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The Future

Supporting Home–School Partnerships during
Stage 6 in the New England Region

December 2012

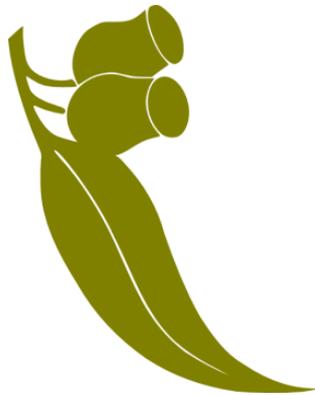




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This document is Book 3 of the portfolio and contains the future direction of the innovation.



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1. Future Directions

1.1. Introduction

Supporting the home-school-student partnership is an ongoing journey which must constantly modify and adapt as expectations change, family demands change, technology changes and as research reveals more about the experiences of students progressing through Stage 6. The Australian Curriculum is being released. It will again alter the needs of the partnership. This innovation will not be finished because the educational landscape is constantly changing. A fixed innovation will become obsolete as soon as the next policy is announced or the next system is implemented. This innovation report concludes in 2012 but the innovation will continue to grow and adapt. It has been designed to ensure ongoing adaptation and development.

In order to ensure that the program *Senior Success* can be dynamic in presenting new workshops and new research, I have created an *Edmodo* site for facilitators trained in the program, see Figure 1. *Edmodo* is a dedicated educational social media platform. It is strictly regulated by passwords and administrators. Such an opportunity for ongoing communication was not available when *Senior Success* was first offered. Initially, new workshops had to be sent via mail in CD format. Then as thumb-drives became cost effective, the new workshops could be placed on a thumb-drive and then posted. These methods were time consuming and expensive. New technology has ensured that regular updates are not only possible but also without additional costs.



Figure 1: Edmodo Page to support ongoing sharing of innovation development

To facilitate the sharing of resources and the information about the importance of the home-school-community partnership, I have developed a web-page that acts as a dynamic source of information and ideas. See Figure 2.

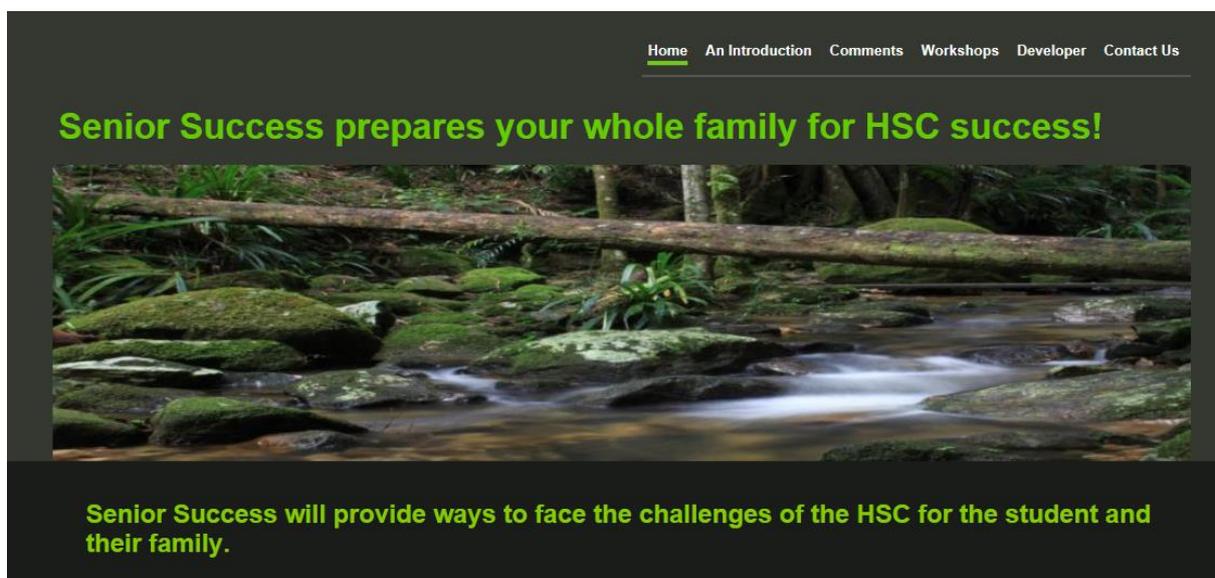


Figure 2: Webpage for Senior Success



1.2. Structuring the future

In order to structure the implications for the future I undertook a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis with the consultation support of my professional supervisor and principal, Mr Wayne Chaffey. Mr Chaffey was in the first group of people trained in *Senior Success* and supported the implementation in his school. This collegial analysis underpins the ongoing development of the innovation and added guidance to the 2012 Literature Review.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Senior Success</i> and the associated resources are well organised, easy to manage and in very simple and accessible formats.• Information is provided in a structured manner, with a courteous translation of the jargon of the education sector.• Information is provided to students and their family simultaneously so that there is a reduced opportunity for mixed messages or no message at all reaching one group or another.• The students and their families who have participated have been able to take proactive steps to maximise the effectiveness of learning over these two years.• Parents/carers 'chat' socially about their learning at <i>Senior Success</i>, thus the message reaches a wider audience than those present at workshops.• All aspects of the project are positive indicators to the community that the school is committed to the home-school learning partnership.• Every contact a family member has with the school offers an	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The program relies very heavily upon goodwill and the preparedness of teaching staff to take on the responsibility of the program.• Ongoing workshops fall into the cold winter months when people are less inclined to attend meetings.• These workshops are also impacted upon by the training commitments of many of the male students as grade football training is of an evening, regardless of code.• There is some repetition of information to the students as all students need to at least hear the information around study skills, assessment and time management. It therefore needs to be presented in a way that the student accepts the second presentation of this information.• The difficulty of finding a suitable time to present the workshops as work hours for both students and their families extend into the evening, every day of the week.



opportunity for minor issues to be addressed before they become major concerns.	
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As an increasing number of students stay at school, the need for family and community support is increasing.• Technology is enhancing the ability to communicate over distance and to sustain information flow, thus the information in the products has the potential to reach a wider audience.• Whilst the premise of the project is for schools and families to work in partnerships, if the school is not offering support of the partnerships, can the products support the learning partnership in the home?	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having returned to a classroom and school based position; I am now subject to conflicting priorities and to a range of <i>urgent</i> rather than <i>important</i> tasks.• As I am no longer in a Regional Position – keeping the project in the eye of those who make regional decisions about where training priorities lie.• The exponentially rising expectations for quick answers to existing problems, rather than committing time to proactive solutions.
Additional Challenges <p>By the time a student reaches Stage 6, their parents have just endured the challenges of middle adolescence when many parent have felt the frustration of being told that they ‘don’t know anything’ and that their child is ‘fine by themselves’. This can be a time of considerable conflict and a time that first time parents/carers often do not realise is transient. Thus, a major challenge is convincing both young persons and their family that there is benefit from working together through this stage.</p>	

This analysis acted as a link between the evaluation cycles and the considerations for Book 3 of this portfolio. By considering each of the points outlines above, I was able to create a foundation for the next phase of analysis and planning. These points are embedded into *Book 3- The Future*.



2. 2012 Literature Review

The 2012 Literature Review was developed to re-evaluate the research base for the home-school-community partnership and the associated program *Senior Success*, as well as the presentations to stakeholders in the partnership; students, parents or teachers. The review was undertaken with the purpose of identifying what has changed and what has remained constant since the first literature review was undertaken to inform the initial response to the need to “do something” in 2007-2008. This review was also undertaken to guide the pursuit of the question “where to next?”.

Figure 3 illustrates the structure of the 2012 literature review.

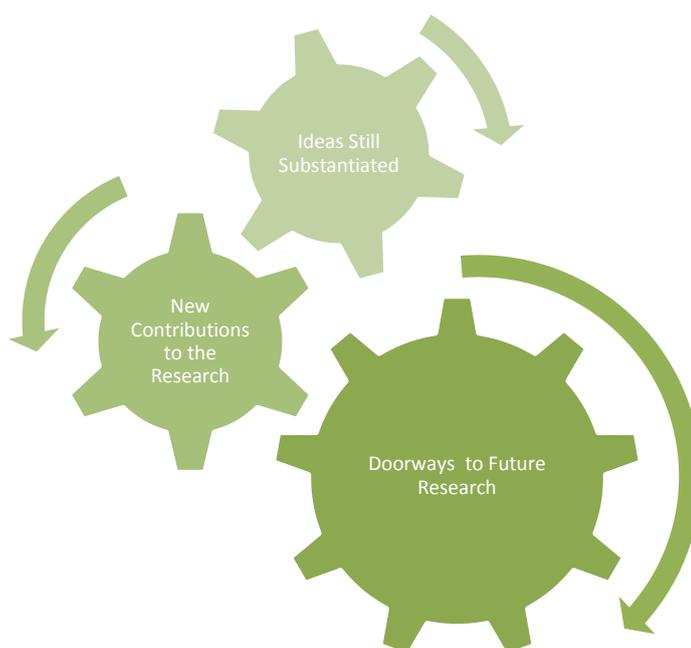


Figure 3: Structure of 2012 Literature Review

This approach is substantiated by the statement in Epstein’s 2010 Report on Home School Partnerships. She states, “Often when one challenge is met, a new one will emerge”(Epstein, 2010:105). Effective partnerships are dynamic, therefore, the research foundation for that partnership must also be dynamic.



2.1. Ideas Still Substantiated

The Literature Review which was the foundation for the innovations development was structured as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4 : Informing Literature Review Structure

The 2012 Review briefly revisits each of these areas of consideration reflecting upon consistencies and new developments.

2.1.1. What is the Higher School Certificate?

The Higher School Certificate in New South Wales and the corresponding exit qualifications in all other Australian states continue to challenge young people to achieve their optimum educational outcomes during a period of rapid social, emotional and personal development (as well as learning to drive and finally being allowed into licensed premises). It continues to be a time of widespread concern for parents, teachers and other significant adults that the well-being of young people at



this stage of their life is often under threat. It also continues to be a concern rarely informed by rigorous research (J. A. Robinson, Alexander, & Gradisar, 2009). However, it is undeniable that this is a time in the education experience of a young person when extra scaffolding from school and community is both desirable and necessary for the students and their families. This scaffolding should support the management of both academic and social behaviours.

The normative stressors of this time of life are to be anticipated. Educators and parents know that this time is inevitable. It is a rite of passage in many aspects of a young person's life. It does not need to be a negative time, nor does it have to be a time of conflict. For the negativity and conflict to be avoided the lessons of others need to be available to those journeying through the experience. It is also necessary to ensure that there is clear and accurate communication about the expectations and the requirements of Stage 6. The salient learning for me through this innovation has been that we, as teachers, make too many assumptions and do not ensure that the lessons learnt from one cohort of students and parents are passed to the next.

In the years since this innovation was first initiated, there have been significant changes in Stage 6 opportunities in New South Wales Schools. There has been an increase in opportunities for alternate pathways through the HSC, including School Based Traineeships, Vocational Education and Training courses and partnerships with other training providers. This has widened the curriculum and allowed more students opportunities which suit their personal goals. However, with each new opportunity and the associated rules and regulations comes the need to provide accurate, timely and understandable information to the parents and students. It also



demands that explicit strategies are put into place to ensure that students are able to meet the requirements of their school based courses, their workplace hours and their personal commitments. This has led to an emerging branch of this innovation which focuses attention upon the explicit needs of this group of students in order to assist them and those involved in their learning partnership to successfully navigate this pathway. This pathway has become increasingly more complex as more TAFE courses are offered to school students, more courses are requiring work placement hours and/or work hours. The focus on trade training centres, as was opened at Tamworth High School in 2012, have added a layer of complexity to time and resource management for students taking a combination of VET and mainstream courses.

The New South Wales response to the Federal policy of *Learn or Earn* has also changed the face of Stage 6 in schools (NSWDEC, 2012). How much this change will impact on schools is still not fully known as the first cohort of students for whom this policy applies, is currently in Year 12. Anecdotally, the change has placed different tensions upon the Year 11 curriculum, upon teachers as they strive to manage the paperwork associated with students not personally committed to being at school and upon students who are compelled to be at school when they do not want to be there. This is also impacting upon parents who are trying to support these young people and meet the legal requirements of compulsory education until the age of 17. What role home-school-student partnerships can play in supporting learning experiences and ensuring that these are worthwhile experiences remains to be seen. It is a growing concern which will need to be a priority area of focus for this innovation as it moves beyond 2012.



2.1.2. Partnership between Home and School

Over the course of a year most children will spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school. These hours are obviously significant in their impact upon the development of the child (PBIS, 2009). If the child is to be given the best possible opportunity for positive life outcomes then teachers, families and communities need to work in genuine partnership. This has not changed over the evolution of this innovation.

The work of Joyce Epstein, an American researcher whose work is the cornerstone of international research on Home-School partnerships, continues to underpin international research on the home-school partnership. Her work is the foundation of the PBIS Family Systems¹. Her 2010 Guidelines for building partnerships reiterates her previous work in its assertion that “The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families” (Epstein, 2010:81). Within the Australian context, Epstein’s work continues to form the framework for the home-school partnership (Daniel, 2011). However, this framework provides a basic structure and does not fully address the needs of those who are not from the dominant sociocultural group. The home-school partnership cannot be reserved for those with the social and cultural capital to be at ease in the school setting (Daniel, 2011). It also cannot be limited to the partnership between the home of primary school students and school. This partnership is a K -12 (or a Foundation -12) relationship that needs work and support (Sanchez, 2010).

Daniel (2011) acknowledges that the value of the home-school partnership in supporting student achievement and engagement is widely recognised. He adds the

¹ See Book 1 Section 5.2.3 of the 2012 Literature Review



theoretical foundations of this partnership remain underdeveloped and incomplete. This has been, and remains, a challenge for this innovation as the purpose of the innovation was to undertake a practical response to the theoretic framework. To date, that response has been based upon the developer being a bicolour of theory. There is no one research foundation for developing this specific partnership. Subsequently, the innovation has been a result of patching together elements of best practice and theory with experience and evidence from the current project.

Of particular note in the recent work of Daniel (2011) is the semantic shift from *home* to *family*, in the discussion of the partnership between the child's school world and their out of school world. It is in the connotation of these terms that a particularly powerful point is being made about equity and cultural awareness. In generally accepted school terminology, the home and the family are synonyms. However, in the diverse communities served by the Department of Education and Communities, *family* extends to those people with vested interest in the child and their future. This may include grandparents, aunt and uncles, other members of the extended family as well as those significant adults who influence and contribute to a child's life experience.

Mills and Ballantyne (2008) draw attention to the challenge posed by the majority of Australian teachers coming from Anglo-Australian middle class backgrounds when developing relationships with the home world of the student. This is a substantiation of the issues raised in the initial literature review and underpins the continuation of careful and courteous efforts to ensure that all students are able to access and utilize some support from their home world. Current research papers also continue to



advocate for explicit teacher training in understanding the home-school partnership and instilling a genuine respect for diversity in all teachers (Daniel, 2011; Elias, Bryan, Patrikakou, & Weissberg, 2003).

Research from *The Harvard Family Research Project* (Patrikakou, 2004) reinforces the fundamental role parents have in a young person's education. This project challenged why there was decline in parent involvement as a young person moves to the later years of school when these are such critical and demanding times in a young person's life. The paradox of need increasing yet participation decreasing is attributed to many factors. This is primarily because of the increasing complexity of structure of high schools, the demanding curricular, which may be daunting for parents, and the lack of outreach programs in the later years of school. The situation documented in the Harwood Project is similar in New South Wales schools where the later years are crucial and the involvement of the family declines.

This begs the common questions however, 'Are they not old enough to do it on their own?' and 'Why do young people who can drive a car need their parents involved in their education?' The response is simple. The vast majority of young people live in a home with some form of family. These people influence the learning experience for the young people, particularly given the assessment, homework and study expectations of the HSC. Thus, families and students, who are informed, communicative and valued participants in the learning partnership, can only add value to the final stage of school education.



Parkard and Babineau (2008) reinforce the importance of the relationships which form the context of the student's life experience. They revisit the importance of understanding the whole child and the role of the family in defining the child's context. They also reiterate the importance of the balance that parents need to attain between the provision of space to learn to become autonomous and the maintenance of a strong sense of belonging in the family. Their work contends that in the increasingly complex world of today's adolescent, young people need to know that they are connected to their family and to a significant adult in their learning environment. These people make an important contribution to the identity formation of the young person and their ability to connect with their learning. This research continues to validate the efforts involved in establishing effective home-school-student partnerships in the final two years of school.

2.1.3. Issues with Parental Involvement

In the initial Literature Review the work of Helme, Poslesel, Teese, Nicholas, & Walstab (2005) provided insight into the challenges of ongoing education for young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. This research illuminated the wide difference between the beliefs of the teaching community about parental involvement and the actual perceptions of the families. This area has been highlighted throughout the process of the innovation as one of greater concern than I had originally perceived. Having grown up going to school in a low SES community and always taught in low SES communities, I was relatively unaware that there was a perception that the parents who did not 'show up' did not care about their child's education.



Having heard snippets of comments that alluded to this belief I have pursued, what transpired to be, the limited research on this perception.

The 2004 work by Gale and Mills from Monash University also explored this perception. Their research concluded that there is a deficit discourse around the lack of parental involvement of parents from different backgrounds held by some members the teaching profession. They suggest that there are barriers created unintentionally between parent and school through language, expectation and situation. There is also the impact of the small 'band of parents' who do have the cultural capital to participate in the school environment with confidence who, unwittingly reinforce the lack of connectedness. This research again reinforced that comment made by some of the parents in the Focus Groups, 'I didn't do well at school so I won't be able to help'. This perception is exacerbated by negative school experiences, often in the same school environment as their child.

Parental involvement in the education of their child is fraught with challenges and barriers. These barriers need acknowledgment and suitable training for teachers and school staff as to how to overcome these barriers needs to be provided. Prior to this research I was naive as to the extent of the barriers parents encountered between their desire to support their child and the skills and opportunities to do so. My research into the facilitation of the home-school-student partnership has illuminated a range of barriers. Similarly, the 2011 New Zealand research by Hornby and Lafaele identified as barriers for parents in being involved in the school. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) pose a four quadrant model that conceptualises the barriers which need consideration when developing effective family-school-student partnerships.



Individual parent and family factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents' beliefs about parental involvement• Perceptions of invitations for parental involvement• Current life contexts• Class, ethnicity and gender	Child factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age• Learning difficulties and disabilities• Gifts and talents• Behavioural problems
Parent- Teacher factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Differing goals and agendas• Differing attitudes• Differing language used	Societal factors <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historical and demographic• Political• Economic

This research substantiates the need to develop increase in the understanding of the stakeholders in the partnership around how others see the school environment, their role within the educational process and their perspectives upon the contribution they can make. School personnel are encouraged to seek genuine partnership rather than tokenistic statements of intent rather than action. In order to do this, innovative approaches need to be sought in how to reach families to make genuine invitations to participate in genuine partnerships.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) continue to support the need for partnerships throughout the school experience of each student. They acknowledge the relative ease of partnership in the early years of school and the demise of the partnership as students grow older. This research suggests that the perception that late adolescents do not want parental involvement is erroneous, a suggestion substantiated by the students who responded to the evaluation evidence collected in this innovation. This report, from an educational environment and cultural environment relatively similar to



the Australian educational environment and culture, reinforces the importance of the partnership and the need for explicit training in the establishment of that partnership. It also substantiates the importance of engaging in 'courteous translation' of the language of the school environment ensuring that parents and community members feel respected and valued within the home-school- student partnership. A 'courteous translation' is a phrase employed by Associate Professor Tom Maxwell when discussing the early stages of the development of this innovation. This approach challenges the speaker to use jargon free language, respectfully explaining ideas without a tone of superiority or condescension. It demands an awareness of context and audience in order to attain the purpose of building a genuine partnership.

Herein lies an avenue for teacher training and development and for explicit consideration of all parents when developing home-school-student partnerships in Stage 6. How can all parents feel empowered and welcomed in the school environment and how can we facilitate that at the point when the students are being educated at a level at which their parents were not? This challenge will be part of the ongoing development of this innovation.

The initial Literature Review noted that fathers were a hard to reach demographic. Fathers were mentioned within a list of groups which were hard to reach for the development of the home-school partnership. At the time of that review focus was placed upon investigating other groups mentioned, particularly those who had limited educational experience themselves. Over the course of the project it has become very clear that Bruan's 1997 inclusion of fathers in this list was of significance (Braun, 1997).



The importance of fathers in the education of the children has been drawing increasing attention in the United States as well as Australia. The role of fathers has undoubtedly changed over the last two generations as the role of mother has changed and the dual income family has become the norm. In 2000 The US Secretary of Education, R.W. Riley and the U.S Secretary of Health and Human Services D.E Shalala, commissioned an extensive report into the role of fathers in the education of children. The report found that “fathers, no matter what their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children’s education” (Riley & Shalala, 2000:1).

Reflecting upon research that says that fathers are a hard to reach demographic and research that says that their role can be critical indicates that more needs to be done to ensure that fathers or significant males have the knowledge of their importance; their value, in the home-school-student partnership and have the opportunity to genuinely participate in this partnership. The research has been validated by the observations made in this project. This project did not seek to delineate by gender the role of parent in the home-school-student partnership. However, it was obvious when the Focus Groups were sought that those invited to participate by the facilitators of each group were, with one exception, female parents. As the workshops have rolled out across the state, the vast majority of SSPs were female parents. This group was followed by dual parent attendance and finally by male parents only. This is only observational and anecdotal evidence as gender was not a question on any evidence collection tool. It does however, raise questions for further investigation.



2.1.4. Adolescent Development and Connectedness

McGraw, Moore, Fuller and Bates (2008) undertook research into the importance of connectedness in the final year of secondary school. Whilst they relied heavily upon established data, stemming back to the early 1980's to substantiate the need for their research; their current work reiterates the stressfulness of this time of life and the need to ensure that there are protective factors in place around the young person. They assert that connectedness to family, peers and school is one of the strongest mitigating factors against high risk behaviours, against disengagement and depression. They state that, "Of particular significance is family connectedness." (McGraw, Moore, Fuller, & Bates, 2008:27) The home-school- student partnership facilitated through *Senior Success* and the associated resources explicitly supports and develops this connectedness.

The research findings from McGraw et.al also contend that the provision of a caring and positive teacher-student relationship when a parent partnership is not possible can also provide the connectedness a young person needs to establish the necessary protective factors around them. This substantiates the decision in *Senior Success* to develop a Study Support Person role in the partnership arrangement in order to ensure that no young person is denied the opportunity to have supportive and protective scaffolds during Stage 6.

McGrath et al's research was concluded with a statement that summarised the intent of this innovation and substantiated the ongoing commitment to be proactive in providing a strong home-school-student partnership in Stage 6. They point out that,



Although challenges to young people's wellbeing can occur at any point in the life cycle, there are specific points in the school years when these challenges are at their highest. Because these stages are predictable, such as the final year of secondary school, it is important that schools develop prevention programs at these levels (Fuller et al., 1999). Prevention efforts that are offered early before the clinical need is apparent or before symptoms have become severe, have the potential to reach a much larger target group. An alternative is to provide prevention efforts at times of greatest stress, for example, during Year 12 exams. If the source of the stress cannot be modified in any direct way an alternative may be to increase support networks through greater connectedness within the social domains of the young person.

(McGraw, et al., 2008)



2.2. New Contributions to the Research

2.2.1. Family Partnerships in Positive Behaviour for Learning Schools

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)² is a school wide approach to attaining maximum achievement for students in both academic and social outcomes. Many of the schools who are drawn to *Senior Success* as a suitable program for their school community are also PBL schools. PBL has a slow process of implementation. It begins with school-wide systems for organisation, moves to Non-classroom Setting Systems, then Classroom Setting Systems, onto systems for individual students and finally to Family and Community Setting Systems. The implementation in the New England Region of DEC schools was, in 2012, moving into classroom systems. The development of Family and Community Systems is being trialled in some Western Sydney schools in the primary school environment.

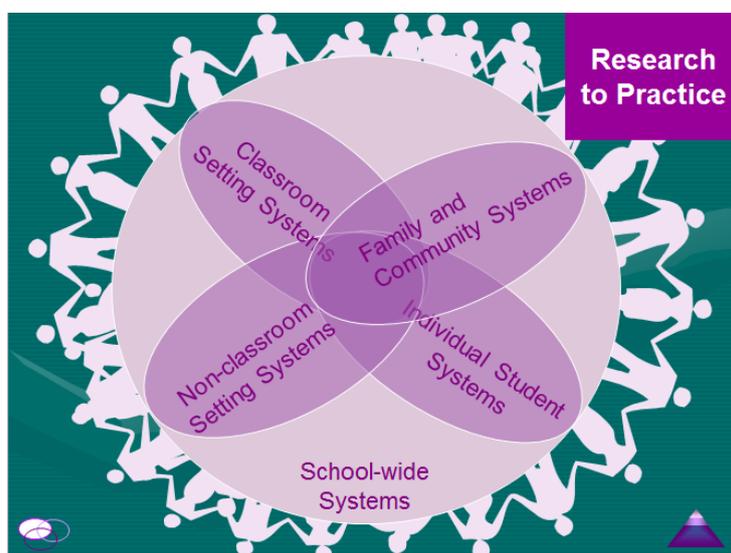


Figure 5: Structure of PBL Systems

² PBL is the title used in the New England Region for the implementation of PBIS systems and practices. See <http://www.pbis.org/> for further information.



Investigating the international implementation of Family and Community Systems it is evident that the work of Joyce Epstein, which has been influential in this innovation, is pivotal to the effective Family and Community System implementation of PBL. The training manual for the Illinois PBIS Network 2008-2009 illustrates the training for school teams and then family and community teams in PBIS (PBIS, 2009). The focus remains very heavily upon supporting the role of the home-school partnership as a scaffold for younger children. This poses the challenge of how will schools ensure that this system works effectively for all students, including the ‘almost adult’ Stage 6 students and how will students in the latter years find their place in this partnership? As family and community systems evolve in the New England Region there will need to be analysis of how this innovation works within that framework and what contributions the learning from this innovation can make to the effective implementation of Family and Community systems in PBL schools.

2.3. Doorways to Future Research

2.3.1. Mindfulness and Resilience Education

The stress of the HSC and the associated challenges of the conclusion of school and the facing of an uncertain future continue to draw the attention of researchers and commentators (McGraw, et al., 2008; Parker, 2010; J. A. Robinson, et al., 2009). That there are concerns does not seem to be a matter of question. The direction for the future is to ascertain what can be done in a proactive manner to mitigate the impact of the normative stressors of the HSC and the conclusion of school.



Initial work is being done around the effectiveness of explicitly teaching mindfulness to young people so that they can employ its strategies as they approach times of greater stress. I have been attracted to this concept after recent contact by an ex-student talking about the impact of being taught to employ relaxation and visualisation techniques in my class as a student. It has been my practice to use relaxation techniques to support creative writing and drama lessons. I had not extrapolated from this practice to HSC classes and their stress management. I have also been reading about anxiety and the use of mindfulness as a treatment as high anxiety and depression are ongoing concerns when working with adolescents. The integrating proactive teaching of mindfulness has potential in supporting the home-school-student partnership, possibly for the benefit of all concerned.

The work of Sherretz (2011) and Sears, Kraus, Carlough and Treat (2011) both advocate the explicit teaching of mindfulness strategies to young people prior to the onset of situations when there can be an anticipated increase in stress and anxiety causing events. There would need to be planning as to the point at which mindfulness training would be useful and beneficial for the cohort of students. As this training is “simple but not easy” (Sears, et al., 2011:167) students and their support network would need to have the skills mastered prior to the point of need, but at the same time the skill development would need to be recognised as useful by the students and their families. Mindfulness can be used to develop skills in developing resilience and the ability to maintain the endurance to commit to the demands of Stage 6. This is an area needing much more investigation.



The explicit teaching of resilience in the school setting is a focus of a current joint project between the Department of Education and Communities and Hunter-New England Health. This project is entitled *Healthy Schools-Healthy Futures*. The project has a focus upon the partnership between home-school and community. I am working with the local project officer to investigate how the research from this project can inform the partnership in Stage 6 as well how explicit resilience skills teaching can support Stage 6 students. This project aims at building the capacity of young people to be resilient in the face of disappointment and challenges. It will be an interesting future direction embedding this research into *Senior Success. Healthy Schools- Healthy Futures* is also indicative of the dynamic nature of the educational environment.

As clearly stated above the concerns about students in the HSC year is drawing attention from many quarters. Hegarty and Currie (2012) have undertaken research into the impact of an explicit exercise program for girls in Year 12, seeking to ascertain if such programs can mitigate negative well-being impacts. Their findings were positive in that the students reported that the program had supported them engaging in positive connections and stress management strategies. However, as stated in their conclusion, the program had a limited scope due to the high SES demographic, the small number of participants and the limitation of the ethics approval limiting access to students after Term 2. Despite these limitations such research indicates that there are more avenues to pursue and challenges to overcome when trying to support effective learning and well-being during the HSC and preliminary years.



2.3.2. Part- time work and the Stage 6 experience

'I really want to come to *Senior Success* but I have to work' is an increasingly common comment from students, one that I thought was just an excuse until I began to investigate how many hours students were working and on what days they were working. Of even more interest was at what time of day and night were the students working and then how did they get home. The information from this straw poll of my current students illuminated long hours, random days, changing rosters, management responsibilities, opening and closing responsibilities and walking home after late night shifts. This poses the immediate question of what impact does this have on educational outcomes; however, it also poses questions around the impact that this has on the home-school-student partnership. Young people tend to work the shifts that their parents do not work. What is the impact of this upon relationships, connectedness, and even basic conversation? Australian retail, fast food and hospitality, traditionally high employers of young, part-time staff, operate 24 hours a day and 7 days per week. What is the impact of this upon learning, upon relationships and upon well-being?

Robinson (1999) undertook research into the effects of part-time work on school students. The outcomes of her work indicated that this is a very limited area of research and that there remains a great many questions around what is and what is not a positive experience for young people. She suggests that 1 in 10 students have to work as a financial imperative. These students have to work and will take whatever opportunity they can get to maximise their incomes. She also poses a figure of 10 plus hours per week as a limit to the number of hours of work that can be accommodated before negative impacts occur on learning. However, of note is that



1999 is prior to the introduction of the 2000 HSC in New South Wales which has changed the demands of HSC study quite significantly.

A decade later the Queensland work of Patton and Smith (Smith & Patton, 2009) still acknowledges that there is no consensus on the impact upon learning outcomes of working part-time. This research states that in 2004 79% of 15 to 19 year olds studying full time were working part-time. What impact this has is very dependent upon the individual young person. Young people can gain a great deal from working part-time; independence; team skills; time management; communication skills; confidence; work skills and access to adult role models and mentors. It can also be costly on time available to commit to assessment tasks and to study, tiredness, lack of time for exercise and leisure. The research into this aspect of adolescent lives is challenging because of the multifaceted influences upon achievement. Students who are inclined towards high academic results are more likely to prioritise study over work hours, thus giving a statistical result of less work hours equals higher academic outcomes. Is this accurate? Is there an optimum number of hours to work part-time? What impact does this part-time work have on academic outcomes? What impact does it have on the home-school-partnership? This is an avenue for further investigation and for inclusion in the training of teachers in home-school-student Stage 6 partnerships and in the dialogue of *Senior Success*.

2.3.3. Technology and its impacts upon Stage 6 and the home-school-student partnership

The changes in technology since this program was first initialled have been beyond the imaginings of the students and families who first participated in *Senior Success*.



Whilst the first group were students with no recollection of life before computers were in the home, they did not have Facebook, did not have Digital Education Revolution computers, did not have smartphones and did not have iPads. In this very short space of time technology has experienced rapid change and this has placed different pressures on the home-school-student partnership.

There is a burgeoning area of research around the use of the new technologies in education and for learning (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Woodley & Meredith, 2012). There is also a rising area of interest and of concern around the negative impacts of social media on the lives of young people (Stephen, 2011; Walker, Sanci, & Temple-Smith, 2011). There is an increasing interest in how the new technology impact upon the thinking and the world view of the 'digital natives' who are today's students. The fundamental concern in this context is *How does the new technology impact upon the relationship between the student, their home and their school?*

There is research concerning the risks of the new technologies (Stephen, 2011) and the important role that parents have in monitoring and guiding young people in safe use of that technology, particularly with the use of social media. This is undeniable. Young people have access to a literal 'world of information'. Not all of this information is reliable or safe. The partnership needs to work on ensuring that young people are discerning users of technology and are open in their seeking of clarification of the values and attitudes embedded in the material that they access. How do parents and teachers of 'almost adults' conduct these conversations? The available literature



focusses upon guiding children and young teens. Late teens may well need a different approach.

There are two primary areas of discussion emerging within the participants in the current *Senior Success* group. One is around the amount of time spent on social media and the impact of this upon study, well-being and relationships. The other is around the practicalities of access and provision of resources.

The obsession with being connected is of increasing interest for researchers in the areas of education, psychology and sociology. The work of Larry Rosen poses an approach to this issue focussing upon awareness and management. Banning technology is not proving effective. Rosen suggests that structured access to checking social media may be an approach that will enable students to dedicate their thinking to their learning or to the face-to-face communication with which they ought to be engaged. Such an approach merits consideration and a trial. He also advocates open discussion and the value of 'digital immigrants'; parents and most of the teaching profession, engaging in the use of the technologies popular with young people in order to facilitate the discussion (Peterson, 1992; Rosen, 2012).

Facilitating this conversation is a challenge as it is like discussing a fast flowing river. The moment a discussion is held, agreement reached and the behaviours practised, the situation changes. This was evidenced in many participants' experience with *Facebook* behaviour. Expectations were set, behaviours monitored and consequences learnt. A sigh of relief was breathed and then the landscape changed



and *Instagram* and *Tumblr* introduced another range of issues. Addressing this situation is an important future direction for this innovation.

Tentative steps a being taken at the present time with investigation into the use of a metacognition tool entitled *The O.K Line*. This work is based upon a combination of the tried and true *STOP THINK DO* program (Peterson, 1992) and a web-based program, *The Thin Line*. The Thin Line web-site is American based with distinctly American language, however, the approach to discussion is proving successful in initial trials with students, teachers and parents. The premise is that rather than setting expectations around specifics, that the partnership works on scaffolding an approach to decision making that supports young people in making effective and wise choices around their use of technology (MTV, 2012).



Figure 6 : The Thin Line approach

This approach also allows for the parent, teacher, employer to have a different level of acceptance of a behaviour and for compromise to be discussed or for the young person to have an answer for their inevitable ‘why?’ question when the person in authority says ‘unacceptable’.



Technology in the home is not standard. Each home is a different context and each home values technology differently. Some homes will have laptop per person, high speed broadband and effective printing capabilities. These homes have iPads, smart phones and a myriad of other tools. Other homes have only the DER laptop sent home with the student in Year 9 and these do not always get charged. Home computers have tended to become more of a communication tool; through Facebook, skype and other media, a management tool; through banking and bill paying and an entertainment source; through games, YouTube and downloadable entertainment. The purpose of technology in the home appears to be quite different depending upon the education and employment of the parents. This is an area needing far more analysis. At present I am taking the approach of opening the conversation about the technology use in the home using the framework below:

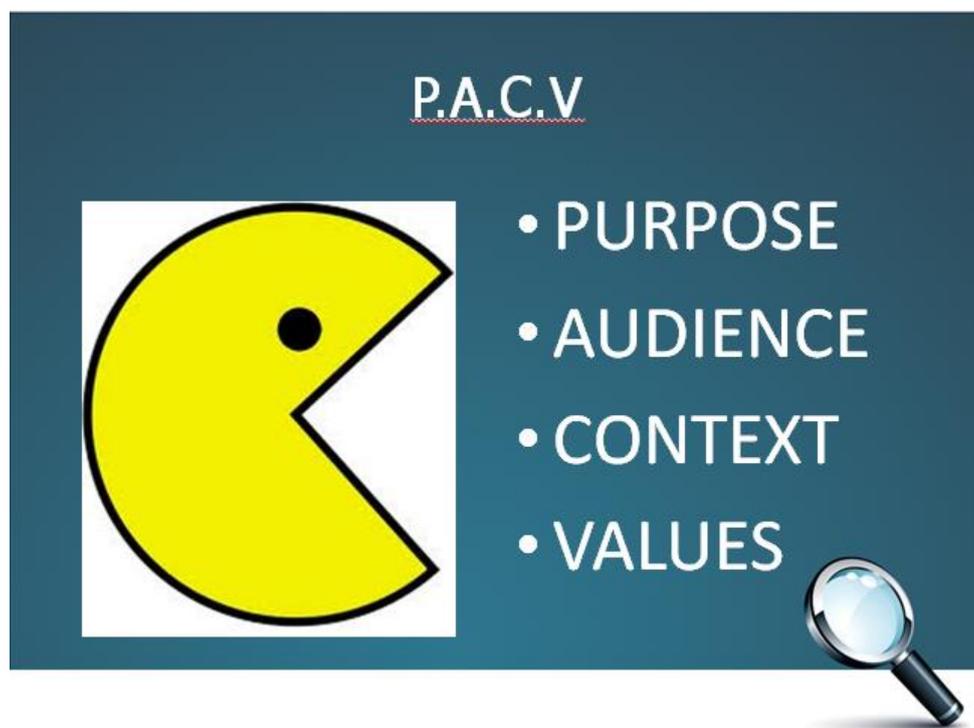


Figure 7 : Conversation Guide for Technology Use

During these conversations there is a chasm of difference emerging between the school and student side of the partnership and the home side. Questions have been



asked as to why students need Microsoft Word on their computer, do they really need the internet at home and how much time should the students be on the computer? For the teachers and the students these were not questions needing asking, they were *everyone knows that* questions. Additionally, conversations with students trying to use social media and other tools for learning activities have indicated that the removal of technology is still seen as a 'punishment' option for some parents. 'You are banned from the computer for a week' may have been a good option in the past, but not when an assessment task is due that requires internet research, an Edmodo link and word processing for the presentation. Initiating discussions around this is contentious and may appear that the teacher is trying to dominate the partnership. It is another area for more investigation.

These conversations point to the need not to make assumptions and to ensuring that people are respectfully supported in asking their questions. Use of technology and its potential for conflict is an area that will need ongoing monitoring with this approach to Stage 6 support.

Interest in the impact of technology upon the home-school partnership was significant enough for it to be included in the New England Region's 2012 iTec Conference. I was invited to speak on this issue at the conference. The workshop was attended by 33 participants. See Appendix 3.1 for the presentation from this conference.



2.3.4. The Impact of the Australian Curriculum on Stage 6 and the home-school-student partnership

The Australian Curriculum is currently moving towards its implementation in all Australian schools. The statement below is the official statement at the opening of the web bases information on the Australian Curriculum.

The development of the Australian Curriculum is guided by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, adopted by the council of state and territory education ministers in December 2008. The Melbourne Declaration emphasises the importance of knowledge, understanding and skills of learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities as the basis for a curriculum designed to support 21st century learning.

The Australian Curriculum describes a learning entitlement for each Australian student that provides a foundation for successful, lifelong learning and participation in the Australian community. It acknowledges that the needs and interests of students will vary, and that schools and teachers will plan from the curriculum in ways that respond to those needs and interests. The Australian Curriculum acknowledges the changing ways in which young people will learn and the challenges that will continue to shape their learning in the future.

The Australian Curriculum will eventually be developed for all learning areas and subjects set out in the Melbourne Declaration: initially for English, mathematics, science and history; followed by geography, languages, the arts, economics, business, civics and citizenship, health and physical education, and information and communication technology and design and technology.

The Australian Curriculum sets out what all young people should be taught through the specification of curriculum content and the learning expected at points in their schooling through the specification of achievement standards.

(ACARA, 2012)

The impact of this change in curriculum will not be known for some time. I hypothesize that the changes will lead to more national need for programs such as *Senior Success*. This will demand a wider consideration of the diverse contexts of Australian school communities and how to facilitate effective partnerships in these



communities. The strength of *Senior Success* as a program is that it can be adapted to meet the needs of different schools and different contexts. For this reason it will be imperative to maintain simplicity in the design of the workshops so that any facilitator can work with the framework. The use of web-based information will also be significant if the Stage 6 partnership concepts are to spread.

2.3.5. Supporting siblings during the HSC

Recent experience with the current group of *Senior Success* participants in my own school has posed a series of questions as to how to support younger siblings in understanding the new demands upon their former playmate and co-worker during family chores. This group articulated challenges around the sharing of resources, the volume of noise in the house, the demands of time on the Stage 6 student and the presence of mess, also known as, art assessment tasks, English representation tasks and various other space consuming activities. These questions and concerns are indicative of the dynamic nature of this innovation. I have embarked upon a brief initial search for a research framework for this aspect of the home-school-student partnership. Again, the answers are not readily accessible and a collection of information will need to ensue.

The Illinois PBIS training briefly alludes to supporting younger siblings when the older child moves into the school environment. There are also numerous websites with advice as to how to assist siblings when the older child leaves for college (primarily American sites). These two sources of information advocate open discussion and planning. This supports the premise of proactive communication which is fundamental for the Stage 6 partnership as developed in this project.



2.4. Conclusion

This innovation has been based on the need to respond to a situation whilst wading through the 'swamp' of daily professional practice (Schon, 1995). It has also been undertaken upon a patchwork of research, informing the multifaceted nature of the Stage 6 experience. Fundamental to the innovation had been, and continues to be the premise that the home-school-student partnership is the foundation for students to attain maximum academic and social outcomes from their last two years in the school system. It is hoped the recognition of the need for more research into this partnership in all school communities will build a stronger platform to work from for those who develop the practice of this partnership in the daily context of a school. The need for further research has also been substantiated by the work of Graham Daniel, an Australian researcher who is investigating the importance of explicit training for teachers in understanding the relationship between home and school.

To reiterate,

The role of family-school partnerships in facilitating children's educational engagement and achievement is now widely recognised. However, the theoretical foundations of family-school partnerships remain under-developed and research in many aspects of this field is incomplete.

(Daniel, 2011)



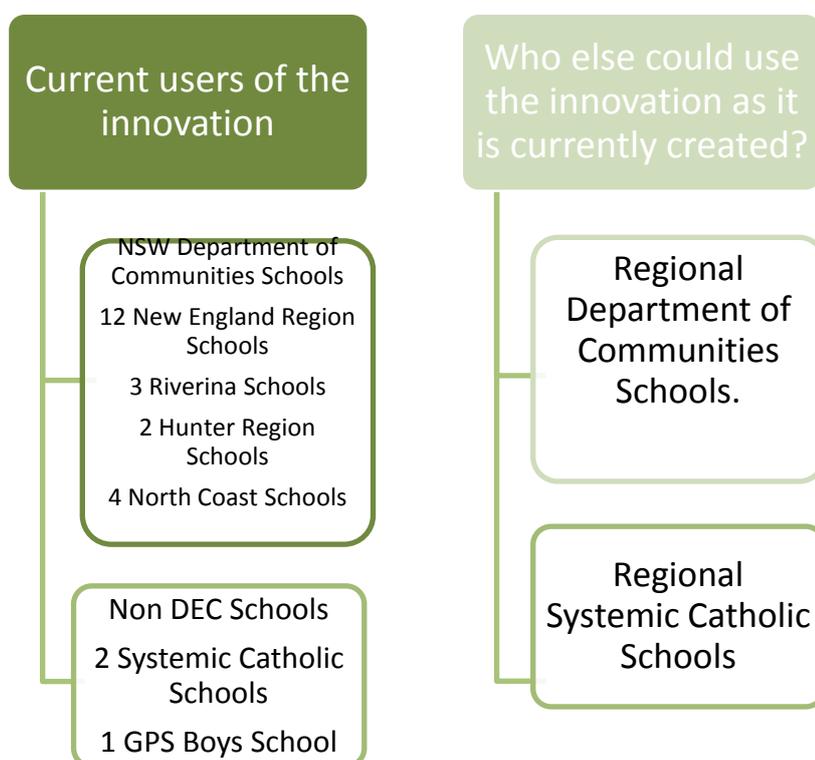
Figure 8: Participants in Senior Success 2012



2.5. Who is currently using the innovation – who could use the innovation in the future?

The innovation is currently being used in a broader range of contexts than it was originally intended to suit. Each context adapts the program *Senior Success*. The other elements of the innovation are also context specific. The framework of the innovation has potential in a wide variety of school contexts. The philosophy and commitment to home-school partnership is also transferable. The potential for the future is limited only by the availability of time and commitment in schools.

There has been interest in the program being developed further for parents and their young person to work through independently of the school. This direction has potential as far as the parent-student partnership is concerned. However, this is only one side of the partnership triangle and my professional focus is on the development and sustaining of the three elements of the home-student-school partnership.





2.6. What the innovation means for

2.6.1. The candidate

This innovation has challenged me to take what I have learnt, almost by osmosis, over 25 years of experience and seek to validate that knowledge with the rigorous experience of development research. I have taken a simple response to the needs of my immediate context and formulated an approach to ensuring that something I believe in has both a reality and rationality. The project has offered me opportunities to work with families, students and teachers towards better learning outcomes for all.

2.6.2. Wider society

The innovations of a package of resources to support the learning partnership between home and school have the potential for wide ranging social impacts. Students who feel connected at home and at school are surrounded by protective factors which mitigate at risk behaviours (Young, 2005). Students who feel cared for and cared about have the skills to learn to care for others (Noddings, 1995). If naught else is achieved than the development of these two areas, then the project has impacted upon life trajectories of participants.

The application of the skills and behaviours which are taught through the project underpin lifelong learning, for the students, their families and their SSPs. Passing comments from SSPs who are also studying acknowledging the use of the skills and behaviours, minutes, even hours saved, because materials are available and organised, students who know how to study and families who have strategies to use



to communicate all contribute to social well-being and the development of positive learning cycles within the home.

The 'butterfly effect' of this project is not measurable, just as the 'butterfly effect' of many of our educational practices is not measurable. However, if the project supports a student in attaining their HSC then it is contributing to their life-long earning capacity and the contribution that they can make to society. This assertion is supported by analysis of Bureau Of Statistics data.

According to a 2010 report from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), more than one million people, or 78 percent of those in the 20-24 age group, had completed their education through Year 12. Because Year 12 completion contributes to a stronger economy powered by better educated workers, the Australian government has set a goal, through its National Education Agreement of 2009, to increase the percentage of Year 12 achievement among the 20-24 age group to 90% by the year 2015. (1)

Once a student has attained a Year 12 certificate, that individual is more likely to pursue higher education, either at university or in a vocational training program, than non-Year 12 students. As of 2010, the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) reports that three-quarters of those students who achieved a Bachelor degree found full-time jobs within a few months of graduation. (2)

Those Australians who hold higher education degrees enjoy a far lower unemployment rate than general labourers. Additionally, those with higher education certificates can expect to earn higher incomes than those who left school at Year 12 or earlier.

(Petrovic, 2011: online)

2.7. Implications of the innovation for the future

The need to support the learning partnership between home, school and student during Stage 6 will continue to be an ongoing responsibility of all of those involved in



Stage 6 learning. *Senior Success* and the associated resources are one set of means to meet this responsibility. The total innovation depends entirely upon the ability for a member of staff to commit to 'doing something' about the paradox of the challenges of Stage 6 being ephemeral and at the same time ongoing. This level of dedication from a senior teacher amidst the ever increasing demands of the profession is a challenge to find. This situation is non-sectorial, however, the only person ever to comment that they would not be able to get someone to run this without additional remuneration was from a non-government school.

2.8. How to manage the innovation into the future & why

There is a need to seek ways of welcoming and supporting those who find their relationship with school challenging. This becomes increasingly important as the groups of students with the 17 years *Learn or Earn* policy. The expectations of Stage 6 remain high and the families of these students have a need to understand expectations as Centrelink payments are attached to attendance and the meeting of requirements of school. In order to address the needs of this group, it will be necessary to seek even more avenues of communication with the students' homes to ensure that the invitation to attend *Senior Success* reaches them.

3. Conclusion

The home-school partnership is the foundation for a successful educational experience. The development of strategies to facilitate this partnership is an ongoing responsibility of all educators.



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