

Strengthening Connectedness with Families



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- **Strong family-education-community partnerships are central to successful developmental and learning outcomes for children.**
- **Partnerships are essential to engaging families in their children's early learning and later schooling.**



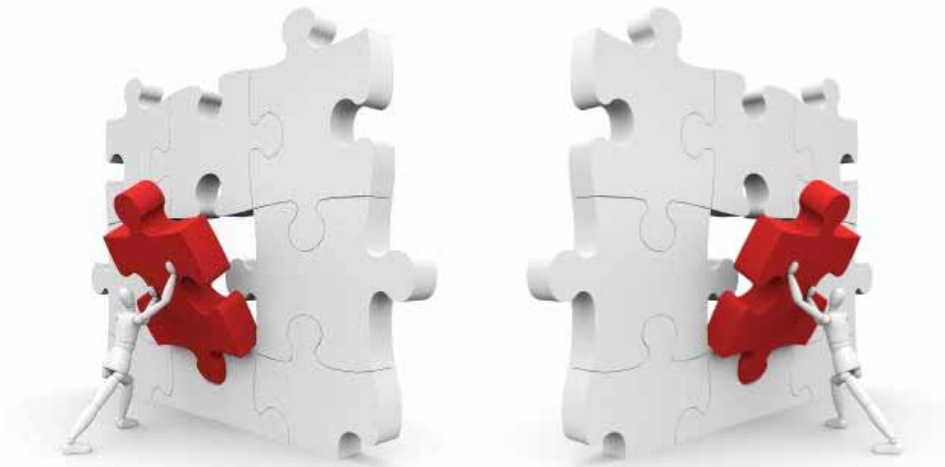
- **This presentation highlights ‘what works’ in connecting with families, especially those families with limited economic resources.**
- **It focuses on tried and true strategies drawn from research that help us better connect with children’s families and their worlds in order to strengthen learning outcomes**



Building connectedness is not easy.

While many initiatives are linked to positive outcomes in the short term, no one activity is successful.

Rather, overlapping strategies built up and infused over longer periods are most





Why connectedness?

To improve outcomes.

Connected families are learning families

To close the ‘achievement gap’- children in disconnected families have poorer educational achievement.

Linked to demography – particularly socio-economic status- and to geo-location.

Children in economically disadvantaged communities or remote communities have poorer academic achievement than those in urban communities.



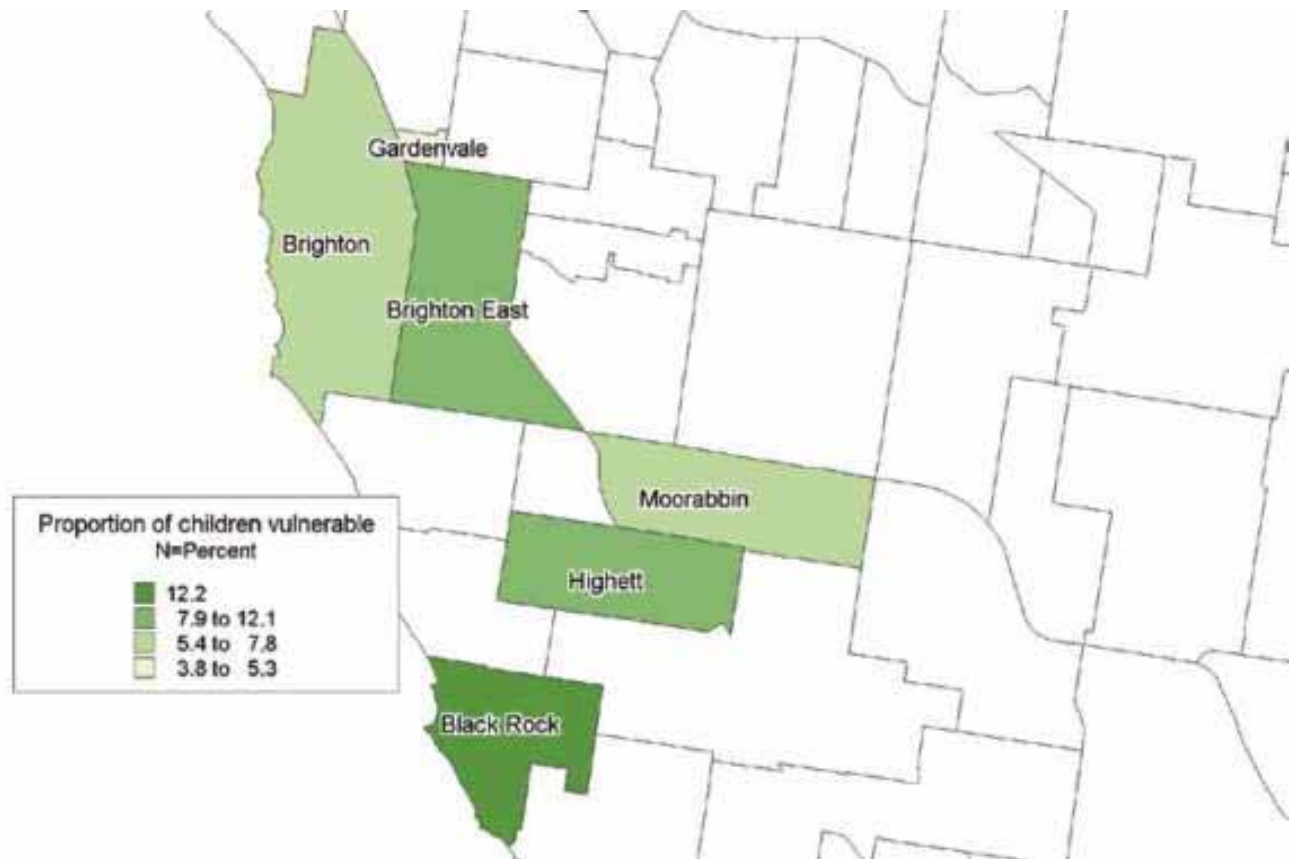


Figure 1

Proportion of children rated vulnerable by suburb in Melbourne

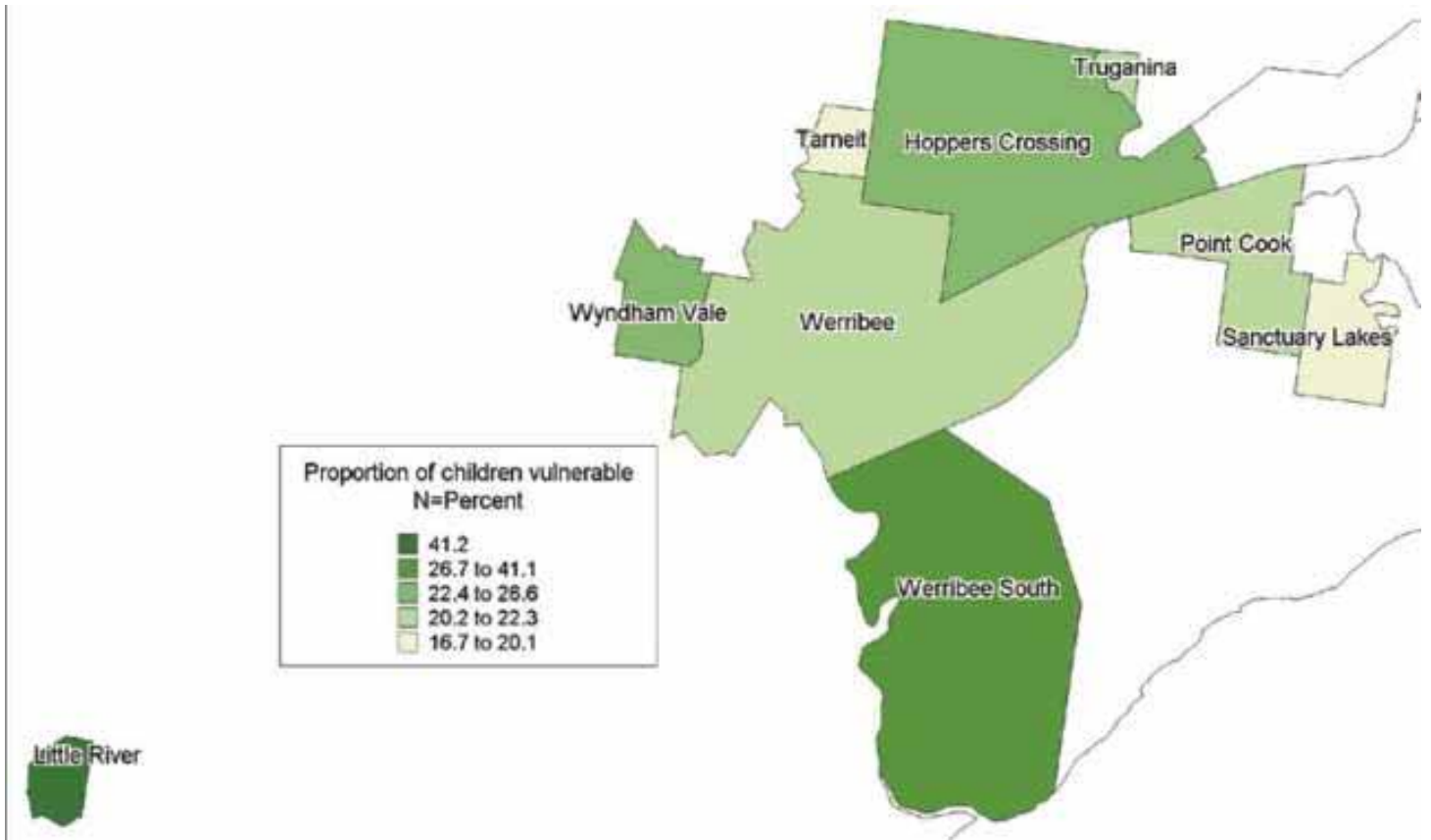
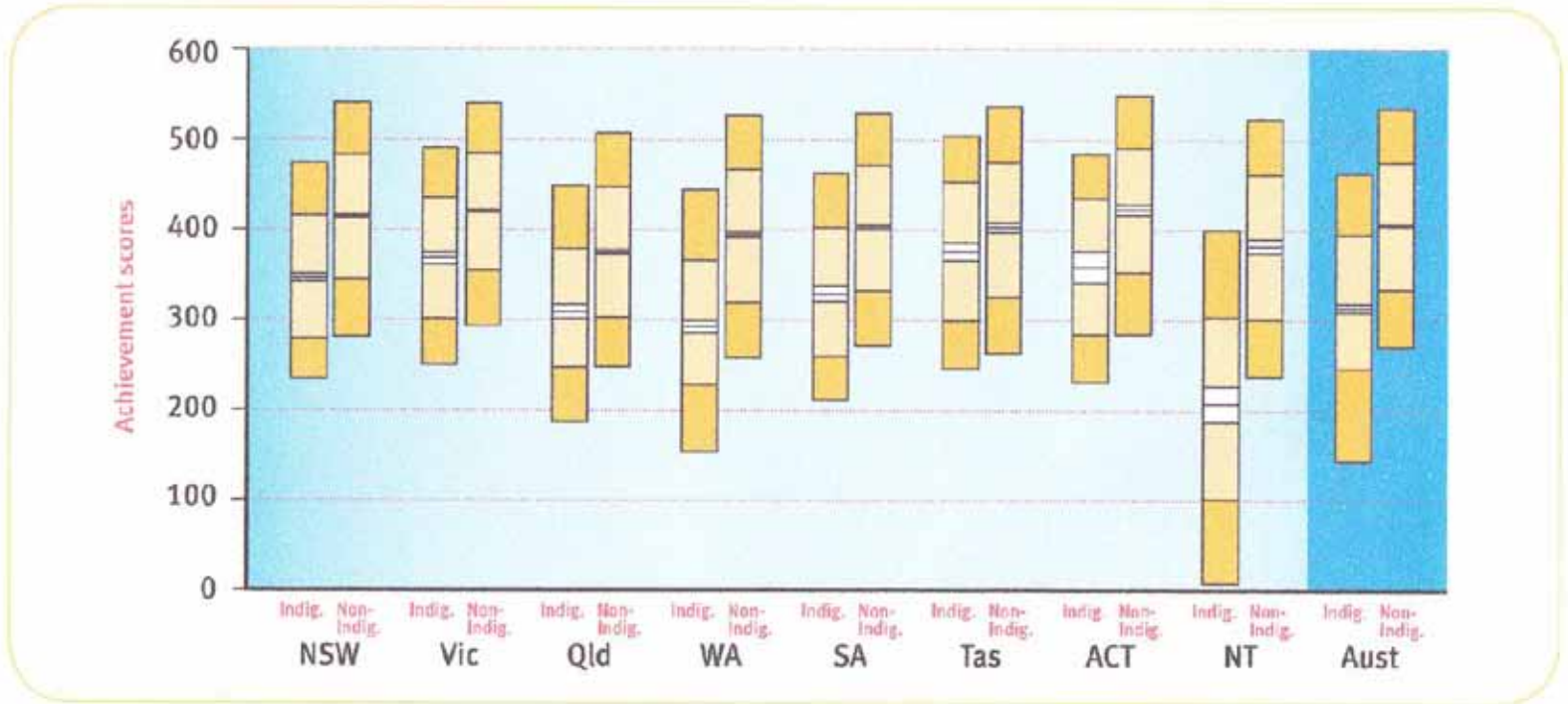
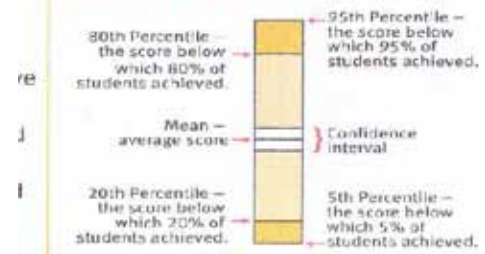


Figure 2
Proportion of children rated vulnerable by suburb in Melbourne

Figure 3.R3: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Reading, by Indigenous status, by State and Territory, 2008.



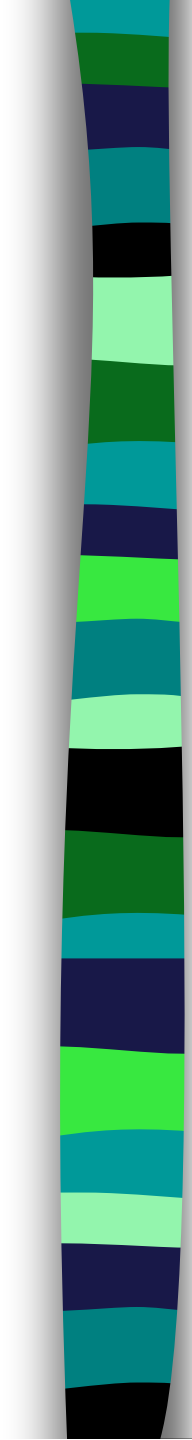
Reading the graph



Each State's/Territory's results are represented in vertical columns with various colours. On the bottom of the column is the 5th percentile - this is the score below which 5 per cent of students have achieved. The next line above this indicates the 20th percentile. The next line above the white section is the lower limit of the confidence interval for the mean. The line in the centre of the white section is the mean. The lines above the white section indicate the 80th and 95th percentiles.

- **A key challenge for early childhood education is that children and families are involved for just a short time as children move in and out of services.**
- **There is little inherent continuity.**
- **There are new players who must understand the importance of the message.**





**The core of
connectedness-
intentional, purposeful and
meaningful relations
between children and
families and early
childhood centres &
schools and teachers.**

**Connectedness embraces a
“feeling of being in touch”
and that “we’re in this
together.”**



Connectedness means alignment and involvement with learning and with early childhood and school values and goals.



“Connectedness” is embedded in shared expectations and aspirations for schooling and lifelong education and a deep cultural affiliation with learning and education. Poor resonance between family and school, results in poor learning outcomes and likely disengagement from schooling.



Too often, parent “involvement” initiatives while well intentioned and purposeful, are superficial and contrived. They become “one off events” or “funded programs” rather than deeply embedded “processes”.



Our research showed that the key strategies to build connectedness require little in the way of extra, dedicated financial resources; rather they rely on inspirational and passionate leadership, “people skills” and teacher commitment and skill.



Intersecting dimensions of “connectedness”

- **Active, personalised communication with families**
- **Responsive, targeted curriculum and pedagogy**
- **Inspired, passionate leadership, and**
- **Explicit and reciprocal neighbourhood links and engagement**



Active, personalised communication with families

- Highly visible and accessible school staff with “open door”
- Regular communication
- Explicit and personal invitations to parents
- Parent meeting area for informal meetings and gatherings
- Refreshments (tea and coffee
- Regular social activities for families linked to learning events
- Services such as clothing and toy “swap shops”



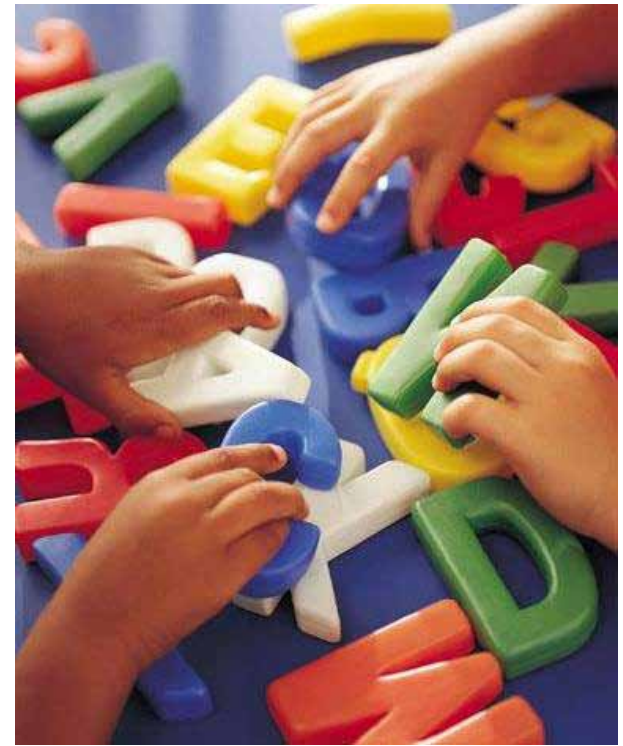
What wasn't mentioned?

What wasn't mentioned as important for engaging families was the formal newsletter, the Parent and Friends committee (or equivalent), and participation in the School Board (or equivalent).



Quality teaching. Personalising curriculum and pedagogy

- **enriching and personalising learning**
- **skilled, caring and professional teachers**
- **teacher dedication and pedagogical skill**



Inspired, passionate school leadership

- passionate, inspirational and democratic leadership
- They banded with community members and leaders and with parents.
- value respected and valued parents and other community members
- “participatory,” team-based planning and decision-making and a culture of genuine culture of care for staff, students and families, and ethical and reflective practice



Explicit and reciprocal neighbourhood links and engagement

- **effective relationships and partnerships require greater investment and effort than many schools can muster independently**
- **Working in partnership with community based organisations helps engage families and build trust. In turn, they bring their assets into schools**

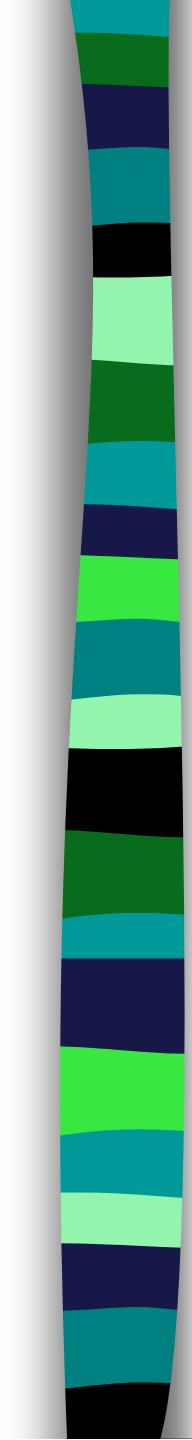


EC centres & schools must first look to their own environments and practices to build cultures of engagement and develop intentional, purposeful and integrated strategies to involve families.

No “one-size fits all”; no quick fix solution.

Building trust and engagement were local concerns to be initiated, nurtured and sustained from *within* the school.





Building trust and becoming securely connected with communities and families involved multi-pronged strategies built around *reaching out* and *working from within*.

Parents need and want a voice in issues that affect their children





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YOUR
WORLD.

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