Understanding Parent Involvement in their Children’s Education in the Australian context

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Parent involvement

Promotes student academic achievement (Meta-analyses)
- $d = 0.35$ (Jeynes, 2012)
- $d = 0.49$ (Hattie, 2015) (based on 195 studies)

Hattie estimates that for $SD = 1$ is equivalent to advancing learners' achievement by one year, or improving the rate of learning by 50% (Hattie, 2015)
An integrated review of recent Australian parent engagement research

This paper is founded on three central beliefs:

• Parental engagement promotes improved schooling outcomes for students (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012; Wilder, 2013).

• How PE improves student outcomes may (or may not) differ between particular contexts.

• There is a need, therefore, to base Australian policies and practices on Australian evidence to ensure relevancy and effectiveness in our context.
Why an Australian literature?

Woodrow, Somerville, Naidoo, & Power (2016) noted that in relation to parent engagement

“...the research literature base in Australia is small and emergent...” (p. 1)
Why an Australian literature?

- One of the four “Key areas” or “pillars” of the Australian Government Students First reform agenda (DET, 2013)
- Most parent engagement research has been conducted in the United States and Britain (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; p. 13)
Why an Australian literature?

• Policy differences (e.g., NCLB; Specialist support in schools; Support programs)
• Culture and history of parent involvement differs (e.g. PTA’s in United States)
The need for quantitative research

The OECD (2012) noted
• “Few studies...analyse parental involvement in a cross-national perspective and few evaluate a wide array of forms of involvement” (Borgonovvi & Montt, 2012, p. 3).

The Australian Evidence for Learning site notes that
• “...high quality evaluations of specific parental involvement programs in Australia are rare, and new studies in this area would be valuable” (Evidence for Learning, 2017).
The focus…

This presentation reviews recent research in relation to school-based parent involvement

• “practices on the part of parents that require their making actual contact with schools”.

Our aim is to bring together current qualitative and quantitative research to contribute to our understanding of the Australian experience of Parent Engagement in their children's education.
Why school-based involvement?

- When parents take the time to meet their child’s teachers, or when they volunteer for activities at school, they signal to their children that they value education (OECD, 2012, p. 39).

- Effective parent and family engagement in education is more than just participation in school meetings and helping with fundraising, it is actively engaging with your child’s learning, both at home and at school (DET, 2017).
School-based parent involvement and children's learning


- Data from the K-Cohort of LSAC
- Wave 2 data (children in Grade 1 in 2006)
- Wave 3 data (children in Grade 3 in 2008)
- $n = 2616$ (48.5% female)
Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)

**Australian Children**
- Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

**Statistically powerful methodology**
- Randomly selected sample of children, stratified on state or territory of residence, and broadly representative of the Australian population for sex, cultural background and socioeconomic status for children of a similar age (Gray & Smart, 2008)
- Commencing with Wave 1 in 2004, LSAC gathers data from a B-Cohort of children aged 3 - 15 months ($n = 5112$), and a K- Cohort (4 ½ to 5) ($n = 4991$).
- Data collected every two years
- Linked to other government data such as NAPLAN and Medicare
Analysis

Diagram showing relationships between variables such as Sex, Y3_READ, Y3_NUM, Y1_Parental School Involvement, Y1_Students’ Approach to Learning, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, Language Background, socio-economic position, and Y1_Cognitive Ability. The diagram includes coefficients and significance levels for each relationship.

• “This study identifies positive associations between school-based parent involvement and student SRL in the early years of schooling, and the role of SRL in mediating the relationship between school-based parent involvement and student reading and numeracy achievement”  
  (Daniel, Wang & Berthelsen, 2016, p. 174)

• Importantly, the patterns remained similar when we controlled of home-based and community-based parent involvement activity.
School-based parent involvement reduces over time

![Graph showing participation in school-based parent involvement activities over time]

Participation in School-based parent involvement activities (Types of activities per school term)

Barriers

International research has identified a range of barriers that might prevent parents from school-based involvement

- Personal barriers
- Social barriers
- Practical barriers

(See for example: Feiler, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Williams & Sanchez, 2011).
Barriers – Australian research

Woodrow et al., (2016) identified barriers that can restrict the involvement of families from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds in Australian schools under the headings of:

• Communication issues
• Family pressures/incapacities
• School pressures
• Lack of specialist knowledge in relation to specific cohorts
Barriers – Australian research

Some of these are particular or nuanced to the Australian policy and social environment

- Mixed messages and unclear policy expectations of staff
- Fear of DoCs involvement
- Lack of specialist knowledge in relation to specific cohorts
  - Lack of cultural capital, lack of common language (CALD cohort)
  - Lack of cultural knowledge, loss of cultural authority (Aboriginal cohort)
  - Lack of specialist help and educator knowledge (special needs cohort).
Teacher outreach

Figure 1. Mean rating out of three for teacher outreach by demographic group

Teacher communication

LSAC K Cohort, Parents experiences of teacher outreach practices. (Daniel, in process)
Capacity building

A survey of 35 teacher educators with responsibilities of addressing parent engagement as part of their teaching, and representing 15 Universities across Australia by Saltmarsh, Barr and Chapman (2015) concluded:

• “...there is insufficient continuity to ensure that all beginning teachers have a thorough understanding of how to work effectively with parents” (p. 69).

• “...over half the participant in our study referred to the way parent-school engagement is addressed in their programme using terms such as “oblique”, “inferred”, “incidental”, “ad hoc” and “added on” (p. 80).

• Parent engagement “appears less consistently” in primary and secondary school teacher preparation than in early childhood teacher education (p. 79).
Australian research - Early career teachers

In Australia, many early career teachers report they do not feel well prepared for this role (McKenzie et al., 2014).
School leadership and parent involvement

Study by Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) involving focus group discussions with 175 NSW parents

• Highlighted parents’ perceptions of the crucial role of the School Principal in setting the tone and building relationships with parents in order to facilitate parental involvement in the school.
Parental motivation

Parent engagement by school type and reason for choice

(Daniel, Wang, Murray & Harrison (in press) Reasons for school choice in LSAC (n = 3,752)
Parent engagement by school type and reason for choice

Results indicate the role of personal commitment (buy-in or sense of belonging) in enhancing parent engagement.

Fig 1.4. Parent involvement by reason for school choice (ANOVA controlling for type of school). (Daniel, Wang, Murray & Harrison (in press))
Implications

Like international experience, Australian parents reduce their involvement in school-based partnership activities as children move through the early years of schooling.

Yet early school-based parent engagement is linked to improved self-regulated learning behaviours, an important individual factor in supporting school success. (Bodovski & Youn, 2011; Pintrich, 2000; Pintrich & deGroot, 1990; Xu et al., 2010; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988).
Implications

Barriers

• A range of barriers, some with specific nuances in Australia, restrict or prevent parents from being involved, particularly in relation to families from minority and marginalised backgrounds (Woodrow, et al., 2016).

• In Australia this includes a reduction in parents experiences of teacher outreach (Daniel, 2015).

• And differences in the leadership of school principals (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014)
Implications

Teacher education and professional development

• Importance of professional development for school staff and inclusion of parent involvement theory and strategy development in pre-service teacher education courses
  • Teachers and school leaders report involving parents as one of the three biggest challenges in their professional roles (Metlife, 2009, 2013).
  • In Australia, many early career teachers report they do not feel well prepared for this role (McKenzie et al., 2014).
  • Teacher preparation for parent engagement in Australia is currently inconsistent (Saltmarsh, Barr & Chapman, 2015)
Implications

In improving our practices of parent engagement, in order to enhance students’ schooling outcomes, it is important to be aware of equity issues that arise as children from families from minority and marginalised backgrounds, or those who experience barriers to their engagement are not further disadvantaged (Daniel, 2011).
References


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