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“I declare that this project is my own account of my own research. It contains as its main content work, which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university.”

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Concepts in parental participation in childhood education

Building family-school partnerships to nurture positive youth outcomes

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“It takes a whole village to raise (educate) a child”
Nigerian Proverb
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This research paper explores the idea of parental participation in childhood education. Evidence is mounting worldwide, that the key to developing confident and constructive youth, is to encourage positive home-school relations and provide an optimistic approach to learning. Unfortunately the notion of parental participation is still yet to be acknowledged in many Australian public schools. By summarising key definitions, theories and research in parental participation, this report shall indicate how parents and teachers can improve family-school collaboration. Outlining perspectives of education since industrialisation and providing a chronicle of Australian Government reform, highlights how our conservative public education system is still limiting participation. Investigating societal and cultural views on education reveals further barriers to involvement. Revealing the positive outcomes of active participation and exposing the negative consequences of absent parents proves just how important parental influence is. Finally, presenting methods of increasing parental participation will underline how change can be achieved. In this report, parental participation will also be referred to as parental involvement and parental engagement. The term parent refers to any adult responsible for the care of a child, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, relations, foster carers and guardians.
INTRODUCTION

Parental participation in the education and development of children has become a subject of immense interest over the last few decades. Parents, educators, government and community are recognising that parental involvement in childhood learning can constructively impact academic success and result in positive youth development. Research is mounting and evidence is vastly accumulating, proving that nurturing the child’s education and developmental wellbeing produces healthy and productive citizens (Hornby 2011, 1-2). When parents are actively engaged and schools encourage and allow participation; children are more likely to have greater schooling accomplishment; partake in better attendance outcomes; engage in positive attitudes towards school; show improved overall childhood welfare and mental health; and consider post-secondary studies (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 34; Sandell 1998, 128; Hornby 2011, 2). Parental involvement has also been found to positively impact teaching staff by improving parent-teacher relations and enhancing educator esteem. Schools benefit with improved school ambiance and an increase in overall morale (Drissen et al 2005, 514). Research has linked growth in parental strength and conviction in their parenting; and renewed consideration of their own schooling, through positively contributing to their child’s education (Hornby 2011, 2). With abundant positive outcomes, why is there still a deficiency in parental and community involvement and engagement in many Australian public schools?

This report seeks to comprehensively explore the reasons why parental participation seems in many communities, unattainable, and how education transformation can revolutionise family-school partnerships and improve the learning outcomes for all children. In determining the meaning of parental participation and investigating theories on how parents involve themselves in childhood schooling, this report shall outline the array of concepts available to those able to improve our education system. Thorough research into the history of learning highlights how past views of schooling are limiting our present and future approaches to schooling. Examining the history of Australian Government reform into education exposes the difficulty in creating community in an extremely bureaucratic system, so reliant on Government decisions, management and funding. Studying societal and cultural views and limitations outlines the numerous barriers faced by parents, community, teachers and schools in achieving optimum participation. Exposing the consequences of lack of active parent interest and the dangers posed by obstacles placed by administration and
teachers shall determine the significance of parental engagement in childhood education. Offering methods of improvement and exhibiting ways parents and community can become involved will highlight how education revolution can be obtained. Overall, this report seeks to establish the importance of parental participation in childhood education in raising healthy and happy children and producing productive future generations.
WHAT IS PARENTAL PARTICIPATION?

Theories on how parents participate and childhood influence

There are numerous definitions and terms applied to the relationship of parents, teachers, schools and community. Parental participation is also identified as parent engagement, parental involvement, family-school relations and home-school collaboration (Drissen et al 2005, 510). The key to all these terms, and the word largely used by researchers, educators, government, parents and community, is partnerships, alluding to mutual and meaningful cooperation between schools, parents and the community (Drissen et al 2005, 510). There are also various ways in which parents can participate in their children’s learning. Whether within the classroom, partaking in fundraising, joining school boards and associations, or assisting in homework outside of the school; parental interaction in childhood education is surfacing as vitally significant in the overall health and wellbeing of our youth (Feuerstein 2000, 30). In order for school officials, teachers, government, parents and community to truly understand the levels of participation and the impact of engagement, academics are establishing categories and closely defining the terms of participation. This chapter shall outline some of the key explanations and classifications in the array of literature available on parental participation, and consider how they can be used to assist parents and teachers in forging beneficial relationships.

Epstein’s (2009, 14) ideas and theories on parental partnerships are sourced in numerous writings. She describes parental participation as the recognition of the shared interest and responsibility between parents and teachers in the education of our children, and the formation of partnerships to “create better programs and opportunities for students” (2009, 14). Epstein believes in overlapping spheres of childhood influence, modelling how school, family and community can impact students (see Appendix 1). The student is at the centre of the sphere, being the main force in their academic success. The overlapping spheres of school, family and community can either converge together or be disconnected. Ideal partnership specifies equal overlap, showing there are some experiences that schools, families and communities must manage individually and some that they are able to accomplish cooperatively, to encourage students learning and development (2009, 10). Epstein says that “partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energise, and motivate students to produce their own successes” (Epstein et al 2009, 10). If students are encouraged and inspired to
positively engage in schooling, they are more likely to achieve highly and gain constructive strategies for youth development.

Epstein has categorised six types of involvement; parenting; communicating; volunteering activities; learning at home; decision-making; and collaborating with the community (2009, 14). This provides a framework for educators in implementing positive parent-teacher relations. Parenting involves assisting carers in creating a supportive home environment that encourages learning. Communicating establishes the need for effective two-way interaction regarding school programs and student progress. Volunteering encompasses inspiring parents to participate in school organisations. Learning at home includes informing parents on how to assist children with homework and extra-curricular activities. Decision-making involves allowing parents to contribute to school decisions. Collaborating with the community entails identifying initiatives and resources from within the community that can strengthen the school syllabus and student learning outcomes (2009, 16). There are abundant ways in which schools can implement each type of parent and community involvement. These categories have been created to guide educators in developing strong, equal and inclusive programs of partnership, allowing all families and communities to share in the education and behavioural and emotional growth of their children (2009, 19).

Hornby is another professional in the field of parental participation. He defines parental contribution as parental involvement “in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (2011, 1). Hornby theorises models of parent-professional relations currently operating in school systems around the globe, to further understand the views and beliefs of educators and carers. The protective model purpose is to avoid tension by disconnecting the professional and parenting functions (2011, 27). The role of the teacher is to educate the child within school hours and the parent’s contribution is to ensure the child is school ready. The expert model depicts educators as specialists in childhood education and development, with parental knowledge of little worth (2011, 27). The transmission model encourages parental involvement through interaction with the teacher for the benefit of the child. The teacher is still considered the expert, however carer knowledge and assistance is requested (2011, 28). The curriculum-enrichment model involves parents contributing to the development and implementation of the school syllabus (2011, 28). The consumer model views the teacher as a consultant to parents, with carers possessing the power to
decide on their child’s outcomes (2011, 29). The partnership model sees parents and teachers working in collaboration to provide optimal education to children (2011, 29-30). This is regarded as the idyllic arrangement for schooling as professionals are viewed as specialists in childhood education and parents are considered experts on their children.

Petr believes in parents and schools working in collaboration to cultivate successful educational outcomes, and describes the concept of family-school partnerships as relationships that “involve school personnel, children, parents and family members working together to ensure the success of children in school” (2003, 3). Petr categorises four levels of family-school partnerships. At the individual child level, parents and teacher work in collaboration to strengthen the singular child’s accomplishment. At the classroom level, groups of children are catered for through parental involvement in whole class activities. The building level involves parents immersing themselves within the school through fundraising, parent and citizen associations and school functions. At the district level, parents are able to participate in educational decisions via school boards and committees (2003, 3-4). He continues to describe three types of partnership roles. Supporting partners comprises the family reinforcing the goals and ethos of the school, by assisting through volunteering, fundraising and supporting extra-curricular activities. Guiding partners are parents able to share in the decision making and implementation partners involves parents aiding teachers in performing their responsibilities (2003, 4).

Parent participation is described by Berthelsen and Walker as “parental behaviour with, or on behalf of children, at home or at school, as well as the expectations that parents hold for children’s future education” (2008, 35). They cite research conducted by Vogels in the Netherlands which characterises four groups of parents through their methods of involvement; partners, participants, delegators and invisible parents (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35; Drissen et al 2005, 512). Partners are parents who are extremely active in informal and formal participatory interests. They collaborate with teachers and administration and are an important factor in the organisation of the institution and their child’s education (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). Participants were parents highly involved in informal activities at the school driven by the educational institute, primarily through volunteer roles within or outside of the school. These parent categories were primarily from a high socio-economic standing (Drissen et al 2005, 512). Delegators are parents with the understanding that teachers are the experts and
the educating of children shall be left to the professionals. While they are classed as quite passive in their participatory efforts, they trust the fundamentals of the school ethos and assist in the background (Drissen et al 2005, 512). Invisible parents are those devoid of contact with the school, through either absence of interest or lack of means and usually come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Drissen et al 2005, 512).

Other scholars theorise methods of childhood influence utilising Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, in which parental participation is a significant factor in youth outcomes (Weiss et al 2005, xiii; McDermott 2008, 33). In this model, “family involvement in education refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and activities of parents and other family members to support children’s learning” (Weiss et al 2005, xvii). Five levels of influence are recognised to interlink and coexist in child wellbeing (see Appendix 2). The microsystem represents the immediate relationship between those directly interacting with the child; being parents, siblings, teachers and peers. The mesosystem comprises the contact between individuals contained in the microsystem, being the relationship between parents and teachers and the linking component, being home, school and community (Commonwealth of Australia 2013a; Weiss et al 2005, xiv). Exosystem portrays environments that impact the child indirectly through those in the microsystem. A parent’s workplace can indirectly affect the child by limiting their ability to participate. The macrosystem broadly encompasses external influences such as cultural values, social policies and economics, controlling the resources and opportunities available to children and the family unit. The more recently added chronosystem represents timeline influences, being the stage of childhood or the evolving and changing nature of society and circumstances (Commonwealth of Australia 2013a; Weiss et al 2005, xv).

With these definitions and classifications of parental participation, it is still quite difficult for schools and carers to navigate positive influences in childhood education. Parents require schools to provide learning and support services, however teachers are recognising the importance of involving carers as co-educators, advocates and allies (Sandell 1998, 144). For some schools, it requires a complete shift in the way they communicate and exchange with parents. For others, it means recruiting carers and conveying the importance of their role. It is vital that educators are able to reach all parents, not just those willing and available to participate. Carers need to realise the vital role they play in the overall education and social and behavioural wellbeing of our next
generation. It necessitates dedication and funding from State and Federal Government and requires the initiation of parent-involvement policies and frameworks, and commitment to further training and research.

“This is a service preparing young people for the rest of their lives. It is essentially a service that exists to promote competence, self-worth, tolerance, co-operation and the development of human potential. It deserves to be managed and delivered with an implementation style sympathetic to its essential nature” (Vardon 1998, 2-3). These descriptions, categories and frameworks can assist Australian schools in recognising their strengths and weaknesses in encouraging parental participation. As research is proving, schools where parents and teachers work in partnership are those that will grow valuable citizens.
HISTORICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES IN EDUCATION

Past views on education still impacting current parental participation

Throughout history, education for children has had a significant influence on the rearing and progression of our youth, and has been applied to “teach individuals to become moral citizens capable of solving society’s problems” (Barbour et al 2008, 26). Education however, hasn’t always been delivered in the more traditional format we are most familiar with today. Prior to industrialisation in western civilisation, it was primarily the responsibility of the extended family and wider community to pass on knowledge and to educate children to continue societal needs. Parents were the first and foremost educators of their children. From tribal cultures to established populations, children were taught survival skills; the rules and regulations of their society; the values and beliefs of their communities; and how they should contribute (Barbour et al 2008, 33; Berger 2000, 41). Children were shown the family trade and traditional gender and social roles within their population. This ensured continuation of humanity by generating good and productive citizens. This chapter shall outline the historical changes that have moulded the education system that still functions today, and chronicle the history of parental participation in education, in contemporary western societies.

During the colonial periods in America (1492-1763) and Australia (1788-1850), when small towns and villages began to form, schools emerged within township houses, to collectively provide village children with skills that their extended family where unable to provide, particularly reading and writing. Attendance in these informal institutions known as ‘dame schools’ in America, (Barbour et al 2008, 35) was highly dependent on wealth, culture, ethnicity, religion, social status and gender. Australia’s pioneers were dependent on a similar structure, as British founders had failed to include trained teachers in the establishment of the colony and the construction of schools was not the highest priority (Smith 1917, 12-13). Religious entities recognised the need for equality in youth education and established more official school-houses, offering formal studies and religious teachings to all. This was an opportunity for devout congregations to elevate their beliefs and impart a majority societal view on marginal groups. It was through the church that the foundation of public schooling was built (Barbour et al 2008, 36). Parents were still a vital component of childhood teachings, ensuring life skills and societal values were passed on.
The rise of the Industrial Revolution in western civilisations in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s saw education alter to the formal institution we know today. With the basis of the economy shifting from agriculture to manufacturing, the family dynamic transformed, with parents no longer working on the land. Men and women left the family home to seek employment and small rural towns grew into large urban developments, isolating the population from their extended families and smaller communities (Barbour et al 2008, 36). Children were no longer able to receive an education from within the family home and the need for further school-houses increased. Australia was settled during the height of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and while it relied on colonial instincts for establishment, Australia was fast to develop due to this time of great technological advancement. Governments in both America and Australia began to encourage families to partake in external schooling and introduced taxes to fund educational institutions (Barbour et al 2008, 37; Smith 1917, 18 and 26). In Australia, as early as 1809, trained teachers began to join the colony as paid educators, implemented by the Government (Smith 1917, 21-23). This was the beginning of Government intervention into childhood education.

With the introduction of formal learning in school establishments, came the separation of parents and traditional education. Trained teachers began to take the reigns from unofficial leaders, and Governments initiated set curriculum for schools to follow. During the late 1800’s specific hours per day of schooling were to be met and universal primary education was introduced (Barbour et al 2008, 37; Hughes 2008, 3). As Government schooling became the major force in childhood education, parents started to relinquish their rights to provide knowledge. Experts in education and child rearing emerged and families were no longer viewed as the most experienced in raising healthy citizens (Barbour et al 2008, 39). Children were expected to leave the home at an earlier age and start formal schooling in kindergarten, which assisted the Government in reaching minority ethnic groups and poorer families that were viewed as not providing a suitable upbringing (Berger 2000, 61). Parent groups began to form; many of these as women’s associations from the middle-class; which assisted in the school programme (Barbour et al 2008, 40; Fuller and Olsen 1998, 6). They set the foundation for the Parent and Citizen Associations that still exist today. Parents were still viewed as an important element in nurturing youth, yet were not partners in the curriculum. Professionals instructed carers on the best way to
assist their children, women in the home, men earning the income and youth in the school system (Barbour et al 2008, 40; Berger 2000, 64).

As economies changed; populations grew; and cultures diversified, education and parent involvement shifted in focus. The Great Depression (1929-late 1930’s) saw some middle and lower class children abandon education in order to earn wages to support their families (Whitford 1989, 17). Many parents were either rendered unemployed or worked long hours for minimal wage, with both parents required to find earnings. The lifestyles of many families altered drastically and parents could not afford time or money to involve themselves in the education of their children, if they were privileged to continue (Berger 2000, 71). World War 2 (1939-1945) also impacted childhood schooling, with family dynamics shifting yet again. Many women were required in the workforce, due to men joining the war efforts and an increased need for labour (Berger 2000, 75). Children were able to commit to studies again, however the curriculum was focussed on political history and helping the war. Little time was given to assisting children beyond the school gates. The importance of education, child welfare and family value gave way to economic survival and sacrifice.

The post war economic boom saw a return to recognising the importance of childhood education and Government intervention. The Commonwealth Office of Education was established in 1945 in Australia, as the first Federal bureau to be responsible for schooling (Hughes 2008, 11). Population growth in the 1950’s due to migration and the ‘baby boom’ saw school numbers increase (Berger 2000, 75). Parents were able to participate in their children’s education again, with a return to previous family roles. Some women returned to home duties after the war and concentrated on raising a family (Berger 2000, 78). Parent associations grew and assisted as parent helpers in the classroom and providing fundraising efforts for the school. Again, these parent groups were predominately managed by middle-class women, with the majority of working-class and ethnic women remaining in the workplace (Fuller and Olsen 1996, 6). Education was viewed as the responsibility of the schools and the duty of the parent was to support the teachers and the curriculum (Berger 2000, 75; Barbour et al 2008, 44). From the 1960’s onwards, the women’s movement altered the family dynamics permanently. Many married women re-entered the workforce to extend the family income or gain financial equality (Berger 2000, 78); altering the availability of family in participating in education.
Partnerships between home, school and community began to increase in the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s with research beginning to recognise the importance of family influence on childhood learning (Berger 2000, 82; Barbour et al 2008, 40). While in previous decades the opinions of parents were not highly appreciated, Government and schools now wanted them to be active participants. There was also a noticed increase in the need of equality and advocacy for children, with civil rights and family programs introduced (Berger 2000, 84). Experts began to discuss the need of adaptable working hours to increase family-work life balance, however economic pressures did not allow for much flexibility. Parents were now given more power to control the education of their children, with school choice encouraged and participation in the setting of curriculum invited (Berger 2000, 87). Many parents were allowed back into the education establishment and were wanting to be more actively involved; yet many were not in a position to offer their services due to work and other family commitments (Fuller and Olsen 1998, 6).

While some schools continue efforts to increase parental participation in children’s education, our fast paced society is providing the opposite affect. Parents in the twenty first century are working longer hours and quite often further from the family home. The cost of living has increased and many households require both parents to work in order to survive (Hornby 2011, 23). Children are increasingly growing up in single parent homes, away from extended relatives and familiar communities. With increased stress levels; limited finances; and reduced family time, parents are struggling to find the best level of participation in their children’s schooling (Hornby 2011, 23). A higher demand on children to succeed in education is also limiting family time with homework and extra-curricular activities encouraged and enforced at a younger age. The last forty years has seen a mix of opinions. Schools open to parent involvement; struggle to appoint volunteers, while parents who are willing and able to contribute to the classroom; are shunned by school staff with negative views of parent interference. While education is constantly evolving to meet society’s needs, the role of the parent in childhood education is still yet to be satisfactorily realised in many Australian public schools.
GOVERNMENT CHANGES AND INITIATIVES IN EDUCATION

Australian Government policy reform affecting parental participation

Parental participation was a fairly unheard of concept in Australian schools, until the revolutionary *Schools in Australia* (Karmel Report); released in 1973 to reform education in Australia under the Gough Whitlam led Australian Labor Party. Prior to this restructure, Australian public schools were extremely formal institutions that traditionally operated like bureaucratic organisations in a top-down fashion, run mainly by the individual State Governments (Rizvi 1995, 17). The Karmel Report presented numerous recommendations to overhaul our education system, including providing equal education for all, increasing Commonwealth funding and extending the period of compulsory schooling. The Committee recognised the need to revitalise the structure of education, to better prepare youth for life beyond the school gates. The report acknowledged the vital role parents and the wider community played in nurturing childhood development and suggested a more grass-roots approach to school management, proposing teachers, parents and the community be granted power to manage their own educational needs (Karmel et al. 1973, 10). This was labelled devolution of responsibility and encouraged schools to be self-governed via school councils or boards formed of teaching staff, administration, principals, parents and communities. The *Schools in Australia* report set a benchmark for education reform, with Federal funding providing an impact and changing the outlook of schooling forever.

While major changes were implemented through Commonwealth funding, State responsibility and equal education policies, the Australian Federal Government was not able to implement grass-roots management of this reform, with a change in government ensuing. The Malcolm Fraser led Liberal Party (1975-1983) moderated Commonwealth spending after what they viewed as exuberant expenditure during the Whitlam years, and reduced Federal education funding. The Coalition did however keep the education management structures formed after the Karmel Report (Lingard 1998, 11). Although schools were encouraged to self-govern and self-manage within national frameworks, the focus of Government post-Whitlam became on achieving more for less (Lingard et al 1995, 85; Lingard 1998, 13). A number of States and Territories began to implement school councils or boards (Townsend 1995, 110) and some confusion over education funding and policy responsibility between State and Federal
Government ensued. The Liberal Government remained on the path of devolution of power; however it became more of a managerial interpretation, rather than a democratic ideal (Townsend 1995, 102). There was a policy shift from ideas articulated in the Karmel Report about the importance of parent and community influence, with ‘participation’ giving way to the importance of securing Australia’s economic prospects.

1983 saw the rise of the Labor Party in Federal Parliament, which assumed fourteen years in power under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. With John Dawkins as Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, school reform concentrated on national economic priorities and focussed more on measuring outputs against vocational and industry standards, rather than on resources and processes (Karmel 1998, 13). Dawkins Strengthening Australia’s Schools report, released in 1988, outlined the Commonwealth’s agenda for schools, noting that “the emphasis is now on value for money and outcomes from schooling rather that demands for increased levels of resourcing” (Lingard et al 1995, 91).

Dawkins sought to create national goals and curriculum for schools with universal teaching skills and standardised testing. Education reform became focussed on efficiency; effectiveness; productivity; and measuring outcomes, attempting to ensure a viable workforce for Australia’s future (Lingard 1998, 11-13). Qualification benchmarks for new teachers were improved and existing teacher professional development was encouraged. Commonwealth funding was reduced in schools from 1987, which caused pressure on the States and Territories to meet national standards with limited resources (Lingard 1998, 8). During this shift, parents, teachers and the community were excluded from the decision-making process as policy was determined by government and business. This saw a return to the bureaucratic top-down approach, with implementation allocated to the grass-roots management of school boards and councils (Lingard et al 1995, 96; Lingard 1998, 5).

A State Government backlash to the concept of a national agenda ensued in 1993 when the majority of States were under Liberal Government (Lingard 1998, 15). In 1996 Federal Parliament fell under Coalition leadership once again and a National Report on Schooling in Australia was released. It was emphasised that Australia fell short of international standards in schooling and funding (Lingard 1998, 16); and benchmarks for literacy and numeracy were set. The Howard led Liberal Government emphasised cooperation between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth to improve schooling in Australia, yet viewed education
as a State Government responsibility. The Liberal Government continued Labor’s efforts in raising the profession of teaching and continued funding professional development. It also recognised the importance of Commonwealth funding in the primary years. The Liberal Government abolished Labor’s commitment to reducing funding in the non-government school sector and giving preference to government schooling, as it was viewed as limiting parent choice (Lingard 1998, 16). The years of Liberal leadership between 1996 and 2007 still prioritised measurement of outcomes and regular testing was introduced (Karmel 1998, 14). The community participation agenda of the Karmel report again did not come to fruition in this education reform, as Lingard explains,

“The notion of a national system of schooling consisting of diverse schools with considerable teacher and community autonomy, which may have been inherent in the Karmel vision, has not been achieved” (1998, 22).

Between 2007 and 2013, the elected Labor Party attempt to reshape education in Australia yet again. With Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister and Julia Gillard as Education Minister, the Labor Party began a crusade coined the “education revolution” (Coorey 2007). This followed ideals enunciated during the Hawke/Keating days, and sought to gain Commonwealth control over State schooling. While substantial increases to Federal funding were promised, there was a further push towards a national curriculum and standardised testing, with the introduction of the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (*NAPLAN*) in 2008 (ACARA 2011). Parents were encouraged to make informed decisions on their children’s education and the *My School* website was introduced in 2010 (ACARA 2011). While this site was created to broadcast test results; providing transparency and accountability across our education system, it also placed schools and teachers under added pressure and public scrutiny (Kayrooz and Parker 2010, 419-420). In 2010 the ALP commissioned a review panel, chaired by David Gonski, to examine the performance decline; the growing divide of accomplishment; and the complex funding structure of Australian schools (ABC News 2013). From the Gonski report findings, the Labor Party developed the *National Plan for School Improvement (Better Schools Plan)*, which focussed on funding underprivileged schools over higher achieving ones and sought to equalise the playing field in education. As in the Hawke/Keating era, State Governments felt threatened by regulations imposed by the Commonwealth in condition to receiving additional funding, and many failed to accept the reform.
While funding improvement was the major contributor to education transformation during the Rudd/Gillard era, it was this ALP that began to implement some reform based on Karmel ideals. Employing the ‘devolution of power’ notion, the Federal Government encouraged public schools to obtain Independent Public Schools status; which was largely creating impact in Western Australia (Tomazin 2014). Independent schools were able to operate more autonomously, within supplied curriculum and funding boundaries and were considered to “improve student performance by providing principals, parents and school communities a greater input into the management of their local school” (Ferrari 2010). In this initiative, principals are given the power to hire their own teaching and administration personnel; and school boards are formed comprising of school staff, business representatives, parents and the community, to manage school decisions (Savage 2014). This allows for improved parental participation in the form of management power through school councils. Rules and regulations differ between States and Territories and generally individual school boards only compromise of a small number of parent representatives. The enterprise faced hostile response from schools not already operating under self-governance in fear that it would lead to privatisation of the public school system (Ferrari 2010; Tomazin 2014).

In 2009 the ALP developed the Smarter Schools National Partnership, introducing six National Key Reform Projects. One fundamental aspect was Parental Engagement in Schooling in Low Socio-economic Status Communities, with a focus on strengthening family and community participation in our schools (Commonwealth of Australia 2011). Concentrating on disadvantaged and Indigenous communities, this project provided research, resources and funds to underprivileged schools across Australia, to incorporate parents and the community into their curriculum (Commonwealth of Australia 2011). The focus was to develop toolkits to assist schools in implementing parent and community help; promote the importance of parental participation; and to learn from schools partaking in the project through a series of case studies (Commonwealth of Australia 2011). A final report on findings was released in 2011 to offer suggestions on improvement. Recommendations included introducing education reform reflecting parental participation; implementing teacher and staff professional development workshops to improve parent-school partnerships; developing a mass marketing campaign; and increasing research, resources and communication on the topic (Patterson 2011, 18-21). Unfortunately time
constraints, a focus solely on underprivileged schools and a subsequent change in Government prevented this project in reaching its full potential.

The nation fell under Liberal leadership once again in 2013, providing confusion and conflict over education reform. While the Coalition has agreed to honour the Better Schools funding for 2014, a policy for future student outcomes is yet to be finalised (Fisher 2013). The Liberal Party has pledged a commitment to modifying the organisational structure of public schools via the Independent Public Schools Initiative as part of their Students First Initiative (Commonwealth of Australia 2013b). As Federal Education Minister, Christopher Pyne argues “independent public schools are more effective and accountable, respond better to community needs and lead to improved student outcomes” (Savage 2014); however some States fear it is a move towards the privatisation of public schooling (Tomazin 2014). Regrettably, with each change in leadership, education has purely become a bargaining tool and while Australian schools and education have improved in the last forty years, it has been a slow and arduous process. Funding decreases have given school administration little power to realise the progress so desperately required by the Commonwealth. Opposing leadership between State and Federal Government has also caused confusion and resentment regarding responsibility. Until there is legislation in parental participation and mass marketing to fully implement research findings, schools are unlikely to satisfactorily benefit from parental and community engagement (Hornby 2011, 23).
ADDITIONAL BARRIERS AFFECTING PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Geography, Socio-economic Status, Beliefs, Ethnicity and Family

Historical economic and social changes; and lack of Government recognition, are not the only factors preventing parents from actively participating in their children’s education. There still remain a number of barriers for carers and teachers to overcome in order to achieve full parental and community engagement. The traditional structure of schools; physical and organisational, and some professional resistance from teachers can hamper participatory efforts (Henry 1996, 13 and 44). Overall school environment can determine whether parents feel welcome (Leithwood 2009, 14). Opinions and beliefs held by parents and teachers can cause relationship problems (Hornby 2011, 12-13). Differing goals and agendas can halt home-school collaboration (Hornby 2011, 12). Ethnicity can impact language and culture difficulties and family social class and economic factors can strongly influence education experience (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). Family dynamics and current life circumstances can determine whether time permits parental involvement (Hornby 2011, 14). Given all of these obstacles, it is understandable that true family-school partnerships continue to elude many public school communities. Immense effort is required from teaching staff, administration, parents, carers and community to ensure successful involvement in childhood education.

The logistics and increased size of long-established school grounds can cause obstacles to participation. During industrialisation, many smaller schools were incorporated into larger inner city institutions, separating schools from their community (Henry 1996, 14) and increasing intake numbers. With the growth of modest neighbourhoods in the last few decades, suburban schools are increasing; however schools still traditionally have large student to teacher ratios which can hamper parent-teacher relations with limited time to involve all carers (Bryans 1989, 36). School architecture can also obstruct parental participation with enclosed buildings appearing prohibited to the community. Open-plan schools are viewed to be more inviting and active in encouraging participation (Bryans 1989, 40). Schools still embedded in bureaucratic top-down operational structures are more likely to be resistant to change, and consider incorporating parental views into their conservative administration culture as time-consuming and unnecessary (Henry 1996, 44 & 55). School ethos and atmosphere can also determine levels of participation. If parents and community members are made to
feel excluded and unwelcome, they are less willing to partake in school functions (Leithwood 2009, 14).

Views on education responsibility are beginning to shift with many parents in the last couple of decades now endeavouring to take an active role in their child’s schooling, rather than leaving it to the experts as previous generations once did (Macbeth 1993, 28). While teachers are predominately viewed as the specialists in childhood education, this perception can at times, provide a limited view of the parent’s influence in learning. Educators spend many years studying the philosophy and principles of instructing children; however parents are their child’s first and foremost teacher (Henry 1996, 93) and can heavily influence educational outcomes (Zedan 2011, 13). School environments that neglect to recognised parental impact and view guardians as a threat or hindrance will create barriers to participation (Henry 1996, 43). Some parents would prefer education be the sole responsibility of the school, with their input being purely to get their child to the school gate (Hornby 2011, 12). Parents with this belief structure are less likely to be involved in extra-curricular learning and interact with the school, creating blocks to contribution. They may be lacking the means to assist their children or permissive of their obligation. It is vital that parents and teachers begin to understand and respect their own responsibility and that of other participants in children’s lives (Fuller and Olsen 1998, 9).

Problematic relationships between parents and teaching staff can be a significant barrier. More often, teachers and parents have quite different agendas when it comes to the classroom. Active parents are concerned for their own child and how they are achieving within the syllabus. However, teachers have to consider every child’s needs to ensure they are meeting curriculum targets throughout the year (Henry 1996, 51). The performance of each child within the set national programme also reflects professionally on the classroom teacher. With such demand, little time can be spared to ensure all parents are included in the curriculum (Bryans 1989, 35). Teachers can occasionally view parents and carers as the problem (Petr 2003, 12). When faced with a difficult child, it is often assumed the upbringing of the child has faltered, hence laying blame on the parents. At times, carers are in fact the issue, with objectionable nurturing capabilities. Teacher-parent relations can suffer negative connotations in this instance reducing parental involvement (Hornby 2011, 6). In contrast, if parents are viewed as too involved and controlling they can be perceived as adversaries. Teachers fear questioning of their professional reputation and can keep parents
at a safe distance (Hornby 2011, 4-6). Successful parent-teacher relationships are those that are constantly growing and involve respectful active and open communication from both parties.

Parent insecurity can also cause obstacles to participation in their child’s education (Hornby 2011, 14). Parents with limited school attainment and from lower socio-economic groups will frequently feel unsuitable to partake in class discussions or assist with homework after school (Stacer and Perrucci 2013, 342). Often parents deficient in education can find teaching staff intimidating and may be less willing to have an opinion contradicting the professional teacher (Hornby 2011, 14). Parents with a negative experience of schooling can value education defiantly and are less motivated to encourage good learning practices (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). Language barriers and ethnicity can also result in declined confidence. Minorities are poorly represented in the education system and a lack in understanding of cultural differences can cause mistrust between parent and teacher (Hornby 2011, 15). Families from contrasting cultural backgrounds to that of the teacher and mainstream students may have differing perspectives of education and its worth (Leithwood 2009, 13). Difficulties in comprehending language can effect communication and the understanding of participation requirements, (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35) and impact the way parents are perceived by school staff (Stacer and Perrucci 2013, 342). Many schools embody middle-class, conventional values, making it difficult for those devoid of cultural and social capital; from low socio-economic and minority ethnic groups; to feel welcome (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 36; Hornby 2011, 15; Henry 1996, 110; Feuerstein 2000, 31; Griffith 1998, 72-73).

Family dynamics can heavily impact levels of participation. The number of children within the family unit and the birth order of a child can influence the time available for parents to offer assistance. Children from larger families and successive siblings are often found to have less parental assistance with caretaking responsibilities inhibiting participation (Zedan 2011, 24; Hornby 2011, 14). The age of children can also create a barrier to parental participation in childhood schooling. While many carers enjoy contributing to the school and classroom during the early years; as children grow and develop, independence is encouraged. It is widely recognised that parental participation regresses as children move upwards in schooling years, with strong evidence of a significant decline once children reach secondary school (Hornby 2011, 16). The teaching methods common in secondary education are not responsive to parental contact,
with teenagers interacting with a number of teachers throughout the day. Teacher-parent relations also deteriorate with parental contact with the school limited. Adolescents often make their own way to the school grounds and communication is commonly filtered through the child. Responsibility of maintaining school-home relations relies on the child communicating with their carers (Templeton 1989, 61-62).

Current life circumstances of the family can hugely impact levels of involvement. Children are now growing up in an extensive range of family structures. High divorce rates are instigating single income families and increased costs in living are triggering a growth in dual income households (Hornby 2011, 23). Many parents are deprived the choice of participating within the school, due to limited time available within their hectic work schedule. Often opportunities to contribute to the school environment are during working hours. Women increasingly returning to paid employment is also changing the face of the traditional family structure and influencing parent responsibility. Parental involvement predominately signified the mother’s connection with the school, with research demonstrating upper and middle-class women were more likely to engage in participatory efforts in their child’s schooling (Henry 1996, 74) Mother’s now face the task of balancing careers, parenting, household tasks and assisting in their children’s education (Hornby 2011, 16). Generally our fast paced society is cause for concern in parental influence on childhood learning. With multiple outside societal pressures adding stress and distraction, parents are left with little time to build and maintain healthy family-school relations (Hornby 2011, 23).

As outlined, parental contribution is affected by a number of conflicting factors. While government and school authorities are unable to control some of the more external elements, they can create programmes to cultivate strong family-school partnerships (Feuerstein 2000, 37) and administer procedures that seek to empower all parents (Griffith 1998, 54-55). Government and school authorities must alter managerial structures to improve parent input and enhance training on communicating with families. School philosophies need to ensure parents feel wanted and welcome. Inclusive agendas should be established so minority groups are successfully reached. Diverse culture, language and social and economic groups require acknowledgement and assistance in participatory efforts. Varied family classifications and circumstances need to be addressed so all parents and carers can feel able to contribute. Teachers must utilise the knowledge parents possess of their children, and carers need to recognise the
value of their input and work in collaboration with teachers (Henry 1996, 131). Most importantly, parents and carers should be viewed as important partners in the education of their children. School and home life need to be addressed as interlinking entities that can equally impact the cognitive and behavioural outcomes of our youth.
WHY IS PARENTAL PARTICIPATION SO IMPORTANT?

Who gets involved and what happens when parents are not involved in education?

The family is a child’s first and foremost teacher. From the moment infants are born, it is the role of the carer to protect, guide and nurture their children (Barbour et al 2008, 88-96). Once youngsters reach school entry age, our bureaucratic institutions expect parents to assume a secondary role and allow professional educators to become their children’s primary teachers and role models. With youth spending more time outside of the school gates than within the compounds of the classroom (Barbour et al 2008, 96); this exerts additional and unnecessary pressure on educators and overlooks the level of influence bestowed by parents, peers and community. Modern day schools are overwhelmed with childhood social issues (Jakes and DeBord 2010, 177) and often find themselves required to conduct lessons in basic life skills that were previously the responsibility of the family (Barbour et al 2008, 96). Scholarly research is revealing the crucial component to improving student outcomes is to ensure parents and community are engaged in childhood education (Jakes and DeBord 2010, 178) and that educators approach teaching as a collaborative commitment between home and school. This chapter shall investigate the positive attributions discovered when parents are engaged in student learning; the detrimental affect inflicted with lack of involvement; and which parents participate.

Parental participation in childhood education is proving vital in the cognitive, behavioural and emotional development of our children (Stacer and Perrucci 2013, 340; Driessen et al 2005, 510). The creation of a strong family bond and a positive relationship with schooling is determining better outcomes for our youth and producing stable citizens. Research is proving that when parents actively engage with their child’s education, the results are; higher grades and improved graduation rates; increased school attendance; better motivation and self-esteem; decreased levels of suspension; less use of drugs and alcohol; and reduced violent behaviour (Griffith 1998, 54; Siddiqui 2011, 43). Youth are also more likely to partake in post-secondary education; have improved attitudes towards education; and sounder mental health (Sandell 1998, 128; Hornby 2011, 2). Investigations are now uncovering that children are not necessarily disadvantaged by social class or ethnicity, but by how involved their parents are in their education (Siddiqui 2011, 45; Henry 1996, 16), with parental participation
heavily linked to socio-economic status (Georgiou and Tourva 2007, 474; Drissen et al. 2005, 510). Parents that provide a supportive home environment; encourage a commitment to learning; foster positive values and social competencies; and nurture progressive parent-teacher relations; are showing their children that they care and support their educational efforts and are invested in their future (Brock and Edmunds 2010, 48; Jakes and DeBord 2010, 178).

Parent involvement in education is also beneficial for teachers and schools. Creating better relationships between carers can strengthen educator knowledge of children and encourage respect and understanding of the individual family unit. With the support of parents in the classroom, teachers are able to provide greater individualised attention and attain better teacher satisfaction (Petr 2003, 14-15; Hornby 2011, 2). Schools profit by parents feeling connected to the school and participating in a more constructive relationship. Parents are more likely to assist in school functions and operations if they feel attached to the institute and are less likely to remove their child in times of conflict (Petr 2003, 15). Parents benefit by gaining a better understanding of the role the teacher and are able to appreciate school programmes and policies. They also attain a better awareness of their child’s learning abilities by actively communicating with educators (Petr 2003, 15). Social capital is also improved for parents, allowing carers to increase their community networks. There is also evidence that schools with stronger family relationships have more social capital and produce higher achieving students (Feuerstein 2000, 31).

Research has found that children actually enjoy parental involvement in their education (Vyverman and Vettenburg 2009, 112). In early childhood and primary years, children appreciate carers assisting with homework and helping in the classroom, as it allows parents to be acquainted with what they are learning at school and supplies a common ground. Children are also able to perceive the benefits with many acknowledging they obtain better marks when carers are supportive (Vyverman and Vettenburg 2009, 112). Parents are able to set a great example by positively contributing to the school and supporting educational needs. Once in secondary school, while the desire for mum or dad to be present in volunteer roles or chaperone class excursions diminishes; adolescents are still keen for parents to remain engaged with their educational needs through home support and school communication (Deslandes and Cloutier 2002, 221). Children feel safe, secure and supported when parents are knowledgeable of all their social settings. It is vital that when youth start to distance themselves from their
parents and discover responsibility, independence and self-reliance; that they preserve a connection to their parents and schooling influence (Deslandes and Cloutier 2002, 221). This can limit the impact of peers engaging in risky behaviours and increase the likelihood of a continuum of academic success (Jakes and DeBord 2010, 179).

The greatest difficulty arises when parents are not involved in childhood education. Whether it is caused by our fast paced society; increased working hours; variations of the traditional family structure; socio-economic barriers; or cultural differences (Drissen et al 2005, 510), there has been a significant decline in the development of our youth and the nurturing purpose of the family (Otto and Atkinson 1997, 69). Studies show that when there is a lack of home-school connection, student test scores diminish; youth are less likely to obtain formal qualifications; there is an increased risk of failure; and an intensified danger of children developing stress and behavioural issues (Siddiqui 2011, 45-46). Stress prone children are more likely to later develop anxiety and depressive disorders with dire consequences. Emotional responses of anger and frustration can increase and developmental delays can transpire with social skills and self-esteem affected (Siddiqui 2011, 46). Youth are also more likely to partake in high-risk behaviours and develop attitude problems when parents are not engaged as they lack supervision, discipline and basic role models. Youth that are observed in rebellious activities; joining in drug, tobacco and alcohol usage; and presenting with negative behaviours towards authority have been proven to lack parental and community protection (Jakes and DeBord 2010, 179).

Recent studies have sought to determine which parents participate, or more importantly, which carers don’t. Socio-economic factors; cultural differences; family structure and gender are all proposed to impact parental involvement. Carers from middle to high socio-economic backgrounds are regarded as primary participants with parental educational achievement and work status contributing to this (Georgiou and Tourva 2007, 474). Parents in higher paid employment are seen to have improved work arrangements and flexibility, offering more time to contribute to education (Stacer and Perrucci 2013, 341). They also recognise the value of schooling and instil this in their children. Carers from low socio-economic standings often feel unprepared to participate, lacking in their own education (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). Parents from minority cultures were viewed to find parental participation quite difficult with trouble relating to teachers and language barriers causing conflict (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). Children
from large families can be considered disadvantaged, with lack of time to participate presenting enormous problems (Zelden 2011, 24; Hornby 2011, 14). Mothers were found to be more involved than fathers with mums still largely assuming the majority of the parental function in our current societal structure (Georgiou and Tourva 2007, 474). With research determining that lack of participation from a father figure is a powerful contributor to negative student outcomes (Siddiqui 2011, 46); schools need to find ways to reach both parents.

Parents are motivated to participate when the school climate encourages and welcomes their input (Griffith 1998, 55). They are also more likely to get involved when they believe they have a role in the child’s learning (Georgiou and Tourva 2007, 475). Regrettably it is youth who would acquire the most improvement from carer engagement that find themselves with parental figures that find it quite difficult to connect with education (Berthelsen and Walker 2008, 35). The sooner educators, parents and community realise they are all responsible for nurturing childhood development and have an obligation to ensure students are engaging in constructive and positive behaviour (Brock and Edmunds 2010, 55), the quicker progress will be noticed. Vast research is determining that school and home cannot operate individually. For children to grow into resilient and sensible adults, there needs to be a smooth transition and better understanding between the environments (McAllister Swap 1992, 55). Parents need to recognise their importance and impact on childhood education, and schools need to improve ways to engage parents who are not commonly able to participate. The creation of parental and community participation projects that engage the three overlapping spheres of influence (see Appendix 1) and the five modes of the ecological systems theory (see Appendix 2) can assist in generating secure, smart and well-balanced youth (Jakes and DeBord 2010, 181).
METHODS OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Ways to improve parent-school relations

There are numerous ways in which parents contribute to their children’s educational needs and various levels of participation. Some parents are extremely proactive in their children’s schooling and have a fantastic relationship with their teachers and school. Other carers feel disconnected and disillusioned with the education system for a vast range of reasons (Barbour et al. 2008, 321). As previously outlined, the historical structure of learning institutions can foster stereotypical and adverse feelings in parents. Some parents devalue the notion of education; some are disappointed with the quality of our current schooling; while others believe it is not their place to interfere. There are often barriers within the classroom, with teachers preferring to separate family from school or seeking to avoid parents altogether (Hornby 2011, 6). Overall, carers need to feel welcome, wanted and empowered to assist in the education of their children; and teachers and school administration need to recognise the value of parental participation. This chapter shall outline levels of involvement in laying the foundation for optimal parental and community participation. Subsequently, utilising Epstein’s six types of involvement we can see how the idyllic method of Hornby’s partnership model can be achieved by reaching the three spheres of childhood influence (see Appendix 1).

Barbour et al (2008, 321) has sought to categorise levels of participation in order to truly understand parental involvement. Carers assisting at the minimum level provide basic support for school programs (2008, 321). This can involve supervising children with homework and outside of school curricular activities. Occasionally parents are approached by staff to attend school-supported proceedings; contribute money or time to events; and sponsor fundraising initiatives. Class learning can often require parental assistance in the form of collecting recyclable materials or donating items or services to the school. While these examples represent minimal involvement, the school system heavily relies on parents contributing in this manner (Barbour et al. 2008, 321). An associate level of participation represents volunteering on a more permanent and regular basis. From assisting in the classroom, to actively partaking in the parent and citizens association, this level represents parents willing and able to advocate for children and ensure educational and support needs are met. The associate level
presents parents with a stronger link with their school, with expectations clearer and communications improved (Barbour et al. 2008, 322).

The decision-making level offers parents the opportunity to serve on curriculum committees or school boards; and share in the responsibility of ensuring quality education is delivered to all children within the school (Barbour et al. 2008, 322). This level requires collaboration of parents, teachers, administration, Government and community and is a key component to the *Independent Public Schools Initiative*. Without mutual respect of each other’s role within the board or committee, this structure of school hierarchy is not successful. Bauch and Goldring (1998, 20) refer to this level of involvement as parent empowerment, as carers are able to exercise impact through decision-making and take on more of a management role. Parents will engage in different levels of participation during various stages of education and family life. Majority of parents are able to perform at the minimal level; and while this offers basic support, it is crucial for school operations. Less are able to aid at associate level; however provided that five to ten percent of parents are represented, school programs and functioning will remain strong (Barbour et al. 2008, 322). Only a small portion of carers are required to participate at the decision-making level; however it is vital that parent and community board representatives embody different populations within the school. Reaching out to invisible parents as described by Berthelsen and Walker (2008, 35), by offering a variety of participatory methods, is now essential in ensuring all children develop and grow to their full potential.

Epstein’s six types of involvement can provide schools with a methodological approach to improving home-school relations. Type 1; parenting, involves educators assisting carers in acknowledging and strengthening their parenting responsibility. Schools that assist parents in refining their child-rearing skills and provide information on adolescent development can encourage a supportive environment (Brock and Edmunds 2010, 50; Berger 2000, 285). It also encompasses teachers recognising the diversity of each family and allowing information on culture, character and individual strengths to be shared (Epstein et al 2009, 14 and 58). Programs such as health and nutrition workshops, parent education classes and carer networks can aid in strengthening parenting skills (Epstein et al 2009, 16; Berger 2000, 159).

Type 2; communicating, comprises establishing effective two-way interaction between educators and families (Epstein et al 2009, 58). Parents need to be
informed of their child’s progress throughout the year and not only contacted when issues arise or during school report season. Keeping the lines of communication open develops positive and caring relationships which fosters support (Canter and Canter 2001, 75). Home folders, notes and parent-teacher conferences are common practice in early education; however need to be maintained throughout the educational life of the child. Newsletters, emails and invitations to school functions can all assist in keeping the lines of communication open.

Type 3; volunteering activities, engages parents to actively participate in their child’s education through offering their time and services to the school (Epstein et al 2009, 58). Inviting carers to contribute in the classroom, join school excursions or enrich specialist lessons has been proven to progress home-school relations. Parents and teachers become more relaxed with their interaction and have an increased opportunity to become acquainted (Sandell 1998, 133). Students feel empowered with improvement in adult interaction and additional individual attention. Not all families are in a position to offer their time in volunteering; however opportunities should continue to be accessible for various roles in order to reach those often unseen.

Type 4; learning at home, entails informing parents of the work children are completing in the classroom and the targets they are required to achieve in the curriculum (Epstein et al 2009, 59). It also encompasses involving carers in homework, which can cause conflict in families ever increasing workloads (Canter and Canter 2001, 87). Regular communication and realistic expectations based on knowledge of the child and their family can convert negative homework connotations to positive opportunities to connect child, family and school.

Type 5; decision-making, involves parents engaging in parent and citizen associations, committees and school boards (Epstein et al 2009, 59; Sandell 1998, 136). While only a small portion of parents participate in this manner, it is expected that they attempt to represent majority of the parent population. Giving carers leadership roles in the planning and delivering of school programs allows parents to advocate for children and provides school administration with direct perspectives of the school community (Sandell 1998, 137). Including parents in decision-making allows for joint involvement in school management, moving further towards participatory governance (Golarz and Golarz 1995, 14). With the
current Australian Government encouraging schools to apply for Independent School Status, the bureaucratic nature of our school system may begin to shift.

Type 6; collaborating with the community, connects schools, families, neighbourhood groups, businesses and individuals (Epstein et al 2009, 59). Seeking additional resources from organisations and members of the public, can replenish school wealth in personnel assistance, provide an alternative outlook on curriculum and deliver a stronger bond with the community. Student outlooks are improved when they witness their school and family positively contributing to community pride (Barbour et al 2008, 341).

While there are numerous models and outlines currently circulating to enhance home-school relations, Epstein’s six types of involvement have provided the foundation to these additional formulations. Each method of participation works to ensure the components of home, school and community are interconnected to effectively nurture the child, creating overlapping spheres of influence. Providing an agenda that encourages schools in

“(a) involving parents as partners in school governance, including shared decision making and advisory functions; (b) establishing effective two-way communication with all parents, respecting the diversity and differing needs of families; (c) establishing strategies and programmatic structures at schools to enable parents to participate actively in their child’s education; (d) providing support and coordination for staff and parents to implement and sustain appropriate parent involvement from kindergarten through Grade 12; and (e) using schools to connect students and families with community resources that provide educational enrichment and support” (Bauch and Goldring 1998, 24), will produce schools that are managed through cooperation and vastly improve student outcomes. A system where teachers are still respected and relied on for their professional skills; and where parents are viewed as significant and competent allies in enriching the growth and development of our youth; will achieve a partnership model, providing the best possible education for our children (Hornby 2011, 29-30).
CONCLUSION

Parental participation in childhood education remains a topic of immense discussion. There is a vast array of books, articles, opinions, theories and methodologies outlining the importance of parent engagement and highlighting ways to improve involvement. Unfortunately in many Australian public schools, the benefit of parental participation is yet to be realised. Reaching the full potential of family-school partnerships requires; a commitment from Government in implementing policy and providing resources; an overhaul of the school organisational structure to allow carers to contribute; recognition of parent significance by principals, teachers and school administrators; an improvement in teacher quality and a focus on coaching new educators in the value of carer communication; acknowledgement and information on how to approach diversity in children and families; frameworks on how to implement improvement in home-school relations; public awareness of the vital role parents can play in childhood learning; and a promise from parents to value their child’s education and academic results (Hornby 2011, 122-126). Improvements in youth outcomes also require our civilisation to decelerate and reconsider our fast paced culture. Our children need nurturing, guidance and support. Until our government and society recognise the importance of family and work-life balance, barriers will remain to influence parental participation.

Despite Federal Government recognition in the 1970’s of the role teachers, parents and community could play in school management (Karmel et al. 1973, 10); public education reform in parental participation has not yet been achieved. A new era of independent public schools is giving institutions greater autonomy and freedom to meet the needs of their students and community (Lampathakis 2009); however with only a small number of parent and citizen representatives on school boards, is this transformation true participatory governance (Golarz and Golarz 1995, 4)? There needs to be significant effort made to utilise parent knowledge, time and influence. Teachers and school authorities need to recognise that every family is different and engage parents and carers from diverse cultures, backgrounds and social standing. This will require additional coaching for educators and the implementation of specific national frameworks for schools (Hornby 2011, 123-124). Parents need government reform to encourage an improved work-life balance. Increases in paid parental leave, more flexibility and additional holidays (Siddiqui 2011, 47) would see carers under less stress and having more time to contribute to the needs of their children. Overall,
Australia needs “all schools to become functioning communities in which parents and teachers along with students, administrators, and community members can work together effectively” (Bauch and Goldring 1998, 31) to ensure the healthiest outcomes for our youth.
APPENDIX 1

Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model

(Emerson et al. 2012, 17)
APPENDIX 2

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

(Adapted from Weiss et al. 2005, xiv)
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