



Working Paper

Equipping Parents to support their children's aspiration: What works?

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Introduction

Parents from low SES backgrounds, in common with other parents, report that they want ‘the best’ for their children’s future. Getting a good education is a part of the aspiration of most parents, regardless of SES status. Parents from mid and high SES backgrounds usually have ‘educational cultural capital’ to support their children’s educational aspiration. This means they can confidently access information they need about possible education pathways within and beyond school, and know where to find out about financial and other support resources available to facilitate access to higher education.

There is a strong theoretical basis for the effectiveness of early outreach to children and families. However, evidence as to the nature and features of programs that are most effective in engaging low SES parents in building their children’s educational aspirations is limited. This project addresses that evidence gap. It builds on partners’ combined experience and international literature to identify features of parent engagement and information programs and resources that are cost efficient and effective in informing and supporting low SES parents’ aspirations for their children’s participation in higher education; produce a web resource for institutions’ use in design of parent engagement and information programs and resources that are effective in informing and supporting low SES parents’ aspirations for their children’s participation in higher education.

There is a strong theoretical basis for the effectiveness of early outreach to primary and early secondary school age children and families, particularly if sustained over several years and if outreach targets all students and parents (Naylor et al 2013). However, evidence as to the nature and features of programs and resources that are most effective in engaging low SES parents, carers

and families (hereafter referred to simply as parents) in building their children's educational aspirations is limited. This project addresses that evidence gap.

The project builds on a substantial body of research from the University of Tasmania (e.g. Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman 2002) and elsewhere (e.g. James et al 1999, James 2002, James et al 2008, Bok 2010, Gemici et al 2014) that has established the key role of family and parents in particular in shaping the career and educational aspirations of children and young people in low SES communities. Longitudinal research has established a strong relationship between education and career aspiration by the age of 15 and completion of Year 12 in Australia (Khoo & Ainley 2005). Parents in low SES communities want to assist their children, but are less likely to be aware of the full range career and educational options available for their children, and supports to available to assist them achieve these aspirations (Craven et al 2005, James and Devlin 2006, James et al 2008, Bok 2010). Interventions that target the attitudes and aspirations of these parents are likely to have a positive influence on the educational aspirations and subsequent participation of children from low SES families (Gemici et al 2014).

The Universities of Tasmania and Wollongong both service low SES regional areas where the need for parent engagement programs is clear. Over time they have developed a variety of models of parent engagement, some standalone such as Tasmania's *Parents Matter* program in rural schools, and some as incorporated into other programs, such as Wollongong's Parent Seminars run as part of the Learning Labs Program and the Parent Seminars run as part of the year 6 program, Kids In2Uni.

The University of Tasmania has established the *Children's University* program that engages parents with their children aged 7 to 14 in learning activities outside school. This project will give the partner

Universities and others evidence to modify their programs to best target resources for parent engagement in an increasingly resource constrained environment.

Australian Higher Education and Equity Policy Framework

To understand the current state of thought surrounding best practices for low SES parent engagement, it is necessary to understand the policy framework under which decisions are being made about when and how to engage parents in an educational context. Over the last two decades, Australia has put forward numerous policy documents that recognise the importance of increasing low SES student enrolments in universities. While none of these documents has a direct focus on parent engagement, the documents do indicate government support for increasing low SES student enrolments and more recently, begin to incorporate parents into action planning.

In 1988, a white paper titled *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* was released by the Minister for Employment, Education, and Training, the Honourable John Dawkins, MP. This document set forward national equity goals and provided see funding for programs aimed at increasing equity. The government reiterates its commitment to developing a more equitable higher education system and states that it believes that higher education should be acknowledged as a legitimate aspiration for those who can demonstrate capacity (Dawkins, 1988).

Following that, in 1990, a discussion paper, *A fair chance for all: higher education that's within everyone's reach*, was published by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) that once again confirmed the government's support for higher education and this time, identified six specific equity groups of interest, including people from low socioeconomic

backgrounds (low SES). In 1996, the progress towards the equity objectives outlined in *A fair chance for all* were assessed in the National Board of Employment, Education and Training Higher Education Council's report *Equality, diversity and excellence: advancing the national higher education equity framework*. This report found that while the situation had improved for a number of equity groups, people from low SES backgrounds were still under-represented in higher education. This report set out 26 recommendations and identified people from low SES backgrounds and rural and isolated students as two priority areas for action, with \$4 million in additional funding recommended to address the needs of these two groups. Because of a change of government, implementation of these recommendations was impacted. While the report never became formal policy, it did influence institutional planning and programs (Gale and Tranter 2011).

Next, *Backing Australia's Future* (Nelson 2003), which introduced higher educational reforms and a range of new funding streams and programs, shifted focus from the two priority equity groups identified previously to indigenous and disability equity groups. In this report, parents, whom the academic literature widely identifies as key in students' success, are mentioned just twice. First, the government recognises the financial stress that can be caused to parents by higher education in its proposal of the Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships and next in its recommendation for enhancements to the Graduate Destination Survey and Course Experience Questionnaire. In this case, the government mentions that along with students, parents will likely be wanting information about institutional and course performance. In 2004, the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau, an organisation dedicated to greater parental engagement and community involvement in schools, was created and funded by the Australian government and following that in 2008, the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations released the Australian National Action Framework for Family-School Partnerships. This indicates a shift in thinking and recognition that parent engagement is a key to success in higher education.

Most recently, the *Review of Australian higher education discussion paper* (Bradley 2008), or 'Bradley Review', was initiated in March 2008 and released in December 2008. The purpose of this review was to examine the future directions for higher education sector, determine its capacity for meeting the needs of Australians and suggest options for future reforms. The Bradley Review acknowledged the level of participation in higher education for people from low SES backgrounds had remained virtually unchanged for the past two decades and that there were a number of factors, including costs and geographic locations, that were possibly contributing to this. It was also pointed out at that this was the case not just in Australia, but in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well. In 2009 budget, the Australian government responded comprehensively to the Bradley Review with \$5.4 billion and released *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*, which set a target for 20% of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level to be comprised of people from low SES backgrounds by 2020. The next liberal government, however, did not adopt these targets and instead created a scholarship scheme. Noonan (2015) points out that "the extent to which that [scholarship scheme] would change the socioeconomic composition of the universities with the most significant scholarship programs is questionable" (p.35).

Despite equity policies being in place, low SES students are still 'significantly and persistently underrepresented in Australian higher education' (James 2008, Gale and Parker 2013). One quarter of the Australian population lives in low SES postcodes, yet year after year, students from low SES backgrounds comprise only approximately 15% of the domestic student population in Australian universities (James 2008).

Simultaneously over these two decades there has been an abundance of research focused on understanding why, despite government support and funding, people from low SES backgrounds

continue to be under-represented and how this can be changed. One body of research examines the barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. Various factors have been examined in great detail, however, two studies from the early 1980's summarise barriers to higher education quite succinctly and describe four conditions must be met for a student to enter university (Anderson and Vervoorn 1983, Anderson et al 1980). These studies explain that an adequate number of places must be available, the institution must be accessible to the student, both geographically and financially, the student must have the necessary preparation and capability to succeed and the student must want to enter. Although all four conditions are closely interrelated and must be met for a student to succeed at university, the focus of this literature review will be on the fourth condition, student aspirations and specifically, parent involvement and support for their student's educational aspirations.

What is parent involvement?

Definition and Terminology

In the literature, two phrases are often used to describe the partnerships between parents and others that constitute their participation in the academic realm of their children's lives: parent engagement and parent involvement. The definitions of the two are quite similar and are often used interchangeably, but more recently there appears to be a shift from parent involvement to parent engagement because engagement implies a broader conception of the role of parents in learning. Drawing on several diverse lines of theory and research, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) defined parents' involvement in children's schooling as parents' commitment of resources to the academic arena of children's lives. Expanding on this, Emerson et al (2012) state that "parental engagement consists of partnerships between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness of

the benefits of engaging in their children's education, and providing them with the skills to do so" (p.7).

Importance

The importance of parent involvement or engagement in relation to educational aspirations is widely understood. Bergensen (2009) explains that parental involvement, across all race/ethnicities and socioeconomic groups is a better predictor of students' education expectations than parents' educational level and student academic achievement and Muller (2009) states in Emerson et al (2012): "Family-school and community partnerships are re-defining the boundaries and functions of education. They enlarge parental and community capacity; they create conditions in which children learn more effectively. In these ways they take education beyond the school gates. (p.7)"

Bordua (1960) was one of the first to investigate the impact of various factors that influence students to attend college and reconfirmed that gender, religious affiliation and socioeconomic status were related to the decision. He also found for the first time that parental emphasis on college also played a role. This opened the door for expanded research on the topic of the influence of parent engagement on the children's higher education aspirations.

Moving forward to more recent times, in the past two decades, researchers have repeatedly confirmed the link between parent engagement and students' higher education aspirations. There is widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of parental involvement for effective education (Grolnick and Slowiaczek 1994, Ceja 2004, Hong and Ho 2005, Jeynes 2005, Bakker and Denessen 2007, Auerbach 2007, Charles, Roscigno and Torres 2007, Cunningham et al 2007, Gonida and Urdan 2007, Jeynes 2007, Fann, Jarsky and McDonough 2009, Hill and Tyson 2009, Cheung and Pomerantz 2011, Kirk et al 2011, and Martinez and Ulanoff 2013, Gerard and Booth 2015, Education

Endowment Foundation 2016). Finally, most recently, in addition to the academic literature highlighting the importance of involving parents in their children's education, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an international organisation of 34 countries, released a report in 2016, *Teaching Excellence through Professional Learning and Policy Reform: Lessons from Around the World* that emphasised the importance of parental engagement. This report indicates that in order for students to be able to achieve, parents need to be engaged and in order for parents to be engaged, teachers need to be able trained to know how and when to communicate with parents. The report also states that schools should specifically reach out to immigrant parents because "students do better when their parents understand the importance of schooling, how the school system works, and how best to support their child's progress through school" (Schleicher 2016, p.30).

Broad issues influencing parent involvement

The research reviewed above strongly suggests that, in order to increase the representation of students from low SES background in higher education, it is advantageous to increase the engagement of their parents. Several researchers have identified factors influencing the engagement of parents from low SES backgrounds. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) present a model developed to help clarify and elaborate on the wide spectrum of barriers to parental engagement. They divide the barriers into four areas: individual parent and family, child, parent-teacher and societal. Individual parent and family factors focus on parents' beliefs about parent involvement, perceptions of invitations for parent involvement, current life contexts and class, ethnicity and gender. Child factors focus on age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents and behavioural problems. Parent-teacher factors include differing goals and agendas, differing attitudes and differing language used and societal factors focus on historical and demographic, political and economic aspects. For each

factor an example is given to clarify, but solutions are not discussed. The authors suggest that the model will provide insight for teachers and offer ideas for areas of future research.

In contrast to providing an overview as did Hornby and Lafaele (2011), other studies examine one specific factor that can negatively impact parent involvement. Ludicke and Kortman (2012) examined the parent-teacher relationship for children with learning barriers. They found that there were often tensions in the home-school partnership, and disagreements or differences in perceptions about solutions to overcoming learning barriers and communications. Likewise, Hill and Wang (2015) examined another specific factor, parenting practices. In a longitudinal study they examined “practices related to the emotional (monitoring and warmth) and cognitive (autonomy support and warmth) engagement” (p.224) for African American and European American parents of children in 7th grade affect success and aspirations of those children in the following years through enrolment in higher education.

Types of parent involvement

A wide range of types of parent engagement with their children’s education is described in the literature. However, three models are often used when describing the various types of parent involvement: Epstein’s six types (Epstein et al 2002), the Australian Government’s ‘Family-School Partnerships Framework’ (DEEWR 2008) and Emerson et al’s (2012) Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research.

Epstein et al (2002) describe six types of parent involvement as listed below, along with ways of fostering each type of engagement.

1. Parenting Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

2. *Communication* Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

3. *Volunteering* Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

4. *Learning at home* Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

5. *Decision-making* Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through school councils, committees and parent organisations.

6. *Collaborating with the community* Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

The Australian Government’s *Family-School Partnerships Framework* (DEEWR 2008) outlines seven dimensions of family-school partnerships. These are quite similar to Epstein’s six types of parental involvement and are list in the table below. This framework was prepared collaboratively by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Parents Council (APC), the Australian Government, and other key stakeholders including State and territory government and non-government school authorities, and school principals’ associations.

Figure 1 Key dimensions of parent involvement from *Family-School Partnerships Framework* (2008)

<p>A. Communicating</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises that effective communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is active, personal, frequent, culturally appropriate and multi-dimensional; is open to families' needs and attitudes • is a two-way exchange between families and schools that involves not only an exchange of information, but also opportunities for schools and families to learn from each other • makes clear that families are genuine partners and can help solve big problems.
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<p>B. Connecting learning at home and at school</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises families and schools understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the overlap between the home and school environments • the connection between successful partnerships and children's learning, including the importance of high expectations from both teachers and parents to children's success at school • the importance of families and schools working together to create positive attitudes to learning, and of parents working with teachers in the educational decision-making process for their children • the benefits of schools being venues and agents to parental self-growth, learning and the development of new skills.
<p>C. Building community and identity</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities that improve the quality of life in a community while honouring the culture, traditions, values and relationships in that community • that the work of schools includes aspects of the social, emotional, moral and spiritual development of young people • that schools can act as a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity building.
<p>D. Recognising the role of the family</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises that as primary educators of their children, parents and families have a lasting influence on their children's attitudes and achievements at school. They can encourage their children's learning in and out of school and are also in a position to support school goals, directions and ethos. Parents look to schools to provide secure and caring environments for their children.</p>
<p>E. Consultative decision-making</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises that parents are entitled to be consulted and to participate in decisions concerning their children. An inclusive approach to school decision-making and parental involvement/ engagement creates a shared responsibility among parents, community members, teachers and school leaders.</p>
<p>F. Collaborating beyond the school</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises identifying, locating and integrating community resources which can strengthen and support schools, students and their families, and opportunities for schools, students and families to assist the community in return.</p>
<p>G. Participating</p>	<p>This key dimension emphasises that families' time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs in multiple ways and that all contributions are valuable. This may involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with students on learning activities in classrooms • participating in other school activities outside the classroom

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participating in activities outside the school itself • supporting and valuing teachers • ensuring that parental involvement/engagement is a recognised topic of staff meetings, professional development and in the induction of new staff.
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Finally, most recently and drawing on Epstein’s six parenting types and the seven dimensions of the Family-School Partnerships Framework, Emerson et al (2012) have proposed a matrix that shows the various types of parent involvement for home-based involvement, school-based involvement and academic socialisation and illustrates the difference between the focal points of each type.

Figure 2 Academic Socialisation from Emerson et al 2012

	School-Based Involvement	Home-Based Involvement	Academic Socialisation
<i>Communication</i>	Between parents and school personnel	Between parents and children about school	Between parents and children about parental expectations for education and about the value and enjoyment of learning
<i>Engagement</i>	Visiting school for school events, participating in school governance and volunteering at school activities	Helping with school work	Discussing learning strategies with children
<i>Learning</i>	Creating opportunities for parents to become involved in academic and learning activities in the school	Creating an environment at home which is conducive to learning	Linking school work to current events and other topics
<i>Parenting</i>	Building relationships between the school and parents	Taking children to events and places that encourage learning (e.g. museums, libraries)	Fostering educational aspirations and making preparations and plans for the future

Misaligned Parental Aspirations

Another section of the literature examines the effect of misaligned parental aspirations on their children’s higher education aspirations, or what happens when the parents have either much higher or much lower aspirations than their children’s abilities and achievements. While previous studies have found that there is a correlation between high parental aspirations and high student academic

achievement and low parental aspirations and lower achievement levels (Schoon, Parsons, and Sacker 2004, Creed et al. 2007), De Boer & van der Werf (2015) found that there is a small to medium positive correlation between parental aspirations and student achievement. They also found that there is no relationship between parent involvement and misaligned parental aspirations.

Criticisms of parent involvement

It is worth mentioning that researchers have pointed out that indeed the involvement of parents can have a negative effect on their students' achievements and higher education aspirations. Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) argue that how parents become involved and the context of that involvement need to be considered and may, in fact, result in a negative effect on the student's achievements. They considered "controlling" involvement versus "autonomy- supportive" involvement and found that children were more likely to be successful when parent involvement, both home-based and school-based, was of the autonomy-supportive variety rather than controlling. They also considered "process-focused" versus "person-focused" involvement and found that when parental involvement focused on the learning process rather than the student's achievements, the involvement had a more positive effect. Likewise, when they examined involvement characterized by "positive beliefs about children's potential" versus "negative beliefs about children's potential" they found that when parents were involved and had positive beliefs about their children's potential, then the child actually did do well in school. Finally, they looked at parent involvement with positive affect versus parent involvement with negative affect and found then when parent involvement was an enjoyable experience for the child, it was likely to have a positive influence on the child's academic success and when the involvement involved negative feelings, it was likely to have a negative effect on the child's academic experience.

Strategies for engaging parents

Best practices for engaging parents in their children's education have been widely studied with numerous peer-reviewed papers as well as handbooks and guides published on the topic. In the last decade, several literature reviews of best practices and meta-analysis of suites of parent engagement programs have been released. Overall findings from these large studies include a focus on incorporating culture into strategies (Gorinski and Fraser 2006), a need for evaluation of parental engagement programs (Agronick et al 2009), and academic socialization as a key characteristic of parental engagement for academic success (Jeynes 2007, Hill and Tyson 2009).

In 2003, Deforges and Abouchar conducted a literature review for the United Kingdom's Department for Education and Skills that examined spontaneous involvement, which they describe as self-motivated and self-sustained versus induced parent involvement, which are intervention programmes, initiated by a non-parental source and usually aimed at increasing parent involvement. Consistent with other studies (Jeynes 2007, Hill and Tyson 2009), Deforges and Abouchar (2003, p10) found "that a form of parental involvement, specifically 'at-home' good parenting, has a major impact on school outcomes even after all other forces (e.g. the effect of prior attainment or of social class) have been factored out." Also consistent with other studies (Agronick et al 2009), Deforges and Abouchar found that the evaluation of parent involvement programs is weak. Finally, with regard to ethnic differences, this review found that while different ethnic groups express their support in different ways, parent involvement consistently has a positive relationship with academic achievement across ethnic groups.

A meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes (2005) used 41 studies to examine the relation between parent involvement and urban elementary school students. Their research found that parent involvement is

indeed positively related to academic achievement regardless of race, gender or urban setting. They also examined the level of effectiveness of several common parent engagement strategies including general parent involvement, specific parent involvement, communication between parents and their children about school activities, checking homework prior to it being turned in, parents holding high expectations for their students' academic achievement, parents regularly reading to their children, and whether and how often parents attend and participate in school functions and finally, whether there was a loving and supportive parenting style. The study (Jeynes 2005, p.262) found that general parent support "may create an educationally oriented ambience, which establishes an understanding of a certain level of support and standards in the child's mind" and the individual strategies such attending school functions and checking homework are less important. This is echoed in the findings Hill and Tyson (2009) that parent academic socialisation is the most important factor affecting student achievement. Jeynes (2007) also found that programs designed to increase parent involvement are positively related to urban students' academic achievement.

In 2006, Gorinski and Fraser published a literature review focused on the effective engagement of Pasifika parents and communities in education in New Zealand. The review included not only literature specific to Pasifika communities, but also relevant international literature about engaging parents on education from low SES backgrounds from 1985 to 2005. Overall, the authors found the literature to be lacking in studies with a micropolitical perspective, or studies that look at how power influences relationships between people and also found that most research was conducted in a 'deficit-theorising' paradigm, which, placed the blame for lack of achievement on parents' lack of interest or involvement rather than on schools' attempts to engage parents. They also discussed barriers to parent involvement including "barriers associated with notions of culture and acculturation; language needs and deficiencies; strained economic resources (both those of families and those of government); parents' uncertainties, and schools' preconceptions."(p.2) Finally, similar to other reviews, the authors identify commonly used parental engagement strategies such as the

use of parents as tutors, workshops for parents to learn new skills and information, literacy programs both for children and families, collaborative projects between the school and families, reporting to parents about academic and social aspects of their children's education and other communication and support strategies such as bilingual community support liaisons.

Agronick et al (2009) conducted a literature review on parent involvement and student success as well as reviewed policies, programs and practices at American middle and high schools in the Northeast and Island regions. This literature review yielded a typology of parent involvement practices which included the following categories: general information exchange, information exchange on individual student performance, special events, volunteer opportunities, parent education, professional development for faculty and staff, parent centres, dedicated staff to promote home and school coordination and outreach to traditionally hard to reach parents. Using this typology, Agronick et al (2009) then examined programs from nine urban districts across four states. Their study found that only a few programs had at least one of the characteristics highlighted by the literature review. The authors note a lack of evaluation for the parental engagement programs studied and highlight this as an area to focus in the future.

A meta-analysis conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009) identifies 'academic socialization', which 'includes communicating parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future', as the type of parent involvement that has the strongest positive relation with achievement in middle school. They also found that the type of parent involvement with the second strongest positive relation with achievement was school-based parent involvement and that home-based parent involvement had mixed results, with some forms not consistently associated with achievement, while other forms of

involvement were positively related to achievement. This analysis synthesised the results of 50 studies published between 1985 and 2006.

Hooker and Brand (2009) examined 23 programs that work to prepare middle and high school students for college/university and had quality program evaluations available. The study looked at Programmatic Elements of Success such as rigor and academic support, relationships, college knowledge and access, relevance, youth-centred programs and effective instruction, as well as structural elements of success such as partnerships and cross-systems collaboration, strategic use of time, leadership and autonomy and effective assessment and use of data. While the focus of these programs was not parent engagement, the programs that were successful often rated high on 'relationships', which included parent involvement.

Gale et al (2010) reviewed Australian and international literature to examine interventions early in school as a means to improve higher education outcomes for disadvantaged (particularly low SES) students. While not looking specifically at the role parent involvement plays in improving higher education outcomes for disadvantaged students, parent involvement is mentioned as a key aspect in many of the studies reviewed. Overall, the successful programs are collaborative, start early and are long-term and sustained, people-rich, cohort-based, use a variety communication and information sharing methods, including digital media, provide familiarisation/site experiences, recognise and value differences, enhance academic curriculum, and provide financial supports and/or incentives.

In 2010, the UK Department of Education released a commissioned report (Goodall and Voorhaus 2010) that reviewed over 50 studies of interventions from 2000 to 2010, along with a few earlier, frequently cited studies. This report found that evidence of the impact of literacy interventions,

interventions to support home-school links and trainings for parents to support their children's learning was robust. The report identifies that there is a gap in the literature regarding "many academic and learning related outcomes, and on many of the specific activities schools and services should undertake in pursuit of the general features of an effective parental engagement strategy" (p.9). Additionally, the authors point out that there is not yet enough evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of the various interventions for different key stages of children's development. Despite this, the authors point out that much of the literature is in agreement on what is effective. Key features of successful parent engagement programs identified by Goodall and Voohaus include planning, leadership, collaboration and engagement, and sustained improvement and support.

Emerson et al (2012) provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on parental engagement in a report by the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau. The authors of this report identify strategies for promoting parental engagement including communication strategies such as parent-teacher meetings, internet/new media, community liaison officers, homework centres and ongoing work to support learning. Strategies are also broken out by intervention focus including parents and families, teachers, whole of community and school plans, processes and reforms. Strategies for early childhood, primary school and high school are also described. The last group of strategies explained are for different cultural groups including culturally and linguistically diverse families, parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and refugee groups. Emerson et al (2012) emphasise the importance of academic socialisation as a type of parent engagement.

In addition to the large meta-analysis studies and literature reviews, researchers have conducted various studies examine strategies for engaging the parents in a specific cultural group and note

ethnic variations in parent involvement patterns and strategies. For example, Kim (2013) explains how despite lower parental involvement of Korean and Chinese parents in the American school system, Korean American and Chinese American students still are likely to attend highly selective universities and colleges. Kim attributes this to parental aspirations consistent with homeland cultural values and practices. Raihani and Gurr (2010) describe the strategies an Islamic Australian school has used to engage parents in their children's education. This study found that although important aspects of Muslim culture were present at the school, parent involvement was limited at the school studied with most communication flowing in one direction, from the school to the parents. Smith (2009) seeks to understand the involvement of low SES African-American parents in their children's college choice and found that parental aspirations were for a completion of high school and academic socialisation focused on a narrative of struggle. A study based in the Netherlands by Smit et al (2007) compared Dutch parents' involvement to minority parent involvement. It also looked identified specific types of parents and proposed strategies for schools to use to engage each type of parent. The study found that at minority schools, parents did not perceive themselves as qualified to be involved in their students' education. And in 2014 (p.11), Alfaro et al, emphasise that educational institutions "must acknowledge and value the positive influence that Latino parental involvement has on Latino students throughout the P20 educational pipeline".

Other studies still focus on how to engage families with specific situations such parents who have not attended university (Eckland 2013) or children with same-sex parents (Fedewa and Clark 2009). In the case of first generation college students, Eckland (2013) discusses that while occasionally parent involvement can be challenging, overall, and with the proper support, it is important for universities to engage students' parents. Fedewa and Clark (2009) found that in the case of same-sex

parents, their parenting practices did not differ from heterosexual parents nor did the effective strategies for engaging same-sex parents.

In addition to mentioning successful tools and methods for engaging parents as a part of a larger study, some researchers look specifically at a single tool or method or a suite of tools and methods and attempt to determine their effectiveness. For example, Lewin and Luckin (2010) investigated how technology can support parent engagement efforts. They found that there are benefits to using technology to support parent engagement, but projects that do so must be flexible in order to accommodate parents' needs, which are complex. This study also looked at whether or not transporting technology between the school and home would have a positive impact on parent engagement and found that overall, it did not.

In any case, it is important that parents have explicit opportunities and reasons to engage. Other key factors are identified in recent research by Dotterer and Wehrspann (2016) include developing policy that instead of vaguely encouraging parent involvement, clearly justifies the importance of parental engagement as well as identifies specific pathways for engaging parents. The same study suggests that programs that are aimed at increasing parent involvement communicate the results to the parents, thus developing a deeper understanding for the parents of how their efforts impact their children. McFarlane (2008) examines Queensland parental engagement policies for schools and questions the true intentions of those policies. Parents are seemingly invited to engage, but it is pointed out that this invitation is often qualified and restricted. McFarlane adds that if parents do not engage 'properly', they may be disciplined and future opportunities for engaging in their children's education may be limited.

More recently, a Canadian study by Leithwood and Patrician (2015) examines several tools used to engage parents in relation to three sets of parent engagement goals related to family educational

culture: 1. fostering high expectations among parents for their children's success at school, 2. creating effective communication between parents and their children in the home and 3. building family's social and intellectual capital related to schooling. For each of these goals, the methods. This study used data collected from seven school districts and found that while parent engagement has a positive impact on their children's educational aspirations, some interventions work better than others. Among the eight lessons learned from this study are, regardless of the intervention method, engaging parents can be difficult, trust must be built between school staff and parents, if meetings are used to engage parents, ample time should be allowed during these meetings for trust building, a handful of meetings is not likely to have much impact on student related goals for parent engagement, effective implementation strategies are likely to be those that are dynamic, engaging secondary school parents is different than engaging elementary school parents, First Nation parents may be from low SES backgrounds, but are highly motivated to increase social and intellectual capital in order to improve their children's academic success, communications between parents and schools are key to parent engagement, but no one form works well in all circumstances with all parents.

Successful programs

While many programs exist that successfully engage parents from low SES backgrounds with the goal of creating a 'college culture' or increasing higher education enrolment for their children, only a few are described in the academic literature. These programs, described below, are often aimed at a very specific groups of parents, but the methods and key features may be transferrable to programs aimed at different groups of parents in different locations. The four programs described here are all parent engagement programs specifically aimed at increasing enrolment of students with low SES backgrounds in colleges and universities.

School, College and University Partnership's Parent and Student Success (PASS) Program

Gilbert (1996) describes the School, College and University Partnership (SCUP) program at northern Arizona University, a program that successfully promoted academic success for Hopi and Navajo students. The program targeted seven rural high schools on or near Navajo and Hopi reservations. Many of the students in the program came from low SES backgrounds. The SCUP program was made up of several smaller components, each with its own goal. The goals of PASS were three-fold: 1. to help parents feel confident and effective about helping with their students' academic performance and success, 2. To facilitate communication between community members, "specifically regarding educational goals and school administration" (Gilbert 1996, p.12) and 3., to encourage communication between parents and their students about "academic performance, homework, school-related attitudes, discipline and family issues" (Gilbert 1996, p.12). Based on evaluations, the most successful of these components was the bilingual and culturally relevant parent involvement program, Parent and Student Success (PASS) program. Communication was key to this program, with bilingual letters, flyers and workshops used. In addition to this, success is attributed to adapting the model the program was based on to fit the needs of the Native American parents' culture. This gave the parents a better understanding of how the American education system is similar to, for example, the Navajo Philosophy.

UCLA's Futures and Families Program

Auerbach (2004) shows how the Futures and Families (F&F) program, a bilingual outreach program at a large, diverse high school that was part of a small, experimental college access program that was part of an ongoing University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)-school partnership, successfully created a "college-going" culture. This program started with parents of year 10 students and focused

on “building parents’ basic knowledge in general, college planning and specific colleges” (p.131) and creating opportunities and a safe space for marginalised parents to dialogue with educators and engage around educational issues (Auerbach 2004). The method of parent engagement used included 25 monthly bilingual meetings organised largely around parent concerns and college planning deadlines formed the core of the program. These meetings combined guest speakers of colour with small group discussions (in a choice of language), handouts, panel discussions and hands-on workshop activities. The meetings were held at high school’s Parent Center and were facilitated by a respected Latina who could provide a cultural and linguistic bridge among the students, staff and parents. In this case, many of the parents wanted to be supportive of their students, but lacked access to information that would allow them to be supportive in a system that was new to them. In addition to building college knowledge, F&F successfully built social capital by facilitating three types of relationships that support college pathways: between parents and educators, between parents and fellow parents and between parents and their children. This, in turn, resulted in the construction of critical capital (and advocacy for some parents, creating strong allies for the students. By acknowledging the barriers to college access that their students face, parents were able to develop strategies for overcoming them and build social capital in the process (Auerbach 2004). It should be noted that a similar program for the students was run simultaneously.

The Puente Project

The Puente Project, started in 1981 and co-sponsored by the University of California and the California Community College Chancellor's Office, works with students who are struggling in high school and community colleges throughout California and their parents. While not all of these students are from low SES backgrounds, many of them are. The aim of this program is to “increase number of students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn college degrees, and can then serve as mentors and leaders within the community” (Agronick et al 2009, p.42). The highly

successful Puente Project has been described by several researchers (Cooper 2002, Gandara 2002, Gandara and Moreno 2002 and Grubb, Lara, and Valdez 2002). In the Puente program, parents sign contracts agreeing to participate in the program and provide support to their students, the teachers and the program counsellors. Parents also participate in workshops to learn about the college admissions process and attend activities such as campus visits. Gandara (2002) found Puente students reported going on to four-year colleges at nearly double the rate of non-Puente students with the same grades and test scores. Grubb, Lara, and Valdez (2002) also found the program to be successful and highlight the returning of participants as mentors as a key to success. Moreno (2002) reports that Puente students have higher levels of college preparation, college persistence, and college preparedness than non-Puente students. Cooper (2002) identifies parent involvement as one of the key 'bridges' in the Puente Program. Finally, Grubb, Lara, and Valdez (2002) examine the role counsellors play in the Puente Program. It is their job not only to help the parents understand the college admissions process, but also "to change parental attitudes toward their children's leaving home for college, getting them to let go of their children—especially their daughters." (p.560) Because of its successes, in 1998 the Puente Program won the Innovations in American Government Award.

Latino Parents-Learning About College (LaP-LAC) Program

Another successful program focusing on Latino parents, The Latino Parents-Learning About College (LaP-LAC) Program is described by Villalba et al (2014, p.47) as "a psychoeducational group work experience wherein Latina/o parents with high school-aged children learn to understand the high school curriculum and become more familiar with post-secondary options (including financial aid), in an effort to empower themselves and their family." Unlike the other programs described here, this program has not been implemented formally in the field. Instead, it was developed/planned and a shorter, modified version was successfully trialled. The program proposed suggests offering six

closed weekly sessions to Latino parents that both provide information about navigating the pathway to college as well as psychological support for dealing with frustration and anxiety regarding tasks required to provide support for their students and processing the information provided. The sessions focus on parents identifying their student's values, skills and aptitudes to help set goals and plans, how to get the most out of their students' high school experience, understand post-secondary options, how to prepare and help their students' with the college application and admission process, financial aid options and how to plan for the transition into college life. As other previous studies, it was found that sessions should be offered in the preferred language of participants and more "personal" and "informal" sessions were preferred.

Key factors contributing to successful programs

The four programs reflect what is described in the literature as key factors that contribute to successful engagement for parents from low SES backgrounds.

- Start early
- Present information in a variety of culturally appropriate ways, including multiple languages
- Adapt to be culturally relevant and address specialised/personal information needs (safety, loans, visa status)
- Facilitate social capital building
- Build critical capital to empower parents by encouraging them to learn about educational inequality and take action to rectify
- Provide explicit reasons for parents to engage, and specific opportunities for them to do so.

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