



Community Matters

Section 9: The school and community

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Leading mental health and wellbeing



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9.1 Introduction

This section:

- defines and evaluates school–community partnerships
- discusses the reciprocal benefits for schools and students in such partnerships
- describes the MindMatters Community Partnership Process for Mental Health and Wellbeing and provides case studies of this process in action in three schools
- identifies a range of practical strategies for building effective partnerships with parents, families and communities, local cultural and other community groups, and agencies and services
- explores some complexities and challenges involved in partnerships, especially in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse populations
- describes some outcomes of successful partnerships
- provides links to relevant community organisations.

9.2 What is a partnership?

School partnerships are collaborative relationships and activities involving school staff, students, parents and other family members, and members of the wider community including service and allied health agencies. 'Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect, and shared responsibility for the education of the children and young people at the school' (DEEWR 2008, p. 2).

Partnerships can be established for short-term or long-term ventures. Through partnerships, people pool resources, share risks, increase efficiency, and integrate and coordinate services. Partnerships work best where goals, values and outcomes are shared by all the partners and where all partners work together to achieve a common purpose (Ife & Tesoriero 2006, p 164).

9.3 The value of effective school–community partnerships

Studies have consistently revealed that schools with high levels of parental and community involvement have better student results, higher attendance levels, and more positive student attitudes and behaviour (Education Foundation 2001; McConchie 2004; Black 2008).

It is acknowledged that working in partnership is likely to produce better outcomes than acting alone (Melaville & Blank 1998), although it may take longer. Considerations of 'social capital' become as important as those of economic capital. Social capital is seen as the glue which binds a society together. It has been defined as 'the processes between people which establish networks, norms, social trust and facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit' (Cox 1995).

Effective partnerships are essential for good mental health, promoting feelings of connectedness and building communities. The World Health Organization (1977) explains that 'health promotion is carried out by and with people, not on or to people. It improves both the ability of individuals to take action, and the capacity of groups, organizations or communities to influence the determinants of health'.

Effective partnerships will strengthen the care and support needed to promote the mental health and wellbeing of students. These can include:

- the caring relationships (e.g. parents, family, friends, teachers, community members)
- the support services (e.g. community organisations, doctors, youth services, police, communities of faith, local agencies, service groups)
- specialist intervention and treatment (e.g. mental health services, psychologists, psychiatrists, juvenile justice agencies).

Acknowledging that 'it takes a whole village to educate a child', the parent organisation, ACSSO (the Australian Council of State School Organisations), advocates that community involvement with schools is relevant in three ways in the context of family–school partnerships:

- i. in so far as families are part of the broader community, schools can play a role in building the social capital of families by helping to connect them with external agencies and organisations
- ii. community connections with schools provide more meaningful, engaged learning that draws on children's experiences
- iii. the role of communities in the enhancement of educational outcomes, particularly for Indigenous students [McConchie 2004, p. 3].

MindMatters recognises that when people work on a topic like mental health and wellbeing for the whole community, there are benefits for all involved.

People are able to bring their own experience to the initiative and they feel a sense of ownership of it. Partnerships are built on the basis of the strengths schools have identified within communities and families ...

Schools that embrace parents and community are more likely to view their students in the context of their whole life. They realise that students function within many groups, including school, family and the community. As a consequence, the school not only has expectations of the school community, but also realises that genuine relationships are reciprocal. It will work collaboratively with parents and the community to strengthen protection and reduce risk [Whole School Matters, p. 62].

The community as a site for enriching student learning

It is widely accepted that school curricula and pedagogy have much to gain from incorporating community perspectives and utilising community resources. Real-world activities requiring problem-solving, reflective thinking and the consideration of consequences and outcomes can be key components of a student's Social and Emotional Learning.

Identifying the community as a new site for learning can revitalise curriculum and pedagogy and make learning more relevant and accessible for students. Learning in the community gives young people opportunities to develop, apply and refine valuable skills and knowledge while increasing their capacity to participate in and contribute to the world around them. Connecting learning to the real world and to the community provides a rigor and a context too often absent from the conventional curriculum [Education Foundation 2001, p. 1].

Effective school–community linkages may be especially important for students at risk of dropping out of school. 'The best outcomes for these students have been achieved through programs which take students into the community and bring the community into the school' (Education Foundation 2001, p. 2. See also the CommunityMatters DVD for illustrative examples).

If a school and a parent work together on the education of a child, there's a circle of interest and care that the child appreciates. It's uplifting for teachers, children and parents. But if a school and a parent have very little connection with each other, the child can become disengaged and can play the parent off against the school [Terry Aulich, Executive Director of ACSSO, quoted in *The Age*, 25 February 2008].

Schools contributing to community partnerships

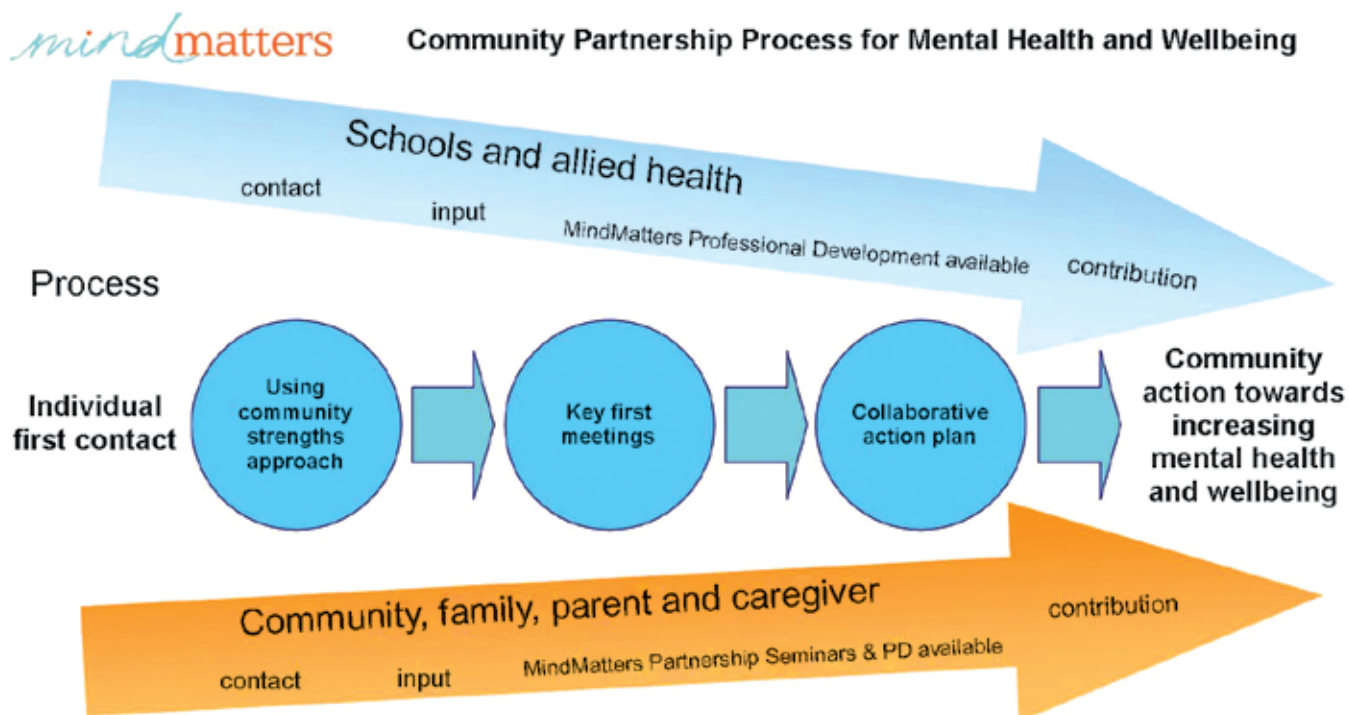
It is increasingly being recognised that educational institutions can play a vital role extending beyond the provision of education and training for young people. This is acknowledged, for example, in the Initial Report of the Australia 2020 Summit, which called for the building of 'infrastructure which integrates services and encourages shared community use'.

Our society is continually changing, and it is widely acknowledged that it is more open and diverse than the society in which many of the current adult generation grew up. Institutions that traditionally functioned to bring people together, including churches and workplaces, no longer have such an impact on people's lives. In this changed environment, schools have a greater opportunity to contribute to the general wellbeing of children and families. Schools can also function as a starting point for the development of a sense of community among new or disparate neighbourhoods (Dunphy 2008).

Research on rural communities which are dealing with the rapid pace of change in a global economy, shrinking traditional industries and declining populations indicates that rural schools can make a significant contribution to community development. Schools can act as 'a focus for community activity, provide expertise and be a crucial component of community capacity or ability to choose to pursue a course of action' (Kilpatrick et al. 2003, p. 1). Collective learning activities including teamwork and network-building have been identified as key social capital-building activities in rural communities.

9.4 The MindMatters Community Partnership Process

The MindMatters Community Partnership Process for Mental Health and Wellbeing outlines a process in which schools, families, parents and community organisations and allied health agencies can plan and implement strategies together. MindMatters proposes that the development of community partnerships will be effective and sustainable when the approach is holistic and methodical.



A concerted, negotiated long-term relationship between school and community means that schools and community plan together, and undertake strategies together to promote a sense of connection and belonging in the student community and nurture the protective factors which will enhance students' resilience.

The MindMatters Community Partnership Process proposes that all schools can benefit from partnerships with their local community and its agencies and services. It suggests that such partnerships take time and mutual respect and need to be forged as part of school processes for the longer term, rather than as a response to a crisis or an immediate need. The evidence of such partnerships working effectively will be seen in the school's ethos and environment; in its curriculum, teaching and learning; and in practical examples of community consultation and input.

The model describes the successful processes that have occurred in a range of communities and their schools. The school can be the first point of contact in indicating an interest in a community partnership. Alternatively, the local allied health groups can act as a catalyst for starting the conversation about mental health and wellbeing. And in some communities, there are existing groups whose interest or purpose incorporates a consideration of mental health and wellbeing. The process seeks to bring together these three possible starting points to provide opportunities for dialogue and Professional Development or forums to discuss future directions.

The process places the school interest and actions and the health promotion, prevention and early intervention of allied health services into a series of steps that develop trust and an understanding of the particular needs of the community and its resources.

When the community, schools and allied health services, other organisations and groups reach a point when they are ready to form a plan, the MindMatters Planning Cycle can be a useful organiser. See Whole School Matters, Section 3.

9.5 Case studies illustrating the MindMatters Community Partnership Process

The MindMatters DVD – Community Partnership Journeys – documents the MindMatters community partnership process for mental health and wellbeing through five separate stories involving the schools and/or communities: Armidale, Canberra, Tamworth, Balga and Ernabella. Three of these stories are discussed briefly below.

The Armidale community story, Making our commitment, captures how one community made a commitment to adopt the Feeling Deadly not Shame workshops for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their own or other communities. Feeling Deadly not Shame is an initiative that is strongly based in a partnership with the local community – a multicultural community in which there are strong differences as well as ties. The workshops use a strengths-based approach focused on inculcating a sense of hope and ownership by the community. Kanat Wano, former MindMatters Coordinator of Community Partnerships explains how the community is involved in shaping and owning the initiative:

A sense of hope comes from having identity, feeling good about who you are and feeling deadly. So the resource itself resonates very nicely with our community. They really want to hear this stuff. The Armidale community will own this process.

We just give people seeds really. We give them seeds and they nourish that seed in their own fertile soil and they grow it. And when they see those seedlings coming forth, there's a sense of ownership. And when they cultivate it – through whatever they do at a local level – that's when we see that this tree of strength that we leave behind is still growing in that community, and it's being nurtured in that community'.

The Balga Senior High School story, Spirit and engagement, describes a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing for students, their families and community. Deputy Principal Trenton Harris says that 'the great thing about MindMatters is that you've got the guidelines and you can interpret these guidelines and make them fit your school'. The story mentions how nine staff from the school were released to attend a MindMatters Level Two Planning workshop in which they had the opportunity to reflect on what they're doing in their school context to promote mental health in their school. The former WA MindMatters Project Officer, Suzi Wood, explained the success of this initiative:

Balga grabbed the implementation model with both hands and they said 'Well, we're doing these things under Ethos and Environment, but we also recognise that we need to support the families. So in the Partnerships and Services part of the MindMatters model we look at family and community partnerships and we look at transitions'. So Balga, actually during the workshop, already started developing some action plans about reflecting on their school context of what they're already doing, what's working well, and collecting some data.

In our own words: Anangu voice is a story based in Ernabella in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia. The story describes how the community introduced MindMatters out of a desire to help the children, as one strategy to deal with health and social issues in the community and schools. The Anangu co-ordinators, teachers and AEWs and people from the communities participated in MindMatters workshops. Aboriginal Education Workers (AEW), Umatji Tjitayi explains that:

We're very happy to have our own classroom where we teach about our culture and teach the children about keeping safe in our own language – so they can learn properly.

Aaron Ken, MindMatters Community Partnership Officer, emphasises how important it is for schools to work in partnership with the community and to utilise their expertise:

The community does have a lot of the experience and a lot of resources that schools should take advantage of.... Why start from something new when you've already got a solid amount of experience and people who can help deliver the material in schools?

What's so good about CommunityMatters is that you can actually talk to the people in the community and find out who these people are. So CommunityMatters is like branching out into the community and bringing these skills into the schools.

9.6 Strategies for building effective partnerships

What do effective partnerships involve?

Good school–community partnerships think 'outside the box' to generate new relationships across otherwise unconnected areas of the community. They build on existing structures and networks in the community to create new shared responses to the needs of the community in general and its young people in particular [Education Foundation 2001].

Because all schools are different, there is no one right way to approach the issue of establishing effective school–community partnerships for promoting and sustaining the mental health and wellbeing of students. Partnerships will, however, have more chance of success if:

- the administration is committed to a Whole School Approach to the issue
- there is a particular person or group responsible for overseeing the mental health and wellbeing of students (e.g. the school core team)
- staff members understand the importance of working in partnership to improve the wellbeing of their students, and are supportive
- people with common links are connected and existing talents, skills and assets are built on
- there is authentic communication with the community to secure their engagement
- there is a focus on capacity-building to ensure that actions are implemented and sustained.

General principles

There are a number of approaches that will ensure high quality outcomes in consulting with students, parents, community groups and service providers. These are basically common sense and some or all of them are routine practice in many school communities. They are equally as applicable to the initial community consultation as they are to on-going meetings of a structured group. They include:

Face-to-face communication

Set up face-to-face communication, rather than written communication, wherever possible. When people meet face-to-face, it is possible to clarify misunderstandings and establish rapport.

Open-ended problem-solving approach

Be open-ended and receptive when approaching problems, encouraging everyone to participate and contribute their understandings. Be careful of making culturally based assumptions.

Jargon-free communication

Be mindful that the education sector and schools have their own terminology. Do not assume that concepts and words which are part of your everyday life are understood by parents or community members.

An external facilitator

An outside facilitator can assist in dealing with controversial issues, and allow key leaders to participate more actively.

Off-site activities

Meeting on neutral territory may be useful in some contexts, especially where people may have negative reactions to 'the school' or 'the system'.

Positive climate-setting

Teamwork and a positive approach can be facilitated by simple procedures such as name tags, personal introductions, humour, informal refreshment breaks, provision for child care and considerate timing of meetings.

Support from administrators

Support from the school administration is essential as it ensures that decisions will be acted upon.

Procedures guaranteeing interaction

Meeting procedures that elicit frequent interaction and participation are more likely to lead to higher levels of participant commitment.

Belief in the value of stakeholder participation

Participation is encouraged when school leaders are convinced that people are capable of making significant contributions.

Transparency

Ensure that decision-making is transparent – i.e. that its assumptions and processes are evident to all.

Representative membership

Check the balance of committees to maximise representation of women and men, and people from a range of cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

Presence in the community

Give the school a symbolic and practical presence in the community, through involving staff and students in community activities and social issues.

[Adapted from Nielsen, H 1995]

Initial strategies

There are a number of preliminary practical steps for involving community and specialist support services in the area of mental health and wellbeing. It is important that this dimension of the Whole School Approach has a high profile within schools. This can be achieved through increased communication with school staff, students, parents and families, and a strategic and Whole School Approach that also involves student services staff and community agencies.

Some preliminary steps may include:

- running a seminar day with local agencies to gain current information about community and specialist services
- ensuring that this seminar day is culturally inclusive by approaching people representing all of the potentially

marginalised groups of young people who are the focus of CommunityMatters – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; culturally and linguistically diverse students; young people with disabilities; same-sex attracted young people; and students from remote and rural locations

- ☑ providing information sheets and flow charts about local agencies for young people
- ☑ profiling what services happen now for individual students when they experience difficulty
- ☑ assessing the current data for the student services section and what this might mean
- ☑ surveying young people and teachers about their knowledge and experience of school referral systems
- ☑ using the school website and intranet to provide more information on help-seeking
- ☑ asking young people in the school to construct information sheets and website pages as part of their curriculum.

Strategies for partnerships between schools and allied health and other support agencies



The impetus for establishing partnerships between schools and support services is coming from many directions. Outside agencies are understanding that schools are central to the lives of young people and their families, and that they provide the obvious starting point for a coordinated approach. There is acknowledgment that schools and support services are all in the business of promoting the wellbeing of young people. There is also a general understanding that schools have to cope with an increasing number of health and welfare initiatives, and that a coordinated approach is necessary if they are to be successful.

Some useful strategies for working with support services include:

- ☑ Spend time discovering what words and terms will cause confusion, and invite groups in to establish a commonly understood vocabulary.
- ☑ Invite individuals or agency workers to talk at staff meetings about their work and what they can offer teachers and the school community. As people get used to their presence, these services will be increasingly seen as approachable.
- ☑ Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services in invitations, even if there is not a big Indigenous population in the school.
- ☑ Use Professional Development days to explore mental health and wellbeing issues (e.g. adolescent psychology, helping students who bully, understanding addiction), and invite appropriate agencies or individuals to help plan or run sessions.
- ☑ Take advantage of opportunities to share staff Professional Development with other relevant professional development occurring in community agencies. This could, for example, be about specific issues like drugs and alcohol, bullying, grief and loss.
- ☑ Encourage agencies and individuals to help plan and participate in classroom activities when areas of their specialisation are being dealt with. At the same time, they can explain to students what support and services they can offer.
- ☑ Encourage agencies to address parent and community meetings (both formal and informal) on how their involvement in the school community can benefit them and their children.
- ☑ Good personal relationships make for good working relationships. Some members of staff within schools (particularly in small communities) do establish very good relationships with individuals within agencies, on a

social level. This can be done both informally (Friday evening happy hour) and more formally (an invitation to a staff barbecue).

- ✓ Ask representatives of community-based organisations whether there are any other organisations or individuals they know of who should be consulted, and what services and programs each organisation provides. This information will be needed to fill any gaps in the audit.
- ✓ Meet with agency representatives, preferably as an inter-sectoral group, to discuss issues of mutual concern and ways of working cooperatively and, possibly, collaboratively. This could develop into the establishment of a regular meeting every two or three months and/or the setting up of more formal partnership agreements.
- ✓ Hold a community forum as a strategy for the initial development of relationships that could become more collaborative partnerships for promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students. This may not be appropriate in all contexts. It may be useful to work on this together with an interested community agency or group.

These partnerships require respect for everyone's profession and professionalism. Different paradigms and terminology are used in education and mental health sectors and bridges between these need to be made so that clear communication underpins partnerships and that misinterpretations don't undermine potentially productive outcomes. It will be important that the school endeavour to make the language and assumptions of the allied health sector, including mental health, accessible to its staff, parents and the school community, and vice versa.

It is particularly important to raise staff awareness of allied health agencies which may play a crucial role in early intervention and effective referral pathways for students who may experience high support needs in mental health. School, sector and system protocols surrounding disclosure and confidentiality, and mandatory reporting, should be canvassed and clarified in initial discussions with community and specialist support services. See Whole School Matters, Section 5.4 for further discussion of this.

The issue of confidentiality is crucial, and one that schools and the health sector tend to understand differently. This will almost certainly become an issue that will need to be worked through.

Clear, informed, engaged, understanding leadership is essential, and if a long-term partnership is developed, there will need to be a clear organisational structure and clear roles for all partners. This will need to be regularly revisited and updated.

Strategies for involving community, families, parents and caregivers

In the local community, there will often be individuals and groups who, while they may have no direct connection to the school, may have much to contribute to the school's understandings and promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

The following suggestions are made for encouraging the involvement of parents, families and community members.

- ✓ Enlist the assistance of workers from cultural community organisations to approach people from those groups. This will have a considerable impact on the establishment of partnerships.
- ✓ Consider holding meetings off-site to encourage involvement. Meeting in community centres encourages involvement of people from those communities.
- ✓ Involve community members, particularly parents, in the design and evaluation of the school's promotion of mental health and wellbeing for all students.
- ✓ Expand the school's MindMatters core team to include key community people.



- Make schools more welcoming through their décor, signage, and visible recognition of community activities and cultural diversity.
- Provide a room in the school as a parent meeting place, where information can be displayed, meetings can be held and issues discussed.
- Investigate setting up a mentoring system within the school where adults can form positive relationships with students (e.g. by working on projects together).
- Structure meetings in small, informal groups to encourage involvement.
- Make provision for someone on the staff to have time to establish and maintain links with the community.
- Celebrate important cultural events in the school.
- Invite community members to contribute positively to the school newsletter on issues that concern or interest them.
- Make some of the school's facilities available to the community for courses such as using the internet and email.
- Run English literacy classes in the evenings where students, parents and community members can learn together.
- Organise cultural enrichment courses that can be presented by appropriate community members, for the whole community.
- Encourage involvement by utilising expertise from within the local community to present or co-facilitate sessions.

Involving culturally diverse communities

Schools are often important connecting points for new arrivals to Australia. Representing their culture within the school, and involving the community in discussions on how the school may respond to their needs, are important if these new connections are to be fostered and maintained [Whole School Matters, p. 67].

Many of the strategies, discussed previously, that encourage general parent and community involvement will also encourage families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to work as partners with the school. However, there are often additional needs requiring perseverance and more nuanced understandings and sensitivity.

Strategies that will be especially relevant in the culturally and linguistically diverse context, and which will help to build sensitivity, may include:

- creating a welcoming, friendly atmosphere for parents and community members, with culturally inclusive signage, notices and posters
- obtaining assistance from cultural workers from local community groups
- providing translating and interpreting services
- celebrating and participating in diverse cultural events
- encouraging contributions from culturally diverse community members in school newsletters
- participating in cultural enrichment courses
- designing programs and communicative styles that are compatible with family structure and values (e.g. consider whether a lecture format is appropriate – maybe a more interactive, less directive approach may be more culturally acceptable)

- ☑ making cultural diversity visible in the curriculum and getting to know the community to see how they would like to be involved in class activities
- ☑ devising strategies that will encourage and support culturally and linguistically diverse students to invite their parents to get involved in the school.

School initiatives need to be compatible with specific family and community structures and values, and this will require some research. See 'Complexities and challenges' section, later.

Schools may also find that the community from which they draw their students can change over a comparatively short period of time. Undertaking a regular audit like 'Who is our community?' may assist a school to gauge the level of change (see Section 2 and the MindMatters website <http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/>).

Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- ☑ It may take some time to find out who the appropriate people are to be involved in any partnership initiatives or consultations. You can begin by talking to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the school, regional staff and administrators of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations. They will be able to advise about the appropriate community representatives, leaders and respected Elders who should be consulted about mental health and wellbeing issues.
- ☑ When arranging to meet with members of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, it is very important to have the assistance of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander worker or community person, who will be able to guide your approach in the most constructive way.
- ☑ A personal approach will be more effective than letters, although an initial letter of introduction and telephone call may be important in establishing the background for the first meeting. Be guided in each case by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who recommended the contact.
- ☑ Take time and expand networks. Invitations without a personal approach just will not work.
- ☑ Similarly, when meeting with members of the community, always have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person with you and be guided by them about where and when the meeting should take place. It is likely that a meeting held at an Indigenous community organisation or other community centre will be better attended than one held in a more formal location such as the school staffroom.
- ☑ Participation can also be encouraged by utilising groups outside the school (such as the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or Indigenous Education Consultative Body) to speak publicly or help disseminate information. Including cross-cultural teaching within the curriculum, where appropriate, will be similarly encouraging.

Formal agreements

The 2006 MCEETYA report Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 made a number of recommendations on school and community educational partnerships, noting that such formal partnerships can maximise the attendance, engagement and achievement of Indigenous students. To achieve these outcomes, the report recommends that there be formal agreements between schools with significant Indigenous student cohorts and local Indigenous communities, which:

- are expressed in plain language
- enable broad community engagement in the selection of the school principal and teaching staff
- enable community input into all school planning and decision-making processes
- establish agreement on school goals and policies relating to matters such as attendance and academic achievement

- provide greater flexibility in the development and adaptation of curricula, while maintaining high educational standards
- provide flexibility in the operation of the school and use of resources
- are referred to Indigenous education consultative bodies for information
- are sustainable over time, irrespective of change of principal, and re-negotiated to suit changing demands [MCEETYA 2006, p. 6].

9.7 Complexities and challenges

Creating a successful school–community partnership is complex and challenging. It is also time-consuming. Furthermore, there has been little documentation of exactly how such links can be established and how they will function effectively. There is a danger that the phrase ‘community partnership’ can become something of a buzz word that is met with lip service. It is important, therefore, that it is subjected to some scrutiny, its real meaning and outcomes discussed and debated, and an understanding reached about what needs to be done collaboratively to meet the needs of all partners.

It is also apparent that while parents, families and communities may participate or be ‘involved’ in the school in some way – often peripherally – the achievement of true partnerships may be quite rare. See Section 2 for a school–community audit and a discussion of how this can be used as a gauge of the effectiveness of partnerships.

Some of the complexities and challenges inevitably involved in partnerships between schools and their communities are discussed below.

Dealing with unfamiliarity or discomfort with the school culture

Parents and community members often feel intimidated by schools and need to be actively encouraged to become more involved in the school community. This can result from their own negative experiences of school, or their discomfort and anxiety from operating in what can be a quite alien culture. A school’s culture, especially in a secondary school, may not feel welcoming for parents and caregivers. They may feel that their presence in the school will be perceived as interfering or over-protective. They may not feel that they have a relevant contribution to make or role to play.

Consequently, their children may not perceive their parents and the school staff as sharing a common agenda and set of concerns. Schools can have attitudes, beliefs and ways of behaving that appear to be very different from those of the parents and community. These issues can create tension and it may be important to clarify and perhaps re-consider the terms on which partnerships are based to ensure some sort of equitable understanding.

Addressing cultural differences and negative perceptions

Negative perceptions may impede good communication and effective partnerships between schools, families and communities.

For example, a number of studies have reported a somewhat negative perception among Aboriginal people about Western schooling. One study concluded that ‘most Aboriginal parents view teachers as hostile and schools as threatening environments’ and, as such, ‘many Indigenous people passively resist the education system, by apparent silent tolerance of the status quo, while in fact steadfastly and impassively refusing to be a part of it’ (Bond 2004).

Furthermore, the researchers contended that the ‘dismissal of Indigenous knowledge and the marginalisation of the custodians of this knowledge and the practitioners of these pedagogies increase the schools’ cultural gap from the community and contribute to the failure of education in remote Indigenous communities’ [Bond 2004, cited in Kamara 2007, p. 15].

Sims et al. (2003) point out that a number of conflicting perceptions and expectations may be present among Aboriginal families as they attempt to establish a relationship with their children's school. A desire for their children's success 'may be tempered by apprehension generated from a history of oppression and parents' own negative schooling experiences' (p. 87). Attempts by teachers to initiate interactions may be misinterpreted as patronising.

There are clear implications here for the long-term work that needs to be done by principals, teachers and other staff members to make schools more welcoming places and their curricula and pedagogy more accessible and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Sims et al. (2003) suggest a number of ways in which teachers can enhance their communication with Aboriginal families. They should endeavour to:

- examine their own values regarding racism, power and parent partnership
- work to create an environment in which families will feel comfortable
- develop skills in intercultural communication.

For more details on these strategies, readers are referred to the chapter on 'Aboriginal families and the school system' by Margaret Sims et al. in Beresford and Partington's *Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education: the Australian Experience*, 2003. This chapter is an excellent discussion of ways in which conflicting world views and negative practices can be re-framed to be positive and useful in the everyday work of educators.

Understanding differences between culturally and linguistically diverse groups

It is crucial to remember that culturally and linguistically diverse people are not a homogenous group. There is a wide range of diverse groups of people within our school communities and these necessitate a range of responses. Different partnerships and approaches need to be developed. Some differences between cultural groups that may be especially relevant are:

- their migration experience – are they managing fractured families?
- their refugee experience, if relevant (for example, the extent to which they may be traumatised by past events)
- traditional cultural practices that may impact on their views about schooling
- possible differences in child-rearing practices
- intergenerational issues (for example, differences between how things were done in the 'old country' and how the migrant community in Australia does things)
- the impact of racism and discrimination
- different experiences with authority and participation in democratic decision-making
- differing religious views about what is appropriate in the curriculum or extra-curricular activities, and concern that their religious practices may not be respected
- different ways of socialising and preparing and sharing food on social occasions
- their degree of confusion about Australian values and institutions (including education)
- whether or not they feel marginalised by language differences
- the extent to which they are economically disadvantaged and living in poverty.

So, for example, an English-speaking family re-locating to Australia for business reasons will clearly have different needs from a family of non-English speaking background who have fled their country of origin for fear of persecution or starvation.

Accommodating different interpretations of family and community

Families, parents and caregivers are generally recognised as part of the community. However, it is important also to remember there are different cultural interpretations of family and community.

For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people typically have broader, more inclusive concepts of family encompassing not only birth parents and siblings but a whole range of extended family members including blood and spiritual grandparents, aunts, uncles, great-uncles and aunts, and various cousins. An Aboriginal adult's relationship with an Aboriginal child will often involve a very different view of children, social obligations and community responsibility. In remote communities, especially, the community may collectively bring up children. However, non-Indigenous Australians are often judgmental about the shared care arrangements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, because they are unlike care arrangements they are familiar with.

Dealing with different social and religious views

While community is sometimes defined in terms of its cohesiveness (for example, as 'a social group with similar interests, social structures, values and life styles' [McInerney 2002, cited in Kamara 2007, p. 14]), others point out there are likely to be contested issues within democratic communities. This inevitably means that there will be challenges involved in establishing and sustaining robust school–community partnerships.

As Australia's population becomes increasingly culturally and religiously diverse, schools will face inevitable challenges in engaging with families who may have a range of views on how children should be raised and educated.

There will be complex considerations involved in how a school aligns itself with different community groups and the positions it adopts on community and social issues. This can be very sensitive when, for example, it involves issues such as particular religious observances or same-sex attraction.

Recognising power imbalances

Inevitable power imbalances between some stakeholders need to be acknowledged and accommodated. Kamara (2007) argues that school principals need to promote partnerships based on trust and dialogue, where:

... staff and community people can enter into a relationship with shared power, responsibility and ownership. Equally, principals should provide staff, parents, and the entire community with the opportunity to engage in open and full dialogue; that is, principals need to foster 'dialogic practice', since 'what gets said and what gets listened to is always understood to be marked by unequal powers' [Kamara 2007, p. 15, citing McInerney 2002].

This recognition of unequal power will be especially important to address when the school community comprises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse families, or others who may feel marginalised from mainstream society and possibly alienated from school structures and protocols.

9.8 Taking action

Outcomes from case studies

The case studies presented in the Community Partnership Journeys DVD provide tangible evidence of practical outcomes arising from school and community partnerships.

For example, the Balga story provides some excellent examples of how a school is working successfully with 57 different nationalities and over 110 Indigenous students from Perth and other parts of Western Australia. One initiative shown is the third of three forums they have held for migrant parents in which interpreters explain the Western Australian Certificate of Education to the parents. The school worked hard on developing staff and student leadership potential, enabling staff to participate in Professional Development about social and emotional learning and encouraging students to stay on in senior school transition programs to develop their literacy skills.

The Tamworth story, *From Strength to Strength*, shows how the Yamanhaa Men's Group inspired by MindMatters developed the Feeling Deadly not Shame workshops with school students, reaching about 400-500 Aboriginal students in high schools, primary schools and Aboriginal leadership camps in the area. The students' own words are eloquent testimony to the way in which the program has empowered them to be able to stand up and talk about their feelings. In defining what 'deadly' means to them, three young boys illustrate the positive social and emotional learning they have gained from the program:

- Deadly means being strong, powerful, deadly family, deadly community.
- Deadly means self respect, having courage.
- Deadly means being yourself, showing respect, love, strong mind, body and soul, and respecting your culture, playing sport, showing leadership.

One young boy explained that after doing the Feeling Deadly not Shame workshops in Year 7 he started to feel like he was 'a bit of a leader'. Another said:

It gives you like, a different perspective on life, how to overcome 'being shame', not feeling welcome around other people...it gives you somewhere that you think you belong.

In the ACT Feeling Deadly not Shame was also seen as an ideal MindMatters workshop for the huge transient community in the ACT where so many young Indigenous people do not have extended family and community around them. Their story, *Starting from where we are*, describes how, through community forums, a number of schools and various community groups were introduced to the aims and processes of the program, aiming to have it embedded systemically. A leadership camp was held for young girls in years 7-10 from high schools all over the ACT, providing them with opportunities to explore their identity and to deal with feelings of shame, self esteem and connectedness.

One of the most positive spin-offs from these examples is that these models have been picked up by other schools and communities and re-modelled to suit their own purposes.

9.9 Links to community organisations and relevant resources

For information about relevant community organisations and allied health agencies in your state or region, there are a number of useful websites, including:

- Citizens Advice Bureau of the ACT, <http://www.citizensadvice.org.au/>
- Community Information Victoria (CIVic), <http://www.civ.org.au/>
- Community Information Strategies Australia – SA, <http://www.cisa.asn.au/cgi-bin/wf.pl>
- Family–School Partnerships Framework (DEEWR 2008), http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/Family_School_Partnerships_Framework.htm
- InfoXchange, <http://www.infoxchange.net.au/>
- Local Information Network for Community Services (LINCS) – NSW, ACT & WA, <http://www.datadiction.com.au/lincs/default.htm>
- Tasmania Online, <http://www.tas.gov.au/>
- TRI Community Exchange Inc., <http://www.tri.ngo.net.au/> (NSW)
- VICNET, <http://www.vicnet.net.au/>.

9.10 Staff Activities for Professional Development

Number	Task	Audience						
1	<p>Invite community members to a MindMatters core team meeting. Use the Tamworth case study for community partnership as a discussion. Consider the MM Community partnership on pg 152. Talk about the how the agencies, organisations and information from staff fit into the partnership process.</p> <p>As a group, discuss what effective partnerships would look like. What would be the gains for each group?</p>	MindMatters Core team						
2	<p>Watch the Yulebrook DVD from the Principals Australia website. What are the characteristics of working in an effective partnership with the community? What would it mean for a school? What would it mean for a community?</p>	Whole school and community						
3	<p>Community links and creative thinking</p> <p>In randomly selected groups, brainstorm all the organisations in your local community. Record each idea on a card. Shuffle the cards and deal out 4-5 to each group. Consider the current and possible links between the different organisations on the cards. What can the school do to support these links?</p> <p>What can the young people and the organisation do for their mental health and wellbeing?</p>	Whole school and community						
4	<p>Using the general principles on pg 155, rank in order of importance for your site. What else would you add?</p>	Whole school						
5	<p>When working with support services from outside the school, use the strategies on pg 156 as a starting point. Divide into groups and expand upon the suggested strategies when working with agencies.</p>	Leadership group Student services staff Community liaison staff						
6	<p>When working with families from outside the school, use the strategies on pg 157 as a starting point. Divide into groups and expand upon the suggested strategies when working with families and community groups.</p>	Leadership group Student services staff Community liaison staff						
7	<p>Develop a register of possible community learning links available to the school.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Organisation</th> <th>Learning link</th> <th>School curriculum link</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Eg. Youth services</td> <td>Uptake of 'Feeling Deadly not Shame' for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander young people</td> <td>Year 8/9 boys - personal development course</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Organisation	Learning link	School curriculum link	Eg. Youth services	Uptake of 'Feeling Deadly not Shame' for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander young people	Year 8/9 boys - personal development course	Whole school and community agencies
Organisation	Learning link	School curriculum link						
Eg. Youth services	Uptake of 'Feeling Deadly not Shame' for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander young people	Year 8/9 boys - personal development course						

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