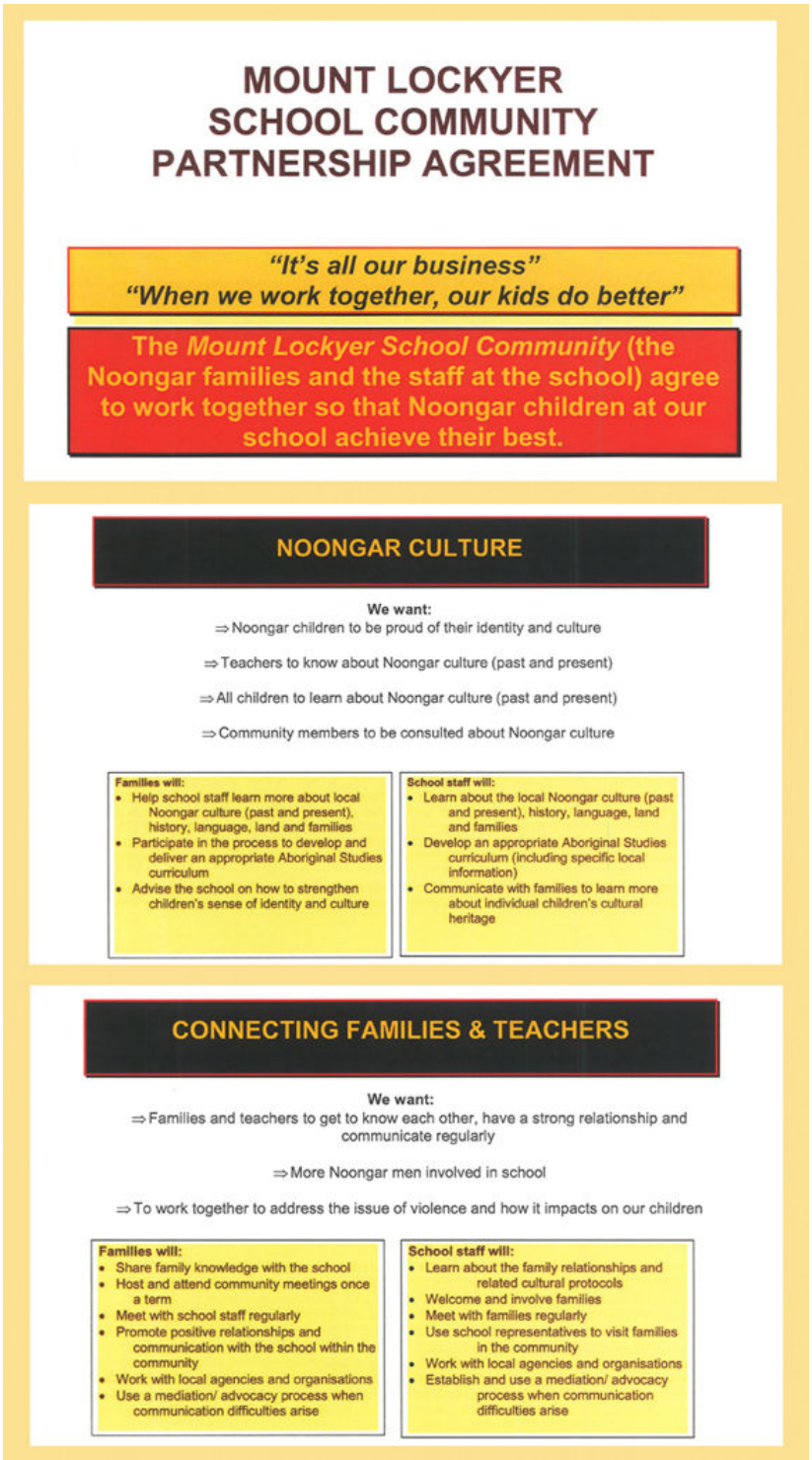
Our recent planning has been about Family and Culture, but we needed to look at attendance and we’ve been focusing on that. I think you need to keep on referring to all the parts of the agreement, because if you drop one, you might just lose ground. So we’re using attendance to focus on Family and Culture. How can we get the children to come to school and be more relaxed but also how can we make their parents and family members more comfortable about coming to school?

Next year I think we might start to get teachers to understand something about the actual places around Albany. We would visit and see that this is a place of significance for the Noongar community and I guess that’s deeper knowledge. We could also focus more on Noongar culture in the curriculum because all our children should know more.

The difference now is that our initiatives are embedded in what we do rather than added on. For example, this term in particular leading up to NAIDOC week there was a real effort by lots of staff members to embed that in what they were doing every day. One of the things they had was a competition for the best decorated door, which sounds funny but actually helped show understanding and there were lots of other things that showed how seriously they were taking it.

And there are classrooms that are continuing with that now, even though it’s not the theme of the term, and they have started to embed that into their work, so when they’re doing Art for instance they’ll find ways to include Aboriginal aspects. So it’s sort of becoming like second nature rather than only when we are doing the Aboriginal theme.

APPENDIX 2 THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT



MOUNT LOCKYER
SCHOOL COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

"It's all our business"
"When we work together, our kids do better"

The *Mount Lockyer School Community* (the Noongar families and the staff at the school) agree to work together so that Noongar children at our school achieve their best.

NOONGAR CULTURE

We want:
⇒ Noongar children to be proud of their identity and culture
⇒ Teachers to know about Noongar culture (past and present)
⇒ All children to learn about Noongar culture (past and present)
⇒ Community members to be consulted about Noongar culture

Families will:
- Help school staff learn more about local Noongar culture (past and present), history, language, land and families
- Participate in the process to develop and deliver an appropriate Aboriginal Studies curriculum
- Advise the school on how to strengthen children's sense of identity and culture

School staff will:
- Learn about the local Noongar culture (past and present), history, language, land and families
- Develop an appropriate Aboriginal Studies curriculum (including specific local information)
- Communicate with families to learn more about individual children's cultural heritage

CONNECTING FAMILIES & TEACHERS

We want:
⇒ Families and teachers to get to know each other, have a strong relationship and communicate regularly
⇒ More Noongar men involved in school
⇒ To work together to address the issue of violence and how it impacts on our children

Families will:
- Share family knowledge with the school
- Host and attend community meetings once a term
- Meet with school staff regularly
- Promote positive relationships and communication with the school within the community
- Work with local agencies and organisations
- Use a mediation/ advocacy process when communication difficulties arise

School staff will:
- Learn about the family relationships and related cultural protocols
- Welcome and involve families
- Meet with families regularly
- Use school representatives to visit families in the community
- Work with local agencies and organisations
- Establish and use a mediation/ advocacy process when communication difficulties arise

Source: (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)

APPENDIX 3 THE ACTION PLAN

Planning meeting, 22 July 2010 [abridged extract]

Attendance: Principal, teachers, community members (total 11 people).

Discussion:

1. Deadly Tucker cooking sessions: Continue, as these have been very successful.

2. Visitors Book: This information is collected by the GP network and sent to Canberra.

3. NAIDOC Week: Highly successful with extensive class participation in all activities.

4. Elders Circle: Improved attendance figures when compared with last year. 2009: 81%, 2010: 85.9%.

5. University link: Would like report on partnership and other matters.

6. Other comments: Great place to work. Good support.

Goal One: Attendance and participation 'Maintain connecting families and teachers, which will help improve attendance'.

Departmental slogan: Better attendance, brighter future.

We want:

- All Noongar children to be at school.
- Noongar children to feel supported, safe and comfortable at school.
- Noongar children to be highly motivated and engaged in all school activities.

Action 1: Movie night. Show 'Bran New Dae' in library in conjunction with disco night. 12 August. D and S to send out flyers and put in newsletter.

Action 2: Early close, show 'Black magic' and 'Yilgarrin Dreaming'. Date in Term 3. M to organise.

Action 3: Teachers/students invite families to class to join an activity. Term3/4. D to discuss with teachers and organise transport.

Action 4: Invite people to come and tell their stories to staff. Focus on younger parents. By end Term 3. J & L to organise. M & D to arrange staff meeting time.

Action 5: Revamp staff bulletin. Make it broader and include the whole term. Teachers can add planned activities so other staff can see what is happening and help out or plan around this. Week 3, term 3. S, E & C to organise.

Action 6: Swimming lessons. Let parents know they can travel on the bus if they want to see their children in swimming lessons. Term 3, weeks 1-3. S to organise.

Action 7: C4C Deadly Tucker. Cooking lessons to continue. Terms 3 &4. C to coordinate.

Action 8: C4C Indigenous parenting. Target young mums, two or three at a time. Organise transport and resources. Terms 3 &4. C to coordinate.

Source: (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2010)