

Engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing: Exploring sustainable models through school leadership teams EPIC 2023 Final Report



OUR SCHOOLS – OUR FUTURE
RESEARCH REPORT
December 2023

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OUR SCHOOLS – OUR FUTURE

Our Schools—Our Future is an Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) research-based initiative designed to promote informed public policy debate about schooling. Through commissioned and internal research, Our Schools—Our Future explores trends and issues in key areas which determine the nature and performance of our school education systems. While the initiative has a particular focus on the contribution of independent schools to our education provision and outcomes, it examines a range of issues and trends relevant to the development and implementation of effective public policy for schooling generally. All research reports are available to members on the ISQ website.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Linda-Dianne (Linda) Willis is Senior Research Fellow and Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University (GU). She is also a Griffith Institute for Educational Research member. Linda is Lead Chief Investigator of the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC)* research. She was awarded her PhD in parent-teacher engagement in 2013. Linda works alongside others to generate authentic student-parent-school-community partnerships to improve student learning and wellbeing, teachers' pedagogical practice, and school success.

EPIC 2023 is the third year of continuous research in Independent Schools Queensland member schools. Nationally, the Senate Committee on Education and Employment recognised EPIC in its final report into school refusal in Australia (2023), recommending that State and Territory authorities better support schools to engage parents.

Since 2016, Linda has received \$700K to conduct parent engagement research. She was awarded approximately \$300K from the Queensland Department of Education to lead longitudinal research titled, *Principal Leadership for Parent-School-Community Engagement*. This research, and Linda's leadership, were publicly recognised in 2023 by the Honourable Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, as creating valuable resources for schools and informing improvements across the education system.

Linda is a registered teacher with the Queensland College of Teachers, having extensive primary and secondary classroom experience in a career spanning three decades. Teaching in State and Independent schools, her roles included Senior Teacher, Middle School Leader, and STEM District Liaison Teacher.

Linda's university roles have included: Program Director, Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching (Primary); Senior Lecturer; and Education Lead, GU's Climate Action Beacon. Her leadership of initial teacher education programs has benefited from deep knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy. Linda has published over 120 research manuscripts, including as lead author of the international volume, *Principal Leadership for Parent Engagement in Disadvantaged Schools* (2021). Since 2014, she has advised 17 higher degree research candidates to completion.

Linda is the immediate past National Publications Director of the Australian Literacy Educators' Association. She is Honorary Senior Research Fellow at The University of Queensland and served on the Bulimba State School Council for seven years.

Professor Beryl Exley is a teaching academic with the School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University (GU), and is an active researcher with the Griffith Institute for Educational Research. Beryl is committed to the pedagogic rights of educational stakeholders, especially for students, teachers, and parents. She considers literacy to be a socio-cultural practice that provides the means of communication for learning. She thus adopts a student and community centred approach to curriculum enactment, including inquiry pedagogies. She brings to this project her expertise in English Curriculum and Literacies Education, and the use of virtual and digital technologies for social and academic interaction. Beryl is a registered with the Queensland College of Teachers, and has taught in early years and middle years classrooms in Government and Independent schools for over a decade. She was Deputy Head of the School of Education and Professional Studies at GU (2018–2022).

Beryl's PhD on theories of teachers' professional knowledge bases was awarded an Outstanding Thesis Award at the Queensland University of Technology in 2005. Since then, she has been awarded over \$1M in research funding from competitive grants. She has published over 150 research manuscripts and co-edited a collection for Routledge on *International Perspectives on Literacies, Diversities and Opportunities for Learning* (2024), and *Pedagogic Rights and Democratic Education: Bernsteinian Explorations of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment* (2015), and for Oxford University Press on *Literacies in Early Childhood: Foundations for Equity and Quality* (2020). Beryl has supervised 17 higher degree research candidates to completion.

Beryl served on the National Council of the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) from 2005–2019, with the last two years as National President. She was the Australian representative of the International Development in Oceania Committee, a standing committee of the International Literacy Association, from 2005–2017, with the last three years as International Chair. In 2019, Beryl was awarded Life Membership of ALEA, and endorsed as an ALEA Principal Fellow, in recognition of her services to the profession and professional associations.

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Foreword



Parent engagement is families and schools working together in partnership and respecting each other's unique roles in a child's education.

We know from decades of research that when schools engage parents and carers – authentically and sustainably – everybody wins.

Trust, open communication and respect between home and school also means when rocky times happen, there's a solid relationship from which to springboard.

But what is parent engagement and how do you achieve it in a busy school, when teachers are already doing so much?

Thanks to our longitudinal research project *Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC)*, culminating in this third and final report, the 'how to' of establishing effective and sustainable models of parent engagement is in view.

Eight Queensland independent schools took part in EPIC this year and what is clear from reading their detailed case studies is that while their contexts and approaches were very different, they had significant things in common:

- An understanding of the distinct difference between 'involving' parents and 'engaging' with them
- Respect for parents as a child's first educator

- Buy-in from school leader/s
- A core group of passionate change-makers in the school (comprising principals, teachers and parents) meeting regularly to trial innovative strategies and evaluate progress.

EPIC has been running in the Queensland independent sector for three years and has been a unique model of university-industry partnership. We thank our collaborators – Independent Schools Queensland and Griffith University – for their commitment and in-kind support. We also express gratitude to project leaders and report authors Dr Linda Willis and Professor Beryl Exley for their respectful research practices, evidence-based guidance for schools and decades-long commitment to this important field of study.

Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network is also grateful to receive funding through the Queensland government, a significant portion of which has been used to fund this important piece of longitudinal research.

Amanda Watt
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
PARENTS NETWORK

Family engagement is increasingly appearing in Queensland independent schools' strategic plans, and rightly so.

Parents are key stakeholders in any school and research tells us they are also critical partners when it comes to maximising students' learning and wellbeing and accelerating school performance.

The EPIC research has gone a step further and provided Queensland independent schools with evidence-based guidance in how to implement effective and sustainable practice.

Importantly, the findings from the last three years of the project aren't buried in reports; we have taken the deliberate decision to distil the research findings into easy-to-unpack resources for busy educators.

Research projects of this magnitude are only successful due to the vision and willingness of school leaders and teachers to take part and I thank the many participating ISQ member schools for their commitment and energy.

Thank you also to Dr Linda Willis, Professor Beryl Exley and QIS Parents Network for partnering with us on this valuable and significant longitudinal research project, which will benefit families and schools for years to come.

Christopher Mountford
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2023 *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research received funding from Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) and in-kind support from Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) and Griffith University.

The project was conducted by Griffith University researchers, Dr Linda-Dianne (Linda) Willis (Lead Chief Investigator) and Professor Beryl Exley (Chief Investigator). The researchers wish to acknowledge the close collaboration throughout 2023 with Ms Amanda Watt in her roles as EPIC 2023 Project Coordinator (ISQ) and Executive Officer (QIS Parents Network).

The researchers also wish to acknowledge the goodwill and generous participation and contributions to the research of the Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) which comprised principals, school leaders, teachers, and parents from eight ISQ member schools. In addition, the researchers thank the support staff of each school who assisted to coordinate meetings and professional learning days to ensure the research was conducted smoothly.

Finally, the researchers acknowledge the strength of collaboration between Griffith University and ISQ and the QIS Parents Network from 2021–2023 to produce an enviable model of longitudinal university-industry partnership.

DISCLAIMER

This research report has been prepared for ISQ and the QIS Parents Network to promote informed debate on issues in school education. The authors accept full responsibility for the views expressed herein. ISQ and QIS Parents Network do not necessarily support all of these views.

The case studies and other findings represented in the report draw on data generated by the researchers during participant interviews, masterclasses, professional learning days, conversations with principals, school leaders, teachers, and parents, and other forms of communication such as blog posts and emails about their work to engage parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing. Data were generated in good faith from the individuals and schools involved. No responsibility is accepted by ISQ and the QIS Parents Network, Griffith University, or the researchers for any errors or omissions contained in this publication. No liability will be accepted for loss or damage arising from reliance upon any information contained herein.

Executive summary

Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) 2023 research used school leadership teams to explore how a culture and practice of parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing may be established and sustained. The EPIC 2023 Final Report presents initial descriptive research findings based on data from 55 participants in eight different Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) member schools. The research was funded by Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network (QIS Parents Network) and received in-kind support from ISQ and Griffith University. The report covers the third and final year of longitudinal research (i.e., EPIC 2021–2023) which has involved 10 schools and over 90 participants (see EPIC 2022 & 2021 Final Reports; Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). The research benefits from similar investigations that have been conducted since 2008 in Catholic Education and State Schools.

Parent engagement has been a national priority for Australian governments for more than a decade. The imperative emanates from the cumulative weight of research evidence that consistently shows engaging parents and communities in children's learning and wellbeing benefits students, parents, teachers, schools, and the broader society. Yet, despite the well-documented benefits of parent and community engagement, ongoing research, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, is needed to provide educators, researchers, and public policy makers with essential knowledge and understanding to support contemporary engagement practices, initiatives, resources, and personnel.

Previous EPIC research investigated effective evidence-based pedagogical practices and school processes for engaging parents and communities by focusing on individual teachers (micro level) (EPIC 2021) and groups of teachers and school leaders (meso level) (EPIC 2022). During EPIC 2023, participating schools were invited to form Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) comprising school leaders, teachers, and at least one parent to investigate sustainable models of parent and community engagement. The use of PELTs therefore scaled up the previous two years of EPIC research to include a focus on school processes and policies (macro level).

The EPIC 2023 Final Report includes the following sections: EPIC research history which documents the projects and findings on which the current research is based; literature review highlighting the value and benefits of engaging parents and communities; impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which provides relevant point-in-time information about schools and education to frame the context in which the research was conducted; theoretical framing which details the four EPIC Pillars; and research design and methods which outlines how the research was conducted.

The contexts and settings of EPIC 2023's eight participating schools (Schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, and J)¹ differed markedly—from a small, metropolitan, multi-age school (School D) to a wholly distance education school serving families locally, nationally, and internationally (School H). To reflect this distinctiveness, the EPIC 2023 Final Report represents the journey of each school's PELT in eight separate case studies. The titles of each case study are:

Case Study 1—School A: An immersive, student-led curriculum approach to engaging parents and communities in the senior school;

Case Study 2—School C: A cogenerative dialoguing approach to engaging parents and the community in curriculum in the middle and senior years of a day and boarding school;

Case Study 3—School D: A steady, intentional approach to engaging parents and the community in the curriculum in a small, metropolitan, multi-age primary school;

Case Study 4—School E: A practical, goal-setting approach to engaging parents and the community in curriculum in a day and distance education junior, middle, and senior school;

Case Study 5—School G: Towards a generative approach in parent and community engagement in the curriculum in the middle years of a small rural school;

Case Study 6—School H: Reconceptualising parent and community engagement in the curriculum in the primary and senior years of a distance education school;

Case Study 7—School I: Using affinity spaces to [re] establish and strengthen community connections for engaging parents and the community in the curriculum in a junior school; and

Case Study 8—School J: Developing a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support a wellbeing curriculum framework in the primary and secondary years.

The case studies respond to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions (below) are reported for each case study.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?
2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?
3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?
4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?
5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?
6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

Finally, the EPIC 2023 Final Report offers overall findings for knowledge, practice, theory, and methodology while also drawing implications for future parent and community engagement practice and research. The overall findings and implications are discussed under the following headings:

KNOWLEDGE

- Towards a sustainable model of parent and community engagement
- Value of research-informed theory and practice
- The work of engaging parents and communities is quintessentially relational
- The role of groups and individuals in championing parent and community engagement

PRACTICE

- Listening pedagogies: being in dialogue with parents
- Aligning digital technologies with a philosophy and pedagogy of parent engagement

THEORY

- A tightly-knit theoretical framework
- Macro, meso, micro: powerful frames for transforming practice, theory, and research

METHODOLOGY

- The accelerator effect of longitudinal research
- Cogenerative dialogues and external experts: a potent combination.

Limitations of the research and a conclusion finish the body of the report. The report includes an snapshot (Appendix 1) which presents practices and processes for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement in the curriculum based on the findings of the EPIC 2023 research. The six-page snapshot uses The Parent Engagement C-H-A-N-G-E Framework developed by Willis and Exley (2020); hence, the information is presented under six headings: **C**onnections, **H**ome-school alignment, **A**gency, **N**ew and different roles, **G**enerative conversations, and **E**mpathy. Suggestions and examples of practice are included. The snapshot can be used in its entirety or as six, stand-alone, one-page snapshots.



¹ Only EPIC schools which participated in 2023 are included in the report. Schools B and F participated in EPIC 2021. The names A, C, D, and E continue the names by which these schools were known in EPIC 2021/2022. The names G, H, I, and J are the names of new schools which joined the EPIC research in 2023.

Introduction

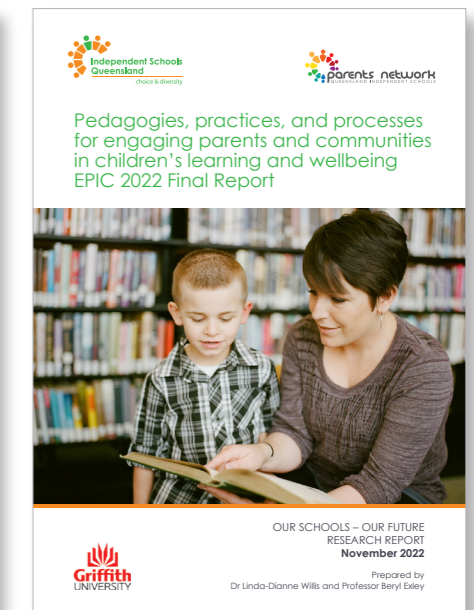
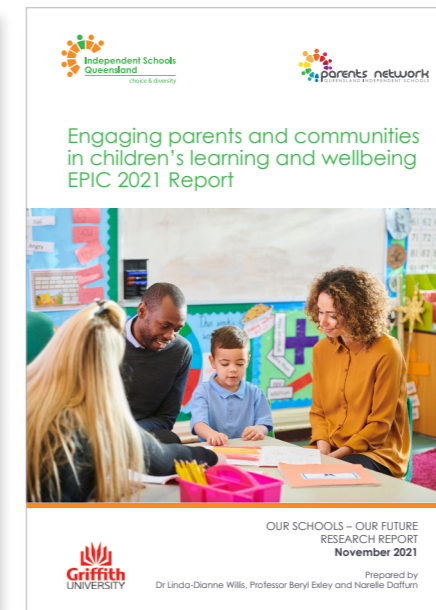
EPIC RESEARCH HISTORY

The *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research has a long history. The researchers, Dr Linda Willis (Lead Chief Investigator) and Professor Beryl Exley (Chief Investigator), first began to explore the concepts and ideas that now inform the EPIC research in their separate professional practice settings and research projects.

Linda's research journey began formally in 2005, ultimately culminating in a PhD thesis titled, *Parent-Teacher Engagement: A Coteaching and Cogenerative Dialoguing Approach* (Willis, 2013). Linda's research, thesis, and subsequent publications investigated and theorised how coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing with a teacher, preservice teacher, and two parents in a secondary school setting enabled parent-teacher engagement, while simultaneously documenting the benefits for students, parents, teachers, schools, and higher education providers (e.g., Willis, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Willis & Ritchie, 2010).

Beryl's research journey began in 2001 when she commenced work in universities as a full-time teacher educator. Beryl worked alongside teachers as a teacher-researcher in Logan schools for four years, and in the Torres Straits for a short period. In both of these contexts, she championed context-specific parent and community engagement practices that brought adults closer to children's learning. In 2006, Beryl participated in a Reggio Emilia study tour in the Northern Italian Municipality of Reggio Emilia where she learnt about many school-based projects in which parents and the community were warmly welcomed into the school to co-teach with the teacher, and co-learn with the students. The Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 1998; Reggio Children, 2002) to early years education amplified Beryl's commitment to connecting parents and community members to children's school-based learning. After returning from Reggio Emilia, Beryl documented four school-based parent/community projects in Australia from which several publications of import to the EPIC research flowed (Exley, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008).

Linda and Beryl's EPIC formal research collaboration began in 2016 with an investigation of parent and community engagement at one local school with the support of industry partners, Brisbane Catholic Education, Catholic School Parents Queensland, and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The focus of the investigation was engaging parents and students using social media (Willis & Exley, 2018).



In 2016, Linda was also successful in the inaugural Queensland (Qld) Department of Education's Education Horizon grant scheme to lead research that investigated *Principal Leadership for Parent-School-Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Schools* with a team at The University of Queensland (UQ) and industry partner, Parents and Citizens Queensland (P&Cs Qld) (Department of Education, 2016). The research was based on a previous study of over 1200 state schools which identified principals who appeared to be effective in parent and community engagement (Povey et al., 2016). The UQ team conducted intense research in four socio-economically disadvantaged² schools in southeast, western, and northern Queensland (Department of Education, 2019; Willis et al., 2017).

Linda and the UQ team were successful in the next round of the Qld Department of Education's Education Horizon grant scheme, attracting further funding to extend the initial research for two more years (Department of Education, 2017). The longitudinal project titled, *Principal Leadership for Parent-School-Community Engagement*, expanded to 12 schools (i.e., the original four schools and eight more). The project thus included schools in more locations across Queensland including the central coast and three more schools considered socio-economically disadvantaged (i.e., seven in total). Major outputs of the three-year research included: international conference presentations in the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), and Australia; collaborations with universities and scholars in Canada and USA; publication of a peer-reviewed international book (seven chapters) titled, *Principal Leadership for Parent-School-Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Schools: What Qualities and Strategies Distinguish Effective Principals?* (Willis, Povey et al., 2021); a Parent Engagement online course (Willis et al., 2019); and a toolkit of innovative practices for principals and teachers consisting of 42 videos and detailed descriptions of practice from the participating schools (Povey et al., 2019).³

In 2018, Linda and Beryl continued their EPIC research over the next two years with the support of funding from a competitive internal grant scheme at UQ. Working in collaboration with Brisbane Catholic Education, Townsville Catholic Education, and Catholic School Parents Queensland, the EPIC research expanded to more southeast and western Queensland schools. Numerous publications including international, peer-reviewed journals and book chapters, professional publications, and a suite of videos used for teaching and research purposes resulted from this work (e.g., Exley et al., 2017; Exley et al., 2018; Willis, 2021; Willis, Clancy et al., 2020; Willis & Exley, 2018, 2021a, 2021b; Willis, Exley, & Clancy, 2020; Willis, Exley, & Merli, 2021; Willis, Exley, & Pether, 2022).

The 2018–2019 EPIC research subsequently provided the impetus for a further successful Qld Department of Education, Education Horizon grant scheme project in the 2020–21 round. Linda and Beryl together with a team of researchers at Griffith University used findings from the 2018–2019 EPIC research as secondary data to investigate, *Building Global Competence through Enhanced Literacy Teaching and Learning: Investigating Student Agency in the Early Years* (Department of Education, 2020–21). The team produced a comprehensive report which included an extensive literature review, five richly-detailed case studies, and a new theoretical framework showing the relationship between parent-school-community engagement, early years literacy, and global competence (Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b).

In 2020, Linda and Beryl commenced a successful four-year collaboration with ISQ and QIS Parents Network, with additional financial and in-kind support from the Griffith Institute for Educational Research (GIER). The first year coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 which saw ISQ commission Linda and Beryl to write an issues paper on parent and community engagement during the pandemic.

2 In Australia, an ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage) score is assigned to schools to measure their level of socioeconomic advantage (ACARA, 2015). Schools with an ICSEA score below 1000 are generally considered disadvantaged. For a fuller discussion on the notion of disadvantaged schools that includes an international perspective, see Willis, Povey et al. (2021).

3 More outputs from the *Principal Leadership for Parent-School-Community Engagement* research can be viewed on The University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR), *Parent Engagement in Schools* (PES) (2023) website: <https://issr.uq.edu.au/parent-engagement-schools>

The paper titled, *Engaging Parents in their Child's Learning and Wellbeing—Change, Continuity, and COVID-19*, used secondary data from articles written by ISQ member school principals and teachers to analyse the nature of parent and community engagement during the learning@home period (30 March to 25 May 2020) (Willis & Exley, 2020). The Parent Engagement C-H-A-N-G-E Framework resulted from this work (Willis & Exley, 2020; see also Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a, 2021b).

Subsequently, Linda and Beryl received funding over three years (2021 to 2023) from QIS Parents Network in partnership with ISQ and Griffith University to conduct EPIC research in ISQ member schools. In 2021, the research focused on school leaders and classroom teachers (micro level) and culminated in a final report titled, *Engaging Parents and School Communities in Children's Learning and Wellbeing: Using Inquiry Curriculum and Online Technologies During COVID-19* (Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). The EPIC research focus in 2022 shifted to groups of teachers (meso level) and examined teachers' pedagogical practices and school processes for engaging parents and the community. A final report titled, *Pedagogies, Practices, and Processes for Engaging Parents and Communities in Children's Learning and Wellbeing*, was produced (Willis & Exley, 2022). The EPIC 2023 Final Report titled, *Engaging Parents and Communities in Children's Learning and Wellbeing: Exploring Sustainable Models through School Leadership Teams* represents the culmination of the current project which investigated establishing and sustaining models of parent and community engagement using parent engagement leadership teams (PELTs) (macro or school level).

Each year of the three-year longitudinal EPIC research (2021–2023) has scaled up the research from the previous year. Apart from the three major final reports mentioned above, outputs from this work so far include: a suite of videos; a set of snapshots (QIS Parents Network, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2022a, 2022b); and professional journal publications (Exley et al., 2024; Willis, Argus et al., 2023; Willis & Exley, 2023; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2022a, 2022b; Willis, Exley, & Volcich, 2023). The EPIC 2023 research culminates the body of research on parent and community engagement produced to date by Linda and Beryl over the last two decades. Significantly, the research has been conducted continuously in this time including throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and into the new normal phase of living with COVID.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Convincing evidence from research studies nationally and internationally over many decades attests to the value and benefits of parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing (e.g., ARACY, 2015, 2016; Boonk et al., 2018; Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Williams, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jaynes, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2023; Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development [OECD], 2017; Willis, Povey et al., 2021). Previous EPIC research reports and outputs have outlined these benefits (Willis & Exley, 2020, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). An updated summary (below) lists relevant findings and supporting research studies and documents:

- Higher academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Goodall, 2017; Jaynes, 2011, 2012, 2023; Kim & Hill, 2015; Wilder, 2014)
- Enhanced wellbeing and mental health (OECD, 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014)
- Increased confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement in learning (Boonk et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2017; Curry & Holter, 2019; Exley & Luke, 2010; Fan & Williams, 2010; Fan et al., 2012; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Willis, 2013)
- Improved school attendance (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004)
- More positive attitudes about school and improved behaviour (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jaynes, 2023)
- Continued school enrolment and higher likelihood of graduation (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Zaff et al., 2017)
- Improving outcomes for students from priority equity cohorts (Australian Government, 2022a, 2023a; Baxter & Toe, 2023; Day, 2015; Goodall, 2017).

Jaynes' (2023) research titled, *A meta-analysis: The association between relational parental involvement and student and parent outcome variables*, adds further weight to the research evidence. He concluded, "the meta-analyses completed over the last 20 years indicate ... the effects of parental involvement [on student achievement] amount to almost a full grade point, for example, the difference between a B and a C" (Jaynes, 2023, p. 20). Jaynes (2023) stressed:

... when considering the power of parent participation ... this consists of the combined effects of all the aspects of parental involvement. With this in mind, it becomes quite apparent that parental engagement can have a puissant impact on children's scholastic and behavioural outcomes. (p. 20; italics in original)

It is not surprising that governments at home and abroad continue to emphasise the critical importance of engaging parents and communities. In line with foundational education documents such as the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Department of Education, Skills, & Employment [DESE], 2019) and the Australian Curriculum (Australian

Table 1: APST for graduate to lead career stages

APST	GRADUATE	PROFICIENT	HIGHLY ACCOMPLISHED	LEAD
3.7	Describe a broad range of strategies for involving parents/carers in the educative process.	Plan for appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in their children's learning.	Work with colleagues to provide appropriate and contextually relevant opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in their children's learning.	Initiate contextually relevant processes to establish programs that involve parents/carers in the education of their children and broader school priorities and activities.
5.5	Demonstrate understanding of a range of strategies for reporting to students and parents/carers and the purpose of keeping accurate and reliable records of student achievement.	Report clearly, accurately and respectfully to students and parents/carers about student achievement, making use of accurate and reliable records.	Work with colleagues to construct accurate, informative and timely reports to students and parents/carers about student learning and achievement.	Evaluate and revise reporting and accountability mechanisms in the school to meet the needs of students, parents/carers, and colleagues.
7.3	Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively, and confidentially with parents/carers.	Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/carers regarding their children's learning and wellbeing.	Demonstrate responsiveness in all communications with parents/carers about their children's learning and wellbeing.	Identify, initiate, and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.

Curriculum, Assessment, & Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2023a), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] mandates the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) (AITSL, 2017a). Three of 37 APST include an explicit focus on parent and community engagement, namely:

- APST 3.7 Engage parents/carers in the educative process
- APST 5.5 Report on student achievement
- APST 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers. (AITSL, 2017a)

Table 1 details the APST for graduate to lead career stages (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2017a).

The relevant APST across the four career stages articulate the need for teachers and schools to develop and implement effective parent and community engagement practices, pedagogies, and processes. Similarly, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (the Standard) and the Leadership Profiles provide a guide for school leaders to achieve high-impact leadership practices and processes to maximise student learning and wellbeing outcomes (AITSL, 2014). The Standard articulates three overarching Leadership Requirements and five key Professional Practices of school leaders which need to be integrated and used together (AITSL, 2014). All of these aspects are relevant to parent and community engagement but one of the Leadership Requirements and three Professional Practices are particularly implicated, namely:

- Leadership Requirement: Vision and values
- Professional Practice: Leading teaching and learning
- Professional Practice: Leading improvement innovation and change
- Professional Practice: Engaging and working with the community. (AITSL, 2014)

Parent and community engagement also appears closely associated with successful schools (Davis, 2000; Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Jesse et al., 2004; Jaynes, 2005, 2018; Willis, Povey et al., 2018, 2021). Willis (2013) noted that schools identified as successful had "higher rates of student achievement and success irrespective of factors such as students' gender, socio-economic class, ethnic background, stage of schooling, or parents' education levels" (p. 4). The Review of the National School Reform Agreement (Australian Government, 2022a) similarly pointed out that successful schools "support parents and carers to actively engage with their child's education" (p. 38). A recent report by Beswick et al. (2022) which investigated Ambassador Schools⁴ in New South Wales further highlighted parent and community engagement as fundamental to school success. The report stated:

Ambassador Schools were stronger in partnering with their community through community resources, active Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs), or high parent engagement, interaction or attendance with school events. Several Ambassador Schools described the mutual respect developed between the school and community, along with the trust given by the community to educate their children. The parent community was often involved in decision-making and kept informed through regular communications regarding many aspects of such things as school events. (Beswick et al., 2022, p. 55)

Writing about the success of one Ambassador School, Carroll (2023) reported:

Twice a month at Auburn North Public School hundreds of parents assemble in the library for hour-long workshops that cover what their children are learning in daily maths and literacy lessons. It has become a hallmark initiative at the primary school ... (para. 1 & 2)

⁴ As part of the New South Wales (NSW) School Success Model, Ambassador Schools were identified from among like government schools for their high performance in areas such as reading, numeracy, attendance, and High School Certificate (HSC) results (NSW Government, 2023).

A succession of recent education reports in Australia have signalled the need for schools and teachers to develop effective parent and the community engagement strategies. For example, *The Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review* (Australian Government, 2022b) made 17 recommendations, two of which specifically referred to strengthening Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs with respect to practices for engaging families and carers. Recommendation seven identified a need for a more specific focus in ITE programs on the APST relevant to parent and community engagement “so ITE students better understand what is being asked of them” (Australian Government, 2022b, p. iv). Recommendation nine stated: “Families and carers are the key partners with teachers in their children’s learning and the Expert Panel recommends more resources be created for families and carers to understand what teaching best practice looks like” (Australian Government, 2022b, p. iv).

Established in late 2022, the Teacher Education Expert Panel (the Panel) subsequently provided advice on implementing some of the QITE Review recommendations (Department of Education, 2023b). In their Discussion Paper, the Panel wrote: “There is a great deal of evidence that families play a critical role in their child’s learning. Family engagement is important throughout all stages of schooling, but strategies may look different at different stages” (Department of Education, 2023b, p. 20). The Panel further wrote that ITE programs should build preservice teachers’ “understanding of ways school teachers and leaders can engage with families to bring about improvements in students’ learning outcomes” (Department of Education, 2023b, p. 20). The Panel prioritised the recommendation of several key primary and secondary school practices, namely:

- Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home
- Supporting two-way, positive communication
- Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families
- Promoting a literacy-rich environment at home. (Department of Education, 2023b, p. 20)

The work involved in engaging parents and the community however, is multifaceted. Jaynes (2023) noted that educational systems are “complex” and “dynamic” comprising “multidimensional linkages and processes” which change over time (pp. 5–6; see also Johnson et al., 2011, p. 9). Jaynes (2023) and Goodall (2023) call on different ecological systems to draw attention to the complexities in which parent and community engagement takes place. The EPIC 2023 report refers to macro (school), meso (groups of teachers), and micro (classroom) level factors, however, external factors (e.g., the influence of government policies) and internal factors (e.g., an individual’s life experiences and personal history) inevitably impact this work. Indeed, it is within this context that relevant research (e.g., Thompson et al., 2022; Willis, Shaikat et al. 2021), government inquiries and reports (e.g., Australian Government, 2022a, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b; Commonwealth of Australia, 2023a), and survey results (e.g., Independent Schools Victoria, 2023) can best be understood. Hence, the reported

value and benefits of engaging parents and communities and the need for pedagogical practices and processes to support this work variously implicate other areas of the profession. These include school leader and teacher satisfaction levels, workloads, and retention and the status of the profession generally. In relation to parent and community engagement, it also follows that each school and each teacher will have different needs, use different approaches, and need different kinds of support. Given the complexity of factors in play, just how the potential of engaging parents and the community can be realised so all students, parents, teachers, preservice teachers, schools, and systems consistently experience the anticipated value and benefits remains open for further investigation. As indicated earlier, the EPIC 2023 research sites introduced Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) which included school personnel in leadership positions, classroom teaching positions, and other associated support positions and parent representatives. The overarching goal of the EPIC 2023 research was to probe how different PELTs enhanced knowledge, understanding, and practice with respect to establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement. Hence, the research and accompanying report make an important contribution to advancing contemporary knowledge, practice, and research nationally and internationally in the area of parent and community engagement.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The EPIC 2023 research was conducted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which has been described as the most serious world-wide, public health crisis for 100 years (Hayes, 2020; Rosenthal, 2020). In Queensland’s case, September 2022 saw the Government announce a changing approach to the management of the pandemic, moving into its next phase of what has been called the “new normal of living with COVID” (McKenna, 2022; Pizzirani, 2022). For example, the declared public health emergency period that had been in place, during which time a wide range of restrictions were imposed across the State, was lifted on 31 October 2022 (Queensland Government, 2022b). The Public Health Direction which required mandatory vaccination of workers in high-risk settings such as early childhood, primary, and secondary education similarly ended on 31 October 2022 (Queensland Government, 2022a). This gave employers the authority to decide whether mandatory employee vaccinations were still necessary in their particular settings (Queensland Government, 2022a). Consequently, the Government decided that workers in places such as schools, early childhood education, outside school care, kindergartens, and family day care were no longer required to obtain mandatory vaccinations (Queensland Government, 2022c). In addition, daily televised press conferences at which senior politicians and health officials reported on the incidence of COVID-19 cases in the State ceased from March 2022 (Jones, 2022). Six months later, in September 2022, reporting of COVID-19 cases across Australia’s various jurisdictions was wound back from daily to a weekly basis (Chorley, 2022).

In June 2023, Queensland moved to monitor COVID-19 as part of a broad surveillance approach of similar illnesses such as influenza (Queensland Government, 2023b). Soon after, in September 2023, weekly case numbers and related statistics of the States and Territories, including Queensland, were made available centrally through the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care (Australian Government, 2023b).

The changing management and reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic in the transition to the new normal phase coincided with the EPIC 2023 research. Although the immediate crisis had subsided, the effects of the pandemic, which were felt by some individuals and communities across Australia more than others, were still playing out in subtle and not so subtle ways. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) wrote:

One of the biggest global crises in generations, the COVID-19 pandemic has had severe and far-reaching repercussions for health systems, economies and societies. Countless people have died, or lost their livelihoods. Families and communities have been strained and separated. Children and young people have missed out on learning and socialising. Businesses have gone bankrupt. Millions of people have fallen below the poverty line. As people grapple with these health, social, and economic impacts, mental health has been widely affected.

Heightened levels of mental ill health and diminished wellbeing among many students, parents, school leaders, teachers, and communities continue to be reported in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2023; Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2023a, 2023b; Independent Schools Victoria, 2021; Telethon Kids Institute, 2021). It is reasonable to conclude that these and other concerning psychological and emotional effects were likely precipitated by: the speed and suddenness of social change; continual disruption of schools and work; shifting at short notice from learning at school to learning from home; prolonged uncertainty; and feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and isolation experienced at the height of the pandemic (Dusi & Addi-Racah, 2022; Independent Schools Victoria, 2021; Telethon Kids Institute, 2021; WHO, 2022; Willis & Exley, 2020). However, there is evidence that the health emergency may actually have exacerbated underlying issues such as “background emotional distress” for some students and families “which [had] been bubbling away for some time before the pandemic hit” (Gething in Telethon Kids Institute, 2021, p. 1).

The health and wellbeing of many school leaders and teachers across Australia were similarly affected by the pandemic with “the exhaustion and overwhelming workload [leading] to an increasing number of teachers leaving the industry and causing a workforce shortage” (Independent Schools Victoria, 2021, p. 3). Again, there is evidence to suggest that the pandemic may not have caused issues of workforce attrition and recruitment associated with teacher shortages *per se*; but rather exacerbated pre-existing problems of excessive workloads and work intensification that

teachers in Australia and overseas have long reported (Creagh et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2022). In addition, Thompson et al. (2022) wrote:

Increased workload and the pressure associated with work intensification generate stress, family conflict for teachers, mental fatigue, burnout, and ultimately ... teacher attrition. Perhaps more pernicious, because of the effect experienced by students, is the role that increased workload/work intensification has in constraining the capacity of teachers to address the complexities of learning needs in schools. (p. 2)

At the time of the EPIC 2023 research, ongoing detrimental impacts of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of students, families, teachers, school leaders, and communities, and the ripple effects on schools and the education sector more broadly across Australia continued to be felt.

The Australian Government’s White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, *Working Future* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023b) further illuminates the context of the pandemic for the EPIC 2023 research. The paper highlights significant socio-economic changes attributable to, or accelerated by, the pandemic which have impacted families and communities. These include: higher rates of working mothers; changing experiences of work and job opportunities due to digital technology and remote work options; continued variable access to quality early childhood education and care arrangements; and increased rates of job switching (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023b). The paper warns about the possible compounding negative effects of changes such as the above on student academic achievement and school success—especially for students and schools already suffering from socio-economic disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023b). Drawing on average Year 9 *National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) scores, the paper highlights the possible negative impact of socio-economic disadvantage on student and school success. According to the paper, low student scores “may also capture the effect of other out-of-school factors, such as parental engagement, availability of learning resources such as libraries, and access to other services” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023b, pp. 143–144). In other words, the socio-economic environment in the aftermath of the pandemic seems likely to affect possibilities of parent and community engagement with consequent effects on students, schools, communities, and broader society. It follows that this environment may have influenced some participants and schools during the EPIC 2023 research.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

As mentioned previously, the EPIC 2023 research is the third and final year of longitudinal research in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) member schools since 2021. The theoretical framing of EPIC has remained consistent throughout this time however, aspects of the framework have been strengthened and extended as a result of research findings over the past two years (see Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). EPIC stands for *Engaging Parents in Inquiry Curriculum*. For convenience the title is often shortened to *Engaging Parents in Curriculum*. EPIC is not a program, but a research project. The EPIC research is underpinned by a philosophy and pedagogy for engaging parents and communities in student learning and wellbeing that uses four interrelated concepts:

- Engaging parents (parent and community engagement)
- Inquiry curriculum
- Affinity spaces
- Cogenerative dialogues.

The EPIC researchers refer to these concepts or thinking tools as the EPIC Pillars. The information about the EPIC Pillars should be read in conjunction with previous iterations of EPIC's theoretical framework (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2022).

Engaging parents

As highlighted in the literature review above, the notion of parent engagement is recognised nationally and internationally as integral and essential for student success academically, socially, and emotionally, while simultaneously considered a fundamental aspect of successful schools. The EPIC researchers use the term, parent/s, as a catchall term to refer to a child's biological parents as well as significant others such as Indigenous Elders or family and community members considered primarily responsible for a child's health, wellbeing, and education. The researchers extend this term to community/communities to describe formal and informal connections and relationships with individuals, groups, and/or organisations within and outside schools which increase opportunities and provide resources and support to enhance student learning and wellbeing. Although the researchers use the term, parent engagement,⁵ to reflect its usage throughout the relevant literature, they purposefully highlight the idea of *engaging* parents. Engagement is an abstract noun whereas engaging is an action verb (process). Hence, engaging parents conveys a sense of the work being more than a single event or series of events, but rather actively woven into the fabric of the everyday work of schools and teachers. In other words, engaging parents is less about the destination and more about the learning journey.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed a parent involvement-engagement continuum with parent involvement at one end and parent engagement at the other. Traditionally, schools have involved parents in school activities where they watch or supervise students and invitations to actively participate in and contribute to their child's learning are few or limited. Engaging parents, on the other hand, is about bringing parents closer to their child's learning and wellbeing. This is an important distinction because the research literature (e.g., Jeynes, 2023) consistently shows that parent involvement in school activities is unlikely to produce large benefits for student learning and wellbeing outcomes.

The EPIC researchers recognise that parents are the first and continuing teachers of their child. Parents bring vast knowledge of their child's life-worlds (e.g., experiences, history, interests) and the broader world including schooling, work, and life in general to the metaphoric table; hence, EPIC research participants such as school leaders and teachers do not seek to build the capacity of parents, but rather seek to support parents to actualise their capacity (Pushor, 2022). Pushor (2022) explained, "One of the critical attributes of parent engagement is that it uses parent knowledge, that's how you know it's engagement and not parent involvement".

Previous EPIC research (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) showed when teachers and school leaders take up this understanding of engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing, distinct shifts in classroom practice and school processes occur. Teachers, for example, rather than only informing parents about classroom activities involving their child or assessment due dates, also include information about why parent engagement matters and how parents, families, and communities can engage (e.g., Justin in Willis & Exley, 2022, pp. 13–15). Teachers also reported that engaging parents need not be overwhelming, but can be folded into long- and short-term planning as well as taking advantage of spontaneous in-the-moment opportunities (e.g., Vivian in Willis & Exley, 2022, pp. 26–29). Indeed, most teachers indicated that thinking differently (i.e., as a result of raised critical consciousness [Teemant et al., 2021]) about engaging parents, often meant only small tweaks in usual practice. At the same time, they reported being quickly rewarded with noticeably enhanced levels of student engagement in learning, teaching effectiveness, and teacher satisfaction as well as a greater sense of collective wellbeing in the classroom and school community (Willis & Exley, 2022).

Inquiry curriculum

The notion of curriculum as a lifelong, life-wide concept is reflected in the *Alice Springs (Mpartntwe) Education Declaration* (DESE, 2019) and the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2023a). *The Alice Springs (Mpartntwe) Education Declaration* (DESE, 2019) articulates two interconnected goals:

Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.

Goal 2: All young Australians become:

- Confident and creative individuals
- Successful lifelong learners
- Active and informed members of the community.

Achieving these education goals is the responsibility of Australian Governments and the education community in partnership with young Australians, their families and carers and the broader community. (p. 4)

The Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2023a) is an interconnected, three-dimensional document comprising learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities for students in Foundation to Year 10. It sets out "the expectations for what all young Australians should be taught, regardless of their background or where they live" (ACARA, 2023a). Schools use the Australian Curriculum to develop learning and teaching plans and assessment for students. Some schools may follow an international curriculum which has been adjusted to align with the Australian Curriculum and approved by ACARA. Schools may also develop school-based curriculum and learning frameworks to support implementation of aspects of the Australian Curriculum such as one or more general capabilities (e.g., school-based wellbeing frameworks that support the personal and social general capability).

EPIC research projects support teachers and schools to develop practices and processes which meaningfully connect home and school learning. For this reason, inquiry curriculum approaches are privileged. Inquiry curriculum may be described as:

... an education approach that focuses on investigation and problem-solving. Inquiry-based learning is different from traditional approaches because it reverses the order of learning. Instead of presenting information, or 'the answer', up-front, teachers start with a range of scenarios, questions and problems for students to navigate. (Department of Education, 2021)

Inquiry curriculum approaches align with all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum (Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b) and support the development of the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions of one or more of the seven general capabilities: critical and creative thinking; digital literacy; ethical understanding; intercultural understanding; literacy; numeracy; and personal and social capability. In the

Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 (ACARA, 2023a), critical and creative thinking "represent two important ways of thinking that work together to help students inquire into the world around them" (ACARA, 2023b) in the context of each of the learning areas of English, Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), Health and Physical Education (HPE), Languages, Mathematics, Science, Technologies, and The Arts.

ACARA (2023b) provides detailed definitions of critical thinking and creative thinking:

Critical thinking involves students analysing and assessing possibilities against criteria for judgement. They construct and evaluate arguments, and use information, evidence and logic to draw reasoned conclusions and to solve problems.

Creative thinking involves students learning to generate and apply new ideas, and see existing situations in new ways. They identify alternative explanations and possibilities, and create new links to generate successful outcomes.

Dispositions such as inquisitiveness, reasonableness, intellectual flexibility, open- and fair-mindedness, and a readiness to try new ways of doing things are enhanced by critical and creative thinking. Students consider alternatives and develop persistence throughout the learning continuum.

An important point is that EPIC research projects are neither separate from nor additional to the Australian Curriculum, but rather contextualise relevant aspects of the curriculum while also bringing a child and their parents closer to the curriculum.

Another important point is that EPIC initiatives do not need to be epic undertakings. The researchers often shorten the phrasing and say, "EPIC does not need to be epic." The way inquiry curriculum may be taken up can either be big (macro level) or small (micro level). An example of a macro-level inquiry is when inquiry takes centre stage in the unit. The title of the unit indicates inquiry, and at the beginning students are invited to pose specific inquiry questions, take the lead in planning a way forward, including consulting with parents and community members who have expertise to share. Towards the conclusion of the unit, students present their findings to a real audience that includes parents and community members (Exley & Luke, 2010). These inquiry units are sometimes described as being "real questions for a real need with a real outcome". When inquiry takes centre stage, it does not mean that all lessons are student-led inquiry activities. Indeed, teachers will provide some balance at strategic points, such as offering explicit lessons on punctuation, using software, setting up hardware safely, or how to prepare and submit assessable tasks (Exley & Luke, 2010). Teachers will also guide students towards authoritative sources appropriate for the year level and in

⁵ Family engagement is often used interchangeably with parent engagement in the literature.

line with curriculum requirements (Willis, Exley, & Pether, 2022). Moving between student-led inquiry and teacher-led explicit instruction is called “pedagogical weaving” (Exley & Richard-Bossez, 2013, p. 353). There are multiple theories and frameworks that explain how teachers set up inquiry units, the different stages of inquiry, and the roles for teachers, students, parents, and community members (e.g., Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b).

An example of micro-level inquiry is when inquiry becomes part of a lesson or a moment-in-time invitation for students and parents or community members to discuss a real-life application of a particular matter (Willis, Exley, & Clancy, 2020). These micro-instances of inquiry might last several minutes to half an hour or so and involve a student engaging with their parent in a discussion in the car on the way home from school or emailing a family member with an invitation to talk about some aspect of research for a subject at school (Willis, Exley, & Volcich, 2023). Micro-level inquiry might also be when a teacher invites a parent or community member to speak to the whole class, and for students to have the opportunity to ask questions of the visiting expert. The teacher then expertly weaves these new experiences and new knowledges into the remainder of the unit of work. Teachers might also plan a number of instances of micro-level inquiry throughout any one unit of work. A number of macro- and micro-level inquiry curriculum examples were included in the EPIC 2022 Final Report (see Willis & Exley, 2022, pp. 10–19, 20–33, 34–41).

Affinity spaces

In EPIC research projects, affinity spaces, a term coined by Gee (2004), describes the multitude of spaces where learning can happen. These are generally gathering spaces for students and their peers, parents, teachers, and community members. Affinity spaces can be physical or virtual; hence, they may involve synchronous, real-time communication or asynchronous, delayed communication. Affinity spaces recognise that learning happens in different places inside and outside of the classroom, across various times, for various lengths of time, and with a range of people. Learning is sometimes intensive and at other times involves fleeting interactions. Affinity spaces are not unlike Schwab’s (1973) notion of commonplaces where schooling is seen in the broader context of a child’s life, thus aligning with an expanded view of curriculum as a lifelong, life-wide concept (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). Willis, Povey et al. (2021) found digital technologies—especially the idea of virtual classrooms—constituted an essential contemporary learning space. These spaces of learning where children find affinity “recognise that where and with whom children live, and their social, cultural, religious and economic contexts are all significant to teaching and learning” (Pushor & the Parent

Engagement Collaborative, 2013, p. 10). The EPIC researchers use the idea of affinity spaces to support teachers and school leaders to identify existing and create possible new learning opportunities for engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing. Conversations between the EPIC researchers and participants about the concept of affinity spaces also recognise that when parents are invited into their child’s learning, the teacher may not necessarily know about the ripple effects that happen when the parents and the child continue the learning conversations in the outside-of-school context, and invite knowledgeable others into those learning conversations (e.g., Exley & Willis, 2016).

The EPIC 2022 Final Report (Willis & Exley, 2022) recorded numerous affinity spaces where schools and parents interacted, including: festivals, working bees, community fora, parent tours, information evenings, parent associations, parent surveys, newsletters, parent camps, musical performances, school social media sites, school websites, and parent portals. The EPIC 2022 Report also documented examples of parent-initiated affinity spaces, such as: social media groups, school bookshops, craft groups, volunteering in the tuckshop, play meets, social events for new parents, and support groups for families in need. All of these initiatives enhance possibilities for positively impacting student learning and wellbeing. Examples of affinity spaces at the curriculum level were documented in the EPIC 2022 Final Report (see Willis & Exley, 2022, pp. 16–17, 22–23, 37–39).

Cogenerative dialogues

Professional dialogues and conversations are considered an essential part of teachers’ critical reflexive practice and ongoing professional learning (AITSL, 2017b, 2017c). This aspect of their work was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns created the conditions for teachers to engage more organically and spontaneously with one another. The EPIC researchers wrote about this phenomenon, which they called “generative conversation”, in the 2020 Issues Paper which used secondary data from ISQ member schools to examine parent and community engagement during learning@home (Willis & Exley, 2020, pp. 12–13). Goodall (2021) highlighted the need for open, respectful dialogue with parents and students especially in relation to addressing the barriers schools and teachers may face in engaging them in their child’s learning and wellbeing. Emerging findings from teachers and school leaders involved in the *Parent Engagement in Schools* project which was supported by Education Queensland’s Education Horizon grant scheme (Department of Education, 2016, 2017) signal the value of opportunities for regular, rich, focused conversations among staff and the need for ongoing discussions with professionally qualified experts to support

their parent engagement journeys (Povey et al., n.d.). The importance of dialogue also emerged as a clear, strong finding from the EPIC 2022 research (Willis & Exley, 2022).

Although the importance of dialogue in education is accepted, few schools and teachers have clear processes and protocols to guide these conversations. For this reason, EPIC has long advocated the use of cogenerative dialogues. Cogenerative dialogues are a type of affinity space. The affix, co, refers to participants (e.g., teachers, school leaders, students, parents, researchers) coming together to collaborate about some aspect of their work (e.g., planning the curriculum). Generative describes the unfolding processes typical of these interactive social spaces which can lead to substantive conversations and hence, enable new ideas and insights to emerge which participants were unlikely to reach alone (Willis, Grimmer et al., 2018). The purpose of cogenerative dialogues is for participants to listen and learn from one another to better understand and strategise about an aspect of their work (e.g., engaging parents and the community), while simultaneously providing support and encouragement for each other. These conversations are designed to transcend traditional barriers to participation associated with age, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, profession, qualifications, or educational background, for example (LaVan, 2004; Shakhovskoy, 2021; Tatum, 2017; Willis, 2013). Hence, they operate on certain ethical principles where participants work with and for, not on, over, or against one another (Willis, 2013). Accordingly, cogenerative dialogues are designed to be inclusive and use respectful practices such as:

- Generous listening that includes radical listening (i.e., listening for what’s not said)
- Inviting one another to participate
- Allowing participants equal talk time
- Accepting and valuing all ideas
- Suspending judgement
- Responding positively to the contributions of others
- Discussing one issue fully before moving on
- Seeing differences as opportunities for learning from one another
- Playing different roles (e.g., facilitators, sounding boards, encouragers, supporters, motivators, empathisers)
- Debate without necessarily reaching consensus
- Respectful disagreement. (Willis, 2013, 2016; Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Grimmer et al., 2018)

During cogenerative dialogues participants may decide on positive actions individually and/or collectively, which become the focus of reflexive discussions in subsequent dialogues. Cogenerative dialogues have been shown to have a “ripple effect” (Willis & Exley, 2022, p. 7) on other affinity spaces (e.g., classrooms) as conversations continue and expand beyond the group. Willis (2016) coined the term, cogenerativity, to describe the transformational potential of cogenerative dialogues for establishing and sustaining communities of learners. Hence, the EPIC researchers use cogenerative dialogues to encourage a culture and practice among teachers and school leaders which promotes parent and community engagement rather than simply involvement in student learning and wellbeing. Detailed examples of teachers using cogenerative dialoguing approaches for engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing are contained in the EPIC 2022 Final Report (see Willis & Exley, 2022, pp. 15–17, 37–39).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design and methods section of a research report provides information by which a reader can make a judgement about the study's validity. This section contains a description of and justification for the research paradigm underpinning the EPIC 2023 research, namely, design-based research (DBR). The ethics processes are outlined, as is an explanation of the data generated across multiple affinity spaces, including flipped learning, masterclasses, a blog site, school-based videos, and cogenerative dialogues including metalogues among the PELT members at school level and between PELT members and the researchers. The section closes with an outline of the deductive and inductive thematic analysis approaches used to examine the data and produce the detailed case studies and accompanying snapshot (see Appendix 1) in the EPIC 2023 Final Report.

The research paradigm: design-based research

Parent engagement research commonly concludes that one-size-fits-all policies and practices tend to have limited success “as they often fail to recognise and respond to the varied life contexts and circumstances of parents—both across and within social class categories” (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020, p. 694). For this reason, the EPIC 2023 researchers eschew a prescribed intervention, instead employing a DBR approach (The Design-Based Collective, 2003; Zydney et al., 2020) of working collaboratively alongside the research participants in complex, real-world contexts. DBR has been an accepted paradigm of educational research since Brown's (1992) publication in the *Journal of Learning Sciences*, and is increasingly recognised for contributing a useful association between educational theory and innovations in school and community practices (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bell, 2004; Papavaslopoulou et al., 2019). DBR is known for “refining theory through qualitative observation” and is “characterised by iterative approaches to the design, enactment, analysis, and refinement of an intervention” (Ryu, 2020, pp. 233–234). The use of the term, intervention, needs to be understood in its dynamic, rather than deterministic, sense. The dynamic intervention that is the hallmark of EPIC research is based on the foundation that interactive engagement with others “improves their attention and focus, motivates them to use better critical thinking skills, and develops valuable learning experiences” (Umar & Ko, 2022, p. 2).

In DBR, the intervention is not a preplanned program; rather it is created in collaboration with individual groups of research participants before being implemented and evaluated in real contexts. To be clear, DBR is a theory driven, context specific, collaboration “characterised by a dual commitment to theory refinement and local impact” (Ryu, 2020, p. 234).

Ethics processes

The research undertaken as EPIC 2023 was granted ethical approval by Griffith University (GU Ref No: 2021/059). Additional access approvals were provided by each school principal so that the researchers could make contact with potential school-specific PELT participants. Once contact was made with prospective participants, and they indicated that they would like to participate in EPIC 2023, formal written consent was subsequently requested and provided by each participant. All participants provided written consent for the following data collection:

- Audio and video recordings using Microsoft Teams® of semi-formal interviews at the beginning and end of the research
- Screen shots and blog posts on the dedicated EPIC 2023 Microsoft SharePoint® site
- Photographs and researcher field notes of both masterclass days
- Audio and video recordings of meetings/cogenerative dialogues/metalogues (face-to-face/online using Microsoft Teams®) between one or more members of the school's PELT and one or both researchers
- Audio and video recordings of cogenerative dialogues with participants who joined EPIC but were not PELT members
- Artefacts (e.g., email communication, school plans, teacher planning documents, photographs, copies of student work, artefacts generated during masterclass workshops)
- School-produced PELT video or PowerPoint® presentations delivered to all EPIC 2023 schools at Masterclass 2
- Secondary data in the form of six professionally-produced videos by ISQ and QIS Parents Network which featured a representative group of EPIC 2023 participants who gave written permission for their video to be used in the research.

In line with courteous and ethical research practices, the researchers continued to ask participants to verbally affirm their consent before each new data collection episode.

The consent arrangements extended to research participants being voluntary participants who may withdraw at any stage of the research process. The consent arrangements also included an undertaking by the researchers that the school sites, and individual participants and any others involved, would be anonymised, except for the researchers and the EPIC 2023 Project Coordinator Ms Amanda Watt (ISQ). Website links to school sites are also not included in this report to protect the anonymity of schools and participants.





EPIC 2023 participants

As mentioned previously, EPIC 2023 is the third and final year of the ISQ, QIS Parents Network, and Griffith University longitudinal research. As shown in Figure 1, EPIC 2022 (Willis & Exley, 2022) and EPIC 2023 built on the activities inaugurated in the EPIC 2021 (Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) research.

Table 2 documents the number of schools and participants in each year of the EPIC research. Over the three years, 10 schools were involved in various EPIC initiatives, with some schools participating in more than one year. Over the three years, the number of participants per year increased, commencing with 14 participants in EPIC 2021, 22 participants in EPIC 2022, and 55 participants in EPIC 2023.

Four EPIC 2023 schools had participated in EPIC research previously: three EPIC 2023 schools participated in EPIC 2022 and EPIC 2021 and one EPIC 2023 school also participated in EPIC 2021. Hence, four schools were new to EPIC in 2023. Although some EPIC 2023 schools participated in 2021 and 2022, the participants in the schools were not always the same.

For example, for School A, none of the EPIC 2021 participants participated in EPIC 2023, two EPIC 2023 participants participated in EPIC 2022, and seven participated in EPIC 2023. This means five of School A's seven EPIC 2023 participants were new to EPIC. Table 3 shows the schools and number of participants involved in EPIC 2021 and EPIC 2022.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the roles of the EPIC 2023 participants in the eight participating schools. Role descriptors refer to formal participant roles and/or responsibilities and not to informal roles or the broader work of participants. For example, all members of school staff are responsible for the wellbeing and welfare of students. Participants were also counted more than once if their formal roles and/or responsibilities fell under more than one descriptor. For example, an EPIC 2023 participant may have been counted according to their teaching role, and counted as a parent representative on the PELT who also taught at the school.

Figure 1: The EPIC longitudinal research 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
6 schools, 2 phases Phase 1 (6 schools) - focus on school leaders Phase 2 (2 of the 6 schools) - focus on 4 teachers' planning & pedagogical practices	3 of the original 6 schools - focus on groups of teachers working together to enhance their pedagogical practices and school processes	8 schools (4 of the 6 original schools + 4 new schools to EPIC) - focus on Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) that include a parent so parent voices feature more prominently in the research

Table 2: Number of schools and participants in EPIC 2021–2023

YEAR	EPIC 2021	EPIC 2022	EPIC 2023	TOTAL
No. of schools	6 x schools A–F	3 x schools A, C, D	8 x schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, J	10 x schools A–J
No. of participants	14	22	55	91

Table 3: 2023 schools and number of participants in EPIC 2021 and EPIC 2022

SCHOOLS/PARTICIPANTS	A	C	D	E	G	H	I	J	TOTAL
EPIC 2023 schools that participated in EPIC 2021	√	√	√	√					4
EPIC 2023 schools that participated in EPIC 2022	√	√	√						3
EPIC 2023 schools	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	8
EPIC 2023 participants who participated in EPIC 2021	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
EPIC 2023 participants who participated in EPIC 2022	2	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	10

Table 4: Table of EPIC 2023 participant information

ROLES	PARTICIPANT INFORMATION								TOTAL
	A P-12	C K-12	D P-6	E P-12	G P-10	H P-12	I P-12	J P-12	
EPIC 2023 Participants	7	9	5	7	7	6	7	7	55
Principals	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	7
School leaders	1	3	0	1	0	4	4	2	15
PELT parents	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	9
Parent/family/community engagement officer (or similar)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Early years teachers	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	5
Middle years teachers	0	5	3	2	2	0	0	3	15
Senior secondary years teachers	3	2	0	3	0	1	0	0	9
Distance education teachers	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	4
Specialist teachers	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
PELT parents who also taught at the school	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
PELT members with pastoral/boarding/wellbeing roles	0	2	0	1	0	1	2	2	8
PELT members with administration/marketing/communication roles	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	4
PELT parents in voluntary school roles (e.g., school committees/boards or school/classroom support)	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4
Teacher/staff member & current/past parent at school	3	1	0	2	5	0	3	1	15
Others	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

Data generation: the enabling strategies

Previous parent and community engagement research undertaken by the researchers (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) highlighted there was no one or right way to engage parents. For this reason, the EPIC researchers do not tell EPIC participants what to do, but instead work alongside them in their parent engagement journeys, sharing relevant literature, research findings, and illustrations of practice. It should be noted that Linda and Beryl undertake the dual roles of researchers and research participants alongside the school-based research participants. During this process, cogenerative dialogues are used as the primary data generation enabling strategy. As indicated earlier, cogenerative dialogues or cogens “enable substantive conversations” and generate the data for “developing shared understandings and fresh insights about aspects of EPIC” (Exley & Willis, 2022, p. 118). Some cogenerative dialogues were also considered metalogues. Like cogenerative dialogues, metalogues are substantive conversations. However, these conversations focus on subjects, ideas, and even feelings which emerge from previous conversations to analyse, problematise, and scrutinise them at deeper, more reflexive (i.e., meta) levels (Willis & Exley, 2021a; Willis, Grimmett et al., 2018). Metalogues occurred between PELT members and the researchers when conversations returned to previous cogenerative dialogues to focus on some aspect of education connected with the EPIC research. Topics that arose included the nature of curriculum and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the EPIC 2023 research, some PELTs appeared to engage in metalogues more than others (e.g., School C) which may have reflected their practice of regularly dialoguing cogeneratively amongst themselves.

Forty-eight cogenerative dialogues occurred in the EPIC 2023 research. Participant interviews also made up a significant portion of data generation. It should be noted that because of the nature of the research, participant interviews with one or both researchers often resembled one-on-one cogenerative dialogues (Willis, 2016). Hence, interviews with participants could be considered a further enabling strategy.

There were 93 participant interviews in the EPIC 2023 research. Following the process for data generation inaugurated in the EPIC 2022 research (Willis & Exley, 2022), Microsoft Teams® was used to generate video data and raw transcripts of cogenerative dialogues and participant interviews. All transcripts were carefully checked by the researchers against the video-recorded data as soon as possible after data generation and adjusted as necessary to ensure the transcriptions were an accurate representation of what was said by participants. Initial analysis occurred during this time and included researcher notes and memos on transcriptions.

Data generation: the affinity spaces

Throughout the EPIC 2023 research, data were generated in a range of affinity spaces through a number of research generation strategies. Table 5 provides a timeline of scheduled EPIC 2023 data collection activities. In addition, in April 2023, EPIC participants received an invitation from Catholic School Parents Queensland (CSPQ) to attend a professional learning session with visiting scholar Professor Janet Goodall from the University of Swansea (Wales, UK). Professor Goodall is recognised internationally for her work in parent engagement. The EPIC research partners from Griffith University and ISQ/QIS Parents Network, Linda, Beryl, and Amanda, attended, together with two EPIC 2023 participants, Jill (School C Principal) and George (School J Family Liaison Officer). Linda, Beryl, Amanda, and Jill were invited to make a presentation on their work which included showing an EPIC 2022 video of School C. Jill spoke about how participating in the EPIC research over the last three years had changed her knowledge and practice of parent engagement as a school leader and teacher, and subsequently answered questions from the audience.

Table 5: EPIC 2023 data collection timeline

DATE	THE AFFINITY SPACE	DATA COLLECTED
6 February	EPIC Microsoft SharePoint® site	Record of decision making; field notes for setting up the Microsoft SharePoint® site
13 February	EPIC coursework published on dedicated Microsoft SharePoint® site introducing the EPIC project and the EPIC Pillars	5 x short-form videos prepared by Linda and Beryl plus other resources assembled into 5 x flipped learning modules
Early March	EPIC 2023 research information videos published on EPIC Microsoft SharePoint®	2 x short-form videos prepared by Linda and Beryl as flipped learning resources
10 March	Masterclass 1 School A 5 participants School C 6 participants School D 3 participants School E 5 participants School G 6 participants School H 5 participants School I 5 participants School J 6 participants	41 x attendees 41 x individual written reflections 8 x sheets of butcher’s paper with PELT strategy planning notes Photographs of individual participants and school PELTs
28 April	CSPQ parent engagement professional learning event with visiting scholar Prof Janet Goodall (University of Swansea, Wales, UK)	Field notes of the professional learning event Presentation by Linda, Beryl, Amanda, and Jill (EPIC 2023 School C Principal) Public sharing of EPIC 2022 video of School C
March – May	Interview 1 with individual participants on Microsoft Teams® School A 6 participants School C 7 participants School D 5 participants School E 7 participants School G 7 participants School H 6 participants School I 7 participants School J 6 participants	51 x individual interviews, approximately 30 minutes each Researcher notes and memos on interview transcriptions Note: Eden, Acting Principal, School G, provided an initial interview when she joined the PELT in August 2023
March – September	School-based Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELT) meet in face-to-face or virtual mode to cogenerate PELT ideas and initiatives	No formal data collected; EPIC participants reflexively discuss their PELT experiences in cogens with the researchers and blog posts on the EPIC Microsoft SharePoint® site
March – August	Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC Blog space	40 x blog posts 85 x unique replies
March – September	Cogens between each PELT & the researchers during Terms 2, 3, & 4 on Microsoft Teams® School A 5 cogens School C 7 cogens School D 7 cogens School E 6 cogens School G 3 cogens School H 6 cogens School I 4 cogens School J 10 cogens	48 x PELT cogens, approximately 30–40 minutes each where PELT members cogenerate with the researchers about the progress of EPIC initiatives, PELT ideas and plans, and other aspects affecting the PELT Researcher notes and memos on cogenerative dialogue transcriptions
24 July	School visit to look at facilities for hosting Masterclass 2	Field notes of school visit and cogenerative dialogues with PELT members from the EPIC 2023 school
11 August	Cogen in Microsoft Teams® Solo writing time & collaboration using emails	2 x EPIC 2023 participations co-authoring with Linda and Beryl 1 x professional journal article, written for a national teacher association and accepted for publication in February 2024
Early September	Flipped learning video for PELTs to prepare a showcase presentation for Masterclass 2, EPIC Microsoft SharePoint® site	2 x short-form videos prepared by Linda and Beryl as flipped learning resources
12 September	Masterclass 2 School A 5 participants School C 6 participants School D 3 participants School E 5 participants School G 5 participants School H 4 participants School I 3 participants School J 6 participants	37 x attendees 8 x PELT showcase presentations x approximately 5 minutes each 37 x EPIC participants provided written feedback as part of the member checking process on the draft EPIC 2023 Report C-H-A-N-G-E Framework snapshot
October – November	Interview 2 with individual participants on Microsoft Teams® School A 3 participants School C 7 participants School D 5 participants School E 5 participants School G 6 participants School H 4 participants School I 7 participants School J 5 participants	42 x individual interviews, approximately 15–20 minutes each Researcher notes and memos on interview transcriptions

FLIPPED LEARNING

EPIC 2023 included two full-day masterclasses for all EPIC participants, one in March 2023 and another in September 2023, for which flipped learning activities were designed. The purpose of flipped learning is to provide what Willis (2017b) refers to as “gateway knowledge” (p. 281), that is, introductory knowledge. With a theoretical foundation in collaborative learning theory and constructivism, flipped learning activities encourage facilitators and learners to “shift away from traditional learning”, bringing them “closer to proactive learning skills” (Umar & Ko, 2022, p. 8). In a systematic review synthesis of literature published between 2012 and 2018, Bond (2020) concluded that the flipped learning approach overwhelmingly supported learner engagement, “with 93% of studies citing at least one dimension of behavioural, affective or cognitive engagement” (p. 1).

To prepare for Masterclass 1, EPIC participants were provided with the opportunity to engage with a flipped learning experience centred on a digital archive prepared by the researchers. The digital archive was housed on an ISQ Microsoft Sharepoint® site in an EPIC 2023 private group. The flipped learning activities were presented as:

- 13 February 2023 'Take Your Mark': participants access five x short-form EPIC 2023 coursework videos and associated reading materials and selected EPIC videos from the suite of EPIC videos made in 2021 or 2022 and loaded to the EPIC 2023 Microsoft SharePoint® site. These resources covered: a welcome and introduction (Module 1); information about engaging parents and the community (Module 2); inquiry curriculum (Module 3); affinity spaces (Module 4); and cogenerative dialogues (Module 5).
- Early March 2023 'Get Set': participants access 2 x short-form EPIC 2023 coursework videos that explained the housekeeping matters associated with Masterclass 1, and provided advice for letting the parents and school communities of each school know about the school's participation in the EPIC 2023 research.
- 10 March 2023 'Go': Masterclass 1 entailed a full-day professional learning event for the school PELTs, hosted in Brisbane City (see separate sections on masterclasses).

MASTERCLASS 1

Masterclass 1, held on 10 March 2023, included a formal welcome and introductions, with activities around the EPIC Pillars (Session 1), EPIC research findings (Session 2), planning for engaging parents in the curriculum (Session 3), and end-of-day housekeeping, including a Kahoot (Kahoot!, 2023) online quiz on EPIC terminology (Session 4). The pedagogic design of the masterclass subscribed to the EPIC Pillars of inquiry-based learning, cogenerative dialogues, and the opportunity to capitalise on the affordances of digital technologies.

THE EPIC BLOG

EPIC 2023 participants were invited to contribute to the EPIC 2023 blog site, housed in the same Microsoft SharePoint® site as the EPIC 2023 private group. EPIC participants were invited to upload blog posts to the Microsoft SharePoint® blog, or to cogenerate with their EPIC peers by commenting on another blog post. Forty blog posts were posted and available analytics which captured participant interactions were documented.

MASTERCLASS 2

Masterclass 2 was held on 12 September 2023, this time at a school site in an outer suburban ISQ member school. As with Masterclass 1, the day commenced with a formal welcome and an explanation of the day's activities. This time, the program featured each of the eight EPIC 2023 schools presenting a five-minute multimodal (including videos and narrated PowerPoint® slide presentations) showcase of their EPIC journey so far. After each school's PELT members presented, the other seven PELTs were given time to turn and talk or mini-gen (Willis, 2016; Willis et al., 2014) to each other so as to capture ideas and reflections that were top-of-mind. Then the PELT members of the presenting school were put into the role of an “expert” of their school's experience, and dispersed across the other seven PELT groups to have more targeted conversations about their EPIC 2023 journey. This provided a timely opportunity for cogens to take place in-the-moment as it were, and in so doing, maximised talking time across the EPIC 2023 participant cohort.

Data analysis

As indicated above, the researchers adopt an iterative and reflexive process of deductive and inductive analysis. Babbie (2010) explained deductive analysis as when the pre-ordinate theoretical category is “tested against observations”, whereas inductive analysis “begins with observation and seeks to find a pattern within” (p. 52). The EPIC 2023 research used both deductive analysis, sometimes described as “top-down thematic analysis”, and inductive thematic analysis, sometimes described as “bottom-up thematic analysis” (Proudfoot, 2023, p. 313). Deductive thematic analysis was used when the researchers employed the Parent Engagement C-H-A-N-G-E Framework to produce a snapshot of EPIC 2023 practices for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement (see Appendix 1). The three-stage deductive thematic analysis was based on the formative work of Boyatzis (1998), and in this study, involved:

- Stage 1: reading the data in recursive cycles to establish points that connected to the theoretical categories of C-H-A-N-G-E
- Stage 2: develop tentative descriptions of the practices to create the draft snapshot
- Stage 3: determine the reliability of the deductive analysis using researcher and participant metalogue.

Specifically, Linda completed Stage 1, harvesting the data and recursively reading the data with the theory in mind to progress to Stage 2, that is, developing tentative descriptions of 10 practices for each key concept of the Parent Engagement C-H-A-N-G-E Framework snapshot. In Stage 3, in metalogues with Beryl, the 10 practices were realigned into 9 practices. Stage 3 was then repeated at Masterclass 2 where each PELT enacted a metalogue as they reviewed the work-in-progress. When research participants are involved in Stage 3 deductive thematic analysis, this is called member-checking as research participants are considered to be *members* of the research project (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Inductive thematic analysis was used when the researchers used the six research sub-questions to generate descriptive findings of the eight case studies. The researchers used the well-established six-stage approach outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006):

- Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data
- Stage 2: Generation of initial codes
- Stage 3: Searching for themes
- Stage 4: Reviewing themes
- Stage 5: Defining themes
- Stage 6: Final analysis and writing up the case studies.

Importantly, the six-stage approach for inductive thematic analysis is also recursive as the researchers moved backwards and forwards through the approaches. For example, during the Stage 4 metalogue, the researchers continued to invest time into data familiarisation (Stage 1) and searching for themes (Stage 3).

There was a purposeful interdependence with using the same data sets for the deductive and inductive thematic analysis. Additionally, this approach helped to ensure that the voices of the participants were valued as they contributed to the creation of extensive data sets over a 10-month period which resulted in the production of the EPIC 2023 C-H-A-N-G-E Framework snapshot and the case studies. The voices of the participants also contributed to the validity of the analysis as they worked with the snapshot drafts in Stage 3 of the deductive thematic analysis during Masterclass 2. Furthermore, participant voices contributed to Stage 6 of the inductive analysis as each PELT leader accepted an invitation to member-check the final draft of their school's case study and provide commentary and feedback.

Case study 1 school A



An immersive, student-led curriculum approach to engaging parents and communities in the senior school

School context

Established over three decades ago, School A was a non-government, co-educational school located in a semi-rural suburb on the outskirts of a major southeast Queensland metropolis. The school catered for over 400 Pre-Prep to Year 12 students and followed an internationally-recognised curriculum adjusted to align with the Australian Curriculum. School A valued mutually supportive relationships among students, staff, and families, while simultaneously encouraging a respect for the environment. Underpinning the school's curriculum were philosophical ideals such as truth, beauty, reverence, imagination, and inspiration. The school adopted experiential approaches to the curriculum. The life and work of the school were regularly celebrated in whole-school community festivals and other events. According to School A's website, parent participation was vital to the school's learning environment. Parents were encouraged to actively participate in all aspects of the school as partners with teachers and other families in the education of their child. The school also had a Parents and Friends (P&F) Association whose aims included fostering a vibrant school community and facilitating communication among its various stakeholders.

Involvement in EPIC

School A was the only school to have participated in all aspects of the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research from 2021 to 2023 (see Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). Table 6 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's three-year involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School A's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised seven participants. The PELT leader, Gabrielle Daniels, taught secondary school Speech and Drama. The parent representative was Amy Zenick. Two school leaders, Principal, Ava Flowers, and Secondary School Leader, Petrina Lorenso, also participated in the EPIC 2021 and 2022 research. The PELT

included two classroom teachers: Valerie Henry who taught secondary school History, English, and Philosophy, and Lizzie Dunlop who taught primary school Science and secondary school Biology and Visual Arts. A specialist teacher, Tilley Nash, supported the PELT's Performing Arts curriculum work.

A summary of information about School A's PELT members is presented in Table 7.

School A's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and five cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Each cogen included either the PELT leader (Gabrielle) or one school leader (Ava or Petrina). Tilley joined the PELT in August and participated in one cogen (Cogen 4) that included two other PELT members and the researchers. In Cogen 3, Petrina and Amy met with the researchers, while Cogen 5 was a one-on-one cogen (Willis, 2016) between Gabrielle and the researchers. Cogenerating in small groups, dyads, or singly with the researchers ensured continuity of knowledge creation in the practice and research of parent and community engagement at School A throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Despite staff shortages and changes, work commitments, and absences through illness, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 37/47 (79%) possible data collection opportunities.

School A's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

School A's PELT leader, Gabrielle, joined the EPIC research for the first time in 2023. She was cognisant of the impact of the EPIC research on the school over the previous two years,

Table 6: School A—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 7: School A—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Gabrielle Daniels	Secondary Speech & Drama Classroom Teacher	Secondary school	PELT leader; Experienced teacher
Amy Zenick	PELT Parent		New parent at school in 2020; Member of School Board 2022–2023
Ava Flowers	Principal	Whole school	EPIC 2021 & 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Petrina Lorenso	Secondary School Leader	Secondary school	EPIC 2021 & 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Valerie Henry	Secondary HASS, English, & Philosophy Classroom Teacher	Secondary school	Experienced teacher & school leader
Lizzie Dunlop	Primary Science & Secondary Biology & Visual Arts Classroom Teacher	Primary & Secondary school	New staff member at school in 2020
Tilley Nash	Performing Arts Secondary Specialist Teacher	Secondary school	Long association with school & school community volunteer

commenting, "I think the important thing that EPIC's brought to our school is the idea of engagement" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Gabrielle felt the culture of the school had shifted over the recent past. Speaking about her colleagues, she said, "We're all aware of doing things for parents and them coming and listening to us or watching things" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Gabrielle reflected,

We've had events in the past that were so engagement driven. I think this is the story of small schools that grow. Initially, it's all engagement, because parents start community schools ... And this school was no exception. It was started by a group of parents wanting a particular type of schooling; so, we have that in our genetic makeup. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

Gabrielle felt "the community aspect still lived quite strongly" at School A (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). She elaborated,

We've got a lot of siblings at the same school. We've got a lot of teachers who are parents. So, we're always linking between different classes or even parents with students or secondary school parents with primary school parents because the primary school teachers teach our children and likewise, we (referring to secondary teachers) teach their children. (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

In 2022, however, Gabrielle expressed a desire to the staff at School A for "a genuine healing gesture towards our community in wanting to bring them in and involve them after a couple of years of COVID" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). As a result, in 2023, she and the other members of the PELT, planned to facilitate a large, student-led, secondary school, community project based on the curriculum topic, *Ancient Worlds*.

The PELT parent representative, Amy, joined School A several years ago. Her involvement in the school was affected by COVID-19, "so it took [her] a long while just to even meet the parents in the classes that [her] children [were] in" (Amy, PELT Parent, School A, Interview 1). More recently, she relayed, "My involvement [in the school] is in whatever class activities have gone on, any of the festivals that the school runs; I've gone to all of those obviously supporting my children ..." (Amy, PELT Parent, School A, Interview 1). In 2022, Amy became a member of the school's governing board. She stated,

I probably don't get as involved in a lot of the things that parents would usually get involved in, because I'm usually very busy with work. But being a board member and offering my skills in terms of financial reporting was something that I thought I could contribute. (Amy, PELT Parent, School A, Interview 1)

CASE STUDY 1 SCHOOL A CONTINUED

Amy projected,

I'm excited about participating in the EPIC 2023 research. I'm also excited about the *Ancient Worlds* event that will happen later in the year for our community. I think it's going to be the most amazing tonic that's needed badly. (PELT Parent, School A, Interview 1)

At the end of the school's EPIC 2022 research journey, School A's principal, Ava, remarked, "If I looked back on where we've come from two years ago ... I think the biggest thing is a school-wide understanding that parent education sessions and inviting community to things like festivals, isn't engagement" (Willis & Exley, 2022, p. 17). At the beginning of 2023, she observed,

There's a different way of thinking [about parent and community engagement] across the school ... especially because Max (referring to a highly-experienced teacher and past principal who participated in EPIC 2022) has been working with the teachers across many grades in the primary school. (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 1)

Ava elaborated, "At the moment in the primary school, [engaging parents and the community] is not about supporting the students' parents from afar, but about supporting the teachers to create change in their classroom in little ways ...". (Principal, School A, Interview 1). Ava identified a similar shift at the beginning of 2023 in the secondary school in relation to the *Ancient Worlds* project, where teachers were asking, "How can we bring parents on board?" and "How can we support the students?" (Principal, School A, Interview 1).

Petrina was also introduced to the EPIC research in 2021 which she said, "brought a renewed understanding of the difference between parent engagement and parent involvement" (School Leader, School A, Interview 1). She stated,

The acronym and the use of the word, EPIC, is familiar [to staff at the school]. Justin, from 2022 (referring to the EPIC 2022 research) is a parent and a teacher across middle and secondary school and is quite involved in the school. He does speak to a lot of people, so people are familiar with that language. (Petrina, School Leader, School A, Interview 1)

Since 2022, Petrina observed, "It's become apparent, especially after COVID, when community comes together again, it's so beneficial" (School Leader, School A, Interview 1). Indeed, she felt it was necessary to build community by "bringing parents in and recognising them for their skills and the way they can contribute to society and the school" (Petrina, School Leader, School A, Interview 1). Petrina thus saw "parents as teachers" (School Leader, School A, Interview 1). She also believed that engaging parents in their child's learning in and through community was "going to make a big difference to the way in which the students and the teaching community benefit" (Petrina, School Leader, School A, Interview 1). When seen in this light, she felt there was a reciprocal benefit for parents because the school was essentially letting them know, "We see you. You are valued" (Petrina, School Leader, School A, Interview 1). According to Petrina, this form of acknowledgement "goes a long way in building that deeper

sense of community and fostering humanity" (School Leader, School A, Interview 1).

Valerie was new to the EPIC research. She worked closely with Gabrielle. As an experienced secondary school teacher, she felt that traditionally there was "a lot more parent engagement in the primary school. Parents will go on camps; they will be there" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). In secondary school,

... there's a necessity for the parents to step back a little bit and allow their children to have more independence, so they don't necessarily go on camps. ... Their role is to support their child to be able to access the learning and to be able to do homework and have a supportive environment at home ... (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

Valerie explained what was different about the *Ancient Worlds* project:

We're asking for our community to be much more involved in [their child's learning] because we're a small rural community on the outskirts of the city, so it's much richer for us if the community is involved in the things that we do. It means that parents may not necessarily be involved directly in their own children's experience, but they're involved in [the school] community. So, other children get the benefit of talking to adults who are not necessarily their own parent, but parents of their friends or other parents in the school. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

Lizzie was also new to the EPIC research. She collaborated with Gabrielle and Valerie in the secondary school on the *Ancient Worlds* project. Masterclass 1 changed Lizzie's perception of "the idea of parent involvement and parent engagement" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). She reflected,

It's easy to say that you're involving parents and that can be a one-sided email about what you're doing [with their child] at school. I had an understanding of engagement, but attending the masterclass, and then working deeply with the idea, has sparked the notion that it is much more than that and it goes hand-in-hand with our school's philosophy. It's the [idea of] community and it's creating this support network of people within the realm of education ... and helping young people to learn how to be in the world. Community is so essential to that. (Lizzie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

As mentioned previously, Tilley joined the PELT later than the other members. It was her first experience of EPIC. Tilley specialised in teaching aspects of the Performing Arts curriculum in ways that supported the school's philosophical approach, while simultaneously engaging students and the community.

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

From the beginning of the EPIC 2023 research, School A's PELT members adopted a macro-level (school-level) focus, envisioning a project designed to "engage the school

community within the curriculum that the school already taught" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Valerie described how the COVID-19 pandemic left "the school community ... disillusioned, tired, disconnected, and concerned for the life and soul of the educational impulse that is so dear to all our hearts" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). Drawing on the school's philosophy, she and other members of the PELT inquired, "Where is renewal happening in our school and how were we going to really live it? With no going back to *normal*, what kind of world were we going to live in now?" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). They took these inquiry questions to the secondary school student body (Years 8 to 12), asking, "If given the opportunity to participate in a student-led experience or festival, what world would you want to create?" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). Given a previous successful youth conference, Valerie asserted, "We knew how powerful student voice can be if given the right spaces and platforms to engage" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). She recounted, "We threw around ideas and initiated discussions. And then a quiet voice arose from the mass ... from our students ... from a year 12 student" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). A signature feature of School A's Year 12 curriculum was a year-long student research project that "combined a personal passion with a community and world development focus" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). The student said, "I want to direct a performance and I would like to work with *Ancient Worlds*" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18). The *Ancient Worlds* project was born. The project was quintessentially EPIC in nature, emerging as Gabrielle explained, from,

... the desire for a student-led festival that would engage our secondary school students in a way that wasn't just an add-on to a festival ... but of wanting them to have some sort of buy-in, something that has sprung from their interests that will engage not only our students, but also alumni and the community in general. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

The *Ancient Worlds* project drew on stories in core texts from the school's mythic literacy curriculum. The texts centred on Ancient Greek protagonists and themes of: letting go of old ways of thinking and embracing new levels of consciousness; overcoming adversity; exploring identity; coming home; and ultimately finding renewal. Considered foundational texts for Western culture, Valerie wrote that such themes "live clearly in the hearts and imaginations of the students who travel the School A journey" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Microsoft SharePoint® EPIC blog #18).

Gabrielle recognised the *Ancient Worlds* project was "very cogenerative" in nature, saying its "tentacles are extending into all different [areas]" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). What she initially conceived as a relatively small Year 10 drama unit which would culminate in an end-of-term performance before the school's Term 3 festival week, became a whole-school inquiry across three terms which was the focus and driving force of the festival.

Gabrielle explained how in Term 1, the *Ancient Worlds* project "filtered into other [Year 10] subjects and practical classes so that [teachers] saw other ways they could bring in [the students'] maths or physics subjects or chemistry or other English classes that would also support the inquiry" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). She further stated that because the *Ancient Worlds* project emerged from the secondary school student body, other classes and subjects also incorporated the inquiry into their curriculum. She described how the Year 12 students began to look at how they might budget for the festival in their maths class. She explained that the Year 12s were "a strong creative group, most of whom are in my drama elective, so it made sense that they were looking at ways they might in the future apply for funding and create a budget for their artistic projects" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). The inquiry also extended to the primary school in Year 5 where students are first introduced to the texts and themes which later comprise the Year 10 literacy curriculum. Gabrielle explained, "[*Ancient Worlds*] goes into the Year 5 curriculum because it's a play that they put on, so they will be involved in the same project, which won't be extra for them because it's a part of their normal curriculum" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1).

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

Macro-level (school-level) spaces facilitated engagement among students, teachers, parents, and the community throughout the *Ancient Worlds* project. As indicated above, in 2023 the school inaugurated a vertical curriculum program on Friday afternoons for Year 8 to 12 students. This opened up other curriculum-focused spaces for students and teachers to work with different age groups in ways that simultaneously connected to the *Ancient Worlds* project and the school community. Gabrielle explained that as part of the school's vertical curriculum program,

Students could choose an area that interested them. So, for example, I took the acting group. Lizzie, our Visual Arts teacher, took the pottery group ... We're also looking at that being a way to build up the projects for the festival. In another of my groups, they're actually starting to look at the script that we might work with for the performances. And next term (referring to Term 2), that will actually be even more focused. And then in Term 3, [the vertical curriculum space] will also make time available [for students] to rehearse and be involved in how we create the different worlds. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

PELT members also exploited existing school structures to enable affinity spaces amongst the teachers which facilitated the *Ancient Worlds* project. Speaking about cogenerative dialoguing, Gabrielle likened these spaces to concentric circles where "the inner circle is obviously our EPIC team. Then there's the staff and we've been using our own high school faculty [meetings to talk about EPIC] as well" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). The faculty meetings occurred every morning, enabling substantive conversations to develop over several days and weeks. These spaces also

CASE STUDY 1 SCHOOL A CONTINUED

afforded opportunities to deal with “those things that just come up ... and can be dealt with on the spot” (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). The outside circle was “the larger connecting circle with the community” (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1).

As a group, the PELT reached out to the school community comprising parents and alumni in Term 1 through the school’s newsletter and Facebook page, inviting them to attend meetings to discuss the *Ancient Worlds* project. They used physical spaces such as the front of the school to “put a boat out with a banner on it that [said] *Ancient Worlds* to create interest within the community” (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1). Valerie also relayed,

I’ve decided to keep a blog of the whole process of the festival. I’ve written the first entry and talked to the communications people at our school. So, that’s gone on the website now and also gone out in the newsletter to parents. That’s one way of me continually, in a small way, keeping the engagement alive and talking to people about where we’re at and what we’re doing. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

The initiatives enabled PELT members to compile a secure list of email contacts. This process facilitated the creation of pods, which involved “particular community members taking on certain roles within [the *Ancient Worlds* project] and they’re tied in with a teacher that’s also tied in with a student” (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1). Pods were part of “an overall project management approach” to the *Ancient Worlds* project of “getting everybody connected” (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1).

Members of the PELT also reached out to parents individually using email. The Term 3 *Ancient Worlds* festival occurred over four days hence, Valerie reasoned, “the students are going to need things to do other than preparing for performances” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Given the Year 12 Philosophy curriculum’s alignment with the *Ancient Worlds* project, she proposed setting up a philosophy café. The café would provide an invitational space for parents and students each morning to watch, listen, and learn from one another as they dialogued cogeneratively about questions relevant to the Philosophy curriculum. Similarly, the philosophy café could open a space in the evenings of the festival for adults to dialogue.

Lizzie also considered expanding the affinity space of the pottery group to after-school sessions so parents and community members could join. She said,

I know that there are a lot of parents who are not only interested in pottery, but also have a deep knowledge of pottery. So, the idea is to bring pottery into the feast aspect within the festival that is either part of the performance or part of an actual gathering of the community. (Lizzie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1)

Another affinity space included internationally-recognised puppeteers from the local community who were invited to become artists in residence at the school. Gabrielle explained that the Year 10 students usually do boat building as part of their curriculum, but to support the *Ancient Worlds* project

they would build puppets instead. Puppet Masters was an artistic group that combined traditional skills in puppetry with digital technology techniques to create original visual theatre works with young people and artists. Gabrielle elaborated on the synergy between the Puppet Masters work and School A’s curriculum approach:

They’re interested in engaging the imagination of audiences ... to be able to create stories through the simplest objects ... One of the reasons we brought them on board is because the method they’re using to work with puppets is a threefold method that works with the head, the heart, and the will, which is strongly linked to our pedagogical framework. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1)

At the beginning of Term 2, Petrina summarised the many different interconnected affinity spaces the PELT members used not only to facilitate, but also accelerate the *Ancient Worlds* project:

Gabrielle has brought together students and staff, staff and staff, community and staff, and ultimately students, staff, and community in the vertical curriculum program. All the different groups who are invested and working with the *Ancient Worlds* project are now starting to materialise in the living-with-the-people. I know behind the scenes there’s a lot going on with Valerie and her blogs, and the various community holders of the groups already looking at specific areas of props, costumes, make-up, and working with that individually. Now, we get a real sense that [the *Ancient Worlds* project] is starting to actually work on the ground.

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

Members of the PELT valued having Amy as the school’s parent representative throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Regular cogenerative dialogues among PELT members proved challenging because the different work schedules of the teachers and Amy meant there were few times when they were all available to connect. Nevertheless, Ava appreciated Amy’s willingness to participate in the research, especially cogenerative dialogues with the researchers (Principal, School A, Interview 2). Similarly, Amy appreciated dialoguing cogeneratively with members of the PELT and the researchers as these meetings occurred online using Microsoft Teams® and were scheduled in advance, allowing her to simultaneously accommodate her participation and work commitments (PELT Parent, School A, Interview 2). Ava acknowledged Amy’s drive in leading a T-shirt initiative as part of the *Ancient Worlds* project, saying, “She’s just one of these people that makes things happen” (Principal, School A, Interview 2). In the first cogen, Amy reflected,

The genesis of the idea [for the T-shirt initiative] was my daughter who came back from an exchange school with a T-shirt the school had produced for their festival. I got thinking that at the same time as we’re planning for the *Ancient Worlds* festival, we’re talking about fundraising from the school governance level. Working with Ava on a

fundraising strategy (referring to her work on School A’s board), I thought T-shirts might help support the project a little bit financially, but also build momentum in the community in the lead up to festival week in third term. (PELT Parent, School A, Cogen 1)

For the T-shirts, Amy added, “I’m thinking about something that can be commemorative, that’s celebratory, and fits in with the project itself” (PELT Parent, School A, Cogen 1). Amy’s business knowledge and connections allowed her to value-add to the *Ancient Worlds* project. Based on earlier cogenerative discussions with PELT members and students, she relayed,

We’re looking at T-shirts which are part of the sustainable cotton initiative, then using a recognised local print company that also uses sustainable inks and dyes for their screen and digital printing. So, it’s a holistic approach to the circular economy and waste. (Amy, PELT Parent, School A, Cogen 1)

Drawings of the artwork for the T-shirt were originally mocked up by Lizzie who worked on different designs with the students during the vertical curriculum program (Valerie, Classroom Teachers, School A, Cogen 2). The final design was completed by a student and passed to Amy who managed production before the festival (Gabrielle, Classroom Teachers, School A, Cogen 4).

Gabrielle highlighted other benefits of Amy’s inclusion in School A’s PELT. Reflecting Valerie’s sentiments, Gabrielle commented, “[School A] normally has a strong culture of parent engagement in primary school; so, in secondary school is where it always peters off” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). She appreciated that parents often took on more full-time work as their child moved into secondary school, and also that alumni parents and community members were a continuous source of support in the secondary school. However, she felt having a “current parent” working alongside a team of teachers was a distinct advantage (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). She explained,

A current parent is fantastic because they’ve really got two different ways of seeing what’s going on—from the inside and the outside. To have someone that’s got her eyes on the same thing as a [regular secondary school] parent, is incredibly valuable. (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2)

Amy’s comments about the school’s use of social media to communicate with parents and the community made members of the PELT more conscious of how they were engaging parents in their child’s learning and wellbeing (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). Ava observed, “There were gaps [in communication] that we didn’t know existed” (Principal, School A, Interview 1). The gaps became apparent when the PELT initially attempted to spread the word about the *Ancient Worlds* project (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 1). Consequently, the PELT, led by Valerie, started blogging regularly about the project, which included sharing the contents of each post through various channels (see above). Longer-term, Gabrielle indicated that Amy’s work on the PELT to highlight possible areas of communication

where the school might enhance parent-school-community engagement was “going to be a great step forward” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2).

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

At the beginning of the *Ancient Worlds* project, Petrina declared, “I do recognise that the project we’re embarking on this year is enormous compared to previous years. It’s not just one subject or one area, or one teacher and one classroom, it’s the entire community” (School Leader, School A, Interview 1). Valerie felt the biggest challenge for the PELT in leading the project was “just figuring out ways in which it can all work” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). The PELT members were “going to hit challenges” throughout the project; indeed, Valerie stated that “if [challenges] don’t show up, then the project won’t have been successful” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Similarly, Amy observed about the project, “It’s like a pilot, isn’t it? Part of the failures that we [will] have are going to be part of the success of the pilot. It’s understanding what they are” (PELT Parent, School A, Cogen 3).

The idea of time, and more precisely, timing, emerged as constant themes in relation to the opportunities and challenges School A’s PELT members identified for engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing. Speaking about the *Ancient Worlds* project and similarly large enterprises, Petrina observed, “the enormity of all involved only appears in front of you as you’re doing it. It’s in the background, that’s why you plan for it. But when you actually start working with it, there’s never enough time” (School Leader, School A, Cogen 1). Commenting on the pace at which the *Ancient Worlds* project seemed to be unfolding, Gabrielle reflected,

There is a level of manifesting things at the right time ... there are moments of acceleration and then there are moments of settling. It’s kind of like an organic process. I think when you’ve had experience in [the process] you realise that when it’s accelerating, you jump on [board] because so much gets done, and then it will settle again, and then it’ll accelerate again. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1)

According to Gabrielle, the key strategy to managing the project was achieving “an even flow” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1).

An inherent challenge in wanting the *Ancient Worlds* project to be a student-led experience was “being careful not to do too much imposing on [the students]” (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). The school’s vertical curriculum program afforded the students time and opportunity to listen and talk with teachers and community members about ideas, and ultimately to “figure out ways to engage that [were] going to work for them” (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 1). Gabrielle commented on how the students approached the *Ancient Worlds* project: “I’m surprised at how engaged they are” and “I was expecting [the process] to be quite an ordeal [for them]” (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1).

CASE STUDY 1 SCHOOL A CONTINUED

She perceived the students' positive response not only "tapped into their love of story and their capacity for listening to stories", but also allowed each of them to "add their own bits to the [Ancient Worlds] story" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 1). One Year 12 student with "a passion for fashion", for example, was supported by members of the PELT to lead a group of Year 8 to 11 students in crocheting clothing for the *Ancient Worlds* performance (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). Gabrielle explained that wide crochet resembled "a fishing net" and therefore "seemed a natural medium that we could use for the [Greek] sirens" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). The use of thread was also a motif that infused the "artistic visual" of the proposed upcoming performance (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). Using the Year 12 student's already "very siren-like" designs and incorporating shells and other suitable objects, she and the small group created a bespoke *Ancient Worlds* clothing collection (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4).

The timing of a visit from an interstate sister school which involved three teachers and up to 12 students coincided closely with the *Ancient Worlds* festival. Although the primary purpose of the group's visit was to participate in a camping trip with School A's Year 10 students, they accepted an invitation to stay on throughout the festival. Gabrielle subsequently announced, "I've worked out a way to get them in the performance, so they'll actually be involved in it, rather than just participants [in the festival]" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). It was also anticipated that the visiting students would participate in "workshops" and "theatre experiences" drawn from Tilley's work with a community group using movement and music to explore archetypal elements (e.g., wind, water, fire) in the *Ancient Worlds* project (Specialist Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). These "different sharings" would be offered throughout the festival's four-day program (Tilley, Specialist Teacher, School A, Cogen 4). Gabrielle further indicated that one of the visiting teachers was going to lead singing on the mornings of the festival week, and another teacher was going to lead a workshop (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 5). Although welcome, the sister school's visit created some challenges for members of the PELT—including finding time for the group to rehearse for the *Ancient Worlds* performance on the Monday of the festival week which was the same day they arrived. However, the PELT's creative efforts to engage the group in authentic learning and teaching opportunities throughout the festival reflected a commitment to strengthening and deepening student-parent-school-community engagement at School A.

As momentum built throughout Terms 2 and 3, the full-scale, organic nature of student, parent, and community engagement in the *Ancient Worlds* project emerged in the catalogue of festival activities which PELT members outlined in Cogens 4 and 5. Further to the examples above, these included:

- School A's Year 10 students engaging with the Puppet Masters and parent and community volunteers to design, construct, and learn how to manipulate the puppets for the *Ancient Worlds* performance

- The school's music director collaborating with a Year 12 student composer who wrote the music for the *Ancient Worlds* performance to "bring a student perspective [to bear]" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 4)
- Working with a festival guest speaker, also an alumni student, who authored a book about their personal journey across the Australian desert which featured relevant *Ancient Worlds* themes (e.g., overcoming adversity)
- Year 11 and 12 students sailing a boat on the local waterway, creating a photo opportunity to document and promote the festival
- Members of the school's community choir that included parent and community musicians, singers, and actors playing cameo roles (e.g., Greek gods, sirens, and mythical creatures) in the performance
- Collaborating with an artist in residence and volunteer parents and members of the community on different aspects of the performance such as sewing costumes, building props, designing sets, painting backdrops, and working with textiles (e.g., weaving and beading)
- Creating opportunities to work with other year levels (e.g., Year 8 and 9 teachers and parents who took carriage of the festival's evening community market stalls; Year 5 teachers and students performing excerpts of their own *Ancient Worlds* play during the festival).

Festivals were part of the collaborative culture of School A. Valerie stated, "We're used to doing festivals here ... and [we] have all different components within the school. So, it's been great to have had that basic framework at the school already to lean on" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 2). The PELT members took advantage of the school's existing festival structures to maximise opportunities for engagement in the *Ancient Worlds* project. Valerie and Ava worked with the school's site manager who highlighted different infrastructure projects which might impact the PELT's festival plans. Valerie commented that knowing all levels of the school were aware of the project meant "it's not something that's going to be forgotten" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 2). PELT members also knew what risk assessments they needed to do rather than "try and sort OH&S (Occupational Health and Safety) issues out later" (Valerie, Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 2). From a parent's perspective, as mentioned above, Amy noted challenges which emerged related to the consistency and, at times, volume of communication parents received from the school. The challenge of communication was generally acknowledged by the PELT members. Valerie observed,

Nothing happens immediately. I'll send a blog to somebody, but by the time it gets to the place where it's published and out there, there's a whole lot of things that have to happen in between ... it's the nature of an organisation. So, I guess it's collaborating with all the different people and always being aware that people need to know what's going on and what is the best way for that to happen. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Cogen 2)

From a teacher's perspective, Petrina described the challenges for members of the PELT who "have funnelled ourselves into the actual logistics of working with timetables and finding time for different aspects of the project to take its legs" (School

Leader, School A, Cogen 3). Speaking about the timeline of the project and working with community volunteers, she commented that people are generally "really busy" (Petrina, School Leader, School A, Cogen 3). There is a sense of urgency for teachers as they are,

... the people working with the project on the ground in the school every day and know the distance is shortened ... when you look at the number of lessons and weeks, and how much time you realistically have to work with the students. (School Leader, School A, Cogen 3)

At the same time, Petrina reflected,

[The project] is something that's growing organically and it's a gesture of goodwill from community members to take part in it ... When someone's volunteering their time and showing enthusiasm, you can't hold them to that (referring to gestures of goodwill) within specific parameters. You have to work with them. (School Leader, School A, Cogen 3)

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As indicated earlier, School A was a co-educational, Pre-Prep to Year 12 school of approximately 400 students located in a semi-rural area. The school had participated in the EPIC research for three years. School A's PELT members conceived a large, student-led, secondary school, integrated Arts/literacy curriculum project called, *Ancient Worlds*. Given the experience of COVID-19, the project centred on an inquiry around the future world students might want to create. The *Ancient Worlds* project afforded a potentially unifying opportunity for the school community in the new normal phase of living with COVID, and was taken up as the school's Term 3 festival theme.

For Gabrielle, the success of the *Ancient Worlds* project, which included the level of parent and community engagement achieved, "validated something that is living [in the school community] as a seed" (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). The project aligned with the philosophical ideals underpinning the school's curriculum which emphasised mutually supportive relationships among stakeholders and critical and creative thinking; hence, it "validated why we do what we do and the way that we do it" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). After Masterclass 2, Amy reflected on the school's parent and community engagement journey: "I felt like we were in a really good position and had travelled quite a long way already" (PELT Parent, School A, Interview 2). Ava observed the project "brought in community in a very authentic way" (Principal, School A, Interview 2). She further observed, "With the material side of things like the pre-planning and marketing, then in the production and costumes, it just built and built" (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 2). She asserted, "But that isn't going to happen every year" (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 2). Instead, she considered establishing and sustaining a culture and practice of parent and community engagement was more about "the bits that happen in every classroom" and "the collaboration between the teachers on how they do it" (Ava, Principal,

School A, Interview 2). In addition, teachers were not all at the same point in their parent and community engagement journeys (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 2). Some appeared to engage parents naturally without even realising, while others needed to start small and then be supported to continue (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 2).

The PELT members observed the reciprocal learning and teaching opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and community members throughout the *Ancient Worlds* project. Amy declared the vertical curriculum program "was the most valuable thing for the school to continue as a result of the project" (PELT Parent, School A, Interview 2). She explained, "You've got cross-learning opportunities from the older students where they get an opportunity to be a leader and the younger students are really excited about what they're learning" (Amy, PELT Parent, School A, Interview 2). Amy endorsed the school's decision to continue the program in Term 4, suggesting the Year 7 students could join. Gabrielle also credited "a rise in leadership roles" to students working with their peers and community members (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). She opined, "I felt there were moments happening that I hadn't seen before" (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2). To explain, Gabrielle recalled when the students independently set up a fashion show as part of a usually primary school community market event:

It felt to me that, after their experience of the *Ancient Worlds* project, they walked into that space with a sense of ownership and pride ... and were showing how anybody can be creative, and every body is something to celebrate. And they were dancing and just the joy that was coming from them was so palpable. (Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2)

Gabrielle also observed profound benefits for parents and community members who shared their knowledge and skills with the students. Unlike other mentoring experiences at School A such as the Year 12 student research projects, the difference in the *Ancient Worlds* project was:

The learning that the community member could have as well. [The community members] were actually learning from the students; they were learning from the teachers ... They were getting something quite direct from it. And of course, they were performing; so, again they were feeling the gift of performance and having an audience witness and share their work. (Gabrielle, Classroom Teacher, School A, Interview 2)

Reflecting on a sustainable model of parent and community engagement, Ava felt a "shared understanding across the school [was] an important part of being able to embed [a culture and practice of engagement]" (Principal, School A, Interview 2). However, she stressed,

Shifting a culture of involvement to parent engagement doesn't happen overnight. You have to bring people along for the journey. It's not as simple as, 'Here it is. Here's the formula. Go do it'. It's educating about why it's important or what would be the possible benefits. (Ava, Principal, School A, Interview 2)

Case study 2 school C



A cogenerative dialoguing approach to engaging parents and the community in curriculum in the middle and senior years of a day and boarding school.

School context

Located in a major regional centre in south-east Queensland, School C's history dated from the early 1900s. It was a non-government, faith-based, single-sex, day (K–12) and boarding (5–12) school with several hundred students. The school offered a high-quality, contemporary education academically, culturally, and in sports. Documents on the school's website referred to the value of parents and the community in the development, understanding, and awareness of children. Strong partnerships and relationships among parents, students, and staff were encouraged to support children's lifelong learning and wellbeing. Parents were invited to share their talents or help in the early years, primary, and middle years classrooms.

A Parents and Friends (P&F) group offered a networking space for parents designed to benefit students by helping to provide an educationally-supportive environment. P&F involvement included attending meetings, serving at school events, fundraising, and taking an interest in school activities.

Involvement in EPIC

School C was one of three schools to participate continuously in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research since 2021 (see Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). Table 8 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's three-year involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School C's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised seven participants. Five PELT members were involved in the EPIC research previously. Jill Brown, School Principal and PELT leader, had participated in EPIC for two

years (2021–2022). Four participants also took part in EPIC 2022: Natalie Carter, Head of Middle School; Tesha Wise, Head of Learning Enhancement; Heather Arlington, Coordinator of Junior and Middle Years Boarding; and Vivian Hammond, Middle Years Teacher (Science). Two participants were new to the EPIC research in 2023: Sandy Gibbs, an early-career teacher, who taught in the Middle Years (Business and Design) and Senior Years (Accounting); and Orla Black, the PELT parent representative, who also taught Senior Secondary English and Drama. Orla was a parent of two middle years children at the school. When Orla entered the research, she commented:

First and foremost, I'm a mum. So that's probably what draws me to [the research], because I think as a parent, you want to walk alongside your child [to develop] the whole person. In our case, my husband and I are very keen to walk alongside our children in their journey ... so it's not just seeing the school as a place where other people teach our children, because I feel we were their first teachers, and I'm really keen to continue that relationship because that keeps those connections going—particularly through the years where my children are now in middle school. (PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1)

A summary of information about School C's PELT members is presented in Table 9.

School C's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and seven cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Despite their many teaching and leadership commitments, the PELT members demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year, with individual members actively participating in a total of 48/57 (84%) data collection opportunities. Three of the seven cogens involved individual PELT members and the researchers in one-on-one cogens which ensured continuity of knowledge creation in the practice and research of parent and community engagement when all group members could not meet together at the same time (Willis, 2016).

Table 8: School C—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 9: School C—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Jill Brown	Principal; Senior Secondary English Classroom Teacher	Whole school; Senior Secondary years	PELT leader; EPIC 2021–2023 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Orla Black	PELT Parent		Senior secondary English & Drama classroom teacher; Long association with school
Natalie Carter	Head of Middle School; Years 7 & 9 English Classroom Teacher	Middle years	EPIC 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Tesha Wise	Learning Enhancement Coordinator	Middle years	EPIC 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Heather Arlington	Junior & Middle Years Boarding School Coordinator	Middle years	EPIC 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Vivian Hammond	Years 7 & 9 Science Classroom Teacher	Middle years	EPIC 2022 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Sandy Gibbs	Middle Years (Business & Design)/ Senior Years (Accounting) Classroom Teacher	Middle & Senior Secondary years	Early-career teacher; Head of House

School C's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

At the commencement of School C's EPIC 2023 journey, the impact of the school's longitudinal involvement in the research was evident. For example, speaking to Linda (researcher) in her first interview, Jill reflected on her journey:

What has stayed with me was probably a conversation that you and I and Beryl (researcher) had at the end of last year when I was talking about our Year 12 parents coming in at the beginning of the year ... to talk about the year ahead and that we would have a panel [to] provide them with information. And I'm not sure whether it was you or Beryl who said, 'And where will the parent voice be on that panel?' And that was the aha moment for me. Of course, then the panel became a parent panel. (Principal, School C, Interview 1)

The school's longitudinal involvement in the research also saw the PELT members ready to continue to explore ways to connect knowledge and practice of parent and community engagement. Jill explained the PELT's rationale:

For me, the most powerful thing ... if you're starting to shift [your practice], if you're thinking about a parent's space and place in a school, it's got to filter through into what you're doing in the classroom. You can't just draw a line and say, 'Well, we're just engaging [parents and the community] here.' (Principal, School C, Interview 1)

At a macro (school) level, Jill also observed:

So, [the language of engaging parents] is filtering, certainly at a leadership team level ... When I sit in our Wellness group, which is 22 of us, and we meet once a fortnight, and I'll say, 'Well, and how are we engaging parents in that conversation?' (Jill, Principal, School C, Interview 1)

At a meso (groups of teachers) level, Vivian, who was "in charge of planning" across middle years science classes reported small, but significant changes in her thinking and practice:

This year I've tried to [highlight] the opportunities [for engaging parents and community in the curriculum]. I've written in a different font colour in the program where I see

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that it's an EPIC opportunity. So, I just write that in red. And the teachers can do it or not because I can't tell them what we have to do basically, but I just put it there, 'Oh, EPIC opportunity'. (Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1)

Vivian relayed how one opportunity arose when the Year 8 students were "looking at the heart [in their] biology unit for the circulatory system" which led her to invite a parent who was a health expert into the school (Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1). The parent coordinated her work commitments around the students' timetables and visited four out of five Year 8 classes. Consequently, her impact across the Year 8 cohort, enriched the students' and teachers' science knowledge and understanding of the current curriculum topic through the detailed, point-in-time information she provided (Vivian, Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1).

At a micro (classroom) level, Jill and Vivian strengthened practices in their pedagogical repertoires from 2022 (see Willis & Exley, 2022). Both emailed suggestions of inquiry questions about curriculum topics to enable at-home family conversations about classroom learning. Jill noted however, that she was more conscious this year of personalising what she wrote: "I try to tailor [the information] so it's specific in some way to each parent and not just a generic reach out to [them]" (Principal, School C, Cogen 1). In a unit on Reality TV, for example, she invited parent voice in her English classroom by "running a poll about the reality TV shows most known or most likely to be watched by parents" (Jill, Principal, School C, Classroom Teacher Email Communication). Jill also suggested to parents to talk with their child about "interesting vocabulary" connected with the unit, such as "see if [your child] can explain the meaning of voyeurism, vicariously, or voracious to you!" (Principal, School C, Classroom Teacher Email Communication). Responses to Jill's email invitation enhanced the quality of classroom conversations and student assessment task responses as well as afforded positive interactions with parents. One parent wrote back, "Hi Jill, This was such a great way to involve me. Cheers" (Principal, School C, Parent Email Communication).

Vivian emailed parents of her Year 7 students studying a curriculum unit on the topic, *Earth's Resources*. Orla, whose child was in Vivian's class, relayed how she and her husband "were invited to respond to the inquiry question: 'What do you think is the most important natural resource?'" (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 5). Orla's child independently designed an activity to gather their separate perspectives, after which Orla relayed:

We then just had a conversation—which our family probably has never really had a scientific conversation to be quite honest—around the dinner table. But we had a conversation about natural resources and what we think is the most important one and my other child in Year 9 also contributed. (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 5)

Vivian's invitation to parents to participate in an inquiry alongside their child positively impacted students' oral and written ability to build a scientific argument and respond to the unit's assessment task (Classroom Teacher, School C, Cogen 5). At the same time, Vivian found conversations between parents and students at home improved her teaching and relationships with students. She said, "The conversations at home [were] a thread that we've been able to refer to right through the unit and it just added to my teaching" (Vivian, Classroom Teacher, School C, Cogen 5).

Orla and Sandy were also positively affected by School C's longitudinal involvement in the research. As new members of the PELT, they worked alongside five other experienced PELT members. Orla and Sandy joined a team which Tesha said in 2023 "had a much better understanding of what they could do and what was feasible" (Learning Enhancement Coordinator, School C, Interview 2). Hence, the PELT narrowed their focus in 2023 to macro-level parent and community engagement. The experienced PELT members were also practised in working cogeneratively, affording an efficiency to making decisions and taking collective action. After Masterclass 1, Orla described the "strength" of the team and the way they "galvanised" ideas, saying, "to see my colleagues in action, their planning and ideas ... was like a well-oiled machine" (PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1). At the same time, Orla found the PELT members were "always very respectful, open, and interested in what [she] had to say" (PELT Parent, School C, Interview 2). Sandy felt her voice was similarly heard in the team (Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1). This enabled her to contribute to the PELT's macro-level focus, while simultaneously focusing on parent and community engagement at the classroom or micro level (Sandy, Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1). After joining the PELT, Sandy approached planning and teaching the curriculum with increased "cognitive awareness of, 'Where am I considering parents in this?'" (Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

School C's parent and community engagement focus in the EPIC 2023 research was the school or macro level. Throughout the year, the PELT members reimagined several opportunities when parents and students typically came together "through the lens of parent engagement" (Jill, Principal, School C, Masterclass 2). The annual Year 8 parent and student luncheon at the end of Term 2 was one example. Natalie described how previously the school had arranged student performances for the parents' entertainment such as "one of the Year 8s playing the piano or singing. [So, the student performances] really had a bit of a social, end-of-term function" (Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3). However, in 2023, she declared, "We changed that completely this time and did it very differently" (Natalie, Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3).

A fundamental part of the school's curriculum was a philosophy and strategy of wellbeing. The approach promoted a caring, supportive learning environment which involved equipping students with the knowledge and skills to develop and maintain healthy relationships. Resolving conflict and repairing harm were key components of the school's approach. Natalie explained that the school invited a community member with relevant expertise to speak at the luncheon which 68 students attended together with a parent/family member (i.e., 136 attendees). She added:

... but more than that, we engaged with the parents quite a bit around the topic. So, we had QR (quick response) codes and questions that we asked the parents and the students about, 'How do you resolve conflict?' and 'What do you see as important elements of resolving conflict?' because obviously the focus of the [school's approach] is about relationships and resolving difficult situations that might arise in various relationships. (Natalie, Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3)

The parents talked with their child about the questions and together "they could also submit questions using the QR codes to [the guest speaker]" who "answered them on the spot" (Natalie, Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3). Time was factored into the event for student-parent conversations as well as questions and responses between students and parents and the guest speaker. The students and parents also provided joint feedback to the school at the end of the event in response to questions such as: "What did you learn about [the school's wellbeing approach]?, Did you think anything that [the guest speaker] shared was helpful?, and What was the bit that you enjoyed the most?" (Natalie, Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3). Natalie reported that the feedback "was really positive [and remarked] it was a very different luncheon than we've done before" (Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3).

Natalie reflected on the event that, while the guest speaker spoke broadly around relationships and suggestions of ideas, she and her colleagues "had a focus on the parent and child relationship" (Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3). This emphasis reflected cogenerative conversations designed to shift the event towards engaging parents more purposefully in the school's curriculum. Natalie underscored the value and importance of what was achieved:

This time we really used the opportunity to increase parents' engagement with [the school's wellbeing approach] because that's a way of being that we use all the time at School C and sometimes we find that parents are really supportive of it until their child's done something tricky, or someone else has done something tricky to their child, and then, depending on which side of the coin they're on, they aren't always as supportive. So, we're just trying to use different opportunities to ensure that our families know that this is why we [adopt our wellbeing approach] and this is why we think it works. And

if your child does find themselves in a conflict situation with another student, or a teacher even, this will be the way that we operate and these are the reasons. So, trying to engage [the students and parents] when they're not already in that situation ... (Middle School Leader, School C, Cogen 3)

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

As part of their macro-level focus in 2023, School C's PELT members were particularly interested in spaces of transition across the school. In cogenerating about how to approach these spaces differently, Jill advanced two provocations for the team to consider, "If we were a brand new school, what would we do?" and "How are we meeting the needs of parents in terms of engaging them in those transition points where we often place too much emphasis on the student and not enough on the parent?" (Principal, School C, Interview 1). Thinking specifically about School C's Orientation program towards the end of the year, she recalled what she said to the school's leadership team the day before:

We have student sessions and parent sessions, but the parent sessions are sort of four sessions in a classroom, one after the other, repeated. Is that engaging [parents] or are we just standing and delivering? And are we missing an opportunity to develop connections with them and for them to develop connections with each other? Because if we're doing those things, it does support their child's learning, but whilst standing and delivering, we're not really enhancing that. We're just giving them a whole lot of information most of which will be forgotten [quickly]. (Jill, Principal, School C, Cogen 1)

Jill again highlighted the notion of parent voice, iterating:

It's just that idea of when do we ask, 'How does your child learn?', when we do have those opportunities. And we don't do it because we feel, as the experts, that we have to impart this expert knowledge and we have to show that we are the experts, so we have to fill the space. I think about those Junior School [opportunities] that involve parents and the teacher. Wouldn't it have been good to say to the parents, 'Turn to those near you and talk about how your child learns'. And for the teacher to hear [what's said] and go, 'Oh, I didn't realise Huan is reading 16 books every week' or that 'Taylor didn't read until they were 10 years of age', or that 'Jessie loves insects'. (Jill, Principal, School C, Cogen 1)

By virtue of the nature of Junior School, Jill felt that teachers may know some of the kinds of information about which she spoke; however, she asserted, "... but we (referring to teachers and school leaders) don't ask enough" (Principal, School C, Cogen 1).

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School C's PELT saw transition points as unexplored affinity spaces which afforded ripe opportunities for building or strengthening parent and community engagement. They also recognised positive student-parent-school relationships as fundamental to a culture and practice of parent and community engagement. Speaking with Sandy about her early parent engagement initiatives, Jill commented that, it might only be "a five-minute conversation, but it's embedding an idea" (Principal, School C, Cogen 1). Throughout 2023, PELT members collaborated to shift their practice in macro-level affinity spaces to achieve more alignment with their knowledge and understanding of parents as "a child's first and enduring teacher" (Jill, Principal, School C, Masterclass 2). Accordingly, their thinking and decisions gave prominence to creating an environment conducive to engaging parents and the community more purposefully in student learning and wellbeing.

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

As School C's PELT parent, and also a teacher at the school, Orla commented that she was accustomed to working cogeneratively with other members of the team: "I feel encouraged and empowered to share my ideas" (PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1). She also felt fortunate to represent the parents at School C and was keen to participate actively in conversations about "opening up channels and really engaging parents at a deep level" (Orla, PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1).

Orla's participation in cogenerative dialogues affords a unique vantage point for seeing how these discussions may have influenced shifts in parent and community engagement practice at the macro level of the school. One topic of discussion was the transition program to support Year 9 to 10 students as they moved from the middle to the senior school. PELT members wondered that if "it's (referring to the transition) daunting for our students, how about our parents? How can we engage them?" (Sandy, Classroom Teacher, School C, Interview 1). Orla was involved in her role as a teacher in the Year 10 subject selection event the previous year. As a parent of a current Year 9 student, she reflected on the experience that, "parents had lots of questions and really wanted to stay and foster greater conversations [but] there perhaps wasn't scope [to accommodate these aspects] in that particular setting" (Orla, PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1). Orla used a traffic metaphor to describe her participation in cogenerative dialogues with other PELT members as staying in the "parent lanes [during] the conversations" (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 1). In several discussions about how different school events could focus more on parents and students, the PELT cogenerated ideas such as having morning or afternoon tea which included guest speakers or roundtable discussions among students, parents, teachers, and school leaders on specific topics or questions.

With the benefit of these discussions, Orla, in the first cogenerative dialogue with the researchers, provided a sense of how her contributions in the PELT helped to reshape the Year 10 subject selection events. She described her interest in the discussions:

There was lots of talk about extending on the current practices for the subject selection event for Year 10 and, for me, with a child in Year 9, I really connected with the discussions because that's what we'll (referring to her child and family) be doing this time next year. (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 1)

Orla indicated how critical it was for parents to have "opportunities to come into the school and have meaningful conversations with staff members"; however, sometimes it may be difficult for them to connect with the teachers at the subject selection event "because the staff involved are predominantly in the senior school [and] perhaps the [parents] haven't come across them before or had them teach their child" (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 1). Something else Orla thought would be "really meaningful for parents" was if Year 9 students had the opportunity to speak to current students taking subjects in which they were interested, so they could "get a student's perspective" (PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 1). Speaking again about parents, she stressed:

And just to hear the same information as their child—and not making choices for them, because we want to give students agency to do that, to make their decisions, but for parents to walk alongside them—but being present to then sow seeds or have conversations that are embedded in something so that you're not getting [the information] second- or third-hand through your child. As a parent, the perspective of your child is through the mindset of a 14-year-old ... and there's many different perspectives [that are possible] from one conversation. (Orla, PELT Parent, School C, Cogen 1)

Another transition activity, the Year 10 Senior Education and Training (SET) planning process (Department of Education, 2023a), affords insight into possible ways in which Orla influenced parent and community engagement knowledge and practice at School C. SET plans are developed and implemented in Queensland schools in consultation with staff and parents by the end of Year 10 (Department of Education, 2023a). The principal (or delegate) is responsible for the process "to ensure staff, students, and parents are provided with high quality advice and accurate information to support students to make effective, informed decisions about senior secondary pathways" (Department of Education, 2023a).

In the fifth cogenerative dialogue with the researchers, Jill spoke about the nature of the school's 2023 Year 10 SET planning process:

We've just been doing Year 10 SET planning. So, there's a group of perhaps six of us and that's been a wonderful experience working with those parents and their child

[as part of the process]. And we have changed the career planning tool that we've used, which means there's a lot more information. And we've asked, which is a shift [in practice], we've really asked the students to discuss the [information in the career planning tool] with their parents before they come into the room. And universally that's been pretty much the case; sometimes it's just with mum ... but I've begun by asking parents, 'When you read the report, did that have resonance with you? Is that how you see your child? Was there anything that you were curious or surprised about?' So, it's been a different approach and I think that's filtered down to all of us in terms of hearing more from the parents in that setting. (Principal, School C, Cogen 5)

Jill's description of the school's reimagined SET planning process bears a striking resemblance to Orla's sentiments and suggestions for possible ways to improve parent and student engagement in the Year 10 subject selection event. It should be noted however, that based on the available data, it cannot be concluded that Orla's suggestions directly resulted in the changes in practice the school made to either event. What is apparent from observing the nature of cogenerative dialoguing among PELT members at School C, is that differences in practice between these events in 2023 and previous years was, at least in part, a result of their ongoing discussions and collective decision making. According to Willis et al. (2018), the essence of dialoguing cogeneratively is:

... that you'll generate something new—and co, that [you're] doing it together. What is important ... is that because of what each participant brings to the interactive space ... you end up with something that actually none of those participants could have individually thought of [themselves]. It's like someone comes in with an idea, but because of some other idea that's added by someone else, actually something completely different from either of those two different ideas ends up being created ... [in other words] ... the whole is more than the sum of its parts. (pp. 56–57)

What is possible to say is that including Orla's voice in the PELT meant she was in a position not only to advance, but also continually endorse the group's thinking and decisions about proposed changes in practice to transition events. From this perspective, the SET planning process honoured the place of parents in their child's life in ways that also reflected Orla's ideas in cogenerating with the PELT about the Year 10 subject selection event. These included: creating opportunities for more meaningful conversations at home and school; connecting with school personnel who adopt a pedagogy of listening consistent with a knowledge and understanding of parent and community engagement; ensuring ample time for parents and students to digest the information, talk together, explore different perspectives, and formulate specific questions; and supporting the process with resources

developed from the perspective of students and parents (e.g., a collaboratively redesigned career planning tool to scaffold thinking and decision making).

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

For School C, engaging boarder parents was a challenge not experienced by other schools involved in the 2023 EPIC research. Orla commented that, although she was not a boarder parent, she would find it useful to "garner some of their insights because, for those parents, it's another complexity in terms of having those opportunities and that space to engage with their child because of the distance and other factors involved" (PELT Parent, School C, Interview 1).

Working with junior and middle years boarding students, Heather was in her second year of the EPIC research (see Willis & Exley, 2022). Her role of supporting boarder students with their academic learning and also wellbeing aligned with the PELT's macro-level focus on parent and community engagement.

In Term 1, Heather continued her 2022 practice of sending parents a curriculum overview of their child's learning. She expanded her focus from Year 7 in 2022 to include Years 8 and 9 in 2023. The overviews included a synopsis explaining the aim of the overviews (e.g., "This is some information which may help you have conversations with your child about what they're learning") and suggestions for how to facilitate discussions (e.g., asking their child questions specific to individual subject areas such as "Have you started reading *The Rabbits?*" and "What can you tell me about forces in science?") (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). Heather saw that many parents had accessed the information and, in Term 2, she expanded her practice to include parents of day students in Years 7 to 9.

Heather also initiated a new practice in Term 1 of meeting with all Year 8 and 9 boarder students to have what she called, academic conversations (Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). These opportunities created an affinity space to talk with each student personally about "how they've gone [academically] in recent years and what that looks like moving forward" (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). Heather talked with approximately 80 students over a two-week period. She could access more data than was available to parents which allowed her to look at "the graphics of student scores" (Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). At the same time, she took the opportunity to make purposeful connections with the school's wellbeing curriculum, speaking with them about "learner attributes such as respect, being on time, and being engaged in the class" (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). Heather noted:

The graphics is what has appealed to the students, particularly those who've been with us boarding since Year five, so they've got Years 5, 6, 7, 8, if they're in 8 currently, and even Year 9, that gives us quite a bit of data. It's shown the bumps, the dips, and the rises that they've had in that period. One child had a bit of a dip one term, and I said, 'What do you think that was about?', and she said, 'Oh, that was when my grandfather died'. And then in the case of somebody else, I said, 'Is that when you had COVID that term?' (Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1)

The conversations were not intended to make the students "feel badly at all", but to look at "the sum of the things to see what might be tweaked in terms of maybe attending tutorials", for example (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). After each academic conversation, Heather: "perhaps [sought] parental support in that space; asked questions [of others] (e.g., to find out where a student sits in class); ... and then communicated with teachers, particularly where the students had nominated that they perhaps could go to tutorials" (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 1).

Heather "tried to keep [the students] honest by saying to the tutorial teachers, 'Alex (pseudonym) has indicated they'd like to come [to your tutorial], Can you watch out for them please?'" (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 1). Students were encouraged to email tutorial teachers themselves, but if they felt unsure, Heather emailed them together with the student. Students were copied into all emails. Throughout the process Heather also spoke with other staff in the boarding school about what she was doing, including showing them the data she accessed with students during academic conversations. In addition, she often connected with the students incidentally in the boarding house such as at breakfast times when, for example, she might inquire about how they went at a tutorial.

Heather felt the academic conversation process resembled "something that parents might do if they had their child at home more regularly" (Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). Although she had always played a facilitative role as parent-school conduit, her shifts in practice were more purposeful in terms of "encouraging students" to use the facilities available to them at the school and "not to be so scared about approaching people" (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Interview 1). Speaking about Heather's efforts to achieve more alignment between parent and community engagement knowledge and practice, Jill observed:

It's a perfect illustration, that learning happens at home and, in this case, ... home is in the boarding house while the boarders are in residence. So, it is expanding that idea of learning only happening in the classroom, but it happens at home, wherever that is. (Principal, School C, Cogen 1)

In Term 2, Heather's practice evidenced more changes when she conducted academic conversations with the Year 7 students. The delayed timing supported their particular needs as they transitioned to the middle school. Given her recent experience with the Year 8 and 9 students, rather than contact only some parents after she had spoken with their child, Heather instead decided to contact all parents beforehand to let them know what she was doing and the reasons why.

Heather recognised a shift at this time in her thinking and practice, observing, "I think my head's in a different space in terms of being involved in [the EPIC research]" (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2). She elaborated:

I suppose each day I'm looking at things slightly differently, to the point that I've had a couple of three-way conversations with parents, the child, and myself ... and I've thought, 'Why haven't I done this earlier and included that parent voice?' You've got the parent voice often supporting you, but actually putting it on the table with them. (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2)

A recent three-way meeting demonstrates Heather's shift in thinking and practice:

And the mother was actually at the kitchen table last night ... and she was chopping up [vegetables], and I said, 'Are you chopping carrots?' And she went, 'Oh, sorry' and I said, 'No, no, no, it's great. It's like sitting around the kitchen table having this conversation which is where it would probably happen if your child were at home.' (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2)

Thinking ahead about the practice of academic conversations, Heather signalled that "having the parent with you having that conversation" is crucial (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2). She added, "So, I think I'd like to maybe next time when I'm doing those to say to parents, 'Can I ring you at the same time and then have it together?'" (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2). As "the conduit for the parents anyway", she felt that parents would be grateful to know that their child had "someone else supporting them [at the school]" (Heather, Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2). Heather concluded:

As a consequence of [thinking differently], 'Right, get the parents in the space'. ... Moving forward, rather than just doing [the academic conversations] with the child, do it with the parents as well, because even though I know some of them have said that they talked a bit to their child over the holidays about certain processes and what they would like of them. But if we do it together, they know that they have my support in trying to facilitate that and the students know that I'm here supporting the parents' requests as well. (Boarding School Leader, School C, Cogen 2)

In response to challenges unique to boarder students and parents, Heather created affinity spaces and adopted a cogenerative dialoguing approach to facilitate opportunities which benefited students, parents, teachers, and the

school. Heather's journey illustrates how School C shifted practice to achieve greater alignment with a knowledge and understanding of parent and community engagement.

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As previously mentioned, School C was a large, single-sex, day and boarding school with a three-year history of involvement in the EPIC research, making it distinct among the eight schools in the EPIC 2023 research. The PELT's macro-level focus on parent and community engagement was also distinctive. School C's case study demonstrates the critical role of leadership in establishing and sustaining a culture and practice of parent and community engagement (see also Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a; Willis, Povey et al., 2021). Jill observed:

Like any improvement or strengthening process in a school, if there's not buy-in from a leadership perspective, then it's just something that, 'Oh, that's what John Smith (pseudonym) does in his class. Isn't that lovely? And that's where it stops. And John leaves the school and goes and gets a job at another school. And he's been in his own little closed space, and no one knows about it. And it's not culturally embedded. (Principal, School C, Interview 1)

To this end, the PELT members were parent and community engagement advocates, models, and collaborators. They exercised leadership informally and formally in building a culture and practice of parent and community engagement among staff and parents. Informally, Jill, for example, recognised incidental conversations when colleagues asked her about parent engagement as opportunities to clarify that "parent engagement is not parent involvement" (Principal, School C, Cogen 6). She perceived that "confusion" and "fear" among teachers stemmed from possibly "fallacious thinking" that engaging parents meant they were: "going to be on campus all the time"; "looking over your shoulder"; "sitting next to you at your desk"; "hovering at your door"; or "telling you how to design curriculum and what's wrong with your teaching methodology" (Principal, School C, Cogens 1, 2, 4, 6). Jill encouraged her colleagues by saying: "Parents know their child better than we do and [when we] pay homage to that notion, then we [can] use that filter in the way in which we engage with parents around their child's learning. Then we shift things" (Principal, School C, Cogen 5). Her everyday conversations reinforced the simple message that parent and community engagement was:

... about privileging and acknowledging learning that takes place away from school. So, whether that's in the car, at home, in the boarding house, on the tractor while they're mustering, fencing, whatever, it's [about asking the question], 'How do we enrich the conversations that parents are having with their children to enhance their learning?' (Principal, School C, Cogen 1)

Simultaneously, Jill emphasised that engaging parents and the community "can actually be a really positive learning experience for parents, teachers, and students, which is what we're ultimately after" (Principal, School C, Cogen 6).

PELT members also capitalised on formal opportunities to speak to other school leaders (e.g., meetings of heads of department) and developed professional learning activities for teachers to workshop how they might connect aspects of curriculum learning and planning and parent and community engagement practice. There was a pointedness to this aspect of the PELT's work. First, meetings and professional learning activities were purposefully designed to provide a platform for discussions, and second, PELT members understood that these discussions "then led to opportunities for further dialogue about parent engagement and what that actually looks like" (Jill, Principal, School C, Cogen 2).

Embedding a culture and practice of parent and community engagement at School C underscored the role of leadership in recognising how to affect sustainable change in the dynamic landscape of the school. As Jill and the other PELT members promoted meaningful conversations at macro, meso, and micro levels with others, they simultaneously created an environment conducive to the continuation and expansion of these exchanges. In their final interviews, Tesha, Sandy, and Natalie also spoke about the PELT members' enthusiasm for parent and community engagement having an infectious effect on others who subsequently made small changes in practice and shared their successes. Jill observed that the "notion of thinking differently" was being taken up across the school; indeed, "there [was] a gentle momentum in the language [at the school]; people are talking about engaging with parents (Principal, School C, Cogen 6). She commented that if she adopted a different approach and said:

'Right, I want to know who wants to be involved and let's do this', [she] might as well go and sit in the corner ... So, [it was] far better to gently begin that conversation and the thinking around it. (Principal, School C, Cogen 6)

The cogenerativity (Willis, 2016) at work in School C created what Tesha and Jill described in their final interviews as a "critical mass", leading Natalie to conclude:

There has been a lot of success [in parent and community engagement] and a lot of teachers just thinking that [making small changes in their practice] was an easy way to improve relationships and to improve engagement with the students and it was positive for the parents as well. So, I think because so many different people have taken [parent and community engagement] on board, that that sustainability is there. (Middle School Leader, School C, Interview 2)

Case study 3 school D



A steady, intentional approach to engaging parents and the community in the curriculum in a small, metropolitan, multi-age primary school

School context

School D commenced in the last decade as a non-government, multi-age, independent, co-educational, suburban primary (P–6) school located in southeast Queensland. At the time of the EPIC 2023 research, almost 50 students were enrolled at the school. According to its promotional materials, School D was a child-focused school that tailored the Australian Curriculum to allow students to learn at their own pace within a conventional classroom setting. The teachers worked closely with one another to facilitate optimum learning outcomes relative to the unique skills and abilities of each student. Fundamental to School D's philosophy was the formation of a learning partnership between students, teachers, and their families. Accordingly, the school's website described the learning partnership among students, parents, and teachers using words such as "community" and "constructively working with each other" to encourage students "to believe in themselves and achieve their potential". Documents on the school's website highlighted the importance placed on parent participation in the learning journey of students. For instance, parents/guardians (grandparents and carers) were encouraged to volunteer at the school either in the classroom or helping to maintain the school premises. The Parents and Friends (P&F) Committee was another avenue for parent involvement in the school. The aims of the P&F Committee included providing feedback and advice on school policies and activities, providing resources to enhance student learning, and improving the school environment.

Involvement in EPIC

School D was one of three schools that had been involved in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research since 2021 (see Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). Table 10 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's three-year involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School D's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised five participants: school principal and PELT leader, Bob Clifton, who also participated in EPIC 2021–2022; two early years teachers, Abigail Jetts and Naomi Lucas, who joined EPIC in 2022; a middle years teacher new to EPIC, Fleur Quinn, who took up a position at School D at the beginning of 2023; and a parent representative, Barnaby Frost, who was also new to EPIC. As a parent of two children at the school, Barnaby had enjoyed a positive, six-year association with School D. He currently supported the school to purchase and set up their Information Technology (IT) resources and was a P&F Committee member. Barnaby was also the immediate past P&F Committee President, having served in this role for three years (2020–2022).

A summary of information about School D's PELT members is presented in Table 11.

School D's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and seven cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Most cogens included all PELT members however, some involved only those members cogenerating about a particular parent and community engagement initiative. In Cogen 3, for example, Bob and Barnaby met with the researchers at the end of Term 2 to discuss the redevelopment of the school's annual, end-of-year parent survey. Despite the challenges of a small staff, work commitments, and absence through illness, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 45/54 (83%) possible data collection opportunities.

Table 10: School D—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D , E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D , E, G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 11: School D—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Bob Clifton	Principal	Whole school	PELT leader; EPIC 2021–2023 participant; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Barnaby Frost	PELT Parent		P&F Committee Member; P&F Committee President 2020–2022; Long association with school
Fleur Quinn	Years 4, 5 & 6 Classroom Teacher	Middle years	Early-career teacher
Abigail Jetts	Years 2 & 3 Classroom Teacher	Early years	Early-career teacher; EPIC 2022 participant
Naomi Lucas	Prep & Year 1 Classroom Teacher	Early years	Early-career teacher; EPIC 2022 participant

School D's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

As School D commenced its EPIC 2023 research journey, Bob declared that "parent engagement is a major strategic priority"; hence, the school needed "to know how to build effective engagement practices in order to engage with [their] community" (Principal, School D, Research Application). He emphasised that engaging parents and the community was School D's "bread and butter" because it was "a small school" and a "vital area of the school" to ensure its ongoing success (Bob, Principal, School D, Research Application). Bob highlighted several challenges to engaging parents and the community for School D including: "a small team of people"; the need for "consistency in parent engagement [practices] combined with parent expectations"; and the need to ensure "parent engagement activities are planned out [given] the myriad of activities that schools need to comply [with] in a year" (Principal, School D, Research Application).

In his first interview, Bob compared his approach to engaging parents and the community over the last two years of participating in the EPIC research to "an evolution" that had

involved small steps in thinking and practice which led to bigger steps over time (Principal, School D, Interview 1). For example, it was usual practice to invite the students to provide input into planning for upcoming units of work, so "it seemed the natural step to give the parents [the opportunity to] feed into some of the curriculum" (Principal, School D, Interview 1). Bob elaborated that he approached parent engagement from the perspective that it needed to be manageable and achievable for staff and the school community; hence, he described an iterative process that needed continual review from staff and parents to evaluate what they were doing and the benefits for student learning and teaching.

Abigail and Naomi, who had also been involved in the EPIC 2022 research, recognised that engaging parents and the community occurred at a time when the school was still transitioning into the new normal phase of living with COVID. Abigail elaborated on the main difference between engaging parents and the community between 2022 and 2023: "Bob detailed that previously the parents were so keen to come in and [the teachers] would invite them in all the time", but during the pandemic the school adopted a "strict 'no volunteers policy'" (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). This year the teachers "are looking at ways to, since COVID, to reintroduce the community into the classroom and the family dynamic that we love" (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). Similarly, Naomi commented that: "It's been a big turnaround in just the last year, now that COVID [restrictions have eased], we can have people in a lot more, which has been really good and our parents have been really receptive to that" (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). She

CASE STUDY 3 SCHOOL D CONTINUED

wanted to ensure that when parents came into the classroom it happened in “a really positive way [where] everyone is excited and they want to contribute to what we’re doing” (Naomi, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). For Naomi, engaging parents in ways that purposely connected them to student learning and teaching was a clear focus.

This focus was confirmed by Fleur, who joined School D in 2023, as she reflected on her past experiences of parent involvement, and compared it to this year’s focus on parent engagement:

So, it’s been really nice to think about how we can include [parents] in the curriculum and actually add to what the students are doing—rather than distract [the students] from their learning with fun activities the P&C are planning, which are good, but at the same time, we still need to be able to relate [the activities] to our core curriculum. I think [parent engagement at School D] has really changed my mindset around parents. (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 7)

Up until Masterclass 1, Barnaby’s experience of parent engagement was mostly defined through his time on the P&F Committee. He stated that he had served on the committee as President for “three years and during COVID, which was interesting” and during this time had “worked pretty closely with Bob on a lot of things” (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). Barnaby was surprised at his own reaction to the experience of Masterclass 1 which he had anticipated would be of little interest to him. He commented that:

[It was] unusual for me (referring to his level of interest), because I didn’t think I’d get that reaction from myself ... I think one of the highlights was actually talking to the other schools ... I went back and I spoke to my wife and I’m like, ‘Guess what? This is what other schools are doing’. And we had a P&F meeting not long after that, so some of those things I took back to the P&F straight away. I’m like, ‘Guys, we’re selling cakes, this other school, this is what they’re doing, they’re giving the students a chance to be an entrepreneur and run a business ... So, [the P&F] is already talking about running a school dance or disco and letting the students have a budget and letting them get used to that entrepreneurial [side of] things. (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1)

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

As noted above, School D’s PELT members understood curriculum to refer to student learning and wellbeing. As a result of the EPIC 2022 research, the teachers had adopted an inquiry approach to curriculum and pedagogy and used recognised inquiry models such as TELSTAR⁶ (Nayler, n.d.; see also Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022) to plan and teach units of work. In 2023, water, was the school’s overarching theme.

Abigail elaborated:

The teachers took the inquiry idea and, as a school, we’ve come up with an inquiry question for each term that we all follow, but obviously we teach it differently depending on what the curriculum allows. So, last term it was, What is water?, and Where does water come from? ... This term’s topic is, *Past and Present of Water*. So, within my HASS curriculum, the students learn about past and present objects and places in general, which I’m starting with next week, but once they have the concept of past and present, we’ll move the conversation onto water [specifically]. (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1)

Abigail added that, “The children, they’re very inquisitive, they love asking the big questions. So, we’ve been breaking things down and using that inquiry approach” (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1).

The use of an inquiry curriculum approach was well suited to a multi-age teaching environment. Abigail noted however, that teaching multi-age classes may require some teachers to adjust their pedagogy. She recounted how she explained to Fleur:

‘You’ve got to get out of the mindset of just because I’m not explicitly teaching them, doesn’t mean they’re not learning’. I said, ‘You could give them an inquiry question based on the science topic which they research and explore themselves and demonstrate some learning and then you’re teaching explicitly to the other group’. And I said, ‘This would work better for you because your [Year 4–6 students] have the skills to do that. [My Year 2–3 students] are still learning how to use the Internet, so it’s a bit hard. So, I’ve gone with the approach of a PowerPoint® where I give them the inquiry topic [which] last term was biology. So, the Year 3s were doing living things and their life cycles and they were going off their own accord: What animals they wanted to find out about, their life cycle, and creating a PowerPoint® on it. So, they’re learning that [doing their own research and creating a PowerPoint®] really engages them and they don’t realise they’re actually doing exactly what I want them to do while I’m not teaching them.’ (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1)

The closeknit community of learners among School D’s teachers meant they learnt side-by-side about aspects of the school such as in the example above where Abigail illustrated to Fleur how she used inquiry pedagogy in a multi-age environment. As will be seen below, for Fleur, this also meant an apprenticeship into engaging parents and the community in the curriculum.

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

The school newsletter, which in 2023 used a new interactive e-format, proved to be an important affinity space for parent and community engagement. Bob explained that the new newsletter was born partly out of frustration at not knowing its actual readership. The newsletter was the result of an 18-month search for an e-platform that would enable the teaching team and school community such as the P&F to “know how many parents [were] opening and reading it, how many parents [were] not actually opening it” and, more importantly, “to know why” (Bob, Principal, School D, Interview 1). As a result of the e-newsletter, Bob now had access to “granular data [that] tells you a bit more” (Principal, School D, Interview 1). For example, “The data indicates that those who’re not reading it are partners of those who have read it. So, they (parents) have decided to say, ‘Okay, one person is reading [the newsletter]’ ... So, it makes sense as to why we don’t see 100% (of parents) [opening the newsletter], but the 70% is still all your parents anyway” (Bob, Principal, School D, Interview 1).

Abigail observed how the transition to an e-newsletter benefited the aim of the school to improve parent and community engagement. Previously, the school newsletter was completed by a member of the administration team hence, the teachers “didn’t really have a say in what went out to parents” (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). They did however, compose a separate weekly email to let the parents of their students know what was happening in each classroom (Naomi, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). The new e-platform made it possible for each teacher to have their own fortnightly news desk in the school newsletter. Abigail commented that the news desks allowed “the teachers to put in anything they want[ed] to get to the parents, basically” (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). During Term 1, she and the other teachers trialled the e-platform to explore its potential for parent and community engagement. Abigail observed:

As much as it is that little bit more work for us, I think we’ve all seen the benefit of it. So, the parents are seeing [that] you can put in photos, videos, voice clips, lots of different things. We’re getting creative! We’re taking photos all the time in the classroom and putting it in the newsletter and then sending it home. And the parents have been commenting on how much they love seeing [what the students are doing]. (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1)

The teachers also used the e-newsletter as a way of inviting parents to contribute to their child’s learning at school and home. Naomi’s (Prep–Year 1) experience of the EPIC research in 2022 helped her to know how she could ask parents to participate. For example, she had the same group of parents last year and knew they were receptive to the idea of engaging in their child’s learning in ways other than

coming into the classroom. In teaching concepts in HASS such as change and continuity, she asked parents to send in photographs of toys from their childhood and contrasted these with pictures the students drew of their favourite toys (Naomi, Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). Naomi observed how this strategy enriched the students’ understanding of the concepts involved.

Fleur included information about her Year 4–6 students’ Term 2 assessment task which: gave parents an overview of what their child would be doing; conveyed expectations for them and their child when they brought their project home; and let them know that, as part of the work, their child was learning to use a new design program (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 6).

Abigail used the e-newsletter to invite the Year 2–3 parents to be part of story book reads—an initiative she envisioned would involve them bringing in their favourite childhood story book as a way to support student learning and teaching about narrative writing in Term 2 English (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 1). She planned the initiative for the students’ morning tea break so there was time for parents to read their story, invite questions from students, and discuss aspects of their book afterward (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 1). When the first parent came in to read, something happened which Abigail did not expect:

Jonty (pseudonym) jumped up and then I think because all of the students watched her jump up with mum and they read it together, like she was turning pages, then the rest of them jumped up when their parent came in and [they] kind of performed together. (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 4)

Abigail continued to use her news desk to invite parents to participate in the initiative. She included photos of story book read moments in the e-newsletter which students and parents said they saw and enjoyed reading. Towards the end of the research, Abigail commented that “the story book reads are still going strong. We’ve got grandparents coming in now” (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 6).

Bob and the teachers at School D recognised the opportunity of the interactive e-newsletter to open up affinity spaces at macro (school), meso (group of teachers), and micro (classroom) levels which assisted to promote the culture and practice of parent and community engagement.

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

The inclusion of Barnaby on the PELT enhanced parent and community engagement through the real-time feedback he provided on initiatives and the specific skills he brought to the team. He commented on the e-newsletter, for example, that invited parents to contribute to the year’s overarching curriculum topic on water:

⁶ The TELSTAR model of inquiry is often used to guide investigations in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS). The model has seven, non-hierarchical phases: Tuning in, Exploring, Looking, Sorting, Testing, Actioning/Acting, and Reflecting.

CASE STUDY 3 SCHOOL D CONTINUED

Straight away as the newsletter went out, I saw a couple of replies come back from parents [which] got forwarded to me from Bob. And I think he was showing me that parents have already come back and said, 'Oh I do this' or 'I work here'. The effect was almost immediate within the school. (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1)

At Masterclass 1, Barnaby said he commented to Fleur (who taught his children) that the e-newsletter was a "better format ... but the big thing was having her input of what's happening (in the classroom)" (PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). He subsequently elaborated that:

Even seeing the music there (referring to a separate section of the e-newsletter). I think our school is unique as everyone gets an instrument from day one to the end, so I think it's good to have something from Mrs Zane (pseudonym) (music teacher) as well.

And also, there seems to be quite a focus on showing what the children are doing and that certainly wasn't possible in previous times. It's changed, I think previously Bob's always had his input, but we weren't seeing that from the other teachers. It's even interesting to read the other teachers' comments—my children aren't in their classes—just to get an understanding of what's happening.

So, I think the newsletter is definitely a major step forward and, just having it there on your phone, it's easy to read. You're not having to wait to get home and log into your email. So, that's quite good. [The e-newsletter] is quite a step forward and very different. (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Cogen 2)

Cogenerative dialogues allowed the PELT members to hear feedback directly from Barnaby about his impressions of the new e-newsletter. The platform and format of the e-newsletter not only improved accessibility of information for parents, but importantly made the school's philosophy and pedagogy of parent and community engagement come alive. The teaching team achieved this outcome through a coordinated approach to curriculum and a focus on students. Barnaby's ability to describe the transformative impact of the use of the e-newsletter, make suggestions for improvement (e.g., to include a P&F Committee news desk), together with his enthusiasm for the change, affirmed for the PELT the success of their efforts to bring parents closer to what their children and other students were learning.

Cogenerative dialogues among School D's PELT members were also enriched by Barnaby's contributions from the perspective of his professional knowledge and skills and unique school roles that included longstanding parent, IT specialist, and immediate past P&F Committee President. One opportunity involved reimagining the school's annual parent survey where Barnaby cogenerated with Bob and the teachers on separate occasions about the content and format of the instrument. Bob was keen to survey parents about a question

that had arisen as part of a recent school board meeting: What does a successful school look like? He commented that:

Barnaby's input into [the process of developing the survey] is great because, with one of his children leaving the school and one halfway [through], [questions could be designed to elicit a range of parent responses about] what a successful school looks like in their eyes. (Bob, Principal, School D, Cogen 3)

Barnaby suggested that the survey be made into an online form (PELT Parent, School D, Cogen 4). He also cogenerated with Bob about the type and nature of the questions:

I was just saying to Bob about these questions, I reckon you're going to get more replies if there are more choices and I think multiple choice makes someone pick one. But if you have the ability to pick three and then parents can add something that may be missing, because I think a lot of parents like, I'm a father, I'm really busy, so I can't think [about all possible responses], but at least if you've got [options], you can grab the top three. (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Cogen 3)

Barnaby further suggested that Bob could use the impetus of the National School Review (Australian Government, 2022) survey which the government was conducting at the time, and which had been raised during cogenerative dialoguing with the researchers, to "get ideas that we could translate into the [school's parent survey]" (PELT Parent, School D, Cogen 3). Cogenerative dialogues meant the PELT members heard Barnaby's opinions and suggestions for rewording questions to eliminate apparent assumptions and improve technical aspects such as the survey's user-friendliness and length. Crucially, cogenerative dialogues that included Barnaby shaped the PELT's decisions about the survey to also take account of the needs of the school and teachers.

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

Naomi described the teachers' approach to engaging parents and the community at School D as "proactive" (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). Hence, they embraced the opportunity of the new e-newsletter as a means to better enact their approach. Abigail commented on the initiative's success: "I think 100% our means of parent engagement has become more efficient and targeted. Like [in terms of] what [parents] want to come in and do, or like what experiences they want to be a part of" (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 7).

The teachers' news desks in the e-newsletter demonstrated the hallmarks of EPIC's Parent Engagement SSOOPP Framework (Willis & Exley, 2022). The SSOOPP Framework (pronounced soup) was the result of EPIC research and emerged from working with teachers who effectively engaged parents and communities. The mnemonic

describes practices that are: **short, sharp, often, optional**, with a **purpose**, and **personalised** to parents and their child. It is not surprising that as the success of the e-newsletter initiative gained momentum in the school community, new opportunities for parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing emerged.

These opportunities included positive responses to invitations such as parents and community members with specialist knowledge to support curriculum learning and teaching on the school's water theme. Bob commented that:

Teachers are generalists, but we're not specialists and there are people out there that we can network with ... to give you a better background and knowledge about what's happening [currently in a particular field] that suits your theme or whatever you're trying to accomplish with the students. (Principal, School D, Interview 1)

Abigail's observation that "parent engagement has become more efficient and targeted" reflected how the e-newsletter initiative enabled the teachers to lessen some of the challenges of connecting classroom learning and teaching with the "specialists" about whom Bob spoke. Bob described the challenges as not only "having the time to network with [parents and the community], but also finding the human resource to fit the [teachers'] purpose" (Principal, School D, Interview 1).

Opportunities to connect with the curriculum also emerged organically from the school community as parents "reached out" to the teachers with ideas and suggestions (Abigail, Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 2). One involved a parent's friend who was a comic book writer based in Los Angeles (USA). Abigail and Fleur, together with Barnaby using his technical skills on the day to reconnect the Internet, arranged for students in Years 2–6 to meet the writer online to talk about her work. Abigail noted, "The students loved it so much that we have scheduled a second meeting with the writer where she's going to read one of her comics, and the children are going to share some of their comic book ideas" (Classroom Teacher, School D, Cogen 2).

The PELT members identified aspects of digital technology among the opportunities and challenges to engaging parents and the community at School D. Barnaby commented that he was "pretty proud of the school and Bob" for what they did in the learning from home phase during the COVID-19 pandemic (PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). In his role in supporting the school's IT, this included "flipping everything on its head" to allow students to take home their devices which was against existing school policy (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). Despite a few initial "hiccups", Barnaby asserted that the school proved to parents and the school community that it was well positioned to transition "quickly and at short notice" to learning from home (PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). He observed, "A lot of parents

were amazed, [especially] once they started talking to other schools and realised how lucky they were ... compared with some children [in other schools] not doing anything for two months" (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1).

As a result of the learning from home experience, Barnaby described how, "Bob's now pushed down Windows devices to the Year 1s, so Year 1 up have Windows, and the Prep students have Apple [iPads]" (PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). Although Barnaby commented that initially he was somewhat "apprehensive" about Bob's decisions, he agreed with him that "we've got to be ready in case something [else] happens again" (PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). For Bob, the additional complexity of future-proofing the school's ability to respond to a similar crisis, included anticipating what that preparedness might mean in a world where the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was increasing. The findings of the school's reimagined annual parent survey revealed that this concern was also shared by parents (Bob, Principal, School D, Masterclass 2).

As the P&F Committee President when the COVID-19 pandemic commenced, Barnaby also witnessed how the opportunity heightened parent engagement. The number of parents who attended P&F Committee meetings swelled from four or five to around 20 and special meetings with Bob were held for parents to ask specific questions about unfolding events and the impact on student learning and wellbeing separately from the business of the P&F Committee. The challenge for Barnaby as he considered parent and community engagement in the new normal phase of living with COVID, was how the school might learn from the pandemic experience. He became acutely aware, for example, that some parents such as those "juggling two children at home at dinner time [are] stuck and don't attend meetings" for that reason (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). Hence, he felt it was important that the school continue to offer hybrid opportunities (i.e., face-to-face and online) for parents to attend P&F Committee meetings and school events and activities. From participating in the EPIC 2023 research, Barnaby also recognised the value of opening up discussions with parents that included teachers to discuss the curriculum formally (e.g., focus groups) and informally (e.g., coffee chats) (PELT Parent, School D, Masterclass 1). These opportunities could focus on ideas and challenges as well as enable 360-degree feedback through ongoing dialogue between the teachers and school community. One challenge however, would be setting up feedback loops (e.g., using the e-newsletter) to "keep the conversations going" (Barnaby, PELT Parent, School D, Interview 1). Bob highlighted however, the need to be "conscious of [teacher] workload, because it's an ongoing factor" given the intense work at School D to maintain the existing quality "relationships they have created with our parents" (Principal, School D, Cogen 7).

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As previously mentioned, School D was a small, multi-age school with a three-year history of involvement in the EPIC research. School D was therefore unique among the eight schools that participated in EPIC 2023. It is possibly not surprising then to hear the PELT members comment on the cumulative effects of their efforts to engage parents and the community over the last several years. Naomi, for example, in teaching HASS units of work, spoke about an expanding set of resources that she had accumulated as a result of previous parent contributions (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1). She indicated that artefacts, examples, ideas, and increased confidence were among her resources. Importantly, she noted how the resources she had on hand (e.g., photographs of special places), together with more coming in from Prep students, afforded her different vantage points to engage students and parents in 2023. In speaking about a unit on Special Places in HASS, Naomi explained:

We're going to be able to dive in a little bit deeper and look at actually how places have changed. What could we do to help them stay sustainable or have they been polluted (referring to islands where some students' families may have camped in the past)? Can we still go there?

So, we're researching places more to make sure the students get a whole picture and then hopefully that will mean that they get a better understanding of why it's important to look after things and why it's important that we have special places such as rainforests and national parks. (Classroom Teacher, School D, Interview 1)

Hence, engaging parents and the community in 2022 benefited teaching and student learning and wellbeing in 2023 by broadening and deepening the ways Naomi could connect with students and parents. In particular, she was able to: explore topics in more depth (e.g., "we're researching places more"); dwell on BIG ideas (e.g., people and places are connected); develop key concepts (e.g., sustainability and change and continuity); and enrich understanding (e.g., by asking more critical questions). These insights assisted Naomi to appreciate the value of her initial and ongoing investment in parent and community engagement.

Abigail also observed the longer-term benefits of successful parent and community engagement initiatives. She used the e-newsletter to ascertain from parents whether to keep the story book reads going throughout the year. Most of the parents responded positively, indicating that more time would let them participate in ways that took account of their other commitments. As a result, Abigail said that she would

"definitely keep [the initiative] in place", but would explore how to "switch it up" next year in line with the school's 2024 curriculum topic of *Life*. For example, instead of parents reading a favourite story book with students, she might invite them to share a life story or talk about a personally-significant, historical artefact. From her observations and suggestions, Abigail, like Naomi, appeared to sense the need to purposefully build a culture and practice of parent and community engagement over time. A sustainable model of parent and community engagement would therefore seem to benefit from thoughtful scaffolding of not only teachers, but also parents to steadily yet intentionally build their knowledge, skills, and confidence for engaging in student learning and wellbeing. A steady, intentional approach also appeared to accommodate for changes in staff as new teachers, such as Fleur, were apprenticed into the culture and practice of parent and community engagement at the school. According to Bob, it was also key to protecting teacher workloads from becoming unsustainable and safeguarding teachers from burnout (Principal, School D, Interview 2). Bob emphasised, "Keep [parent and community engagement initiatives] simple. Don't overthink things and don't be afraid to say no to things that will not work or will cause a lot of work for a few people" (Principal, School D, Interview 2). Fundamentally, he asserted, a steady, intentional approach was "a matter of balance" (Bob, Principal, School D, Interview 2).

From what the PELT members said and did, projecting forward to the next and subsequent years in anticipation of the needs of students and the school also seemed connected to a sustainable model of parent and community engagement. At a macro (school) level, Bob and Barnaby's work to redevelop the school's annual parent survey, for example, reflected a need for more detailed information to help prepare students and the school for the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly-changing, future world. So too, at a meso (groups of teachers/parents) level, conversations with Barnaby about other possible forms of data collection (e.g., regular parent-teacher focus groups or coffee chats) to gain ongoing feedback to inform parent and community engagement initiatives and practices. A play group initiative led by Naomi and Bob which was endorsed by the school's governing body represented another meso-level example of the notion of projecting forward. The proposed initiative involved current parents and students at the school co-leading activities for early years children not yet old enough for Prep and recognised the need to begin engaging families earlier than the formal school years. The "bottom-up" initiative was designed to ensure "the long-term sustainability of student enrolments and flowed naturally from the theme of building positive relationships with the school's existing and future population" (Bob, Principal, School D, Interview 2).

At a micro (classroom) level, looking ahead to next year's units of work from the perspective of parent and community engagement allowed teachers to conceive more substantive projects than they might otherwise. The themes for the units were derived from the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United Nations, 2023), having been identified by School D parents who expressed a desire for their children to study the themes as part of the curriculum. Bob, for example, began to plan for an upcoming unit of work in HASS about a local river which aligned with several SDG (e.g., SDG 6 [Clean water and sanitation]; 11 [Sustainable cities and communities]; 14 [Life below water]; and 15 [Life on land]). Instead of studying maps of the river *per se*, he envisaged a project that might run across the year and show the river's history (past and present) through the eyes of the school's multicultural community. Reimagining possibilities for parent and community engagement, as in Bob's case above, and projecting forward in other ways (e.g., the school parent survey) to proactively anticipate the needs of students, teachers, and school community aligned with a steady, intentional approach. This approach afforded those involved potentially more time and space to plan, organise, and coordinate resources and initiatives to ensure practices and processes for engaging parents and the community supported the future needs of students and the school.

Case study 4 school E



A practical, goal-setting approach to engaging parents and the community in curriculum in a day and distance education junior, middle, and senior school

School context

Located in central Queensland, School E was a relatively young, non-government, faith-based, co-educational, Prep to Year 12 school with approximately 2000 students. The school focused on providing rich and diverse student learning experiences in a supportive, safe environment. Junior, Middle, and Senior Schools for day and distance education students were designed to cater for seamless transitions between year levels. Distance education families were located across Australia and internationally. Flexibility existed in the Senior School for day school students to take distance education subjects. School E offered a range of academic, cultural, sporting, and extracurricular programs and enjoyed a long and valuable association with the local community. The school's website contained a number of documents which highlighted the priority of working closely with parents.

Involvement in EPIC

School E participated in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research in 2021 (see Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) and 2023. Table 12 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, most members of School E's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) were relatively new to the school. The PELT comprised seven participants. The PELT leader, Darlene Cameron, was the school's newly-appointed, inaugural Enrolments and Community Engagement Officer.⁷ This role saw her working closely with the principal, Astrid Piers, who had been in senior leadership roles at School E for approximately five years. Astrid also worked closely with Ross Humphries, a school leader in Distance Education in the

Senior School who had recently joined School E. In addition, the PELT included two early-career teachers, Kaylene Masters and Betty Spencer, who taught Year 5 (Junior School) and Years 9 and 10 (Middle and Senior School) respectively, and an experienced Senior School teacher, Malcolm Currey, who taught Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) and English. The PELT's parent representative was Marilla Shoemaker who worked in the school's administration team. PELT members, Darlene and Ross, were also parents at the school.

A summary of information about School E's PELT members is presented in Table 13.

School E's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and six cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Despite challenges such as illness, the members of the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 44/61 (72%) possible data collection opportunities.

School E's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

Although each school in the 2023 EPIC research was unique, School E's distinctiveness added to its richness and complexity. Astrid commented, "We're an interesting school because 70% of our clientele either travel on a bus [to attend day school] or are a distance education family" (Principal, School E, Interview 1). She believed that parents

Table 12: School E—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E , F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E , G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 13: School E—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Darlene Cameron	Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer	Whole school	PELT leader; Parent at school
Marilla Shoemaker	PELT Parent		School administration officer; Long association with school
Astrid Piers	Principal	Whole school	Experienced school leader & teacher
Ross Humphries	Distance Education School Leader & Teacher	Middle & Senior school	Experienced school leader & teacher; Parent at school
Kaylene Masters	Years 5 Classroom Teacher	Junior school	Early-career teacher
Betty Spencer	Year 9 & 10 Classroom Teacher	Middle school	Early-career teacher
Malcolm Currey	Year 10 Classroom Teacher	Senior school	Experienced teacher; Long association with school

and schools were partners in the education of students. Astrid further indicated, "I believe a degree of trust needs to be held between the educator and the school that everyone is working in the best interest of the child or student, and when that's flourishing, I find it works best" (Principal, School E, Interview 1).

Trust was fundamental to Astrid's view of effective parent and community engagement, however, different strategies for achieving trusting parent-school relationships were needed at School E. In distance education, for example, she explained, "Parents are often the educator so [the school] is building resources to ensure they can provide the education delivery needed [such as] parent handbooks and purpose-built resources that students can work through independently with a parent's guidance" (Astrid, Principal, School E, Interview 1). In the day school, which relied on a fleet of buses to transport students to and from campus from as far away as 90 minutes, communication was central to parent-school-community engagement. Astrid commented, "We don't see a lot of parents because of our bus [dependent community]" (Principal, School E, Interview 1). She added, "Not only that, we've had COVID-19 for the last two years. So, for some parents, I'm actually just meeting them for the very first time" (Astrid, Principal, School E, Interview 1). The school had also

grown rapidly in a comparatively short period. Hence, Astrid pointed out, "I've come from a school where I knew every parent, every student, and every sibling [however] ... in the absence of parents [on campus], building trust is more challenging" (Principal, School E, Interview 1).

Similarly, Ross felt that "seeking to understand the school community" was crucial to engaging distance education students and parents (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1). From working in disadvantaged schools throughout his career, Ross was acutely aware of the roles parents and community members play in the process of achieving quality student education outcomes. He underscored Astrid's comments about School E's rapid growth, saying, "Distance education enrolments during COVID-19 surged by 30–35%. It was unprecedented and wasn't forecast in the school's five-year strategic plan" (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1). Although the pandemic was the impetus for increased enrolments, in the new normal phase of living with COVID, School E was keen to maintain its overall distance education student population. The COVID experience made the school "more aware of the importance of engaging with students and parents on a regular basis" (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1).

⁷ Positions of leadership in schools with a dedicated focus on parent and community engagement may be variously titled including, Parent and Community Engagement Officer/Coordinator/Worker, Parent Liaison Officer, Head of Family Engagement.

CASE STUDY 4 SCHOOL E CONTINUED

Kaylene's experience of parent engagement in the Junior School showed her "just how much some of the parents wanted to be back in the classroom after COVID-19" (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). She attempted several parent and community engagement initiatives the previous year, one of which involved inviting parents with knowledge of Australia's democratic processes into the classroom to talk with students. Kaylene recalled, "We actually did [a mock] election campaign. We did a sausage sizzle like they do on election day. ... We invited the parents back in to cast the first votes" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). She reported, "the students and parents showed so much enthusiasm" for the election campaign initiative, crediting authentic, student-parent-community-curriculum connections for its success (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). Kaylene commenced her EPIC 2023 journey with a view that consistency was key to engaging parents and the community in curriculum and practice.

Betty reported her experience of engaging parents and the community in the Middle and Senior Schools was affected by several mitigating factors including: a mandatory, delayed school start in 2022 because of COVID-19; the effects of natural disasters; working parents; and families living long distances away (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). She commented, "Parents are coming back on site ... They're coming and watching the awards night and they're spectators at the cross country, but they're not going on the actual excursions with us" (Betty, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). She reported predominantly communicating with parents by email. She noted however, "Parents say [in surveys], and we often hear it, that they get too many emails. So, they're getting bombarded with information and emails" (Betty, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1).

Like Betty, Malcolm, felt "parent engagement was very important, not just involvement" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). He said distance education students "whose parents are not engaged don't see the kind of success they should otherwise get" (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). Referring to a past project-based program, he commented, "I've also seen the huge benefits of parent engagement in our day school classrooms" (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). The project-based program centred on collaborative student inquiry which integrated multiple subjects (Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) and included "opportunities [for students] to invite parents in to share their expertise in various capacities across curriculum areas" (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). However, a major curriculum "reshuffle ... to ensure integrity when it came to meeting mandatory hours of subjects and various other requirements ... saw the program go by the wayside" (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). Malcolm commented, "Many of the opportunities that came naturally through the [project-based] program for parent engagement don't exist anymore" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). He therefore approached the EPIC 2023

research wishing to explore ways to re-engage parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing at the school.

As the Enrolments and Community Engagement Officer and PELT leader, Darlene stated, "I've been looking at parent engagement for over a year. Being a mum, I'm quite passionate about it. I feel it's an important part of my child's journey to be connected to the school that they attend" (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Interview 1). In coming to School E, Darlene commented, "I've seen a great difference in what [my child's] previous school did" to engage parents (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Interview 1). Examples included: open classrooms; parent representatives for each class; keeping parents updated with term overviews; and using the Seesaw⁸ app interactively to encourage two-way, parent-teacher-student communication. Darlene's role incorporated enrolments where she met first-time families as well as liaising with them and other families about issues concerning their child or the school. She said, "I'm the first-port-of-call [for families] with the school. So, I bridge that relationship between the school and the parent" (Darlene, Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Interview 1).

Marilla interacted frequently with parents in her school administration role. As the parent representative on the PELT, she was "interested in getting more parent engagement in education for our children" (Marilla, PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1). She reported feeling somewhat disconnected with the school, especially when her children entered Senior School. Marilla stated, "The teachers have been really good when I've approached them and they've always offered extra support for my children" (PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1). However, she generally "found [parent engagement] a bit hit and miss. Some teachers will send out information about what [my children] are doing, what they're learning, what unit they're studying" (Marilla, PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1). For Marilla, parent engagement mostly relied on "what I have put in myself in having those question times with my children after school. Asking them specific questions about each of their subjects and whether they have assessments" (PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1). She suggested, "Teachers could provide more information [to parents] about how to help students at home such as questions to ask, pointers about the direction of the work their child will be studying, and connections with family experiences, knowledges, and skills" (Marilla, PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

Engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) afforded new opportunities for School E's PELT to think about curriculum and pedagogy. Astrid commented that previously the school had engaged parents as guest speakers "depending on the

curriculum and [parents'] availability" (Principal, School E, Interview 1). She observed however, "I don't know if our staff ever thought to capitalise on the unique opportunity of parent engagement in a way that would be less by chance and more of a purposeful arrangement" (Astrid, Principal, School E, Interview 1). School E had recently rewritten its curriculum as part of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NASAB) process (Queensland Government, 2023). While being purposeful in planning for parent and community engagement, Darlene indicated,

We don't want to go and rewrite the curriculum ... and we do not want to be adding to the teachers' workload at all, but we do feel that small tweaks [to curriculum enactment] trickling across the school is doable, achievable, and worthwhile. (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Interview 1)

The PELT consequently approached EPIC 2023 from a macro (school) level, developing three, practical parent and community engagement goals for implementation from Term 3.

The first goal involved the team developing a Term Overview for each year level from Prep to Year 9 to share initially with families in the day school. Astrid described how Darlene used the Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Program (CARP) developed from the Australian Curriculum for staff,

... to build a template for every teacher [that included]: a short blurb about each subject; what parents can expect from an assessment point of view; and then some pondering questions that we want the staff to collaborate with us on in terms of what questions could [parents] be asking their child. (Principal, School E, Cogen 2)

Part of the initiative also involved asking parents if and how they might support the curriculum. Astrid elaborated:

We're going to attach a Microsoft Forms® link or QR code so parents can express their support that way. Darlene will collate that with the teachers and then send that to them in terms of, 'Mrs Jones has responded, she works for Water Wise Council and wants to come and talk to you.' (Principal, School E, Cogen 2)

Astrid, Darlene, and Ross collaborated as a small group to develop the curriculum overviews. Darlene led the template's design as a one-page, A4 flyer and populated each learning area for each year level with relevant curriculum and assessment information. She noted, "From being a parent myself and not understanding the curriculum, I reworded some sentences from the CARP using ChatGPT⁹ and put some questions together for parents to send to the group" (Darlene, Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 4).

Darlene's approach accorded with the small group's aim of ensuing the language in the curriculum overviews was "parent-friendly rather than education speak" (Astrid, Principal, School E, Cogen 3). Simultaneously, the group's approach was designed to minimise the workload for teachers with whom

they subsequently liaised to finalise the overviews.

The PELT's second goal entailed increasing the involvement of teachers in engaging parents and the community. Referring to the Term Overviews, Astrid explained that the second goal connected to the first, "[as it involved the teachers] collaborating on what they're happy for the school to send out to families and responding to parents who agree that they want to help with the curriculum" (Principal, School E, Cogen 2). She added, "But we also want to put out a brief survey to parents at the end of Term 3 to say, 'In your opinion, do you think the strategy increased parent engagement in student learning?'" (Astrid, Principal, School E, Cogen 2).

The PELT's third goal entailed an initiative called, Classroom in the Spotlight, where teachers from the day or distance education school were invited to make a short 30-second film about a day in their school life. Members of the PELT worked with the school's marketing team to pre-build an animation using a digital platform similar to Movie Maker for the teachers to use. Astrid experimented with the platform, finding it was easy to "slide in a video, put in some transitions, put in some audio, and write a blurb" (Principal, School E, Cogen 3). The PELT hoped to feature every primary classroom in the initiative in Term 3 and promote the short films using the school's Facebook page. To this end, Darlene met with teachers personally to promote the initiative as well as generally introducing them to the PELT's parent and community engagement work.

Working in distance education, Ross brought a different perspective to parent and community engagement in the curriculum. He asserted that distance education teachers were "very well equipped to use 21st Century digital learning pedagogies for which, prior to COVID-19, there hadn't been the same drive to adopt in mainstream classes" (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1). Although other schools were "catching up" with distance education pedagogically, Ross and his team remained focused on ensuring the strategies and tools they used were highly accessible for students and parents (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1). He explained, "It's our home tutor that actually takes the lead in educating their child in the home, so we always need to be cognisant that they may not have the same level of training and expertise the teachers do" (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1). Distance education adopted a holistic, student-centred approach using inquiry-based learning combined with a multimodal platform to deliver the Australian Curriculum. Moreover, the approach was strategically designed to enable students and parents to become more agentic in their respective roles and practices as learners and facilitators. Ross concluded that teacher-created, online media and scaffolded tools in distance education at School E afforded differentiated learning through "a stream of different learning experiences that students and parents adapted based on their needs at any particular time" (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 1).

8 Seesaw® is promoted as an online learning platform teachers and schools use to engage families by personalising students' learning and school experience (Seesaw, 2023; see also Willis & Exley, 2018).

9 Chat GPT is an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot.

CASE STUDY 4 SCHOOL E CONTINUED

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

The different roles of the PELT members at School E saw them consider how they might harness a range of new and existing affinity spaces at macro, meso, and micro levels to further parent and community engagement. At a macro (school) level, members of the PELT presented the team's three parent and community engagement goals at a weekly event called School E's Morning Show. Astrid described the presentation as a "launch", saying, "most of the staff know we've got this group but they don't realise what we're doing" (Principal, School E, Cogen 3). The school's Morning Show was similar to a staff briefing and, as a consequence of COVID-19, streamed live using Microsoft Teams®. The show's format commenced with a prelude and included a devotional, staff notices, weekly wrap-up, staff shout-outs, and a wellbeing focus (Astrid, Principal, School E, Cogen 3). Astrid commented, "Most people, even if they're off site will log into that show because if you miss it, you miss a great show" (Principal, School E, Cogen 3). Apart from the PELT's goals, the presentation encouraged teachers to engage in the initiatives and let them know the school's plans to support them administratively. Darlene reported on the impact of the PELT's Morning Show presentation: "It was us talking to [the whole staff], so no matter where they were—making a coffee or tuning in from home—around 200 staff [including] grounds people, teachers, and administration staff [heard the information]" (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 4).

At a meso (groups of teachers) level, Betty, Malcolm, and Kaylene each reported using informal, incidental opportunities to talk with year-level colleagues about how to incorporate parent and community engagement in practice. For example, Betty observed,

I'm finding that when I'm talking with my colleagues, and we're talking about [parent and community engagement], they've started picking up on it and asking a few things. I'm able to then give them some ideas that they can do. (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 6)

Rather than telling her colleagues, "Here's this new thing, go off and do it" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1), Betty's approach mirrored the supportive, collaborative work of the PELT.

Kaylene commenced the year already working reasonably collaboratively with her Year 5 colleagues. They developed term overviews for parents which outlined: what students were learning in each subject; assessment tasks and due dates; and possible questions to enable at-home conversations (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 1). As the year unfolded, Kaylene described one initiative which involved inviting parents to video science experiments at home with their child for subsequent sharing with the class. She said, "I shared [the idea] with my colleagues: 'Hey, just wondered if you wanted to send this home, this is what

I'm doing. Let's get our parents on board'" (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3). Kaylene relayed, "We got a lot of engagement, not just from my class; my colleagues got some awesome feedback too" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3). As a result, she commented, "[the Year 5 classes] watched some videos of our students and families doing experiments at home" (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3). Furthermore, she noticed, "How much more parents wanted to be on board and how excited the students were and their growth [in science learning]" (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3). Commenting on the extent of the Year 5 teachers' collaboration, Kaylene stated, "And it's actually got to the point now where the teachers in my team say, 'Hey, I'm sending this home. Do you want to send it home too? I'm like, 'Yes, I do. Thank you!'" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3).

At a micro (classroom) level, Malcolm created virtual affinity spaces using student emails to parents which contained questions on Senior School topics to provoke meaningful conversations at home. He felt, "[Engaging parents in the curriculum] is less about getting them involved in the kinds of activities we're doing in school and more about, 'How do we get students talking about what we're doing outside of the classroom?'" (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1). Malcolm described his response (below) to students studying Senior English who initially asked, "Why do you want me to send an email home to my parents?" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1).

I said, 'Well, I bet as a teenager, the first thing that happens when your parents pick you up or they get home from work is they say, 'Hey, how are you? How was your day?' And you say, 'Good'. And then they'll say, 'Okay, you say it was good. That's great. So, what did you do at school today?' And you'll say, 'Oh, you know, we did stuff'. And then you'll go to your room, because you're a teenager. [I said], 'How accurate was that?' And everybody in the class went, 'Well, yeah, okay, that's right'. So, rather than saying, 'good' and 'stuff', maybe you could actually talk to your parents about what you're learning and we can use this idea of a question to ask them for their ideas and opinions about Shakespeare as a springboard so the next time when they say, 'What did you do at school today?', you won't just assume that they won't know what you're talking about because you will have already sent them an email and you can pick up the conversation. And so, 'The more you talk about [the question], the more you'll learn'. (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 1)

The aim of Malcolm's approach was to "increase awareness across all the families" through student issued emails that invited parents to actively participate in their child's curriculum learning (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 2). He reported, "[There] was also a lot of value" in his approach in terms of "opening up [his students'] minds to the idea that, 'This is a topic I can talk to my parents about. It's not just boring old Shakespeare that my parents don't know anything about'" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3).

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

Reflecting on Marilla's influence as the parent representative on the PELT during cogenerative dialogues, Darlene observed, "She's been a voice to our PELT in terms of what's important to her as a parent" (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 5). The impact of Marilla's voice, and indeed the voices of PELT members, Darlene and Ross, who were also School E parents, was conspicuous in different ways as highlighted in three examples below.

First, the parents added weight to discussions about the nature and volume of information parents received from the school. Kaylene commented,

It's been really helpful to me to listen to the parent voices on the PELT because, as a teacher, you think, 'Oh yeah, do all of this stuff', and then hearing it back in a parent's voice, 'When I get a billion emails, I don't look at them. It's helped us (referring to the PELT) streamline what we've done. (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 5)

Kaylene elaborated that she intended to use the student-email-home strategy, but found her primary students could not email outside the school because of the school's online safety policy. The students subsequently used Seesaw® however, not every parent received their child's message. Kaylene then noticed, "Most parents see communication that comes from me [on Seesaw®]" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 1). Hence, she and the students decided to make a class recording with the message: "Hey family, we're reading, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. What's your favourite book by Roald Dahl? Who's your favourite author? What was your favourite book when you were my age?" (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 1). The day after sending the recording, Kaylene relayed,

I haven't checked this morning, but last night there were about 17 out of 26 parents who had seen it. So, I'm hoping we get some replies and we'll read them today or watch them if they've sent us a video back which would be really cool. (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 1)

Kaylene also cogitated about how to engage her students' parents in the science experiments initiative mentioned above. At first, she planned to invite them into the classroom at a day and time each week, but then thought,

'A lot of parents of my students both work full time'. I really want to be sensitive to the students and parents. I don't want only one or two parents being able to come in [to the classroom] every single week and other students feeling, 'Oh well, my mum or dad can't come in' and getting upset over it. So, I'm trying to think of a different way to tackle that [issue] without another email that they need to reply to or overwhelming them. (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 1)

The PELT's parent voices appeared to raise Kaylene's awareness of how and which parents in her class were accessing information about their child's learning. She also

became more cognisant of parents' different situations and how these may affect possibilities for engagement and possible negative impacts for them and their child.

Second, the parents on the PELT supported suggestions for parent and community engagement initiatives as well as provided feedback on their implementation. As the PELT commenced its EPIC 2023 journey, Marilla forecast possible end-of-year markers of success, saying, "I think a noticeable change would be if we can get some consistency with the different classes; even just sending out overviews of the school terms so that parents know what's happening" (PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1). The development of year-level Term Overviews for Prep to Year 9 classes represented the achievement of one of the PELT's goals. Kaylene compared the PELT's Term Overviews to those she and her Year 5 colleagues previously developed, saying, "I think the way the overviews were presented to parents landed a bit better than every class teacher sending something out" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 5). Her comments referred to the school's approach in sending out one, professionally-presented, "official" Term Overview for each year level (Kaylene, Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 5). Marilla noticed however, that the Term Overviews did not include all the teachers' email addresses. Darlene subsequently emailed the addresses to each family and in the process found she could improve accessibility to the information for all families. Darlene's actions in providing parents with the contact details of their child's teacher/s and ensuring the information was readily accessible for families demonstrated Marilla's contributions to the success of the PELT's Term Overviews initiative.

Third, the voices of School E's PELT parents confirmed the effectiveness of certain parent and community engagement strategies and afforded insights into their transferability across year levels and different contexts. For example, as a parent of a day student, Ross relayed,

I sit there with my wife at night and young child at the dinner table and we look at some of the curriculum plans (referring to the Term Overviews) that have been sent home. And I actually feel a sense of ownership around them too, because we've worked on [the initiative] as a team. But I've asked my child some of the provocative questions we've built into that, and I've gone through some of the assessable items, things that I didn't have access to as a parent previously. And it's great because it's become a conversation starter at the dinner table, where it opens a whole doorway to my child telling us about their day, telling us about the units of work that they've been undertaking. (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2)

As a parent, Ross concluded about the Term Overviews initiative, "So, [my family would] say it's really powerful" (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2). As a distance education educator, he added, "I think if we continue to refine that work, it really has the ability to be something that changes how we approach and work with our families" (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2).

CASE STUDY 4 SCHOOL E CONTINUED

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

The members of the PELT generally approached parent and community engagement challenges and opportunities at School E from the perspective of needing to balance the two. For example, as indicated earlier, the PELT felt it was paramount to consider how any new parent and community engagement initiatives might impact teachers' existing workloads particularly given legislative requirements surrounding curriculum content and delivery. As also seen above, the changing landscape of education, especially in the new normal phase of living with COVID, and School E's particular context and setting, created additional challenges for parent and community engagement. As Astrid pointed out, "Particularly when you're a newer teacher. ... having parents in your classroom is not a new revolution in schools, but I think if you've only taught since 2019, it probably is a revolution for you" (Principal, School E, Cogen 3).

Communication was identified as an ongoing, macro-level (school-level) challenge for parent and community engagement at School E especially in distance education where there were few opportunities for meeting in person. According to Ross, some of the issues included:

... ensuring that the communication that comes from all key stakeholders within distance education is consistent and ultimately, we're talking the same language and that we're using a language that parents understand because quite often we can go off on an educational tangent ... (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Cogen 1)

The school's communication strategy, which was recently reviewed, entailed coordinating and managing: procedures; timelines; expectations around communication with families; and workflow (e.g., directing information/parent feedback to school leaders, classroom teachers, or administration staff) (Ross, Distance Education School Leader, School E, Cogen 1). Timely action was identified as an area for specific focus hence, the school maintained a secure data base to record how feedback from parents was actioned or responded to. The distance education communication strategy included providing feedback to parents when they came together on activity days. However, Ross recognised the potential to strengthen the strategy, saying:

If we had a designated period of time where we harvest information through dialogue with parents, and even if that is a parent information or engagement session that's been set up in Microsoft Teams®; it might be a series of phone calls that are made in some kind of systematic fashion. But having dialogue and actually asking some provocative questions around, 'What impact did you see? Has this made your life easier?' And possibly even getting a little bit of information around, 'If you could change one thing, what would it be?' That for me would be the best way forward. (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2)

From Ross's perspective, thinking creatively, the challenge of managing communication that included providing useful and timely feedback to parents might also open possible opportunities for gathering useful, point-in-time information through substantive conversations with families throughout the year. The further benefit of such conversations was the potential to better support parents to engage effectively in their child's learning and wellbeing.

The effectiveness of the Term Overviews initiative was discussed above. After speaking with the distance education team, Darlene relayed that the overviews were subsequently "tweaked" and sent to Prep to Year 9 distance education families (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 6). This step showed the school community that the Term Overviews initiative was "a one school thing" (i.e., a whole-school parent and community engagement strategy), while simultaneously endorsing Darlene's new role (Darlene, Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 6).

However, the intensity of work associated with initially setting up the Term Overviews for the beginning of each term—which necessarily meant starting weeks earlier—presented a possible challenge in terms of sustaining the initiative (Darlene, Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 4). The PELT also felt that creating a similar resource for parents and students in the Senior School was more involved. Given the range of Senior School electives, Darlene pronounced, "the task would be way too big to customise it for each student" (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 4). Malcolm agreed, saying, "[The Term Overviews] weren't practical for Years 10 to 12 and a different approach was needed for the older students" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 2).

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As previously mentioned, School E was a large, faith-based, co-educational, Prep to Year 12 day and distance education school that participated in EPIC 2021 (see Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) and again in EPIC 2023. Although the PELT focused mostly on macro-level (school-level) initiatives, the impact of their work was equally evident at meso (groups of teachers) and micro (classroom) levels. School E was unique among the eight participating schools in 2023 by being one of two schools with a dedicated parent liaison officer, namely Darlene whose official appointment was as Enrolments and Community Engagement Officer. According to Astrid, Darlene's appointment was part of a broader strategy of [re] creating a sense of community at School E. Speaking about sustaining parent and community engagement, Astrid asserted,

The key message is that it's really important to have a strategy. It just doesn't happen by chance. Putting a strategy in [place], ... staffing it well, resourcing it. Without resourcing it, it will just become another add-on and that's not sustainable in schools. And [it's important to] support

teachers; so, if we want them to [engage parents and the community], then support them administratively so they can do it. (Principal, School E, Interview 2)

Darlene's role involved coordinating the many moving parts of not just the work of the PELT, but also other aspects of her work which included providing pastoral support to families. She recognised for School E to embed a culture and pedagogy of parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing, teacher "buy-in" was critical (Darlene, Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 3). As the Classroom in the Spotlight initiative showed, Darlene adopted a proactive, "intentional" approach to support, showcase, and celebrate the work of teachers (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Cogen 3). Speaking about the PELT's success, Malcolm observed,

Darlene really jumped into the role that she was given wholeheartedly and provided us with a real sense of direction as well as very practical support. I feel if we hadn't had Darlene in her role, we wouldn't have made the progress we did. She was able to get across those 10 year levels of teachers and subject areas and produce documents in a timeframe that certainly was not possible for teachers. (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 2)

For her part, Darlene indicated that she could not have achieved what she did without Astrid's support. She remarked, "I'm lucky enough to have a principal who believes in and understands parent and community engagement in the curriculum and [who has] jumped on board and is happy to support me in my job" (Enrolments & Community Engagement Officer, School E, Interview 2).

Members of the PELT observed that cultural change takes time and may happen incrementally. For example, Ross postulated about a sustainable model of parent and community engagement:

... change can be a deterrent because families are busy and it's one of the primary reasons why they don't engage. It's not because they don't want to, it's because they're time-poor, like many of our staff here at school. So, I think coming up with a concept, even if it's in its most rudimentary form, and then keeping that going consistently like a cyclical, systematic approach each term for at least a year until we've stimulated the interest and built the understanding and awareness will mean we're going to see a better uptake moving forward. (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2)

In addition, Malcolm observed small but significant shifts during parent-teacher interviews which he attributed to students emailing home about their classroom learning. He relayed,

[Instead of] talking about the academic struggles of a student, we were talking about what they're doing and how they're doing it. I found parents were more receptive [than previously] ... and we were having richer conversations

because there was some familiarity there. (Malcolm, Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 2)

Malcolm recommended "continuing to work in ways that brought parents into their child's learning" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 2).

In reaching out to engage parents, Kaylene also noticed,

It started as a bit of a novelty and a lot of parents [responded to the initiatives], and then it dropped off. And now I think the parents think, 'Oh, this is going to keep coming. And I don't have to do it every time. I can just do it sometimes', but the engagement is picking up in a more regular way now. (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3)

Kaylene added, "And then I'm getting parents just emailing me or students coming and saying, 'Hey, I talked to mum about what we're doing ...'" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Cogen 3). Student and parent suggestions of ways they might contribute to the curriculum were thus becoming part of the culture and practice of the class.

Similarly, as indicated previously, Ross suggested sustaining parent and community engagement involved "providing opportunity for parent voice ... in more organic ways by giving them a platform [to speak beyond surveys] and then communicating back to them the impact that their voice had" (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2). According to Ross, it was important to create a sense of ownership and autonomy not only for parents, but also students around aspects of the learning environment.

Members of the PELT signalled the need to keep parent and community engagement simple. For example, Marilla observed,

Just the simplicity of [engaging parents and the community]. Not having to overcomplicate things and not having to ask the parents for huge input, but just giving those points where they can engage with their child and can bring something practical if they feel comfortable and if they know about different [learning] areas ... making those subtle changes and then working towards getting more parent engagement. (PELT Parent, School E, Interview 1)

At the end of EPIC 2023, Kaylene declared, "Parents just want connection" (Classroom Teacher, School E, Interview 2). Ross concluded,

Education is complex, so I suppose my learning not only from Marilla, who was our parent representative within the PELT, but also from our families' responses to some of the strategies that we've trialled throughout the process [of learning about parent and community engagement] has been, make it as simple as possible. And honestly the response that we've had to that [approach] has been quite significant in a short period of time. So, I think it's given us a good foundation for the future. (Distance Education School Leader, School E, Interview 2)

Case study 5 school G



Towards a generative approach in parent and community engagement in the curriculum in the middle years of a small rural school

School context

Located in a rural setting in north Queensland, School G was a non-government, co-educational school established in the early 2000s that accommodated single-stream classes (K–10) for over 100 students. The school followed an internationally-recognised, holistic approach to education where students were nurtured through connections to nature, one another, and the wider world. Parents and the school community were regarded as central to the school’s philosophy of student learning as well as its continued growth. Moreover, the school actively cultivated positive relationships with parents and close connections with the local community to create support systems for students at and beyond school. Documents on the school’s website indicated the importance of assisting parents to know and understand what they can do at home to support their child’s learning and growth at school. Active participation of families in the life of the school and “parent contributions [were] very much valued” (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1), to enhance the quality of their child’s education as well as promote the school to others.

Involvement in EPIC

School G was one of four schools out of the eight involved in 2023 to participate in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research for the first time. Table 14 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school’s involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School G’s Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised seven participants. The PELT was led by Marigold Baker, Head of School, from March to August, and then Eden Richards, Acting Head of School, from August to December. There were two middle years and a specialist

teacher on the PELT: Giselle Perrot who taught Year 5; Vincent Ready who taught Year 9 Maths and Science; and Hazel Brent, a school community garden specialist teacher. Giselle and Hazel were experienced teachers who enjoyed a long association with the school. Vincent was an early-career teacher with a background in the community services sector working with young people experiencing hardship. Ronit Tula was the school’s Administration Director. She worked remotely in south-east Queensland to manage the school’s day-to-day operations and also enjoyed a long association with the school. Ronit’s role included a focus on parents and the school community. The PELT’s parent representative was Vashti Castles whose children attended the school. At the time of the research, Vashti chaired the school’s Board of Directors—a role she had held since 2021. She spoke about the EPIC 2023 research:

I’m very interested in being part of this project, not only because of my role on the Board of Directors and [hence] I see the broader sphere of what’s happening with regards to parents and community, but also [for] my own children and how we can have a better experience within the school and how I can support what they learn there at home. (Vashti, PELT Parent, School G, Interview 1)

Except for the Head of School (Marigold) and Acting Head of School (Eden), five PELT members were current or past parents at the school. Ronit commented:

It’s just the way of the whole school that the majority of staff are always wearing two hats. So, we always have a parent perspective as well as a staff perspective in terms of [what we bring] ... to working at the school. (Administration Director, School G, Interview 2)

A summary of information about School G’s PELT members is presented in Table 14.

Table 14: School G—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G , H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 15: School G—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Marigold Baker	Head of School	Whole school	PELT leader (March–August); Experienced teacher
Eden Richards	Acting Head of School	Whole school	PELT leader (August–December); Experienced teacher
Vashti Castles	PELT Parent		School Board Chair 2021–2023; Background in marketing
Giselle Perrot	Year 5 Classroom Teacher	Middle years	Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Vincent Ready	Year 9 Maths & Science Classroom Teacher	Middle years	Early-career teacher; Background in community services
Hazel Brent	School Community Garden Specialist Teacher (part-time)	Whole school	Long association with school as a parent & teacher
Ronit Tula	Administration Director	Whole school with a focus that included parents & the school community	Long association with school as a parent & administration officer

School G’s PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and three cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Most PELT members participated in the masterclasses and cogens. The PELT members were among the most active on the Microsoft SharePoint® site which was designed to support school-to-school collaboration throughout the research, posting eight blogs. Despite the challenges of some staff at the school working remotely or part-time, staff shortages and changes, and absences through illness or long-service leave, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 36/42 (86%) possible data collection opportunities.

School G’s case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

At the commencement of School G’s EPIC 2023 journey, Marigold indicated that the school placed a high value on parents and families (Head of School, School G, Interview 1). She described the school community as active and inclusive (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1). Speaking about schools in general, Marigold described how past parent involvement approaches were mostly “superficial” (e.g., working bees) or “reactive” (e.g., in response to parent complaints) (Head of School, School G, Interview 1). Historically, schools generally approached parent involvement from a view that was:

... process-driven and outcomes focused ... none of it was proactive, other than having parents facilitating change—which is ultimately what you wanted and ensured [parents] were considered as a stakeholder—but really having no say at all. So, [parents had] no weight in [the school] and certainly not involved in curriculum. (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1)

CASE STUDY 5 SCHOOL G CONTINUED

Marigold contrasted this view with how she understood engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing from her early participation in the EPIC 2023 research:

So, [the traditional view of parent involvement in schools] is very different to EPIC because you're actually inviting parents into the curriculum space in a way that's much more special. It's actually about parents and community becoming part of designing a curriculum that's really tailor-made for a particular group of students and serving the needs of the community. (Head of School, School G, Interview 1)

When Eden joined the EPIC 2023 research in August, she expressed similar sentiments about School G's view of parents and families and its inclusive school community (Acting Head of School, School G, Interview 1). She also recognised some challenges of engaging parents for teachers and welcomed EPIC's emphasis on a different way of thinking about parent and community engagement:

Even though I love working with parents, I've seen some really different attitudes [from teachers] towards [parents] and some fear and hesitation. So, to have this [focus on student learning and wellbeing] as a doorway is just wonderful. (Eden, Acting Head of School, School G, Interview 1)

Giselle similarly welcomed the idea of engaging parents and the community. She observed:

Parent engagement is paramount in our context because we base our philosophy on building relationships with the children and the families. Our philosophy is that, the more we can understand each individual child and their context, the better we can cater for the children in the classroom and their learning needs. (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

Giselle had always hosted parent information evenings and conducted optional, voluntary home visits with families. She described these visits as exciting times for the students and parents as the children showed her their bedrooms and favourite toys and she spent time talking with their parents. These opportunities "created so much connection; they provided a really nice foundation for the ongoing partnership [between home and school]" (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1). Giselle commented however, that her EPIC research involvement transformed her thinking about practice:

First of all, it was a big, wake-up moment to understand that just sending dirty tea towels home with a parent who washes and returns them, that that's not really engaging parents. Just to see the spectrum of what is possible from involvement to engagement and, for me, ... even permission to engage parents further and going beyond involvement. (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

The difference between involving and engaging parents was even more stark for Giselle when she considered how she had worked in schools previously "that preferred to keep the parents at an arm's length, not invite them to school assemblies, and keep them completely off the school grounds as much as possible" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

Ronit also appreciated the shift in emphasis to "engaging parents" and its concomitant focus on student learning and wellbeing (Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). Parents were often drawn to School G because of its philosophical view of community however, they may not have experienced the philosophy before or had misconceptions that the school was parent-run (Ronit, Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). As a result, Ronit had often "needed to, and been encouraged to, do a lot of holding that boundary [between parents and schools], particularly in the area of curriculum" (Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). Hence, she said:

I do like changing the words around from parent engagement to engaging parents because in many ways, whether [parents] make any ground of being involved or not involved or how they could be involved, it's very dependent on the teacher or the staff member. The concept of engaging parents, I think is a powerful idea in that it's the precursor [for thinking about] what the aim is here. It's not, 'Well, could you just set up the table over there and get the cakes all out?'" (Ronit, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

Vincent, an early-career teacher new to School G, experienced similar shifts in thinking throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Drawing on his background in community services, he felt it was important to "give some positive feedback to families who may have had historic negative communication with schools, like, 'Your child isn't doing this or isn't doing that'" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1). At the start of the EPIC research, he had "not included parents and the community in the curriculum and was still getting his head around what [he was teaching]" (Vincent, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1). Nevertheless, EPIC's focus on engaging parents and the community more purposefully in the curriculum made him think, "Okay, how do I go about this?, How do I bring it forward?... it just shifts the emphasis in my brain [in terms of] what I'm prioritising That's the big shift for me. It's a priority reset" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

School G's philosophical approach to curriculum was heavily embedded in inquiry. The school's learning model comprised three-week cycles on specific topics through which core subjects such as English, Maths, Science, History, and Geography were incorporated. Giselle declared that School G's model of curriculum opened up opportunities to integrate "a whole smorgasbord of different disciplines in each topic" (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). After joining the EPIC 2023 research, Vashti felt that "inquiry curriculum can go a long way in subtly engaging parents ... helping the students at home [and] also helping the parents get a little insight into their child's learning" (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 1). If parents do not have a background in the school's philosophy however, they rely on the teacher letting them know what and how their child is learning (Vashti, PELT Parent, School G, Interview 1). For this reason, Vashti remarked, "A lot of parents commented [during the COVID-19 lockdown] on the fact that we got a bird's eye view of the curriculum and it was beautiful" (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2).

At a macro (school) level, the PELT anticipated that respectful relationships could become a government-mandated component of curriculum in the near future. Rather than purchase a ready-made program, PELT members cogenerated to design a social and emotional learning (S-E-L) curriculum tailored specifically to the school's philosophy and the needs of its school community and parents. Giselle explained:

We have set out on a journey to actually look at our curriculum to see where we already have beautiful, teachable moments ... to bring our S-E-L curriculum across to the students ... We're quite a unique school ... with a diverse community, so we didn't want to just purchase an S-E-L curriculum and say, 'That's it, we're doing the South Australian [program]' for example ... We want to find out, 'What do our parents want?, What's covered in the home context?, Where do we have gaps at the moment where [S-E-L] is not covered fully?' (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

The PELT felt that many S-E-L goals already infused School G's curriculum, but relied on each teacher to make explicit what was mostly implicit. Giselle and Marigold mapped the school's curriculum, the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (HPE), and relevant Queensland Education documents according to themes and students' developmental needs for different age groups. This collaboration led to a draft learning progression document for S-E-L from Years 1 to 9 which the PELT used to brainstorm questions for a parent survey subsequently distributed to the whole school. The findings were grouped according to parents of students in lower primary, middle school, and secondary school. When

analysed, the survey showed universal parent support for certain topics and values, but also variations which reflected different student age groups. PELT members also spoke with community members such as a specialist wellbeing teacher who might coteach aspects of the S-E-L curriculum (e.g., techniques for managing stress and values such as gratitude, kindness, compassion, and empathy). Marigold described the PELT's threefold approach as: informing the preparation of a school-based S-E-L curriculum; supporting teachers' pedagogical practice; and engaging parents and the community more purposefully in student learning and wellbeing (Head of School, School G, Interview 1).

At a meso (groups of teachers) level, Hazel, in her role as the school's community garden specialist teacher, welcomed parents and community volunteers to work in the school garden and kitchen. She connected with different curriculum topics across multiple disciplinary areas (e.g., companion planting in Science; composting in Maths; designing and building gardens in Design Technology; and Indigenous language and culture in Humanities and Social Sciences [HASS]). Hazel adopted an inquiry approach. For example, she conducted scientific experiments with the students that employed gardening techniques such as composting to explore the properties of light, air, heat, and water.

Hazel asserted that the curriculum program she developed "lived in [the school's] community"; hence, she adopted a collaborative approach to learning and teaching, saying,

All of the teachers know my broad vision and have connected with me before the term starts. I check in with them about anything they assume or hope that I'm covering, like, 'We need to harvest corn at the end of the term, is that something that's achievable?', just to make sure that [our relationship] is a dialogue, not an assumption. (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

Hazel provided release time for teachers, but kept the dialogue about curriculum going by connecting with each teacher before or after lessons. Every class was accompanied by a teacher aide or school-approved parent volunteer, providing another point of connection to each teacher. Hazel's longer-term goals included building the capacity of each class to take ownership of an area of the garden. She hoped to engage parents in their child's learning and wellbeing by inviting them to become co-owners with their child of certain garden areas and simultaneously co-teachers with her of the curriculum.

At a micro (classroom) level, as seen above, Giselle adopted a proactive approach to involving parents in inquiry curriculum. It was her practice to "look at the curriculum [for] different ways that [she could] engage the parents" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1). She illustrated her practice using recent examples. In a *Past and Present* History unit, she said,

CASE STUDY 5 SCHOOL G CONTINUED

I get the children first of all to research their own family tree. They create their family tree and then they go home with interview questions and get mum and dad, maybe the grandparents involved. For their assessment, they write a beautiful biographical account where they trace back their family—many of them have family members that a few generations ago came to Australia from other countries. So, they write about their family's journey. It really brings the history alive for the children. (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

In a Physiology *Coming-of-Age* unit, Giselle's students learnt about the digestive, respiratory, and reproductive systems. As part of the school's curriculum, teachers could invite a parent or friend of a parent who is either pregnant or recently given birth to talk with students. This year, Giselle relayed,

I invited a mother who had a four-week-old baby. The mother came into the classroom and the students literally got to see how she took all the swaddles and clothes off the baby and were really engaged with giving the baby a bath. We played some beautiful, pentatonic, gentle soothing music to the baby and asked the mother [questions] and she gave us ... an [age-appropriate] description of the birthing process ... (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

According to Giselle, "by hearing about this real-life event, the children gained a very lively picture" of the mother's pregnancy and birth experience (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1). Consequently, the students deeply connected to the physiology curriculum. Giselle concluded, "It was quite amazing for those youngsters to be holding this little bundle of joy and then for them to go, 'Okay'" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 1).

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

As noted above, at the macro (school) level, the PELT cogeneratively developed a survey instrument for parents to inform the proposed S-E-L curriculum. They planned to use the initial findings to stimulate conversations with teachers and parents. They envisaged these exchanges could elicit responses not captured in the initial survey and allow them to ask specific questions in subsequent surveys. For example, values emerged from the parent survey as an area of importance, but the PELT felt they needed more information to "determine what values the school represents best" (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1). Using the survey and follow-up conversations, they hoped to "narrow [the information] down, and come up with maybe 20 values and then survey the parents again to see which values [the school] needed to highlight" (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1). The iterative process would "influence [the proposed] S-E-L curriculum, but also the review of the [school's] strategic plan" (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1).

Responding to the provocation of the EPIC research, Marigold reported how she and the PELT members created affinity spaces to better engage parents and the community. She stated,

Our groundskeeper has repurposed an entire area that was sort of left to its own devices into a coffee area. And we've put a fridge in it. So, it's a community space now where we can hold information sessions. We have decided to run a study group on a Tuesday morning next term and we have a book [to use] that I've purchased for the families who are participating. (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1)

Marigold also recognised that existing affinity spaces afforded the potential to enhance parent and community engagement. Hence, she started: attending the school's weekly craft group; inviting parents to a forum at the beginning of each term; and producing a video update to include in the school's weekly newsletter. As a result, she observed, "I'm much more accessible" (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1). Consequently, parents let her know that they valued certain school initiatives such as "the cultural smoking ceremony at the start of the year" and invited her to collaborate on emerging projects such as developing a school policy to support gender diverse students (Marigold, Head of School, School G, Interview 1).

From a meso-level (groups of teachers) perspective, cogenerative dialogues between Giselle and Hazel opened up a buddy space of collaboration, reciprocity, and support which strengthened and enlarged throughout the research. Giselle invited Hazel to participate in a community-based, marine warrior program for Year 6 students. Hazel commented,

Giselle is stretching [my learning] by me getting involved in the marine warrior program, [but] she doesn't do it alone. I know the value of having a buddy, so I'm supporting her in that. And then she's supporting me with the kitchen. (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 1)

The pair's collaboration, which also involved Giselle's Year 5 teacher aide and a roster of teacher aides from other classes, released Hazel from the kitchen for one lunchtime a week to work with Giselle and the Year 6 marine warriors. Hazel observed that parents of some marine warrior students were becoming more engaged in the school community garden and kitchen program. Supporting the students' involvement in the marine warrior initiative, while simultaneously weaving the skills of the parents into their child's curriculum, presented Hazel with a welcome challenge. However, she commented that fusing the two "is building [collaboration] and it's amazing to see the energy that comes in" when parents and students are engaged (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Cogen 3). It is not surprising that the buddy (affinity) space in which Giselle and Hazel operated also expanded to include their collaboration as PELT members on aspects of the proposed S-E-L curriculum (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 1).

At a micro (classroom) level, Giselle signalled shifts in her existing pedagogical practice (see above) which enriched parent and community engagement. She observed,

... being involved in, and having been exposed to, the EPIC narrative over the time [of the research], I am becoming more and more conscious now that every time I start a new learning block, I will always first introduce it and explain to the parents ... and then I send home dinner table conversation suggestions and things like that. (Classroom Teacher, School G, Cogen 2)

Using the affinity space of email to implement small, frequent, purposeful changes in practice, Giselle brought parents closer to their child's learning and wellbeing, while simultaneously enhancing her relationship with them in ways that benefited the students and her teaching. She pronounced,

And what I really love is—because it takes a little while to put such a parent letter together—[when] I send it out, I have about four or five regular parents who actually write back to me and say something like, 'Thank you. We really appreciate you taking the time in mapping this out for us'. And so, for me, it's really nice to also hear back from the other side. (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Cogen 2)

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

As the parent representative on School G's PELT, Vashti gained personal insights into parent and community engagement. She felt that cogenerative dialogues "brought more awareness" of how one of her child's teachers engaged her in their learning and wellbeing (Vashti, PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2). Vashti described how the teacher seemed to carefully consider the topic of study and then encouraged the students to ask their parents to work with them on an aspect relevant to their learning at home. She concluded, "It's that simple, I think" (Vashti, PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2). Vashti recalled,

There was an animal subject and my child wanted to look up a bird, and I [said], 'Well, let's do macaws because I went to the Macaw Research Centre and ... they're really interesting'. So, we went to the library. We were both fully engaged in that project because then we worked on a diorama. (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2)

Vashti indicated that the teacher positioned her alongside her child to feel like a co-learner and co-teacher (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2). In light of the way the teacher engaged her, together with her participation in the PELT, Vashti announced, "Now I see why I know a lot more about where my child is at!" (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2).

Vashti's insights also proved valuable for the teachers on the PELT. Vincent observed, "Having a parent on the team made

it easier for us to consider how parents receive information that is communicated to the school community" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Giselle concurred, elaborating,

When we were generating ideas together then, obviously, the educators had our teacher hats on, and we would know how certain things would fit into the school day and how they would work from a school perspective. But then when we had Vashti there, we could ask, 'How does this read for you as a parent?, How would you feel if you got this letter?, or How do you think the parents would feel about filling out a survey?' It was really valuable to hear what she wanted more of and what she was comfortable with. (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

School G's PELT commenced their EPIC 2023 journey with the aim: "To bring to the school, the tools to move towards a high level of community and parent engagement in curriculum which brings improvement to student learning and supports the work of the teacher" (PELT, School G, Masterclass 2). As noted above, the team anticipated that respectful relationships could become a government-mandated component of curriculum and aspired to develop a school-based S-E-L curriculum aligned with the school's philosophy to enable explicit learning and teaching of S-E-L throughout the school. Simultaneously, they viewed the process, and ultimately the outcome, as a vehicle to mobilise parent and community engagement. However, the PELT's aim of developing a school-based S-E-L curriculum was somewhat thwarted because they were "still waiting for the [school's national education authority] to give [them] some more direction towards how to bring S-E-L into the philosophical context [of the school]" (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, Cogen 2). Balancing the fact that a national framework was "not developed yet" against the reality of "already [having] so many initiatives within the school community", the PELT considered it might "be wiser to build the parent and community engagement impulse up through some tangible initiatives that they might actually do [now]" (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, Cogen 2). Hence, the PELT decided in Term 3 to pause the S-E-L project.

CASE STUDY 5 SCHOOL G CONTINUED

The implications of School G's journey for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement are discussed in the next section. However, PELT members found the challenges they experienced also afforded an abundance of learning opportunities. For example, Vincent, speaking about his future plans for teaching, relayed,

[Our experience of EPIC] has been quite remarkable because we're getting information out early, and this is not attached to S-E-L ... So, we're doing a *Read from Rainforest* unit next year, which is going to be very comprehensive. We're now [connecting with] parents who are involved with different organisations and with Indigenous groups. We've got an attachment to Indigenous rangers who are going to give us information about people who are doing water monitoring. All of a sudden, we're finding all of these aspects that we can weave into our curriculum because the resources are just blossoming. (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

Vincent stated that "planning ahead early" for engaging parents and the community eased the perceived "burden of the task" of teaching a new unit (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). From his perspective, the efficiencies, benefits, and satisfaction to be derived for teachers, students, parents, and the community from this change in practice was the "biggest learning" he took forward (Vincent, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As mentioned previously, School G was in its first year of the EPIC research. The school was also distinctive among the eight participating EPIC 2023 schools because of its relatively small size, north Queensland location, and holistic educational approach. The hurdles the PELT encountered led Vincent to suggest that they may have "hastened too quickly", not only in attempting to bring about cultural change in parent and community engagement, but also in "taking on a very challenging topic" in the S-E-L curriculum (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Given the experience of COVID-19, Hazel reported that "bringing back the vibe" in the garden and kitchen program was happening "incrementally: through small teams, then coming from within the school, and then being extended with the parents" (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Likewise, she suggested that for the school and families to go forward and reap the possibilities of "what EPIC is offering, [then] taking a step back and getting everyone on the same playing field" was necessary (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

Hazel also suggested the need for staff and the school community to develop a "shared vision" and "common language" to describe and explain parent and community engagement (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). She stressed that a common understanding of language was fundamental in providing a foundation for "everyone

involved to take back to their communities and normalise the language: 'Actually, we're talking about engaging parents; This is what engaging parents means' (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Vashti similarly observed the importance of embedding knowledge and understanding of parent and community engagement, saying, "Even up until Masterclass 2, some of us [on the PELT] were looking at engaging parents as in parent involvement still" (PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2).

PELT members recognised the power of generative approaches to sustain parent and community engagement in their school context. Class carers, for example, was an existing initiative in the school where a parent was responsible for liaising with each teacher about aspects of a class and then "networking with the other parents in each cohort" (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). The class carer community thus afforded "channels" already within the school to "bring awareness of the idea of parent and community engagement" (Vashti, PELT Parent, School G, Interview 2). Hazel, however, advocated a more strategic approach, saying,

Rather than waiting for the right constellation ... my suggestion is, and it hasn't happened for some years, but it needs to come back, that there is a dedicated person in the staff that networks with those class carers ... on the ground. (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

She envisaged a class carer model where information and ideas can "feed in and feedback to one hub and then [the information] can be redistributed out" to the school community (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). The approach was potentially sustainable because "it's not dependent on the class teacher to hold it. And it's not dependent on the school leader. It's living within the class community, but it's supported by the staff" (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Hence, the proposed approach was capable of generating a sense of shared ownership for student learning and parent and community engagement among students, parents, teachers, and school leaders.

As part of a generative approach, Hazel felt the school needed "multiple ways of reaching [parents] and bringing them in" besides emails and newsletters (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). These ways might include notice boards for parents as they come into the school at drop off times or text messages for parents of students who travel by bus. Describing her own practice of contacting and communicating with parents, Hazel stated, "It's sustainable for me. It's small and steady and lots of communication in different ways" (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Examples such as, "something tangible that goes home with a child, stories of success, something to inspire families, or [news about] something upcoming", were among her suggestions for keeping student learning and wellbeing "in the business of parents" (Hazel, Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

Several PELT members observed that leadership was crucial to achieving the promised benefits of engaging parents and the community at the school. Giselle observed, "Both principals I worked with, first, Marigold, and then, Eden, were really supportive around engaging the parents on a deeper level" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). Ronit asserted however, that the idea of leadership included more than the principal, but extended to senior leaders at the school (Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). She observed that one or two champions on the ground was also not enough to change the culture and practice of parent and community engagement (Ronit, Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). Giselle stated that teachers are responsible for learning and teaching. However, it was possible to include parents and the community in ways that did not usurp their role, but rather appreciated the knowledge and skills they could bring to the classroom to support student learning and wellbeing (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

To attain a sustainable model of parent and community engagement, it was important for school leaders to grasp the idea of engaging parents and the community and recognise the benefits that can flow from working in this way (Ronit, Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). Once the idea is well rooted in the school leadership team, determination to continue "having conversations" would be needed so thinking and talking about engaging parents and the community "becomes normal and everyone's just used to the conversation" (Ronit, Administration Director, School G, Interview 2). At the same time, "a critical mass" of teachers was necessary to ensure "full successful take up" of a culture and practice of parent and community engagement across the school (Ronit, Administration Director, School G, Interview 2).

In similar vein, Giselle described how Eden recently led a professional development day which "first of all, acknowledged all of [the PELT members] and brought our [work] to the whole school's attention [in terms] of what some of us have been working on" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). She relayed,

The day was facilitated really well ... and rather than having an, us and you [approach], it was, all of us [are] on this journey with EPIC together, and acknowledging that most likely every single teacher in our school already is doing their bit to engage parents in the curriculum. (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

Giselle observed that the work of engaging parents and the community now "feels like it's coming from within the circle" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2). She compared the professional learning day to the school's work in restorative practice with students and parents where teachers and school leaders:

Bring the dialogue back to peaceful communication and ... once we see everyone's needs, there's often a way to move forward. ... So, we do acknowledge that obstacles occur, but because we're almost like a family, we always work with each other and overcome [them]. (Giselle, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

On the basis of deeper understanding and strengthened relationships, Giselle observed of the school's parent and community engagement journey ahead: "Out of the struggle, often something quite beautiful can emerge" (Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2).

Case study 6 school H



Reconceptualising parent and community engagement in the curriculum in the primary and senior years of a distance education school.

School context

School H was a faith-based, co-educational, distance education school for Prep to Year 12 students. Although the school was established over a decade ago, its transition to distance education occurred in the last five years. Most of the school's staff worked online however, the school's office was located in southeast Queensland. Pedagogically, School H followed a Universal Design for Learning approach which enables high learning expectations, while simultaneously maintaining flexibility to differentiate for students' needs through multiple means of engagement. Teaching and learning were also supported by a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) which teachers prepared for each student and shared in consultation with the child's parents. Each student's PLP was created in line with the Australian Curriculum. As a distance education school, School H relied heavily on parents as the at-home educators. The school considered positive parent-school relationships foundational for students' personal, academic, and spiritual success. Hence, School H worked closely with parents as at-home educators to build parents' knowledge and skills for facilitating student learning through one-to-one parent-teacher sessions, online video tutorials, and group mentoring sessions.

Involvement in EPIC

School H was one of four schools out of the eight involved in 2023 to participate in the Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) research for the first time. Table 16 (shaded cells) below provides a snapshot of the school's involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School H's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised six participants. Each of the team's five professional educators had extensive teaching and school leadership experience. Principal and PELT leader, Carson Jones, commenced in 2021. Pastoral Director and qualified

teacher, Rex Stringer, commenced at a similar time. The PELT included three of the school's Deputy Principals: Deputy Principal (Senior Secondary Years), Spencer Gallagher, who commenced in 2022; Deputy Principal (Prep to Year 9/10 Curriculum), Josephine Rigatoni, who had worked at School H for several years; and Deputy Principal (Head of Learning Enrichment and Professional Development), Sasha Porter, who had also worked at School H for several years. The parent representative, Noah Centino, had been a parent at the school from the first year it opened. Of his two children, one had recently graduated, and both had only attended School H. Hence, Noah and his wife had been at-home educators of their children for over a decade. He joined the school staff as a Film and Media Officer three years ago.

A summary of information about School H's PELT members is presented below in Table 17.

School H's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and six cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Five cogens included most PELT members, while Cogen 4 was a one-on-one cogen (Willis, 2016) between Rex and the researchers. The participation of the PELT members in cogens thus ensured continuity of knowledge creation in the practice and research of parent and community engagement at School H throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Despite the challenges of absence through illness, changes in staff, and work commitments, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 40/54 (74%) possible data collection opportunities.

School H's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

Table 16: School H—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G, H , I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 17: School H—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Carson Jones	Principal	Whole school	PELT Leader; Experienced teacher & school leader
Noah Centino	PELT Parent		Film & Media Officer; Previous career in health; Long association with school as a parent/at-home educator
Rex Stringer	Pastoral Director	Whole school	Experienced teacher & pastor
Spencer Gallagher	Deputy Principal Senior Studies (Years 10 to 12)	Senior Secondary school	Experienced teacher & school leader
Josephine Rigatoni	Head of Curriculum (Prep to Year 9/10)	Primary & Middle years	Experienced teacher & school leader
Sasha Porter	Head of Learning Enrichment & Professional Development	Whole school	Experienced teacher & school Leader

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

Carson had worked in various education settings which he described as mostly "low fee" schools with "high needs students"; hence, he found "parent engagement was absolutely vital all the time" (Principal, School H, Interview 1). He was also "highly involved in service-based organisations [which] reach out to families in the community" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 1). Carson approached his work in schools somewhat clinically (e.g., "analyse the problem"), while simultaneously exercising "a great deal of care" (e.g., "realise you're dealing with human beings") (Principal, School H, Interview 1). Compared with the other schools involved in the EPIC 2023 research, Carson stressed, "School H already has 100% parent engagement because, as a distance education school, we're not teaching the students directly. Except through the online lessons, the supervision of the program is mum and dad" (Principal, School H, Interview 1).

As the parent representative on the PELT, Noah related the idea of parent engagement to the notion of "patient engagement" with which he was familiar in his previous health sector work (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). He indicated that doctors, directors, and staff nurses engaging with patients was essential from the point of view of "good healthcare" (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). As an at-home educator, Noah said, "I have the privilege and challenge of working with my children; to try to be a teacher

at the same time as I'm their dad" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). Together with his wife, Noah engaged in his child's learning "all the time ... adding just a twist here or there without changing the context of the ACARA curriculum" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). If his children were learning drawing at school, rather than draw a flower, he would suggest they draw something to do with *Star Wars* which he knew they would find exciting and bring them enjoyment (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). Noah and his wife played different yet complementary at-home educator roles. He explained,

My involvement is on things that are more creative because maybe my background is more creative. All my children play instruments. So, that came from my wife's passion of music. She's really good with languages, so that part as well falls to her ... I fall maybe on the [the foreign language that I speak] and then history. So, we use our strengths as parents [in terms] of what we like to bring to the curriculum with the children. (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1)

As the school's pastoral director, Rex elucidated, "I'm a teacher and also a pastor. I take responsibility for things not curriculum related ... I look after student and staff wellbeing, pastoral care, and the faith-based ethos of the school. I also run extracurricular events and activities" (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 1). Speaking about distance education, he reflected,

As a teacher originally, I would have completely written off the idea of parents teaching their children. The concept of a parent saying, 'I'm better qualified to teach my child than somebody who is trained for four years at the tertiary level' was something completely foreign to me. Having spent a lot of time working with people in a whole range of different industries, and then having had the experience of School H, I've completely changed my view. (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 1)

Rex felt that distance education "translates perfectly to [the idea] of engaging parents" (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 1). He explained, "[Distance education] gives teaching staff the opportunity to walk alongside the parents in a real relationship, not [just] parent-teacher night ... but an opportunity to partner with each other in a real educational experience" (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 1).

Spencer understood the difference between involving parents in school activities and engaging them in their child's learning and wellbeing. Referring to the ideas and examples of parent engagement from others throughout the EPIC 2023 research, he commented, "I see how that works in a day school. I just can't see how that would work in distance education, so that's probably one of the challenges to ponder, 'Is there a different way of doing it?'" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 2). Compared to a day school, Spencer asserted,

Distance education parents are more involved in [their child's] actual education because they do need to be the eyes and the ears behind the scenes and in their home, because that's where education is happening, and they've got to look over the shoulder of their child. (School Leader, School H, Interviews 1)

Spencer reflected on the 2020 six-week learning@home period during the COVID-19 pandemic: "The students survived for about four weeks. By week six, it was, 'Oh, please get me back to school!' They didn't have the social interactions that normally happen in a classroom situation" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). He contended, "Whereas in our [distance education] context, the long-term families are generally doing quite a good job because they're engaged in their child's learning" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 1).

Josephine's views on the importance of engaging distance education parents reflected those of her colleagues. She asserted, "In our [distance education] context, it's absolutely key" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). She insisted, "They are the frontline. If they're not engaged, that makes it very difficult for us as the teaching staff to be able to support them, because they're delivering [the curriculum]" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1).

At her first school, Sasha described a unique parent and community engagement experience which was possible because the school shared a boundary fence with a nursing home. She often engaged the grandparents from the nursing home in her Junior School classroom. She recalled, "We gave them little horns on their electric wheelchairs so that they could beep to let us know they were on their way" (Sasha,

School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Speaking about the culture and practice of parent and community engagement at her last school, she maintained, "I would say that it wasn't engagement. It was just your typical parents running in to change readers or parents running canteens, either for lunches or on Saturdays for school sport" (Sasha, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Since coming to School H in 2019, Sasha remarked on "a significant amount of change" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). She described how "the nature of distance education was probably more closely linked to a home education model [which included] ... actually going into people's homes [as an area teacher] ... where they were set up like classrooms" (Sasha, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). As an area teacher, she collaborated closely with parents who themselves sometimes formed small collaborative groups to coteach their children where "one parent might teach particular subjects and another parent, might teach other subjects" (Sasha, School Leader, School H, Interview 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

School H PELT members focused on the macro (school) level throughout the EPIC 2023 research. As Sasha indicated above, School H previously operated more like a home education service than a distance education school. To achieve alignment with the requirements of the Australian Curriculum, Josephine stated it was necessary in 2022 "to change [the existing model] and rewrite all of the curriculum from Prep to Year 10 in every Learning Area" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Noah described the shift as "a very big change. The new curriculum was redesigned last year from scratch. It usually takes three to four years to create a curriculum, but the school did it in just six months" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). The curriculum restructure stood to improve the quality of education experience for students and parents, while simultaneously affording opportunities to redesign the school's systems to create efficiencies in workflow for teachers at school and parents at home (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 3).

To accompany the new curriculum, School H produced bespoke workbooks. The process involved the development of unit plans for each year level and subject based on the school's curriculum and assessment overview. Josephine elaborated,

Our unit plans are quite extensive, but that's deliberate because our teachers are scattered all over the State. ... It's different when you've got face-to-face [teaching] and you can go and follow up with somebody on campus if you need something done ... When teachers are working in their homes, we're relying on them to be able to work quite independently. (School Leader, School H, Interview 1)

The curriculum writers transferred the detail of the unit plans into the workbooks. According to Josephine, the workbooks were "more of a unit guide. Every lesson has learning intentions, success criteria, and an inquiry question" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Although the content was

based on the Australian Curriculum, Josephine stated, "We needed to create material for the [at-home educators] that they can pick up which then becomes like the teacher's voice for them in the home" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Hence, the language of the workbooks needed to be accessible for parents and students (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Josephine commented, "We've tried to make the workbooks so the parents have the information, the teaching [instructions], and then follow-up activities and links to different sites. But how they use the workbooks is obviously up to each family" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Given some families at School H were accustomed to a home education approach, she commented, "I'm not quite sure at this stage how much flexibility they feel they have" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Josephine elaborated, "[Previously] Years 7 to 10 used the same book and they all did the same thing except there were increased expectations in the summative tasks" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). She said, "Now, instead of doing one unit for all of their children, they were going to be doing, if they've got six children, six different units ... and even with all of the support we've given, they're struggling" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Carson commented that sometimes parents with young children also found distance education challenging. He remarked, "Our real issue seems to be that the younger a student is, the more difficult it is" (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 2). The introduction of the new curriculum therefore focused attention on the need for some parents to develop different pedagogical approaches. Carson observed, "Josephine's been teaching parents for years [about] how to run a multi-age classroom in your home" (Principal, School H, Cogen 2). Josephine similarly encouraged teachers "to work with parents" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1) to help them understand and think about strategies for managing "not so much a multi-age as a mixed-age environment" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 2).

Spencer considered engaging parents and the community in students' curriculum learning was essential for the school's ongoing success, but that it was "a work in progress" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 2). Carson described the Year 10 to 12 curriculum as "largely stable" (Principal, School H, Interview 1). Spencer explained that implementing the curriculum was "harder for Josephine in the Prep to Year 9/10 space [than for him] because parents generally understand the QCAA (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority) 11-12 space and the impact for their senior student" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 2). He noted however, "Our starting point is involving parents within the curriculum, because that is our existing need: parents need to be heard" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). He suggested a first step "may be working with parents to further their understanding of some of the [curriculum] documents, the Australian Curriculum and QCAA documents in particular, as well as NASAB's (Non-State Schools Accreditation Board's) requirements" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Spencer concluded, "[Implementation of the curriculum] is a whole school movement, but slowly we're meeting the needs of families and, if they allow us to talk it through with them, it can bring a positive change" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 2).

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

A futures-focused approach at School H saw the PELT members create several new macro-level (school-level) affinity spaces designed to listen to parents, gather constructive feedback, and take positive action to improve parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing. As Carson stated, "The EPIC 2023 research has been very good to shift my senior leadership's focus from fixing today's problems to planning for the future" (Principal, School H, Interview 1). The affinity spaces enabled generative conversations among members of the PELT and other staff members and parents.

Rex and a small team of staff from School H travelled to 15 locations across Queensland to conduct listening tours. The tours were designed for maximum coverage of the school's families and communities with locations from the State's far north and north, central, and western and south western Darling Downs, to the northern and southern coasts and metropolitan regions (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 2). Speaking about the locations, Rex explained, "I used a map of Queensland and asked, 'How far is reasonable to ask someone to drive to a meeting?' Then I found a centre that [parents] could get to within that driving distance" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 2).

Physical meeting places included locations in towns or parents' homes which included western Queensland cattle stations and involved current and sometimes past School H parents. Rex adopted a listening disposition. He recalled, "The format I used was to allow people to ... share whatever was happening for them ... and not try to justify anything [from the school's perspective], and then ask permission to speak into whatever they'd said" (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 2). Rex reflected,

It was such an excellent strategy, not just because we were going to gather lots of information—because a lot of the information we sensed we'd receive anyway—but because it showed the parents that we were willing to sit with them in a gentle way and hear them out. (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 2)

Following conversations among the PELT members during Masterclass 1, Carson sent an invitation in Term 2 to parents in the school's newsletter to join a new parent engagement group (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). As a result of a positive response, the inaugural Parent Engagement Advisory Group was established. To ensure the group was representative of the school, Carson noted, "We've deliberately got a couple of parents from each region [in the group]" (Principal, School H, Cogen 2). The group was invited to provide feedback on aspects of learning and teaching (e.g., the new curriculum) to the school's board (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). As the name suggests, the group's role was advisory in nature, which Carson explained "means we're listening" (Principal, School H, Cogen 2). In Term 3, Rex commented that the Parent Engagement Advisory Group was "very active," "meeting regularly," and "chaired by one of the

CASE STUDY 6 SCHOOL H CONTINUED

school's senior managers" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4). Apart from the school's existing feedback channels, he remarked, "All School H parents are now aware of the Parent Engagement Advisory Group, so they can go straight to the group and provide feedback to the school that way" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4).

A series of parent focus groups in which teachers invited parents to talk on the phone about their experiences of the new curriculum and workbooks represented a further affinity space (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 1). During these conversations, the intention was to "spend very little time talking and most of the time listening" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 1). The parent-teacher conversations afforded parents a platform for their voice to be heard on "what things were working for them", "what difficulties they saw", and "what challenges they faced" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Masterclass 2 Video). The parents' feedback and insights provided a "pool of ideas" for school leaders to discuss and establish goals in order to respond proactively to the parents' needs (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Masterclass 2 Video).

Affinity spaces such as the listening tours, Parent Engagement Advisory Group, and parent-teacher focus groups encouraged a process of listening and learning which benefited students, parents, and teachers. Josephine found positive feedback from parents about the new curriculum and workbooks reassuring. She stated,

The feedback I've heard so far is that parents are absolutely loving the workbooks because at the end of a busy day of teaching, they don't have to sit down and start trying to plan lessons for the next day. It's all there. They just open the book. (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Cogen 2)

She further stated,

A number of parents have also given feedback that they're really liking the online lessons. Some of them are sitting in [with their child] and finding them interesting, while others are going, 'Somebody else is teaching [my child]. Quick! I can go and put the washing on!' (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Cogen 2)

As a result of feedback from the Parent Engagement Advisory Group, the school instituted "a workbook feedback tab on each of the subject areas in every year level, so parents can easily click on the tab and give feedback" (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Cogen 2). Some parents felt the live lessons were doubling up on the workbook; consequently, to avoid duplication for the at-home educators, Josephine asked teachers to highlight for parents what they were covering out of the workbook in the live lessons (School Leader, School H, Cogen 2).

Rex pointed out that the nature of the activity days and workshops "has changed quite significantly since the Parent Engagement Advisory Group has been speaking into them" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4). As indicated previously, these opportunities afforded parents, staff, and teachers time to socialise and build positive relationships (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4). Rex relayed,

One of the things parents [have said is] that they prefer workshops more often, but for a shorter period of time. So, rather than doing one workshop that runs for an entire day each term, doing two, possibly three, three-hour workshops spaced throughout the term. (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4)

He observed that despite the travel involved, the parents "are happy to invest that amount of time in a different flavour of workshop, because the outcome suits them" (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4). Although it was not possible in a distance education school to bring students together at these times to teach them *per se*, it was possible to engage parents in their child's learning and wellbeing in different ways. Rex highlighted one example of a workshop in north Queensland that staff could not attend. He recounted,

One of the parents who's on the Parent Engagement Advisory Group said, 'I only lived three hours away and I can run the workshop'. So, the parent got together with a couple of the other parents and they designed the whole day—a good part of which was based around the Physical Education program. We didn't base the day on the workbooks, but we did have a long conversation about what some of the activities were in the workbooks, and what these actually looked like on the ground. ... Then the parents delivered the ideas on the day. (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4)

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

As indicated previously, Noah was the parent representative on School H's PELT and also a staff member. In addition, Noah participated in the Parent Engagement Advisory Group initiated by Carson. Working in the school's film and media unit, Noah created videos for Prep to Year 12 students "to promote the learning the school wanted", but which were also sympathetic to "the point of view of parents watching [the videos] with their children" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). Carson was grateful to Noah and the other PELT members for the roles they played throughout 2023 in furthering parent and community engagement. He said, "Because I'm still learning about distance education, they were teaching me what I needed to know" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). The PELT members' contributions were also "very important ... to start the Parent Engagement Advisory Group [as] information coming back [from across Queensland] was dissected and re-evaluated to see if we're on the track" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). Carson particularly acknowledged Noah's contributions to be "a useful sounding board, helping him (Carson) to avoid "a tight system that locks people out who need flexibility" (Principal, School H, Cogen 5). Likewise, Spencer found having Noah's voice on the PELT "beneficial", noting that Noah could share "a little bit of history" and ask questions, "What about this? What about that?" (School Leader, School H, Interview 2).

Rex similarly endorsed Noah's voice on the PELT as "hugely valuable" (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2). He contended,

It keeps the school accountable in the sense that we had an active parent who was part of the PELT who could say, 'Well, hang on a minute, that's not how the parents might see it, or that's not what's happening at the parent end'. (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2)

Rex explained, "the positive experience" that came from working alongside Noah in the PELT or other parents in the Parent Engagement Advisory Group "made it more comfortable" for everyone involved to continue the work of parent and community engagement in the future (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2).

At the start of the EPIC 2023 research, Noah recognised "that when parents ask for a small change it could be a big change for the school" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). He also understood that the school needed to ask parents what they know about their child (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 1). However, his knowledge and understanding of the school's perspective of parent and community engagement appeared to deepen as a result of participating in the PELT and the Parent Engagement Advisory Group. Although School H was a distance education school, Noah's role on staff meant he frequently travelled to the school's office. Spencer appreciated such opportunities to meet Noah face-to-face as they enabled "exchanges of conversations" about the PELT's work (School Leader, School H, Interview 2). Spencer commented,

It was interesting a number of times when Noah goes, 'You know what, in all these years, I've never observed that [aspect of the school]' or 'I could see how it is as a parent, but not through the eyes of the school. And so, [his experience on the PELT] has actually been eye opening for him as a person who can have both caps on, not just the parent hat. (School Leader, School H, Interview 2)

Noah himself commented on his increasing awareness of the diversity of families and settings in distance education. He said,

What I found is that it's a little bit more complex than actually engaging with a parent of a Year 6 student because they might have children in Years 6, 9, and 12. Whereas the pattern in a day school is usually one teacher for each classroom, the [at-home educator] has to teach across all year levels. (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2)

Parents' needs also differed widely because of their location. Some distance education families lived inland from the nearest city; hence, Noah remarked, "They have to go to the shop in a helicopter!" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2). Being in the PELT and the Parent Engagement Advisory Group, Noah heard "what parents have to say, where they're coming from, if they're rural, if they're not rural, if they have access to the Internet, if they don't have Internet access" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2). He stressed,

Parent voice is very important so all the different types of parents in different types of situations are represented (e.g., on the Parent Engagement Advisory Group) so, we can sit down and talk about how we can make the education journey easier for each family. (Noah, PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2)

Noah declared, "I think every school in the future should have this type of engagement with the parents" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2).

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

School H served diverse communities across each of Queensland's regions as well as some interstate- and overseas-based families. Challenges such as those associated with distance, communication, isolation, the impact of natural disasters, and access to services including digital technologies variously affected day-to-day possibilities of parent and community engagement. Carson indicated that the reasons parents might choose School H differed from the reasons parents might choose a day school (Principal, School H, Interview 1). These included high needs children, family mobility, physical location, career expectations, and gender diverse students. School H also offered a low-fee education alternative compared to most day schools. Rex observed, "One of the downsides of distance education is that families move often" (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 1). The challenge of fluctuating enrolments in School H intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Spencer stated, "In a day school, there's a lot more stability in [enrolments] than in distance education. But, when COVID-19 came, we were losing enrolments and then re-enrolling [at an unprecedented rate]" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Carson remarked, "At the same time, we employed a lot of staff and we lost a lot of staff" (Principal, School H, Interview 1). He further commented, "Our usual enrolment processes weren't robust enough. Three weeks for an enrolment had to be reduced to three days" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 1). Spencer similarly noted rapid enrolment turnovers were exacerbated because the school "didn't have the software that talks to everything" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). The school subsequently installed new enrolment software together with a new enrolments team (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interviews 1 & Cogen 6). These innovations reduced the time to enrol students as well as inaugurated a process to manage student withdrawals with the view of retrieving enrolments if possible (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 1).

Better management of School H's enrolment processes was part of a suite of changes in the last two years which "turbocharged" under Carson's leadership (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Cogen 6). At the beginning of the EPIC 2023 research, Spencer noted, "We're starting to head towards being more data orientated. ... We're looking at data analysis and customising our integration using our APIs (Application Program Interfaces) software" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). He declared, "Starting Term 4 last year, we've literally replaced every piece of technology in the whole school" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1).

According to Spencer, "more fully integrated" systems at School H were "producing new opportunities" for providing feedback to, and working with, parents and the community (School Leader, School H, Cogen 6). He further noted that opportunities for engaging parents and the community would become increasingly clear once implementation of

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the school's integrated systems "settled" and took "pressure off staff" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 6). He felt staff could then "continue to select the best [parent and community engagement] opportunities" (i.e., potentially high-impact propositions) and avoid school activities that "cluttered" (i.e., slowed down) possibilities of engagement (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Cogen 6).

Members of the PELT identified challenges which arose from a more integrated systems approach. Josephine commented, "At the beginning of the year, the teachers and parents were trying to get their heads around all the digital [technologies]" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). In the process of instituting the changes, including the transition to the school's new curriculum, Josephine noted, "we lost a few families" (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). She felt the staff and teachers would need to continue to support parents in the area of digital technologies (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Interview 1). Spencer also remarked, "There's only so much that we can do [to sustain change]. We can't change too much for parents too quickly, too often" (School Leader, School H, Cogen 5).

PELT members described opportunities which emerged throughout the EPIC 2023 research which looked inward to building the capacity of parents as at-home educators as well as outward-facing (Willis, Povey et al., 2021) parent and community engagement opportunities. Rex suggested, "[The listening tours] highlighted a need that we may have to provide certain levels of professional development for the parents, who are the in-home educators. They're the ones who are delivering the workbooks and the curriculum" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 2).

Josephine subsequently indicated, although there was "a lot still unfolding", the school had begun "to establish processes (e.g., navigating transition points) which help students feel engaged and help the parents to be able to assist their children" (School Leader, School H, Masterclass 2 Video). A school leader conducted live information sessions twice a week for existing or new parents, walking them through the expectations [of the school] and answering questions from them about the curriculum or digital platforms (Josephine, School Leader, School H, Masterclass 2 Video). To support parents in the area of digital technologies, Noah relayed,

The school has put in place an online tutorial every week. Any parent can log in and for 30 minutes be trained one-on-one and shown the answers to their questions. So, they can have personal training with an IT guru and, if you didn't pick it up today, then you can just join next week. (PELT Parent, School H, Cogen 5)

According to Noah, this innovation said to parents, "I'm here for you" (PELT Parent, School H, Cogen 5).

From an outward-facing school perspective, members of the PELT visited western Queensland to capture the day-to-day life of a distance education family. Spencer described a video that Noah produced of a family on a rural property. Its message was not so much about engaging existing parents, rather the

message was, "Hey, families, do you realise this is what this school is about?" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Cogen 1). In the interests of creating a whole-school community, he added, "Some parents in southeast Queensland forget what it's like for those families who are living in western and inland parts" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Cogen 1). Spencer subsequently indicated that families also want to see real people face-to-face (School Leader, School H, Cogen 1). He asserted, "They don't just want to talk online" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Cogen 1). Carson described a proposed 2024 parent and community engagement initiative: "One of the things that Rex is doing in the new year is a country tour to talk with clusters of families" (Principal, School H, Interview 2). He said, "It's less of an issue in the southeast corner ... but out west and up and down the coast, we need to do a better job with helping the parents connect with each other" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). Rex elaborated,

We're going to empower parents to run the cluster groups ... When the group identifies a problem or an issue or an opportunity, they can just get on the phone to me and we can work out what can happen and how things best fit with the overall objectives of the school. As we go around those groups, we're also going to be able to identify the real needs, not the needs that we suppose, but the real needs of families in helping to educate their children. (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2)

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As previously mentioned, School H was a faith-based, co-educational, distance education school catering for Prep to Year 12 students across Queensland. At the beginning of the EPIC 2023 research, Sasha metaphorically described the "uniqueness of the different fragrances" of the regions the school served, with "very different families" in the north and south of the southeast corner and other families in rural and remote areas being "completely different" again (School Leader, School H, Cogen 1). She felt this level of diversity "is what's beautiful about [School H]", suggesting that "for our school to have longevity, we need to embrace the uniqueness of families" (Sasha, School Leader, School H, Cogen 1).

In the last two years, School H had undergone radical change. As seen above, throughout the EPIC 2023 research, the PELT members embraced listening and learning approaches towards engaging parents and the community. Carson recognised that the value of listening to parents was also in understanding that "parents needed somebody to hear their story" (Principal, School H, Cogen 3). He commented however, "Listening is a good thing to do. I've listened. Now, what do I do with the information?" (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 3). Carson's words reflected a shift in the school's parent and community engagement focus throughout the EPIC 2023 research from listening and learning to also including longer-term, strategic, action-oriented, holistic approaches.

The EPIC 2023 research coincided with School H's 2022-2024 school improvement agenda (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). Carson stated, "[The research] is giving us the opportunity to step back and think about those things we've been working through as part of our three-year plan" (Principal, School H, Interview 2). He further stated that the school's board was "developing a long-term strategic plan that will be finished by Christmas. So, the [EPIC 2023] work will feed into that, especially how we consult—starting with the executive management and also key staff and several focus groups with parents" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). Rex endorsed Carson's strategic approach towards a sustainable model of parent and community engagement, observing, "the actual size of the school's board had increased by four parent representatives" (Pastoral Director, School H, Cogen 4). For Noah, this and similar initiatives showed the school's increased emphasis on "parent voice" (PELT Parent, School H, Interview 2).

Carson reflected on a sign on the school's marketing officer's whiteboard, quoting, "Without data, it's just an opinion" (Principal, School H, Cogen 5). Speaking about engaging parents and the community, he said, "The EPIC research project has allowed us to create forums to gather the information [we need], and then test the validity of the information that we thought we knew" (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 5). Spencer similarly reflected on the changes at School H which included adopting a raft of computer software and platforms to better integrate the school's digital systems. As a result, the school had more ready access to data such as when: students enrolled and left the school; students logged onto lessons; parents accessed the school newsletter; and students and parents accessed the school's Learning Management System (LMS) (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 1 & Cogen 5; Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 5). Going forward, Spencer suggested, "Next year we're up for refining of methods and models ... Part of our challenge is what we've moved from to where we're moving to (School Leader, School H, Interview 2). The question to ask is, "How do we actually keep parents engaged?" (Spencer, School Leader, School H, Interview 2). On this point, Carson observed, "Integrating technology systems with human systems has been a side benefit of [the EPIC 2023 research] because I keep putting on my parent hat" (Principal, School H, Cogen 5). He felt it was important to continue to maintain a listening ear beyond formal affinity spaces such as the school board to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 5). He suggested, "Beefing up our social interactions [with families] at school carnivals and creating a space in there around the sausage sizzle, where you can sit down and talk to people" (Carson, Principal, School H, Cogen 5).

As noted above, early in the EPIC 2023 research, Josephine identified the "biggest area of difficulty" is for "parents who have multiple children" in different year levels (School Leader, School H, Interview 1). She felt teachers could work together with parents to "identify connection points across learning areas and across year levels" (Josephine, School Leader,

School H, Interview 1). In thinking about a sustainable model of parent and community engagement, Josephine's ideas aligned with discussions among the school's board members about a possible future "multi-subject approach" (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2). According to Carson, around five per cent of families would benefit from the proposed approach. He observed,

It's that thing, where if it doesn't affect a lot of people, we won't bother. But if it's affecting five per cent of the parents and we can resource it, it's probably worth looking at it. We're gradually eliminating old-style thinking where you look after the majority and leave the fringe to be the fringe. So, [we're] getting right down to an individual [level]. (Carson, Principal, School H, Interview 2)

Rex stressed the importance of engaging parents and the community in their child's curriculum learning and wellbeing. Some families objected to "the emphasis that was placed on curriculum over the last two years" (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2). However, Rex felt,

It's now going to come home in a really positive way, because I think we'll start to be able to integrate subjects and integrate concepts. Parents are now to the point where they're starting to understand the breadth of the curriculum and the requirements that are there, so we can start having those conversations that are broader [on] things like critical thinking. (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2)

Rex also felt the cluster group initiative "might just be the way for him to do pastoral care and wellbeing"—a challenge with which he had long grappled (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2). He asserted, "For over 1000 students who are as geographically separated as they are, we can have all kinds of check-in methods online, but there's nothing like that face-to-face sitting down, having a real conversation" (Rex, Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2). Rex shared both his sense of excitement, and a reality check, about attempts to nurture a sustainable model of parent and community engagement, observing:

The one thing that I'm excited about is that it's not artificial. It's everything that we've been working with you guys (referring to Linda and Beryl) [that] has been a part of what we needed to do to make a better platform for our school. And I love the fact that right now in my area, we're reaching a point where we can start to discuss some new variations on engagement and connection that [are] going to present a few challenges I suspect, but given where we've come from, the challenges don't seem so dangerous anymore. I'm pretty happy at the moment about what we might be able to achieve, particularly in terms of that whole legitimate engagement area. (Pastoral Director, School H, Interview 2)

Case study 7 school I



Using affinity spaces to [re]establish and strengthen community connections for engaging parents and the community in the curriculum in a junior school

School context

School I was a non-government, co-educational, faith-based school for K–12 students located in the hinterland of a large, southeast Queensland metropolis. Established almost 40 years ago, it catered for approximately 2000 students across Junior, Middle, and Senior Schools. The school was committed to inspiring the minds and hearts of students through a myriad of educational opportunities to provide a rich, fulfilling learning experience. Documents on the school's website indicated that parents and friends play a vital role in the education of students. The school welcomed their assistance as volunteers in the classroom, excursions, sporting activities, and Parents and Friends (P&F) Association events. The P&F was integral to the school community, operating on the principle that without building a community spirit and establishing friendships, little else can be achieved. Accordingly, the P&F promoted the interests of students, fostered friendships within the school community, assisted to improve school facilities, and nurtured relationships among parents, teachers, and students.

Involvement in EPIC

School I was one of four schools out of the eight involved in 2023 to participate in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research for the first time. Table 18 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's involvement in EPIC.

In EPIC 2023, School I's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised seven participants who mostly worked in the Junior School. The PELT leader was Clarissa Warwick, Head of Junior School, who worked closely with Roxanne Miller, Chief of Staff, and, Lorelei Penfold, Assistant Head of Junior School. Clarissa, Roxanne, and Lorelei were all experienced teachers with a long association at the school.

Roxanne and Lorelei's roles included a particular focus on student and school wellbeing. Kimberly Howard, Director of Pre-Prep (Kindy), was relatively new to the school, but also an experienced teacher. The space in which she worked was detached from the rest of the Junior School, making daily contact with other Junior School teachers unavoidably sporadic. One Junior School teacher, Annette Young, taught Year 1 part-time. As a classroom teacher, Annette brought a unique perspective to the PELT. So too, Director of Marketing and Community Engagement, Evangeline Cuthbert, whose role distinguished her not only on School I's PELT, but also among the EPIC 2023 schools. Evangeline's inclusion in the PELT was a strategic decision because her role included parent communication, community relationships and working closely with the school's P&F. The PELT Parent representative was Tamzin Forbes whose children attended the Junior School. Kimberly, Annette, and Evangeline were also current parents at the school, with Evangeline a former student.

As Tamzin commenced her EPIC 2023 journey, she observed the parents' interest in engaging in their child's learning and wellbeing:

I would think that lots of parents aren't from an education background and so, just saying to them, 'Hey, do you realise if you're involved it makes your child more successful?' I think that's enough. People would be like, 'Oh, I didn't realise that at all!' ... I think some parents are very, 'Just let the school do their job. I don't need to worry about it. I'll just sign the diary and that's it'. But, educating parents about the benefits of [parent engagement] for them and their child I think a lot of parents will be interested to know more about it. (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 1)

A summary of information about School I's PELT members is presented in Table 19.

School I's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and four cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). The PELT members also met

Table 18: School I—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 19: School I—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
Clarissa Warwick	Head of Junior School	Junior school	PELT leader; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Tamzin Forbes	PELT Parent		Tertiary teaching background; Long association with school
Roxanne Miller	Chief of Staff	Whole school	Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Lorelei Penfold	Assistant Head of Junior School	Junior school	Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Kimberly Howard	Director of Pre-Prep (Kindy)	Junior school	Experienced teacher; Parent at school
Annette Young	Year 1 Classroom Teacher (part-time)	Junior school	Experienced teacher; Parent at school; Long association with school
Evangeline Cuthbert	Director of Marketing & Community Engagement	Whole school	Parent & past student at school; Long association with school

weekly to dialogue cogeneratively throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Most PELT members participated in Masterclass 1 as well as the cogens with the researchers and one another. A representative group of PELT members attended Masterclass 2. Despite the challenges of staffing arrangements, travelling distance, and prior parenting commitments, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 46/56 (82%) possible data collection opportunities.

School I's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

A series of six research sub-questions are reported below.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

Most of the participants in School I's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) enjoyed a long association with the school. At the commencement of the EPIC 2023 research, the team felt there had been a change in the nature of parents and the community interacting with the school in

recent years. Roxanne stated, "We've talked about parents being a bit disconnected" (Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 1). Evangeline added, "I guess it's something that we'd noticed, but I don't think we actually put our finger on it" (Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Cogen 1). The team subsequently approached this conundrum with a sense of inquiry, often comparing their experience metaphorically to missing pieces of a puzzle (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). Clarissa indicated:

I've always had a real interest in ... partnering with parents ... because I can see from my own experiences, [and] also from the reading and research I've done, that there is a direct correlation between establishing really positive relationships with parents and student outcomes. (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1)

For Clarissa, an "important piece of the puzzle" in establishing positive relationships with parents was about "teachers feeling valued [and] being part of the [parent-school] partnership" (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). Previously, she organised parent workshops and programs that included open classrooms for parents to come into the school, explaining:

... because I've always heartily believed that parents often see the final product of what [teachers] do and yet the magic happens in classrooms. The more that parents are actually able to engage with [what teachers do] ... it builds up trust and faith that correlates to teachers being able to do their job well. For me at school, happy parents, happy teachers, happy students! Everything fits together nicely! (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1)

Since the end of 2020 however, Clarissa felt there had been "a real change in how parents are perceiving education and teachers" (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). She spoke about workforce attrition and media reports that sometimes represented the teaching profession negatively. Clarissa acknowledged the importance of parents and recognised the future relied on students however, she uttered, "But if we can't rely on and value our teachers, then there's a really significant piece of the puzzle missing" (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1).

After Masterclass 1, the team gained more awareness of some of the possible contributing factors to the connections with parents and the community they perceived had been lost. Hearing from other schools involved in the EPIC 2023 research, they were buoyed to find that they were not alone in "feeling this disengagement" and recognised that "COVID-19 had a big impact on the engagement of our parents" (Lorelei, Assistant Head of Junior School, School 1, Interview 1). Tamzin described how pre-COVID-19, when her children were younger, she interacted weekly with the school; however, she observed, "Since COVID-19, I probably haven't stepped foot into a classroom!" (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 1). Evangeline similarly noted: "We think, 'Oh, COVID-19's over, back to normal', but it actually isn't. It's actually changed a lot" (Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Interview 1). Like other PELT members, Evangeline highlighted how the experience of COVID-19 was compounded by the issue of a lack of available parking spaces for parents around the school and associated traffic congestion. She noted:

There are less parents coming onto campus, because it's tricky to find a park, and we're always sort of saying, 'Move on, move on, pick up your child and move on'. We just kept doing [what we did during the pandemic] and didn't realise just how much of an impact it's made on our parent engagement. (Evangeline, Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Interview 1)

Roxanne commented that Masterclass 1 also helped the PELT to change their thinking about whether they were involving parents in the school or engaging them in their child's learning and wellbeing. Hence, she relayed how the team "looked beyond post-COVID-19 ... and started thinking about, 'Well, how are our parents actually feeling? Are they feeling like they are welcome to come in?'" (Roxanne, Chief of Staff, School I, Interview 1). Tamzin observed that, although her interaction with the school was much less than pre-COVID-19, "I would say we have a lot of involvement in the school; there's a lot of different concerts, but probably not much engagement. Parents are always being invited to various events, but that's kind of where it stops" (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 1). Annette also reflected:

From a teacher's and a parent's perspective ... our school, I believe, does parent involvement quite well [and] we do have parents on campus. But it's so formal. It doesn't feel like we're getting parents in. So, when I heard the language of engagement and bringing parents closer to their child's learning, it just clicked and I went, 'Oh, that's the difference'. (Classroom Teacher, School I, Interview 1)

As a result of their early EPIC 2023 discussions, Clarissa described the PELT's response going forward: "We're trying to reframe what we do towards having parents become more engaged and looking at it from the perspective that it's an investment in the learning and teaching process" (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

The apparent parent-school disconnect identified above by the PELT members saw Roxanne consider what this meant for reframing parent and community engagement practice and shifting culture at School I:

I'm learning a lot about how the words, involvement and engagement, work more prescriptively about what we're talking about. I'm seeing there's an opportunity to reach out to our parents beyond, 'Oh, come in for the Easter hat parade' or 'We're doing groups in Year 2 and you can come and read to the children'. I'm thinking, 'Do we need to start with educating parents? Do we need to enrol families, not students?' (Chief of Staff, School I, Interview 1)

Clarissa subsequently relayed how the proposition of "educating parents [in the context of being] engaged in the curriculum, [confirmed for the team that] Pre-Prep is the place to start" (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 1). The PELT therefore adopted a macro (school) level approach based on a twofold rationale. First, as indicated above, although Pre-Prep ran separately and was different in nature to the Junior School, they recognised the value for the school in learning more from what Kimberly and her Pre-Prep team might share. Second, they thought that building a firm foundation in the early years would support parent and community engagement as students and families progressed through Junior, Middle, and Senior Schools.

Speaking from an early childhood perspective, Kimberly described her pedagogical approach to curriculum as "engaging with families in an active way and in a meaningful context" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1). She observed, "We do a lot of reaching out to families quite consistently and in different ways" (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1). On a micro (classroom) level, the Pre-Prep teachers engaged parents in their child's learning and wellbeing using a family-friendly app called, *Storypark* (Storypark, 2023). *Storypark* provided a secure online environment for: communicating with parents; sharing student stories of curriculum learning through photos and videos; and inviting parent sharing (e.g., family recipes). Kimberly also created a leadership page to upload "information about early childhood development or skills-based strategies to help parents develop [their child's] fine motor skills" (Pre-Prep Director,

School I, Interview 1). In addition, she created a secure online community page where she posted items that she thought might interest families. The community page also provided a valuable space for parents to interact. Furthermore, Kimberly appreciated its point-in-time nature. "A decline in community posts [from parents]", for example, recently prompted her to talk informally with parents and conduct a short survey "to find out more about what and how they were engaging [in their child's learning]" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1).

The design of Pre-Prep curriculum activities reflected the value teachers placed on learning conversations between children and family/community members. For example, in developing a classroom display on reconciliation, the students took home a piece of card to ask their parents to help them trace around one of their feet. Kimberly explained, "Instead of the teachers doing it, the parents and their child had an activity at home [which included] talking more about the topic and sharing in [their child's learning] that way" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1).

Parents and community members were also invited to support the curriculum by sharing information, stories, or hobbies with the students (e.g., bringing in honeycomb and bee hives) (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1). Equally, invitations to teachers from families to share aspects of their history and culture (e.g., presenting a PowerPoint® on the significance of a cultural festival) were accepted and encouraged (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1).

Kimberly articulated the reflexive practices that she and her Pre-Prep colleagues adopted at a meso (groups of teachers) level:

The main barrier to engaging families is just being able to create a space where they feel confident [to engage]. We're constantly reflecting on how we're framing our engagement with parents. This involves thinking about: the platform we're using [to invite engagement], which might be too overwhelming [for parents]; reframing questions or inviting ideas and suggestions on our philosophies, policies, or program; and asking parents whether they're engaging in the curriculum and making that more accessible if possible. (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1)

Kimberly explained, "It's giving the parents the confidence to know that there's no wrong or right way [to respond to our questions or invitations]. It's just the fact that we want them to be in partnership with us" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1).

At the beginning of the year, the Pre-Prep teachers interrogated "all the [parent and community] engagement activities they have currently and the purpose behind them [to determine] whether they truly reflected a collaborative [parent-school] relationship" (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1). As a result, early in Term 1, they reframed the usual end-of-first-term parent-teacher interviews to meetings with parents called, Share and Collaborate. Kimberly explained:

The conversations [with parents about their child in interviews] tend to lead the same way, 'They're settling really well. They've made some little friends.' Families really expect us to give some sort of review on how their child is doing. It felt like we could make [these times] more worthwhile if we turned the tables and created an opportunity where it was a you-tell-me type scenario. (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1)

Consequently, parents were invited to talk about: what was important to them; what was special about their child or family situation/background; what they hoped for their child; what they perceived were their child's needs; and how the teachers might support them and their child within the Pre-Prep program. Kimberly concluded, "[This change] really opened up a sense of [parent-school] collaboration" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 1). She noted, "We called those meetings, Share and Collaborate, to try and send a real message [to parents] that it wasn't just the teacher talking to them. They were really about what parents wanted their child to learn" (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1). Moreover, Kimberly highlighted, "The children's Term 2 goals have fed directly from the parents and will go up on their online profile so parents can actually engage in that [curriculum] and also support their child to achieve those goals at home" (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 1).

Clarissa reflected on her conversations with Kimberly, noting that it was important to adopt a "parent perspective" (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 1). Kimberly also saw starting with educating parents as a proactive way to establish understandings and practices with families about the nature of partnerships. She explained, "Even though we want partnerships with parents, these still [need to occur within the context of] respectful relationships" (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 2).

Subsequently, the PELT focused on the school's enrolment process. For example, they reframed Pre-Prep orientation from "an observation day for families [and] telling them, 'This is how it looks. This is what you need', [to activities with more of an] education focus for parents" (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 1). In addition, Kimberly and members of the PELT collaborated to strengthen a workshop series titled, Get-Set for Pre-Prep, that she initiated the previous year. The workshops were for families not yet enrolled, but who hoped to join the school next year. Parent invitations were framed in a way that the team hoped would elicit a positive response such as, "Why would I not want to learn how I can best support my child's learning and help them as they transition to school?" (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 1).

In 2023, two workshops were held. In the first, a speech pathologist and an occupational therapist workshoped information and activities with prospective parents. The teachers also "had a chance to talk about early childhood curriculum and pedagogy" (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 2). In the second, the school's psychologist led a session on resilience. Kimberly reflected on the series, "There were lots of meaningful conversations between parents and the specialists and with one another as they asked questions

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and shared ideas about how to support their child coming into Pre-Prep” (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Cogen 2).

Lorelei also suggested the enrolment process include some school history to help prospective parents recognise that the school “was built on a very strong community basis” (Assistant Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 2). In other words, to help them see that when they joined the school, “You’re not just becoming a Pre-Prep parent, you’re becoming a School I parent!” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). Clarissa described how PELT members “dug out some old video footage and Lorelei talked it through [during orientation with the prospective parents]” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). She observed, “It just kind of got people by the heart; almost like, ‘Oh, okay. I’m actually part of something a bit bigger than just the Pre-Prep class or just a school’” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). Clarissa concluded, “In fact, the opportunity to engage parents emotionally with the idea that they were joining a community [past and present] to continue a journey of learning [with their child] was inspirational” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). The PELT signalled in cogenerative dialogues how reframing the enrolment process positively impacted the ability of all involved to build meaningful relationships for parent and community engagement before the parents and students even stepped into the school (PELT, School I, Cogens 3 & 4). According to Roxanne, it was an “EPIC entry” (Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 3).

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

The importance of space for parent and community engagement practice at School I captured the attention and imagination of School I’s PELT. At a macro (school) level, Clarissa stated: “One of the key points we came away with from Masterclass 1 was thinking about space and the impact that spaces were having on our parents being able to actually feel part of the community” (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). Up until the EPIC 2023 research, she observed, “We haven’t really focused on spaces quite so much, but now noticing spaces is something we do” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2). Similarly, speaking about the school’s outdoor education area, Roxanne commented:

Previously, we’d only ever looked at that area [from the perspective of], ‘What can we do with this space for the students? But then our thinking became more holistic in terms of, ‘What can we do with this space to engage the school community?’ (Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 2)

The PELT members agreed that issues of safety and traffic congestion together with the experience of COVID-19 (see above) had inadvertently created a situation where, compared to the past, “parents were less visible in the school” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). Clarissa remarked: “We just don’t see parents unless there’s a problem, or unless parents are dropping something off, or unless there’s a real reason for them to be in the school” (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). She felt going forward there was a need for school spaces where parents could gather regularly,

as opposed to parent spaces that needed to be regulated (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1).

Clarissa and the PELT members envisaged welcoming, gathering spaces for parents and the community. She elaborated,

I want to really listen to parents ... I just want to get some feedback from them. It’s also an opportunity for parents to hear from us. So, ‘What are the things that are affecting you?’ ‘How are you feeling?’ but also, ‘This is how we’re feeling’. Having open-dialogue conversations ... where parents are able to have a voice at different times for all sorts of reasons. (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1)

In parallel, Kimberly stated, “As much as we really are focused on child voice within our [Pre-Prep] program, we want to have parent voice as well” (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2). She further observed how, and how much, families want to be engaged varies from cohort to cohort, emphasising that spaces need to be designed as invitational and use the language of positivity (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2). This included virtual spaces such as the parent survey (above). Kimberly noticed how, “Changing the language from, ‘This is what we’ve decided’, to ‘Have you got anything you’d like to celebrate?’ and ‘Can we get your input into something?’ can get a different response” (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2).

The PELT’s thinking about spaces for engaging parents and the community subsequently impacted different macro levels of the school. Roxanne reported, “[The idea] of parent spaces is being looked at and is now part of conversations around the future development of the school” (Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 2). Clarissa elaborated:

There’s a master planning process that’s been going from the beginning of the year, but just in the last two meetings, we’ve added that parent flavour, ‘Okay, how are parents going to be affected by this?’ And not just in the typical sense, ‘Oh, they want a new pool or they want a new building’. But in redesigning the school ... if we’re getting parents here, ‘What is it they want to do when they’re here?, How is this going to impact parents?, How can we create spaces for parents?’ So, in the new car park, ‘Yes, we want parents to be able to park and pick up children safely and more efficiently. But is there also an opportunity to have a meeting space for parents, a play group space, a cafe with a playground?’ All of these ideas are now part of the conversations about planning and building that haven’t been before. (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3)

The PELT acknowledged the significant issues of car parking and traffic congestion in the school’s parent and community engagement journey. Thinking philosophically about spaces however, afforded the school “an opportunity to analyse what we can do” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3). Clarissa posited, “Maybe we can’t fix everything, but at least now we can understand both sides of the dilemma” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3). Indeed, she felt, “all the

little things” arising from reconceptualising school spaces as possible places for engaging parents and the community “were pieces of the puzzle coming together” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3).

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

Tamzin was School I’s parent representative on the PELT however, as mentioned above, three staff members on the PELT, Annette, Evangeline, and Kimberly, were also parents at the school. Cogenerative dialogues were thus enriched by the multiple perspectives the four parents could offer and the deep insights possible given their different roles. Tamzin observed,

I think it was actually quite important to have someone who’s a parent as opposed to a parent and a teacher [on the PELT], because I think we all brought different ideas. Annette would say things as a parent and a teacher, whereas maybe I wouldn’t know things from having not been a teacher. I think it was also important for [the PELT], which [Evangeline, Annette, and I] didn’t realise [initially], having children in different year levels. Having older children, I just assumed things that happened to me when my children were in the younger years were still happening today. (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2)

Tamzin described her experience of parent engagement when her older child was in the early years: “I would do a connect and learn program in Prep and reading groups from Prep to Year 2” and “the teachers used an app called Seesaw® for posting photos every day about schooling and what’s going on” (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 1). However, until she listened to the teachers, she said, “I hadn’t really thought about the use of Seesaw®. I always thought that was a lower-level primary thing, not realising that it wasn’t being used in lower-level primary anymore” (Tamzin, PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2).

In the first cogenerative dialogue, Tamzin commented, “... just hearing Kimberly talk made me think that there’s probably two sets of parents: the parents who haven’t had to deal with COVID and then the ones that have” (PELT Parent, School I, Cogen 1). Evangeline agreed, saying,

I’ve got an upper primary and lower primary child. My lower-primary child’s first year was Pre-Prep which was the first COVID year. I noticed a huge difference in my experience as a parent of a Pre-Prep child pre-COVID and one during COVID and the difference in connection that I have as a parent to the school through those two different children. (Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Cogen 1)

The difference in parent-school connection that Evangeline described also impacted parents of students new to middle and upper Junior School. Tamzin reported that although parents in this situation attended formal events such as school concerts, they were left asking, “When do I get to meet other parents?” (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 1). Dialoguing cogeneratively, she realised she had taken for granted “the culture that was established early on of being involved in [her children’s] schooling” (PELT Parent, School I, Cogen 1).

Cogenerative dialogues also helped Tamzin gain personal insights into the difference between involvement and engagement in her child’s learning and wellbeing. Speaking about the process, she observed,

You think you are involved in your child’s curriculum, but then when you think about it, ‘No, I actually just attend events or read a homework sheet or read the school’s online web page’. I just think it’s opened my eyes to thinking I’ve been engaged, but not really. (Tamzin, PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2)

Tamzin’s insights had implications for the PELT. She said,

I’m probably noticing the difference [between involvement and engagement] more now, but I think it would be beneficial for the school to explain to parents that this is why we’re doing this; this is engaging, it’s not you doing your child’s homework, it’s the rich discussions about learning that are important. (Tamzin, PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2)

At the same time, it was valuable for Tamzin and the other parents on the PELT to talk about decisions the school made or how teachers felt about adapting their current parent and community engagement practices. Speaking about a suggestion for teachers in the Junior School to adopt universal parent engagement practices (e.g., writing in student diaries), Clarissa felt,

It was really good for Tamzin to actually be part of those conversations as a parent, because she (Tamzin) said, ‘Okay, well, no, the teachers didn’t really respond to the [suggestion]’. They kind of gave us a big, ‘Not right now. Thank you’. And then for us to unpack the reasoning behind that was actually a really powerful process because she saw it wasn’t that [the teachers] were being obstructive or difficult. There was really clear reasoning behind why they were giving us that pushback and we had to take that on board and reflect on it. (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2)

Collectively, cogenerative dialogues that included parent voices assisted the PELT members to understand more about what reframing parent and community engagement practice and shifting culture at School I entailed. Tamzin concluded, “I thought, ‘We’ll just implement all these changes and it’ll be fine and everyone will be happy and there’ll be parents around campus all the time wanting to be involved’. But it’s bigger than I realised” (Tamzin, PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2).

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

Some challenges to parent and community engagement at School I such as those associated with car parking, traffic congestion, and suggestions for teachers to adapt their current practices have been discussed above. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the PELT members however, was deciding what concrete actions they might take to achieve their aims of reframing parent and community engagement practice and shifting culture at the school. At first, they

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planned a major event to [re]launch parent and community engagement onto the school stage, but through dialoguing cogeneratively they realised many of their ideas were neither practical nor sustainable (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3). Consequently, Clarissa stated, “We pulled our thinking back. We wanted to go a little bit slower, but also think about how we can embed practice in what we’re doing” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). In a similar way to Kimberly and the Pre-Prep team who interrogated their parent and community engagement practices to determine if they reflected a collaborative [parent-school] relationship, Clarissa explained that the PELT wanted to be more purposeful in their approach (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 3). Roxanne elaborated, “We approached [the work of parent and community engagement] philosophically, asking, ‘What’s happening for parents? and How are parents feeling?’ It was a totally different way of thinking” (Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 3). Furthermore, she said,

The clarity that comes through the dialogues with [the researchers] and the openness of the [PELT] in not being afraid to say, ‘Well, we were going to go this way, but hey, this could be more powerful’, helped us to see what is a sustainable [approach]. (Roxanne, Chief of Staff, School I, Cogen 3)

Hence, the PELT members saw an upcoming, three-day learning festival in a new light. The festival was sponsored by the P&F and featured a guest speaker who was engaged to speak to parents on the topic of resilient children as part of supporting the school’s wellbeing curriculum. The festival’s activities opened up opportunities for the PELT to: invite parents to meaningfully engage in their child’s learning and wellbeing; reach out to parents to ask them to join the school’s parent and community engagement journey; and begin to bridge the apparent school-parent disconnect they had identified (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 2). The festival’s theme was, *Hopes and Dreams*. Clarissa relayed to students that the festival was not just “learning in three days, because learning should be everything we do every day” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4).

The festival was reframed with a strong focus on parents hence, the activities were infused with opportunities for them to interact and ask questions. Clarissa described one way the PELT and class teachers reached out to parents:

We asked parents to write their dreams for their child, but without the children knowing. It was all done in the background. The children also wrote a dream for themselves and their teachers each wrote an individual dream for each of the children in their class. Then we pulled all of those [dreams] together and presented them [at the festival] in a frame to the children. (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4)

In a cogenerative dialogue, the PELT members reflected on what happened:

Clarissa: There were a lot of tears.

Lorelei: A lot of crying.

Clarissa: ... there was an emotional link to the learning that was taking place in the festival. And then we invited the parents in for the finale, which was also really spectacular. During the week, our music teacher had a lesson with every class and the students learnt a part of a song. And there was one try. No takes. We all got together in the theatre, 600 students and invited the parents to come and see what we could do and pull it all together. It was just amazing.

Lorelei: They sang a million dreams from, *The Greatest Showman*.

Annette: There wasn’t a dry eye in the building.

Tamzin: I’ll say, I got teary, and I thought, ‘Oh, am I going to go into school for a five-minute thing’, and then I was like, ‘Okay, I’ll go in, because my daughter’s asked. And the lady next to me, who I didn’t know, she looked at me with tears in her eyes because the Preps were singing and I think for me, with children in the older primary years, I don’t see the little children that much.

Lorelei: Their little voices were cute, weren’t they.

Tamzin: And then when they all sang together, it was so loud.

Lorelei: It was amazing.

Evangeline: My favourite moment was actually when the little children sang, I noticed the Year 5 and 6 students looking at each other and saying, ‘Oh my gosh!’ Then when my child in Year 5 came home they said, ‘Mum, did you hear it when the little children sang? That was something really beautiful.’ (PELT, School I, Cogen 4)

Clarissa reflected, “We certainly included and engaged parents throughout that week more than we have” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). Other opportunities for families to engage in student learning and wellbeing were incorporated throughout the festival such as the Book Week parade, Junior School concert, and small-group, school tours for approximately 90 parents. Annette commented, “From a parent’s perspective, I found it was just such a beautiful example of EPIC. Parents were back on campus, but in more of an invitational way” (Classroom Teacher, School I, Cogen 4).

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As indicated previously, School I was a relatively young, co-educational, faith-based, Pre-Prep (Kindy) to Year 12 school with approximately 2,000 students. The PELT members were mostly from the Junior School (Pre-Prep to Year 6). Throughout the EPIC 2023 research, they adopted a macro (school) level approach to engaging parents and the community. In considering a sustainable model of parent and community engagement at School I, Clarissa observed, “Asking questions

and listening for the answers is really important because a community is made up of key stakeholders and you can’t discount one as less important than another” (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2). She remarked, “Like all schools, we say [to parents], ‘Please come and talk to us if you have a problem’, but it’s really about putting those words into action to demonstrate that we actually believe what we say” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2). Clarissa further observed about a sustainable model of parent and community engagement that, “It’s continuing to be about educating” (Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2). She explained, “We want parents to feel comfortable and engage with what we’re doing at school. But we also want them to recognise that that comes with responsibilities. It’s not all about rights, there’s got to be reciprocal respect” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2). Roxanne agreed, suggesting Clarissa’s ideas could be expanded to include educating parents “on what [reciprocal respect] actually looks like: it’s not a set of rules, it’s a set of opportunities” (Chief of Staff, School I, Interview 2). In other words, co-responsibility for student learning and wellbeing among key stakeholders characterised a sustainable model of parent and community engagement. “Yours, mine, now ours!” declared Roxanne (Chief of Staff, School I, Interview 2).

Evangeline suggested that “changing the tone of conversations and our way of thinking will give [the school] success [in parent and community engagement] moving forward” (Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Interview 2). She highlighted how in the past the school conducted “sessions that were bringing parents in and feeding them information, but we hadn’t actually canvassed them to find out exactly what they would like to know and how they would like to hear from us” (Evangeline, Marketing & Community Engagement Director, School I, Interview 2). Similarly, Annette suggested listening differently was crucial to long-term parent and community engagement. She described how this manifested in the way the PELT and other members of the school now spoke: “Before it was, ‘There’s complaints about the car park’, and it changed to, ‘There’s feedback about the car park’ and ‘What can we do here?’” (Annette, Classroom Teacher, School I, Interview 2). Annette observed, “Definitely deciding to open back up the oval [for car parking] has made parents feel a lot better in terms of being easier [for them] to pick up their children” (Classroom Teacher, School I, Interview 2). Tamzin also noticed,

Reinstating the oval car park has allowed parents to think, ‘Oh, I can pop in for this or that’. I do think it’s our EPIC journey that has helped. Otherwise, parents weren’t seeing each other. You couldn’t even get a park to go in and see a teacher if you wanted to. Before it might have been dangerous in the afternoon at pick-up time. Now there is a teacher on duty for half an hour to supervise the students who sit down and wait while the parents park and then go and get them. (PELT Parent, School I, Interview 2)

Progressing an agenda of [re]establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement at School I thus appeared tied to a pedagogy of listening in conjunction with

finding creative solutions to removing, or at least managing, identified obstacles.

From a Junior School perspective, Kimberly sensed that members of the PELT were more resolved to “unpacking what’s happening now and just taking steps slowly to best suit the needs of the parents ... and trying to bridge some of the gaps that seem to have happened ... particularly through COVID” (Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2). Hence, she suggested that a sustainable model of parent and community engagement involved, “... just responding to those relationships in a different way” (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2). Indeed, School I’s 2023 journey showed the merit in Kimberly’s suggestion as much of the PELT’s work revolved around [re]building and strengthening connections. This included: looking to Kimberly and the Pre-Prep team to understand more about the relationship-building they instigate with prospective families; reconnecting with the school’s history of collaboration and community-building; and reframing partnerships with existing groups such as the P&F. Working together to create processes that valued relationships, supported critical reflection, and assured authentic connections were fundamental to embedding a culture and practice of parent and community engagement at School I (Kimberly, Pre-Prep Director, School I, Interview 2).

Clarissa believed it was important to approach parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing strategically. She said, “We have to look at the whole puzzle to really make any change moving forward” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 1). The experience of EPIC 2023 saw the PELT members adopt a similar longitudinal view. Hence, at the end of the research, they suggested it would be beneficial to: keep the PELT together the next year and include more parent representatives and classroom teachers to increase the group’s diversity; introduce regular cogenerative dialogues from the beginning of the year to share different ideas and illustrations of practice as well as facilitate staff professional development; reinforce the findings from research that reframing practice and shifting culture is less about a massive undertaking and more about regular, small tweaks; encourage teachers to take up the opportunity of engaging parents and the community in different ways; and continue informal conversations with teachers and parents and formal discussions with other school leaders to create and sustain a positive ripple effect throughout the school about the nature and benefits of parent and community engagement. Clarissa observed after the learning festival that some school community members “had recognised there were pieces of the puzzle [the PELT and others] were trying to put together to build momentum” (Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4). She further observed however, that establishing and sustaining a culture and practice of parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing “is a slow, gentle process” (Clarissa, Head of Junior School, School I, Cogen 4).

Case study 8 school J



Developing a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support a wellbeing curriculum framework in the primary and secondary years

School context

Founded over half a century ago, School J was a faith-based, co-educational, Pre-Prep to Year 12 school located on the outskirts of a major southeast Queensland metropolis. Approximately 1200 students were enrolled in the school which comprised: Junior School (Pre-Prep to Year 6), Middle School (Years 7 to 9), Senior School (Years 10 to 12). An International School also offered English language and homestay programs for overseas secondary school students (Years 7 to 12). Central to the school's strategic foci were student wellbeing, global citizenship, and critical and creative thinking. Documents on the school's website indicated that parent involvement was encouraged through supporting the school's strategic direction and fund raising and volunteer activities.

Involvement in EPIC

School J was one of four schools out of the eight involved in 2023 to participate in the *Engaging Parents in Curriculum* (EPIC) research for the first time. Table 20 (shaded cells) provides a snapshot of the school's involvement in EPIC.

School J's Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) comprised six participants. PELT leader, George Martin, took up a position at the school in 2023 which included the roles of inaugural Family Liaison Officer and Middle School HASS teacher. During his career, George had also worked in pastoral ministry and as a school chaplain. There were two PELT parents, Jeanie Hudson, representing the Junior School, and Chrystal Tanner, representing the Secondary School. Jeanie had a long association with the school, while it was Chrystal's first year. Assistant Headmaster, Oscar Mayberry, was an experienced educator with a long history of teaching and

leadership in schools. Junior School Director, Faith Curtis, was also a highly experienced educator having worked at School J for over two decades. For both Oscar and Faith, student wellbeing, particularly spiritual wellness, and the school community were fundamental aspects of their different roles. Jane Webber was an experienced educator having taught at School J in the Junior School for over 15 years. She worked closely with Faith in her current role as a Year 6 classroom teacher.

A summary of information about School J's PELT members is presented in Table 21.

School J's PELT members participated in: two masterclasses; individual interviews at the beginning and end of the research; and 10 cogenerative dialogues (cogens) with the researchers (Linda and Beryl). Five cogens included most of the PELT members. Four cogens involved individual PELT members and the researchers in one-on-one cogens (Willis, 2016). In Cogen 1, for example, George met with the researchers to talk about the PELT's cogenerative work on a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support School J's wellbeing curriculum framework. In Cogen 5, Chrystal met with the researchers to cogenerate about parent and community engagement as a Secondary School parent since she was no longer able to meet at the same time as the other PELT members. Cogen 6 involved a school visit in which George and the researchers participated and Cogen 10 involved George and the researchers. In a further cogen, Cogen 8, George and the Junior School Librarian, Bonny Young, met with the researchers to talk about Milo® Mondays—an innovative literacy initiative for families (Exley et al., 2024). Bonny became an EPIC 2023 participant but was not part of the PELT. Cogenerating singly or in dyads with the researchers ensured continuity of knowledge creation in the practice and research of parent and community engagement at School J throughout the EPIC 2023 research. Despite the challenges of staff absences and the PELT members' work commitments, the PELT demonstrated sustained involvement in the research

Table 20: School J—EPIC 2021–2023

2021	2022	2023
Schools A, B, C, D, E, F	Schools A, C, D	Schools A, C, D, E, G, H, I, J
Phase 1 – School Leaders	Groups of Teachers	Parent Engagement Leadership Teams
Phase 2 – Individual Teachers (Schools A & B)		

Table 21: School J—PELT members

NAME	ROLE	AREA	OTHER INFORMATION
George Martin	Family Liaison Officer; Middle School HASS Classroom Teacher	Whole school; Secondary school	PELT leader; Experienced teacher; Previous School Chaplain
Jeanie Hudson	PELT Parent 1		Long association with school
Chrystal Tanner	PELT Parent 2		New parent to the school
Oscar Mayberry	Assistant Headmaster	Whole school	School leader with a wellbeing focus; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Faith Curtis	Junior School Director	Junior school	School leader with a wellbeing focus; Experienced teacher; Long association with school
Jane Webber	Year 6 Classroom Teacher	Junior school	Experienced teacher; Long association with school

throughout the year with individual members actively participating in a total of 49/57 (86%) possible data collection opportunities.

School J's case study responds to the overarching research question:

How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

The research sub-questions guide the case study which follows.

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?

As part of School J's aim to provide an holistic, positive education experience for all students, Oscar described parent and community engagement as "a partnership between school and family" (Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1). Although the school and parents had different responsibilities, both parties worked together "to help develop a flourishing young person" (Oscar, Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1). According to Oscar, it was equally "important for parents to have a deep understanding of the way in which the school was approaching education, so that what was happening at home complemented what was happening at school" (Oscar, Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1). This thinking was the genesis of the school's Parent Support Group. Unlike Parents and Citizens groups in

other schools, the focus of School J's Parent Support Group was not fundraising, but rather "helping parents connect with each other and with the philosophy, policies, and procedures of the school" (Oscar, Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1).

George viewed parents as their child's first teacher. Like Oscar, he "looked at the school as a partner in education" (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). As School J's inaugural Family Liaison Officer, George also approached engaging parents and the community from "a strong pastoral perspective" (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). His role involved working closely with Oscar to reimagine how the Parent Support Group in the new normal phase of living with COVID might work more closely with parents and the community including alumni families and other school groups. Another aspect of his role was to extend the school's wellbeing curriculum framework to include parents. The wellbeing curriculum framework's philosophy and pedagogy infused learning and teaching at School J, being well established in how teachers and students thought, spoke, and acted. George commented, "But our parents sort of get [the framework] and they sort of don't. So, my role is to help them to take [the framework] on board and possibly actualise it in the home" (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). Given the wellbeing curriculum framework's potential practical application, George hoped that encouraging parents to embrace it would represent a concrete way they might partner with the school. As he approached his role, the question at the forefront of his mind was not "how do we teach children, but how do we teach a community?" (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1).

CASE STUDY 8 SCHOOL J CONTINUED

Faith understood parent and community engagement similarly to Oscar and George, saying, “When I interview new families, we talk about the partnership: it’s parents, the school, and the child. We talk about the best outcomes for the child being obtainable if we’re all together on the same team” (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1). The school was very active in welcoming parents and in communicating with them about events. Faith felt however, that even before the challenges of COVID-19, there was a “need for schools to think differently about how to engage parents when the external circumstances continue to change” (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1). In the past, for example, parents felt very connected to the school and helped in classrooms and ran community events. Nowadays, teachers needed to “help parents to have conversations with children to know what’s going on in the classroom and feel connected to the school” (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1).

Jane reflected on her experience of engaging parents and the community across the Junior School, saying, “Engagement with parents is so different from Year 2 to Year 6” (Classroom Teacher, School J, Interview 1). She explained, “The children in Year 6 may not want their parents around or forget to let them know about what’s happening at school” (Jane, Classroom Teacher, School J, Interview 1). Like Faith, she felt keeping connected with parents relied on thinking differently hence, she used communication platforms such as Seesaw® and organised events at the beginning or end of the day to allow more parents to come into the classroom. She remarked however, “I do find that we have a lot of working parents, so they’re not around to be available” (Jane, Classroom Teacher, School J, Interview 1). Upper primary and early years content differed in ways that also affected possibilities of parent and community engagement. In the upper primary years, for example, students studied topics in more depth over longer periods. Jane felt there may be “an opportunity for [upper primary school] parents to come in and share their knowledge, but then there won’t be another opportunity in that subject area for quite a while” (Classroom Teacher, School J, Interview 1).

As a parent of two Junior School children, Jeanie appreciated the difference between participating in the school or classroom and engaging in her children’s learning and wellbeing. She felt however, that “participation is a start because being there means I can start to build relationships to help me engage and that’s important for my child” (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). Participating in the classroom helped Jeanie to connect with her children’s teachers as each new teacher did things differently. Jeanie was also able to connect with her children’s learning, in particular, the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework. She said, “We have a wellbeing curriculum framework so if you’re not in the classroom, you don’t necessarily know what aspect of the framework [your child] is working with; whereas I get to see that because I go [into the classroom] when I can” (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). The benefits for her children included being able to, “Ask those curious questions from my side (as a parent) that encourages them to continue to ask curious questions from their side (as learners)” (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1).

As a Secondary School parent, Chrystal also believed that “parents should be very invested in their child’s schooling because they are [their child’s] first educators” (PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 1). She emphasised, “It takes a village, so it’s not just parents, but other members of the community that [also] need to [help] raise a child. Everyone plays a part” (Chrystal, PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 1). According to Chrystal, an engaged parent not only prepared their child for school, but also modelled different ways of behaving and learning such as play-based approaches. Chrystal provided support emotionally, mentally, and physically for her child throughout their educational journey. She stressed, “Parents are real-world educators, they have on-the-ground-experience, which is invaluable to bring into the classroom [to support] the students’ learning” (Chrystal, PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 1).

2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?

School J’s PELT initially adopted a macro-level (school-level) focus in which they collaborated to draft a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework. The wellbeing curriculum framework represented more than a decade of collaborative investigation among school leaders, parents, and the community to chart a path for students to embrace life and work in a constantly changing world. Oscar elucidated:

The wellbeing curriculum framework is not instead of a regular curriculum, it’s as well as. We’re still committed to mastery of the basics and we’re still committed to disciplinary mastery, but the framework is really about how we teach. It’s another layer on top, which is a focus on helping students to be innovative thinkers and problem solvers. (Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1)

As a parent, Jeanie recollected enrolling her then one-year-old child in School J after hearing about the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework. She explained,

I don’t think the future looks like it does today. My husband’s basically building robots for a living. I’m in a professional space where I can get ChatGPT to do some of my work tasks, so I don’t need my child to rote learn things like we did. Moving forward, I thought, ‘Yes, [the wellbeing curriculum framework] just works for us. My child might not become an entrepreneur . . . but that doesn’t mean [the philosophy’s] not right. (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1)

The proposed parent and community engagement vision and values statement continued the school’s “journey towards developing a new pedagogy fitted to an uncertain future” (Oscar, Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1). The inclusion of parents in School J’s PELT represented an opportunity to reflect pedagogies (i.e., ways of thinking, speaking, and acting) in the vision and values statement suited to parents as well as teachers. Oscar explained,

What I hoped the goal of [School J’s participation in the EPIC 2023 research] might be was to engage parents . . . in helping us to develop [curriculum resources] that were in a sense co-created by parents for parents to better understand and utilise the wellbeing curriculum framework at home as they talked to their children, helped with homework, and so on. (Assistant Headmaster, School J, Interview 1)

George felt that cogenerating with parents as members of the PELT to develop a parent and community engagement vision and values statement would shift “blue-sky thinking . . . to asking questions about the ‘So, what?’ and ‘So, how?’ . . . it’s going to help us to be practical” (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). Hence, he recognised the value of articulating an overarching vision and values statement (macro level) with parents to enhance its utility for translation in meso (groups of teachers/parents) and micro (classrooms/family homes) levels of practice.

Jane catalogued numerous initiatives in the Junior School aimed at engaging parents and the community in student curriculum learning and wellbeing. These included:

- Hosting parent information nights and pastoral care meetings to set goals for student learning at the beginning of the year
- Providing pamphlets to parents to help them find different information and navigate channels and platforms for connecting with the school, teachers, and other parents
- Preparing detailed Term Learning Outlines
- Inviting parents into the classroom for Sneak Peeks of their child’s learning portfolio
- Posting videos on school-approved platforms of a teacher working with a class to teach specific concepts such as in upper primary maths
- Using time in school-based subjects for students to design collaborative projects that included parents aimed at improving someone’s life in the school or community
- Maintaining classroom learning journals which included student work samples, photographs, and interactive components for parent comments and questions.

Jane also identified everyday activities for connecting with parents about student curriculum learning such as emails, Seesaw® posts, Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and homework tasks.

Faith described various macro-level initiatives for engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing. A key strategy was School J’s Classroom Parent Representative (CPR) initiative. A CPR was attached to each class who “helped with communicating and making sure people are connected . . . but their main role is community, so we challenge them to try and facilitate some class or whole year level activities like an afternoon tea” (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1). Another initiative called, Parent Partnerships, involved inviting parents to meet with Oscar and Faith or other school staff to:

[Talk] about questions that have either come from staff or parents about something that’s happening within the school. It could be anything from a behaviour or social issue . . . [such as] conflicts on the soccer field or friendship issues, or it could be something about homework, or the way we teach maths . . . or how the reading program is organised. (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1)

Faith remarked, “[The Parent Partnership initiatives] are never the same because the questions are different every time” (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1).

In the new normal phase of living with COVID, Faith reflected on the school’s parent and community engagement initiatives, saying, “We actually had a lot going on before COVID. . . . COVID made you think, ‘Was all of that necessary?’ It gave us time to do that [thinking] which is one positive” (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1). She stated, “Coming out of COVID . . . I think we’ve realised that we need to be more purposeful about how we’re going to go about [engaging parents and the community]” (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Interview 1).

Jeanie endorsed the Junior School for its “good communication and opportunities for engaging with what students are learning” (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). Posts on Seesaw®, for example, allowed her to say to her child, “I saw you doing this in class today” (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). Yet, she remarked, “The big thing for me is I don’t always know what to do with the information. And if I’m extending that to the wellbeing curriculum framework, I’m not sure I’m equipped to keep that thinking process happening at home” (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1).

3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?

After a comparatively short time at School J, George declared, “I think it’s pretty clear that there’s already heaps of parent engagement happening [in the Junior School] which is so encouraging coming into my role” (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 4). Hence, George asked: “Where are the spots we can improve and engage parents a little bit more in the curriculum rather than simply giving them information?” (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 4). He described his response as, “figuring out the spaces where dialogue can happen naturally” and “looking for ways to connect [with parents and the community]” (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). George also applied these principles to his role as the PELT leader. To attain the PELT’s macro-level (school-level) goal of developing a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework, for example, he formed different affinity spaces. Chrystal relayed that George initially organised face-to-face cogenerative dialogues where “everyone just started making notes, brainstorming, and writing ideas on a whiteboard” (PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 2). Due to Chrystal’s work commitments, he facilitated her joining PELT meetings online using

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Microsoft Teams®. At other times, he met with her in person, subsequently passing on their cogenerated feedback to the team (Chrystal, PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 2).

George also invited the PELT members to join an online affinity space using a Miro board®¹⁰ which allowed them to brainstorm ideas asynchronously (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 2). As part of developing the parent and community engagement vision and values statement, the PELT used the Miro board® to shape four objectives. Chrystal commented, “Having the Miro board® allows us to go online to gauge where everything’s at. Even if you haven’t spoken to each other in a couple of weeks, it keeps everything together in the one area” (PELT Parent 2, School J, Cogen 5). Chrystal subsequently affirmed, “It was good to have my voice, opinions, and feedback heard on that platform” (PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 2).

Cogenerating with external stakeholders was another example of an affinity space. To this end, George asked to meet with the researchers to discuss an early version of the parent and community engagement vision and values statement on which he and the PELT members had collaborated. Drawing on a similar statement from another organisation, George developed a template which the team populated using ideas from School J’s stated strategy, mission, and vision. In thinking about the school’s values, he asked the PELT, “What are the principles by which our school wants to be known in parent and community engagement?” (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1). In response, they cogenerated three statements: “Parents are a student’s first teacher”; “Parents partner with teachers and the school”; and “Parents engage in School J’s approach to education” (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1). In the first cogenerative dialogue, Linda (researcher) reflected with George on the language of the document’s strategy, mission, and vision sections:

Linda: The use of *our* is very inclusive and the pronoun, *we*, for example. In the section, *our core values*, the language shifts so it feels a bit transactional. . . . I wonder if you can flip it to something like, ‘We value parents as their child’s first teacher?’

George: I like, ‘We value parents as their child’s first teacher’. . . . So, have it more as a statement of value. I love that. (School J, Cogen 1)

The affinity space of the one-on-one cogenerative dialogue with the researchers offered an efficiency for the PELT’s work as George relayed his ideas from the conversation to the team which guided the vision and values statement’s further development.

Outside of the PELT, George worked with the school’s leadership team in other affinity spaces to develop an initiative that involved two parent and community engagement workshops. The workshops were named after the school’s mission and introduced the wellbeing curriculum framework. Although initially intended for new

parents, the invitation to attend the workshops included “all parents” (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1). To accommodate as many parents as possible, the workshops were held before and after school on the same day. In addition, Jeanie commented on the affinity spaces used to connect with parents to promote the workshops:

I think the biggest thing for me about this [initiative] is there’s a lot more visibility of it. I know the CPRs are pushing it out. I’m talking [to parents] in the Junior School. . . . I’m in the library at the moment and there’s a poster on the wall . . . it’s exciting. (PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 2)

The workshops were attended by approximately 80 parents. They represented further affinity spaces in which: George spoke about the importance of parent and community engagement in education; an alumni parent shared the history of the wellbeing curriculum framework’s development; Oscar described specific aspects of the framework; and breakout groups facilitated conversations among parents about their experiences of parent and community engagement and the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework. George emphasised:

[The initiative] is a generic step one: ‘This is what we’re on about’. As well, we’re going to talk about continued parent engagement. We don’t want this just to be a workshop and then [parents] clock out. But this is a workshop and [parents] buy into [parent and community engagement in their child’s learning and wellbeing]. (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1)

The workshops took place in a new building, the architecture of which was “intentionally designed to tell the story of the school’s wellbeing curriculum framework”; hence, they represented an immersive experience for parents (Oscar, Assistant Headmaster, School J, Cogen 3). Oscar elucidated, “The medium is the message. In this case, the medium is the building, and as we move through the building, work in the building, and have conversations about the building, the message is better understood” (Assistant Headmaster, School J, Cogen 3).

Jeanie highlighted that wellbeing was a strong focus of the breakout groups in the workshop she attended. Significantly, she noticed, “We all got to the fact that our value system was actually more important to us at the end of [a child’s education]” (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 3). Jeanie concluded:

There were some really good conversations because we walked through the library and the new building. . . . It was another affinity space in a non-pressured environment because we weren’t picking up [children], we weren’t rushing to class. . . . It provided an opportunity for a different conversation . . . in the context of how our children were learning. . . . When I see those people now, I can continue those conversations. (PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 3)

4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?

Together, Jeanie and Chrystal represented parents in Pre-Prep to Year 12; hence, including both of them on the PELT was a strategic decision from School J’s perspective. In addition, their disparate experiences meant each one offered “a very different angle” on parent and community engagement (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). Generally speaking, George found collaborating with the PELT parents “really helpful”, remarking, “they kept [the team] focused . . . pushing our work forward, pushing our thinking, asking the questions” (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2). Having worked with Jeanie previously, Faith commented, “Her approach is always encouraging, but also, she’s not worried about sharing her own thoughts or ideas” (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2). She appreciated Jeanie’s contributions “because sometimes she pointed us in a different direction than we might have otherwise gone as teachers” (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2). In collaborating with Chrystal, Faith reflected:

It’s been insightful to hear how she’s felt coming to a secondary school that she didn’t know anything about . . . She’s found it hard in terms of how things work, so I think that’s helpful for the staff to understand. (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2)

Jeanie and Chrystal contributed to the PELT’s work of engaging parents and the community at School J conceptually and pedagogically. In developing the parent and community engagement vision and values statement, for example, George pointed out:

Jeanie’s been instrumental in helping to soften the language so it’s less corporate and more relational. She’s really helped the document to be something that parents could read and understand and feel like, ‘Yep, that’s inclusive of me’. So not, ‘The school is talking down [to me]’, rather, ‘The school is warmly inviting me in’. (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 7)

Jeanie and Chrystal also helped to develop the objectives of the parent and community engagement vision and values statement. George asked the PELT, “What do we want to see happen?” (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1). The team subsequently cogenerated four objectives: “Parents are informed. Parents are included. Parents are equipped. Parents are engaged” (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1). George noted:

We wanted to be very deliberate about the process because we could do a ton of things which are all about informing, but we’re not actually including, we’re not equipping, we’re not engaging. We wanted to make the four objectives very clear moments of movement in the [parent and community engagement] journey of a parent. (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 1)

Pedagogically, Jeanie heard her own voice reflected in the parent and community engagement vision and values statement. Objective 3: Parents are equipped, for example, mirrored comments she made about scaffolding parents more so they can continue the “thinking processes” of the wellbeing curriculum framework with their child at home (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). As she listened in cogenerative dialogues, she also felt the idea was reflected in proposed changes in practice (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 7). Jeanie explained:

I can hear when we’re talking about [equipping parents], we’re moving away from information briefings to demonstration sessions . . . where parents can be in a classroom and work through the [different aspects of the wellbeing curriculum framework] so they can remember how it felt to them as opposed to [receiving] just another information sheet. (PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 7)

Jeanie and Chrystal also influenced changes in practice in the Junior School. Faith stated, for example, “[The information] in the Term Learning Outlines and the links between what is taught in each subject and aspects of the wellbeing curriculum framework are quite extensive. We’re learning from Jeanie, it’s a lot of teacher talk” (Junior School Director, School J, Cogen 7). Consequently, Faith indicated that she and Jane were “having a think about how [they] might improve the Term Learning Outlines” (Faith, Junior School Director, School J, Cogen 7). Jane highlighted the myriad challenges for new parents at the beginning of the year such as learning to navigate the school’s systems and classroom communication channels. She commented, “The parent starter packs are so full” (Jane, Classroom Teacher, School J, Cogen 7). She imparted cogenerated ideas among members of the PELT about having parents “sit around, set up the [relevant] apps and social media pages on their devices, and the new CPR explaining things through” (Jane, Classroom Teacher, School J, Cogen 7). Faith expanded, “Something else we’ve been talking about is buddying new parents up with an existing parent more formally” (Junior School Director, School J, Cogen 7). She described inviting new and existing parents to morning tea and continuing the parent buddy initiative throughout the year. Parent buddies reflected the PELT’s thinking in terms of Objective 3: Parents are equipped, while simultaneously affording the kind of connection and support Chrystal spoke about missing as a new parent to School J.

5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?

Members of the PELT identified challenges as well as potential opportunities for engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing at School J. Chrystal’s experience as a new parent, for example, highlighted that “joining at Middle School is very different to joining at Junior School” (PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 1). She appreciated the connections she made through participating in the Parent Support Group and meeting with a pastoral care leader early in the year however, the parent-teacher interviews in Term 3

¹⁰ Miro® is an online platform that allows users to build content like a physical whiteboard.

CASE STUDY 8 SCHOOL J CONTINUED

represented the first opportunity to meet her child's teachers (Chrystal, PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 2). In contrast, in her first interview, Jeanie declared, "I have a really good relationship with [my child's] teacher. That's priceless!" (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1).

Nevertheless, Jeanie recognised some challenges for parent and community engagement in the Junior School. For example, a family member often collected her children—one in the early years and another in the upper primary years—from school. The family member followed the feed on the Seesaw® app for one child. Jeanie remarked, "[The family member] probably doesn't ask the same type of questions as me, but they certainly use the platform because it creates a personal connection to a child at the end of the day" (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). As mentioned previously, Jeanie appreciated Seesaw® posts afforded opportunities to engage in her children's learning and wellbeing. Yet, she noticed that possibilities of meaningful parent-child conversations with her younger child were greater when the posts were sent and/or read closer to the activity (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). In relation to her older child, Jeanie said, "If I've been away all week, even if the posts are two days ago, I can have a chat to them and they remember. [The posts] allow me to replay with them what I missed while I was away" (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 1). The experiences of Jeannie and Chrystal afford insights into the kinds of factors (e.g., timing, purpose, students' age) that may impact the effectiveness of different parent and community engagement strategies for parents, families, teachers, and students.

As indicated above, the PELT's initial challenge was to develop a parent and community engagement vision and values statement to support the school's wellbeing curriculum framework. Members of the PELT verbalised the further challenge of ultimately translating the statement into practice. Jeanie felt however, that a solely macro-level (school-level) focus throughout 2023 risked missing current opportunities for learning about implementing parent and community engagement at meso (groups of teachers) and micro (classroom) levels. Based on EPIC's Parent Engagement SSOOPP (pronounced soup) Framework (Willis & Exley, 2022) which describes effective, research-informed parent and community engagement practices that are **short, sharp, often, optional, with a purpose, and personalised** to parents and their child, she questioned, "Why wouldn't we start tweaking what we're doing now? You can evolve as you go along. . . . I see opportunity abounds all over the place" (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, Interview 1).

Indeed, as the process of drafting the parent and community engagement vision and values statement continued, the PELT's focus shifted from a mostly macro-level focus to including more meso- and micro-level foci. In cogenerative dialogues with the researchers, members of the PELT started to use the language of SSOOPP colloquially (i.e., *ssoopping it up*) to [re]imagine school and classroom activities as opportunities for parents and the community to engage in student learning and wellbeing. George *ssoopped up* the workshops above, tweaking the initiative's usual format and

style to include an alumni parent and breakout groups of parents. In Cogen 4, PELT members discussed how they might use the Parent Engagement SSOOPP Framework to connect posts on Seesaw® more purposefully to the school's wellbeing curriculum framework. Jeanie suggested,

If we're looking for those little tweaks that we can make which aren't onerous for the teacher, but also aren't onerous for the parent, I think in Seesaw®, there might be some opportunities to cut and paste information from the wellbeing curriculum framework [and say to parents], 'Consider asking your child a question about this.' (PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 4)

Faith introduced an initiative in her Year 6 Religion class using conversation starter cards in which parents were invited to share a life lesson from an experience or person to illustrate the meaning of a parable from the Bible. Faith included Jeanie (not a Year 6 parent) in the initiative, asking if she could pilot the activity with her children (also not in Year 6) and provide feedback. The cards enabled Jeanie to ask meaningful questions. She elucidated, "Having my children retell the parables to me was excellent. Then I could hear what they were saying and they could start translating [the stories] into their world" (Jeanie, PELT Parent 1, School J, Cogen 9). Faith returned, "And that's part of the aim, getting them to understand [the parables] from their perspective" (Junior School Director, School J, Cogen 9). Jeanie reflected on the opportunity to work with Faith to learn more about parent and community engagement: "I thought [the experience] was pretty powerful because you don't need to do pilots that are really big" (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 2).

George engaged parents in his Year 8 History students' formative assessment task on the topic of *Heraldry*. The students used email to invite their parents to talk with them about their family's values. George remarked, "There was some good buy-in from parents who talked with their child about all sorts of different values that their family held and the students really loved that" (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 9). He reported the students: spoke articulately about what they learnt; researched the meanings of different symbols and colours; and incorporated their findings into drawings of a family shield (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 9). According to George, the initiative was "a very easy" shift in classroom practice (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Cogen 9).

6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

As mentioned previously, School J was a large, established, faith-based, co-educational, Pre-Prep to Year 12 school comprising Junior, Middle, Senior, and International Schools. School J was one of two schools in the EPIC 2023 research with a dedicated Family Liaison Officer, George, whose role included a 50% teaching load. Speaking about his role, George stated, "Parent engagement is part of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017). We already recognise it's important . . . children who have engaged parents in their education do better" (Family Liaison Officer,

School J, Interview 2). George's role not only acknowledged the importance of parent and community engagement, but also represented an "investment" in each child's education and the school community generally (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2). With a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in mind, Chrystal observed,

Our biggest strength is having George in his role. . . . He has the pulse of the school. Because he's an educator as well, he understands where everybody's at and can bring the different perspectives of parents and teachers together. He will listen and talks with the principal and other school leaders. (PELT Parent 2, School J, Interview 2)

When George commenced in his role, he commented, "[The] school leadership is still trying to figure out what resources I need and I am too; but not just me, the whole school. What resources do we need to engage families, for instance?" (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 1). At the end of the year, George reflected,

Coming into this role, I was going, 'Okay, this is a new area for me. What does it look like?' Being able to participate in the EPIC 2023 research has given us a great platform to think about [engaging parents and the community]. It gave us some structure going forward. It helped us to form a team. That team is still engaged—which is encouraging—and I know I can call upon them to continue this work, especially in either the Junior School or Secondary School. And so, they can be champions for [parent and community engagement]. . . . I don't have to rally them again next year. It's just going to flow on. (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2)

Jeanie also commended the platform of EPIC 2023 for "figuring out which parents are leaning in, which teachers are leaning in, which parts of the administration are leaning in. What a great way to start!" (PELT Parent 1, School J, Interview 2). Jane similarly highlighted the importance of establishing a platform of positive connections: "For me, it's . . . trying to keep [parent and community engagement] simple and just drip feeding . . . it doesn't need to be something enormous. Start small and when you get the bite or, if you don't, adjust from there" (Classroom Teacher, School J, Interview 2).

Setting forth, Faith "reflected on being a bit more mindful about when we have opportunities to bring parents in" (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2). She described how she and Jeanie were "doing something a bit different" for the end-of-year Prep Orientation Day which usually involved parents dropping their child at the school and collecting them two hours later (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2). Faith explained,

We've decided to focus on, 'What do parents actually need to know', not what we think they need to know. . . . We're setting up a big morning tea with small group tables where we're going to get a parent who's been here for a while, and is open and willing to talk about things, to be at each table, and then have them talk with new families over morning tea about the transition and what they've learned in their first few years of being at School J. (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2)

Faith strongly suggested, "Building on from that orientation morning, the challenge for 2024 is making sure we don't let an opportunity go by" (Junior School Director, School J, Interview 2).

George's plans for sustaining the work of engaging parents and the community were two-pronged: connecting parents and engaging parents. Connecting parents involved initial connections with new parents such as the Prep Orientation Day above as well as continuing connections with new and existing parents. In discussions with School J's Communications Director about the new year's events calendar, the suggestion that March could be "a parent engagement month" emerged (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2). George elucidated,

We've started thinking about, 'What things can we do to help parents feel like they're part of this community?' so they understand what we do with the wellbeing curriculum framework, and there's a broad-based comprehension where everyone in the Junior School goes, 'We know what Jane is trying to achieve in her classroom. We know what Faith is talking about when she mentions [the wellbeing curriculum framework] at an information night'. We want to start disseminating the language of our school in terms of what we're trying to achieve so that not only do students talk about it with their parents, but also their parents have heard it and they've comprehended it. So, there's a common community language across the whole school. (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2)

At the same time, George asked the school's Directors of Curriculum, "Where are the moments where we can bring parents at home into the learning of their child in the classroom?" (Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2). He observed, "The ultimate step is to help teachers and students include parents in their education. That's the key. And I think if you can get there, that's the pinnacle for me. So, I'm not going to let that go" (George, Family Liaison Officer, School J, Interview 2).

Overall findings and implications



The *Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) 2023* research investigated the overarching research question: How do Parent Engagement Leadership Teams (PELTs) enhance knowledge, understanding, and practice for establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement?

Six research sub-questions were used to generate early descriptive findings in each of the eight case studies in this final report:

1. How do members of the PELT view and define parent and community engagement?
2. How do members of the PELT understand curriculum and/or use inquiry pedagogy to integrate parent and community engagement into curriculum?
3. How do members of the PELT imagine affinity spaces (macro, meso, micro level) to facilitate parent and community engagement in practice?
4. How do members of the PELT use cogenerative dialogues that include parent and/or student voices to enhance parent and community engagement?
5. What opportunities and challenges for parent and community engagement are identified by the PELT members?
6. What observations and suggestions do the PELT members offer for a sustainable model of parent and community engagement in their school context?

Together with the case studies, the following section draws overall findings for knowledge, practice, theory, and methodology as well as implications for future parent and community engagement practice and research. The findings below complement those presented in short-form in the snapshot in this report (see Appendix 1). Limitations of the research are also included below.

Knowledge

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The most compelling aspect of the EPIC 2023 research is the diversity of the eight schools involved coupled with the diversity of members within each Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT). As highlighted in the case studies, the contexts and settings of the schools differed markedly. The case studies also identified differences in schools' philosophy, size, gender, year levels, and education delivery. The parent and community engagement focus of the PELTs included whole school, secondary, middle, and primary school initiatives as well as combinations of these. In addition, EPIC initiatives occurred across and within the schools at macro (school), meso (groups of teachers), and micro levels (classroom level). Schools not only took different journeys towards engaging parents and their communities, but also described being at various points in their journeys. At the same time, members of each PELT (school leaders, teachers, other staff members, parents, and community members) who worked in various professional and volunteer roles in and outside the participating schools benefited from collaborating with different people and groups, and the knowledge, skills, backgrounds, and experiences they brought to the team. The consistency of participant accounts in describing positive shifts in the culture and practice of parent and community engagement at their schools affords confidence in the potential sustainability, scalability, and transferability of the philosophy, principles, practices, and processes underpinning the research and findings. Further longitudinal research based on the findings to investigate the effectiveness of EPIC as a whole-of-school approach in current and new EPIC schools and/or clusters of schools—with a possible focus on equity cohorts (e.g., students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and living with disability)—is a logical next step.

VALUE OF RESEARCH-INFORMED THEORY AND PRACTICE

The EPIC researchers adopt a strengths-based approach, playing an educative role in working alongside participants as co-participants throughout the research experience. Participants repeatedly indicated that increased knowledge and understanding of the relevant research literature including previous EPIC research findings (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2020, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) positively impacted their thinking and practice of parent and community engagement. In particular, they credited three aspects of the research as increasing their critical awareness of the nature of parent and community engagement, giving them the confidence and tools to shift their practice in intentional, targeted ways. These aspects were:

- A strengthened and/or deepened appreciation of parents as their child's first teachers
- Understanding the difference between involving parents in school activities and engaging them in their child's learning and wellbeing (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014)
- Appreciating that parent and community engagement initiatives do not need to be epic undertakings. Initiatives that are **short, sharp, often, optional**, with a **purpose**, and **personalised** to parents and their child (i.e., the Parent Engagement S-S-O-O-P-P Framework [pronounced soup] [Willis & Exley, 2022]) can be implemented immediately with powerful effect and demonstrable benefits for students, parents, teachers, and the school community.

The three ideas above afforded participants consistent ways of thinking and speaking about engaging parents and the community at their school as well as across the EPIC 2023 research schools. The need for common thinking tools and a shared language among parent and community engagement stakeholders—including teachers and parents—for describing and explaining ideas and experiences appears critical to establishing and sustaining a model of parent and community engagement.

THE WORK OF ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES IS QUINTESENTIALLY RELATIONAL

The findings in the case studies underscored positive, respectful relationships as the foundation of parent and community engagement. The schools appeared to [re] evaluate their relationships with parents and the community, showing an intuitive appreciation that the work of engagement happens in and between relationships (e.g., parent-child and parent-teacher [Jeynes, 2023]). Hence, most described a need to [re]prioritise a sense of “community” and “[re]connection” with families. This was especially associated with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its legacy of seeming unconscious complacency in relation to parent and community engagement which many participants felt in the new normal phase of living with COVID. Prioritising positive relationships was also evident in the strong focus in most schools on the area of personal (students, teachers/ staff members) as well as collective (classroom, whole school) wellbeing (see Willis & Exley, 2022). This was evident in: wellbeing curriculum frameworks (e.g., School J); whole school community festivals of learning (e.g., School A); macro-level celebratory/milestone events (e.g., School I); and the pedagogical practices teachers and school leaders adopted/ strengthened (e.g., School C). The schools particularly exploited the idea of affinity spaces to initiate and further the relational work of student-parent-school-community engagement as well as [re]set the tone of the school as a vibrant, inclusive learning community. Schools used these spaces to enable opportunities for substantive conversations which benefited from parent knowledge (Pushor, 2022), while simultaneously creating shared experiences for [re]connecting with students’ curriculum learning and wellbeing.

The crucial importance of positive relationships reflects previous parent and community engagement research findings. On a macro level, for example, Willis, Povey et al. (2021) showed positive parent-teacher-school relationships were fundamental to creating and maintaining a supportive school climate and culture for engaging parents and communities. On a micro level, Willis (2013) found that building positive student-parent-teacher relationships engendered mutual respect and trust, providing a platform to actively engage parents in their child’s curriculum learning and wellbeing. Moreover, Jeynes’ (2023) meta-analysis of 76 quantitative studies which focused on the relationship between parents and their child indicated a statistically significant positive association with student academic and behavioural outcomes irrespective of students’ different backgrounds. The case studies contained in this report provide contemporary, detailed information and examples which may enable schools and teachers to create a climate and conditions conducive to establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement. The findings may prove particularly useful to schools wishing to [re]evaluate aspects of parent and community engagement in the new normal phase of living with COVID.

THE ROLE OF GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS IN CHAMPIONING PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Each school’s parent engagement leadership team (PELT) brought together a critical mass of people (i.e., between five and seven people in each team) who benefited from ongoing professional learning as they collaborated with one another as well as with other EPIC 2023 research schools. PELT members championed the work of parent and community engagement, frequently cataloguing the myriad opportunities they used to talk positively about the work of engaging parents and the community. These included formal and informal opportunities at the bus stop, staff meetings, board meetings, parent groups, family workshops, social gatherings, regional meetings of school leaders, and national conferences (see also Appendix 1). At the same time, each PELT was essentially a parent and community engagement action group as they [re]envisioned initiatives and spearheaded the work at micro, meso, and macro levels at their schools.

Key roles among the PELTs included: the parent representatives (i.e., PELT parents); PELT leaders; and formal, school-appointed parent and community engagement leaders. The PELT parents enriched the work of the teams through the insights, perspectives, opinions, and feedback on initiatives they provided during and between cogenerative dialogues with other PELT members. They also brought particular professional knowledge and skills which, combined with their knowledge of the school, families, and their own child/ren, appeared to enhance the effectiveness as well as the potential sustainability of parent and community engagement initiatives at the school.

The PELT leaders played a crucial role in helping set the tone and direction of the parent and community engagement work at their school, not least of which was their enthusiasm and motivation for the work. Importantly, they modelled the language and practice of parent and community engagement. Previous EPIC research participants (e.g., Schools A, C, and D participants) also played important leadership roles at their schools in continuing to embed a culture and practice of parent and community engagement. This included apprenticing teachers new to EPIC during cogenerative dialogues using inclusive practices (e.g., inviting them to speak about their ideas) and offering respectful suggestions and sharing examples especially in relation to engaging parents in their child’s classroom curriculum learning.

Two EPIC 2023 participants held formal, school-appointed leadership roles in parent and community engagement. Darlene was the Enrolments and Community Engagement Officer at School E (see Case Study 4) and George was the Family Liaison Officer at School J (see Case Study 8). In both cases their positions were new to the school. As PELT leaders, Darlene and George were instrumental in leading and coordinating the work of their PELTs. Participation in the

EPIC 2023 research therefore formalised early opportunities for them to work closely with school leaders, teachers, and parents to cogenerate ideas and initiatives as well as potential solutions to shared challenges/problems. Darlene and George separately reported the transformational impact of the EPIC research in helping them define their new roles, while simultaneously shaping their work in ways that reflected their school’s context and current and future needs. Importantly, each stressed the need to balance the pastoral care aspects of their role with a focus on working alongside teachers to support the work of engaging parents and the community in student curriculum learning and wellbeing.

All eight EPIC 2023 schools—irrespective of their time in the EPIC research—concluded the year with a positive frame of looking forward to continuing the work of engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing. Hence, there is merit for schools and others (e.g., education researchers) in further exploring a model of engaging parents and the community which involves a critical mass of diverse people with individuals who play different roles to lead the work.

The EPIC 2023 research findings also hold national significance when considered in view of the recent Senate Committee inquiry into *The national trend of school refusal and related matters* which made 14 recommendations. Recommendation 10 stated:

The committee recommends that state and territory education authorities and the non-government school sector work together to develop and promote stable and ongoing resources to support effective family engagement. This should include the provision of specialist family engagement support staff in schools. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023a, p. 125)

The dedicated school-appointed leadership positions in parent and community engagement at Schools E and J provide examples of “specialist family engagement support staff” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023a, p. 125). Case Studies 4 and 8 afford an understanding of how these roles can be defined, what they might entail, and insights into the ways these specialist leadership roles can help establish and sustain a culture and practice of parent and community engagement in different school contexts. Although a handful of examples of similar roles were unearthed in related parent and community engagement research (e.g., Povey et al., 2019), contemporary detailed case studies which feature such roles are rare.

Practice

LISTENING PEDAGOGIES: BEING IN DIALOGUE WITH PARENTS

Further to the findings above, members of the PELTs demonstrated shifts in parent and community engagement practice towards pedagogies of listening (Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b). Beyond privileging the voices of the PELT parents in cogenerative dialogues, examples included: opening up more opportunities for dialogic (two-way) exchange with parents; restructuring typical school/ classroom sessions involving parents (e.g., information evenings, orientation days, family workshops) to enable more meaningful, relevant opportunities for discussions and interactions (e.g., parent-child, parent-teacher, parent-parent, parent-expert); and conducting listening tours in distance education settings.

The idea of listening to parents was also reflected in pedagogic practices which involved information and data gathering. Informal micro-level examples of practice included when teachers developed surveys with students to send to parents about an aspect of the curriculum (e.g., favourite past television shows). Formal meso-level examples included inviting parents to join an advisory or focus group to understand and learn more about their experience of some aspect of parent and community engagement. Formal macro-level examples included using digital technology programs and applications to gather more discrete data to ascertain how aspects of learning and teaching may be working or improved for students and parents such as in distance education settings.

Thus, pedagogies of listening were reflected in practices that enabled or suggested being in dialogue with parents in order to learn how to engage them more effectively in their child’s learning and wellbeing. As indicated above, participants described their approaches as more intentional and targeted. Yet, the principles of dialogic (two-way) exchange—such as those underpinning cogenerative dialogues—have endless application as shown by the number of different listening practices highlighted in this and previous EPIC reports (see Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a). Accordingly, participants in the EPIC 2023 research indicated they either used or planned to use the information or data gathered from listening to parents to continually shape their future practices and improve school processes.

ALIGNING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES WITH A PHILOSOPHY AND PEDAGOGY OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The need for digital technology programs and systems sympathetic to the work of parent and community engagement also emerged as an EPIC 2023 research finding. Allied to the notion of listening as pedagogic practice and creating a climate and conditions conducive to the work, this finding reflects the increasing reliance of schools and the community on digital technologies for student learning and communication purposes. Participants thus signalled an emerging imperative for schools and teachers to utilise and develop digital technology platforms and programs not only aligned with a philosophy and pedagogy of parent and community engagement, but also capable of enhancing this work.

Dusi and Addi-Racah (2022) emphasised the need to balance the multitude opportunities for parents to engage in their child’s learning and wellbeing which were accelerated by COVID-19 through the advent of new learning technologies, against the potential risks. They wrote:

... the relationship between parents and schools/teachers does not exist in a vacuum, but rather forms part of an ecosystem. In this context, policymakers, school leaders, and the wider community all play an essential role in promoting responsibility sharing and reciprocal support on the part of schools and families. (Dusi & Addi-Racah, 2022, p. 19)

The EPIC 2023 research findings raise two implications. First, the findings draw attention to the need to exploit digital technologies for engaging parents and the community, while simultaneously guarding against the risk of compromising the relational component essential for this work. In other words, there is a need to balance what and how digital technologies are deployed with the need for continual personal connections. Second, there is a risk of missing the opportunity of capitalising on the environment in the new normal phase of living with COVID that seems more conducive than previously to enabling student-parent-teacher-school co-responsibility for student learning and wellbeing. The case studies in this report (e.g., Case Study 4) together with the parent and community engagement literature (e.g., Willis, 2013), highlight the idea of co-responsibility where there is a sense of shared ownership for student learning and wellbeing among education stakeholders. These include: aspects of student learning (e.g., setting learning goals); the learning environment (e.g., coordinating opportunities for student and/or parent voice); and the curriculum (e.g., enabling suggestions to improve enactment) (Willis, 2013). Given that digital technologies is a dynamic area that is subject to constant change, the opportunities and risks of establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement in the new normal phase of living with COVID deserve continued focused attention. Although these findings are particularly relevant in distance education settings, they are equally relevant to all schools and systems.

Theory

A TIGHTLY-KNIT THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As indicated previously, EPIC research projects are underpinned by a philosophy and pedagogy for engaging parents and communities in student learning and wellbeing that uses four interrelated concepts:

- Engaging parents (parent and community engagement)
- Inquiry curriculum
- Affinity spaces
- Cogenerative dialogues.

These thinking tools or EPIC Pillars (Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) which make up EPIC’s theoretical framework are each informed by education research—an aspect about which the EPIC 2023 participants often commented gave strength to the research and their commitment to participation. Together, the EPIC Pillars equipped the PELTs with concepts to describe, explain, and enhance their knowledge, understanding, and practice of parent and community engagement. The versatility of the EPIC Pillars is demonstrated in the widely different parent and community engagement journeys of the EPIC 2023 research schools, showing how each PELT successfully used theory to inform practice and vice versa. In other words, the PELTs used the EPIC Pillars to enable an iterative theory-practice cycle that facilitated continuous professional growth and school improvement in their context.

Hence, EPIC’s theoretical framework represents an organic, responsive, innovative approach which supports what Pushor (2018) asserts is needed in education as a “gentle revolution”. Pushor’s (2018) idea of engaging parents and the community in students’ learning and wellbeing combines parent and teacher/school knowledge to improve student and school outcomes. The strength of EPIC’s theoretical underpinnings is therefore the capacity to create lasting sustainable change without radically overhauling schools, but rather allowing schools and participants to identify areas of focus to [re] conceptualise existing pedagogies, practices, and processes. As shown in the case studies in this and previous EPIC reports (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a), schools and participants often made small shifts in practice which they said maximised their usual efforts to bring parents and the community closer to students’ learning and wellbeing. Equally, the findings showed that knowing and understanding the EPIC Pillars affirmed the effectiveness of existing practices and processes for some schools and participants. This affirmation conferred what some participants described as a sense of permission to talk more openly about what they do and why. At the same time, participants said it renewed their commitment to continue, reinforce, and extend their existing parent and community engagement practices and processes.

The findings are significant for school systems, leaders, and communities. Early career teachers who understand the importance and value of parent and community

engagement from their ITE programs, may need professional space and active encouragement to explore parent and community engagement opportunities in their context. This approach would assist them to implement their developing understanding of parent and community engagement, while simultaneously building a repertoire of effective practices. Similarly, opening up collaborative spaces for experienced teachers who effectively engage parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing would enable them to share stories of success, evidence of impact, and professional benefits with colleagues and the school community.

MACRO, MESO, MICRO: POWERFUL FRAMES FOR TRANSFORMING PRACTICE, THEORY, AND RESEARCH

The idea of macro (school), meso (groups of teachers), and micro (classroom) level frames was introduced in the EPIC 2023 research. The EPIC research participants easily recognised and applied these frames throughout the research. Hence, the frames became a normal way for participants to describe and explain what they did and why which enabled them to articulate the nature and complexity of their work with clarity and precision. This proved especially useful as participants shifted in and out and between frames.

Incorporating the frames into the suite of EPIC concepts also assisted with data analysis and theorisation, supporting and enhancing the conceptual work of the EPIC Pillars and other pedagogic frameworks such as the Parent Engagement S-S-O-O-P-P Framework (pronounced soup) (Willis & Exley, 2022). For example, the EPIC Pillar of engaging parents and the community can be understood from the perspective of school (macro), PELT (meso), and each PELT member (micro) levels. So too, cogenerative dialogues about parent and community engagement which occurred at: school or macro level (e.g., metalogues between PELTs and the researchers; masterclasses); PELT or meso level (e.g., formal cogenerative dialogues among PELT members); and two or three people or micro level (e.g., informal chats, brief exchanges, or mini-gens [Willis, 2016; Willis et al., 2014]). The Parent Engagement S-S-O-O-P-P Framework (Willis & Exley, 2022) can also be applied and interpreted using macro, meso, and micro level frames. In the EPIC 2023 research, PELT participants identified and/or created opportunities across all three levels that were: **short** and **sharp** (e.g., the adoption of an inquiry disposition or approach using inquiry questions and provocations); **often** and **optional** (e.g., the use of invitations and conversations); and **purposeful** and **personalised** (e.g., simultaneously connected to the curriculum and families). These theoretical findings give further confidence in the strength of the philosophy, principles, practices, and processes underpinning the research. It is possible to suggest the implications for establishing and sustaining a culture and practice of parent and community engagement may be far reaching, encompassing micro (school) and meso (school clusters) levels, and extending to macro (school systems) levels.

Methodology

THE ACCELERATOR EFFECT OF LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH

EPIC research projects (e.g., Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) use a design-based research (DBR) approach (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bell, 2004; Brown, 1912; Papavlasopoulou et al., 2019; The Design-Based Collective, 2003). The longitudinal nature of the EPIC 2023 research benefited participants who were able to build on the foundation of the previous two years (i.e., EPIC 2021–2022). Participants had access to comprehensive reports that included richly detailed case studies and illustrations of practice complemented by a suite of videos in which previous EPIC participants positively reflected on their different experiences of engaging parents and the community. EPIC 2023 participants also had access to a repository of teaching and research materials curated on a Microsoft SharePoint® site which included a blog space where participants, the researchers, and EPIC 2023 Project Coordinator Ms Amanda Watt (ISQ), often posted updates from schools and the research. Two masterclasses—one in March and the other in September—brought the eight EPIC 2023 PELTs together to listen and learn from one another. These opportunities focused attention on the research as well as enabled participants to talk about their parent and community engagement journeys, experiences, challenges, successes, and future plans. The masterclasses were designed to reflect the inclusive, collaborative principles and processes underpinning cogenerative dialogues. The participants commended the approach taken in the masterclasses where they learnt about the theory and practice of parent and community engagement through exercises designed to help them experience the pedagogy of dialoguing cogeneratively for themselves. They also indicated that hearing research anecdotes from past iterations of EPIC and first-hand accounts from school leaders in their third year of the research had a powerful effect on their understanding of parent and community engagement. The design of the EPIC 2023 research thus meant that even schools new to EPIC benefited from what some described as exponential learning. The diversity of schools involved also accelerated the participants’ learning through the critical awareness and professional insights they gained of disparate contexts, variations in practice, and the range and kinds of challenges which can impact parent and community engagement.

COGENERATIVE DIALOGUES AND EXTERNAL EXPERTS: A POTENT COMBINATION

Regular cogenerative dialogues among PELT members and between PELTs and the researchers were designed to continue the cogenerativity (Willis, 2016) of the EPIC 2023 research project. PELT members used words such as “electric” (Lorelei, Assistant Head of Junior School, School I, Interview 2) and phrases such as “spilling out ideas” (Vincent, Classroom Teacher, School G, Interview 2) to describe the positive experience of brainstorming cogenerative dialogues (see Willis, 2013). The findings shine light on the pivotal role of the PELT leaders in facilitating cogenerative dialogues. They also bring the role of the researchers as external experts into sharp relief. Although regularly scheduled online cogenerative dialogues represented an innovative, convenient mechanism for data collection, these opportunities also provided a structure which enabled PELT members’ ongoing participation and continual professional learning. The researchers did not tell participants what to do or provide advice *per se*, rather they adopted a “we’re-here-to-think-out-loud-with-you” approach. In particular, the researchers worked with participants in ways that took account of their different experiences and needs. Mapp et al. (2022) noted that engaging parents and the community is “dynamic” and “changing” and looks different across a child’s K–12 learning journey (p. 75). Accordingly, schools and teachers need different ways of thinking about, and developing strategies for, engaging parents and the community in student learning and wellbeing in the early years compared to the senior secondary years (Jensen & Minke, 2017). The EPIC 2023 research participants benefited from working with external experts who brought in-the-moment knowledge, materials, ideas, and examples bespoke to the needs of each PELT/ PELT member to maximise the cogenerative dialoguing process for planning and clarifying ideas and future actions. At the same time, the researchers connected each PELT with current international and local research findings that became available throughout the research as well as emerging findings from the work of the other PELTs. This aspect of the researchers’ role not only reinforced the sense of collaboration among the eight participating schools, but also accelerated the knowledge generation process that occurred throughout the EPIC 2023 research. External experts therefore have a critical role to play in helping to establish and sustain a culture and practice of parent and community engagement in student learning and wellbeing in all spheres of education. This may include collaboratively: developing courses for ITE programs or postgraduate degrees; facilitating programs for school leaders, teachers, parents, and communities; working with schools or school clusters as resident experts; working with internal school experts such as parent liaison officers; and working with curriculum developers and public policy makers in education. It follows that further research on such initiatives would support long-term, systems-wide, sustainable change in the culture and practice of parent and community engagement.

LIMITATIONS

The EPIC 2023 research was deliberately designed to focus on school leadership teams that included parents. Of the 55 participants in the research, 22 were principals or school leaders, four held administrative school roles, and nine were parent representatives. Hence, the research features mostly macro-level examples of parent and community engagement, while the number of participants who were classroom teachers limited data collection of micro-level examples. In addition, despite the diversity of the PELTs not all areas of each school were represented in the teams, further limiting the findings and conclusions which can be drawn.

The parent representatives on the PELTs were each actively involved in their school communities. Most PELT parents were also staff members or in leadership roles on the school board or P&C (or equivalent), affording them access to what could be described as *insider* knowledge. Their dual roles often benefited the PELT as they networked with others in the school or community and seamlessly enacted cogenerated ideas and decisions of the team. Nevertheless, some participants suggested that PELTs could benefit from the input of a more diverse range of parent voices. This aspect may have limited the findings of the 2023 research and needs consideration in future similar investigations.

The different roles and responsibilities of the PELT members together with the dynamic environment of schools and the PELT parents’ various outside commitments, sometimes affected possibilities of finding mutually-convenient times for whole-group meetings. Meeting online or a small number of PELT members gathering if others could not attend mostly afforded flexible solutions. However, some participants highlighted the challenge for some parents (e.g., parents working fulltime outside of the school) and teachers (e.g., specialist teaching staff for whom finding replacement staff is difficult) of meeting in and around school times when most PELT meetings and research days such as the masterclasses were held. At times, these constraints affected possibilities or slowed cogeneration of ideas and decisions among PELT members which in turn may have affected or delayed opportunities for research data collection. It follows that these factors warrant specific consideration in planning, designing, and implementing future similar research projects.

CONCLUSION

The vision of achieving widespread, lasting sustainable change in the culture and practice of parent and community engagement is closer as a result of the EPIC 2023 research. The findings in this and previous reports (Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) produced from longitudinal EPIC research (2021-2023) in Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) member schools, provide a window into the ways stakeholders such as schools, school leaders, teachers, parents, communities, universities, and industry partners can collaborate to precipitate, cultivate, and accelerate the realisation of this vision. The body of work produced over the last three years is particularly significant given data were generated at a time which afforded critical insights into the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic up to the current new normal phase of living with COVID. The findings presented in the case studies and overall findings in knowledge, practice, theory, and methodology now invite further exploration in relation to how they may be applied more broadly in education systems locally and internationally. Certainly, the EPIC 2023 participants expressed confidence in the possibilities of this work to effect lasting sustainable change in engaging parents and communities in student learning and wellbeing. Hazel stated,

The EPIC 2023 research comes from the word *priority*. Through sharing the work with others, we can build more strength for the purpose of prioritising parent and community engagement in Australia and other countries. I’m excited for the potential of this research because if everyone is engaging parents and the community, we can really change education. (Specialist Teacher, School G, Interview 2)

Ava said, “Once schools start to see how beneficial parent and community engagement is, engaging parents and the community as a way of thinking and working will take off like wildfire” (Principal, School A, Interview 2).

Jill concluded,

The EPIC research has had such a powerful impact upon the way that I think about parents. I’m so incredibly grateful for that because it’s shifted my practice and it’s shifting practice in the school, which is good for everyone. . . . Some of the most beautiful feedback I’ve received was from one parent who said that what the school has done to engage them in their child’s learning and wellbeing has opened the door for conversations with their child that they’ve never had before. (Principal, School C, Cogen 7)



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Appendix 1

C-H-A-N-G-E Framework—EPIC Engaging Parents In Curriculum



C-H-A-N-G-E Framework

EPIC - Engaging Parents in Curriculum



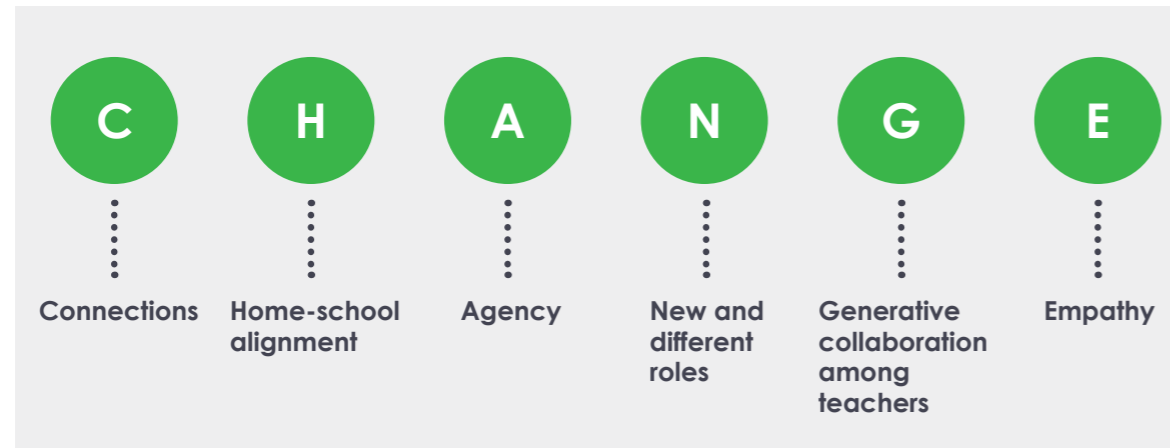
Connections



EPIC Research Snapshots

Establishing and sustaining parent and community engagement and impact: Research-informed practices

The Parent Engagement C-H-A-N-G-E Framework (Willis & Exley, 2020) documents research-informed practices from Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) research for schools and teachers wishing to establish and sustain parent and community engagement in student learning. The framework comprises six interconnected themes: **C**onnections, **H**ome-school alignment, **A**gency, **N**ew and different roles, **G**enerative collaboration, and **E**mpathy. The C-H-A-N-G-E Framework can be used at the *macro* level of school processes and policies, the *meso* level of teaching and leadership teams, and the *micro* level of the classroom. Previous research (Willis & Exley, 2022; Willis, Exley, & Daffurn, 2021a) highlighted how the framework assists teachers and school leaders to integrate parent engagement in the design and delivery of curriculum.



Notes

The Engaging Parents in Curriculum (EPIC) researchers use the term, **parents**, to describe a child's biological parents or significant others such as carers, family members, and Elders responsible for a student's health, wellbeing, and education.

Volunteers will need to satisfy official requirements to work with children (e.g., the Blue Card requirements which operate in Queensland). Schools can offer opportunities (e.g., a short course relevant to their context) for parents/ community members to become volunteers at the school.

The term, **community**, describes formal and informal connections and relationships with individuals, groups, organisations, and businesses within and outside schools which increase opportunities and provide resources and support to enhance student learning and wellbeing.

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EPIC Research Snapshots

Connections is about contact and communication to establish and sustain open, trusting home-school relationships.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
C1 Encourage positive, respectful relationships with parents through formal/informal school channels and parent-led social channels (e.g., Facebook groups).	Open the relationship bank account early—including before students commence school (e.g., playgroups, family library mornings, parent spaces, assemblies, activity days) and build positive relationships as students and families progress through the school. Have processes in place for new school families who join outside typical transition points.
C2 Regularly communicate to parents and staff the benefits of engaging parents for students, families, teachers, schools, and communities.	Use relevant research findings and illustrations of practice to open conversations about the importance of engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing.
C3 Use the language of engagement in communication with parents including school frameworks, policy documents, and curriculum overviews.	Engagement language is welcoming, invitational, inclusive, and respects parents' different situations. It refers to parents and teachers as partners, learning journey companions, and working together as a team.
C4 Coordinate what, how, and when parents receive information from the school and/or teachers.	For example, send one email to the school/classroom community at a set time each day/week. Where appropriate, apply digital filters so information for a specific group of parents is not sent to the whole school. Ensure teachers know about sessions hosted for parents, and if relevant, free up time for teachers to attend.
C5 Discuss with teachers and parents communication protocols that foster consistency in content, style, volume, frequency, and timing across the school/year levels.	Adopt universal practices in relation to: classrooms (e.g., teachers are always inviting parents in; the door is always open), student diaries, emails, contact times, digital platforms (e.g., Seesaw*), and parent-led social channels.
C6 Set up a central source of information such as the school newsletter or Learning Management System for official communication relevant to the school community.	Integrate digital technology and human systems so the central source of information provides a single point of truth (e.g., one not multiple calendars of school activities). Select important information from the central source to disseminate to parents/school community using a range of different digital platforms (e.g., school website, social media sites). Encourage any parent-led social channels to refer to the school's central information source.
C7 Adopt interactive, personal forms of communication where possible.	Use video newsletters or innovative formats such as a school radio station to enable interactivity between school/staff, parents, and students. Invite families to assemblies and informal gatherings (e.g., coffee mornings, family picnics) to facilitate teacher-to-parent and parent-to-parent interactions.
C8 Encourage a culture of openness, transparency, and trust by establishing processes for collecting, analysing, and responding to parent feedback.	Establish ways of working that enable continuous feedback loops. For example, provide regular updates about responses to parent feedback in the school newsletter.
C9 Regularly gather data from parents, students, and staff about different communication practices and the nature and quality of communication for engaging parents in their child's learning and wellbeing.	Generate data using surveys, audits, focus groups, advisory groups, school blogs, social media, and personal conversations. Review the findings together with parents, students, and staff (e.g., ask What's working? What are the complexities and challenges? What can be improved?).



Connections

Home-school alignment



Home-school alignment is about continuing and expanding learning at school in the home environment.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
H1 Develop Term Overviews using parent-friendly language which detail learning areas, curriculum foci, assessment tasks, and suggested ideas/questions for parents to support their child's learning and wellbeing.	For consistency of practice across year levels and learning areas, make Term Overviews available as early as possible each Term and digitally pin them to the top of parent email lists or social media feeds.
H2 Create a dynamic record of parents' expertise, interests, and willingness/availability to contribute to curriculum areas and topics.	Gather information from parents systematically and securely such as during enrolment interviews, when Term Overviews are made available, transition points (e.g., as students move into Prep, Primary, Junior, Secondary years), and when onboarding new students (all year levels).
H3 Embed parent engagement throughout curriculum design and planning.	Use the C-H-A-N-G-E Framework to highlight opportunities for engaging parents in year-level curriculum unit plans.
H4 Invite parents into the classroom to talk with their child about what they're learning.	Offer regular classroom Sneak Peeks where students show their parents a portfolio of their learning. Provide suggested questions for parents to ask their child while they look at the portfolio together.
H5 Legitimise conversations about aspects of the curriculum in the home environment by inviting parents to discuss relevant experiences, stories, ideas, perspectives, life lessons, and opinions with their child.	Invite parents to participate in their child's learning and wellbeing using the S-S-O-O-P-P Framework (pronounced soup): short, sharp, often, optional, purposeful, and personalised to parents and their child (Willis & Exley, 2022). Email parents with suggested topics and/or questions for dinner table conversations. Let older students develop their own questions to email to their parents (e.g., Have you ever faced a moral dilemma? What was it? What happened?).
H6 Close the loop by asking students to share and/or show their peers (with permission) what their parents talked about at home or wrote in emails in response to invitations from them or the teacher.	Share parent responses to curriculum questions on a secure shared platform where all students have access. Allow students to discuss the responses, compare/contrast ideas, draw conclusions, generate further questions, and explore the value of hearing from parents.
H7 Encourage teachers to continually build their portfolio of knowledge and practice in parent engagement.	Create a secure repository of curriculum resources (e.g., video clips, photographs, artefacts) from parents/community members to use (with permission) in subsequent years with different classes.
H8 Recognise the power of literacy to engage students and parents in curriculum learning and wellbeing beyond the classroom.	Examples include: sharing stories (e.g., life happenings, memories, connections to people/places); oral/written histories (e.g., family ancestors, heraldry); Storybook Reads with family members; Show and Share opportunities; family library mornings; and intergenerational projects.
H9 Spend time with individual teachers to talk with them personally about parent engagement and brainstorm ideas about how they might engage parents/community in the curriculum.	Share examples of teachers engaging parents in the curriculum with others including the school community (e.g., feature a Classroom in the Spotlight in the school newsletter and/or on social media channels).



Agency



Agency is about recognising the nature and value of parent agency for building the capacity of their child to participate actively in their own learning.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
A1 Use formal and informal opportunities to highlight the reciprocal relationship between student and parent agency for enhancing student learning and wellbeing.	Speak often about the unique role of parents in their child's life. Incorporate language that reflects this uniqueness (e.g., parents are a child's first and lifelong teachers; children belong to families). Use research findings and videos to show how engaging parents increases student agency to further their own learning and wellbeing.
A2 Develop teachers' understanding about the delineation between <i>involving</i> and <i>engaging</i> parents. Highlight how involving focuses on the relationship between the school and parents as passive recipients, whereas engaging focuses on the relationship between parents and their child's learning and wellbeing as active recipients.	Schedule professional learning sessions focused on parent engagement. Create a dynamic display (physically/virtually) about what parent engagement is and what it isn't. Include drawings, pictures, photographs, anecdotes, stories, artefacts (e.g., emails). Critically discuss activities and pedagogical practices for engaging parents at your school.
A3 Rethink parent involvement activities through the lens of parent engagement to increase student and parent agency for enhanced curriculum learning and wellbeing.	Use graphic organisers (e.g., <i>Frayer Model</i> , <i>T & Y-charts</i>) or a continuum with involvement and engagement at opposite ends (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) to explore how conceptual and pedagogical shifts can enhance student and parent agency in your school's context.
A4 Include parent engagement as a standing item on formal meeting agendas for teachers, school leaders, staff and/or parents. Place this item in a prominent position on the agenda to highlight its value as an integral part of practice.	Use staff and/or parent meetings (e.g., Parents & Friends Association) to strengthen knowledge and affirm parent engagement practice. Share information; discuss fallacious thinking and assumptions (e.g., that engaging parents is about parents telling teachers what to do); celebrate shared learning between home and the classroom; explore how teaching and teacher satisfaction are enriched.
A5 Strategise ways to draw upon existing resources and networks available to parents and students which support curriculum learning and teaching.	Resources can include human (e.g., knowledge) and material resources. Connections can include formal/informal relationships with past/present families, community members, government agencies, organisations, industries, and businesses.
A6 Start with the curriculum and invite significant others with relevant knowledge and expertise to partner with you and your students in the learning and teaching journey.	Significant others can include parents, grandparents, family members, Indigenous Elders, and community members who accept invitations to become subject matter experts, artists in residence, and coteachers in curriculum planning and delivery.
A7 Create videos to show what happens in the home environment when parents open conversations about the curriculum using inquiry questions provided by teachers.	Video parents using a list of inquiry questions provided by the teacher to initiate conversations with their child. Highlight how parents draw on specific knowledge of their child (e.g., experiences, interests, connections, curiosity) to contextualise the curriculum in the home environment.
A8 Facilitate parent agency to support their child's learning and wellbeing as early as possible.	For example, turn early years observation days into practical workshops where parents interact with staff (e.g., school psychologist) and health professionals to prepare them for their child's next learning phase.
A9 Facilitate teachers' pedagogical practices for engaging parents through conversations which encourage mindfulness and intentionality about the nature and value of parent agency.	Some questions to discuss: If parents attend a school event, what will we do to engage them? What's important to parents? How can we help parents to see the part they play in building a relationship with their child through the curriculum? How can we engage with parents as partners in their child's learning and wellbeing journey?



New and different roles



New and different roles is about formal and informal positions and parts school and community personnel can play to respond to recognised and emerging needs in your school context to support parent engagement.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
N1 Create formal leadership positions on staff with a dedicated focus on parent/community engagement (e.g., Parent Engagement Officer/Coordinator, Head of Family Engagement, Parent Engagement Worker).	Suitably qualified personnel for parent engagement roles can include school leaders, teachers, and parents with deep knowledge of the school and curriculum and recognised skills for working collaboratively with parents/communities (consider city/country communities in distance education). Continually review such roles to ensure the work involved is supported by the resources available (e.g., time, personnel).
N2 Recognise the role of advocacy in promoting a culture and pedagogy of parent engagement. Think of advocacy as gently opening a conversation about parent engagement.	Ask questions such as: Are parents at the table? Where are the opportunities for parent voice? How do parent engagement plans connect to student learning and wellbeing? Use parent engagement research to talk with others about what you do and why – formally/informally (e.g., professional learning sessions; curriculum planning days; school leader, faculty, heads of department meetings; parent evenings, activity days; conference presentations; academic/professional publications; local newspapers; buddy schools; hallway, carpark, coffee shop chats).
N3 Allow students, parents, and community members to take up particular and varied roles in ways that work for them.	Students, parents, and community members may: coteach aspects of the curriculum (sport, camps, classroom); facilitate educational workshops, family-support groups, family/staff camps; co-lead playgroups; co-write grant proposals; compose music for performances; co-design/make sets, props, costumes; collaborate on projects (e.g., community gardens).
N4 Encourage school leaders and teachers to become parent engagement researchers.	Collaboratively explore ways to evaluate the sustainability and impact of parent engagement initiatives/practices on: student learning, behaviour, attendance, retention, and teacher satisfaction/workload. Discuss research design, data collection, analysis, findings, and implications.
N5 Enable parents to play active roles alongside the school/teachers in helping their child make decisions about their learning journey.	For senior secondary school subject selection, for example, use three-way conferences. Provide a guide to scaffold productive conversations between students and parents at home. Encourage critical reflection about what further information/tools students might need. Three-way conferences invite parents to dialogue with their child and the school which fosters a sense of co-responsibility for the student's learning.
N6 Use appropriate metaphors to describe and explain the roles teachers and parents play in creating a culture of engaging parents.	Examples include dot connectors and weavers which describe how teachers and parents connect the dots to people and/or curriculum and weave information and ideas throughout groups and from place to place.
N7 Set up a Networker Supporters' Group for the purpose of engaging parents.	The group's focus might include activities and strategies for networking with others and facilitating parent engagement in the curriculum.
N8 Work with Parent Advisors who volunteer to coordinate initiatives proposed and organised by other parents to connect families socially as well as to student learning and wellbeing.	Recognise the need of families for social connections especially distance education families. Parent Advisors may assist to organise initiatives run by parents of the school for families in different locations/regions as well as families in different education settings (e.g., homeschooling).
N9 Regularly consult/liase with parents about relevant aspects of the school, parent engagement, and student learning and wellbeing.	Invite parents to form an advisory group or create other suitable forums which allow the school to gather information securely (e.g., feedback, suggestions, advice) from parents. Use the information to: test opinions and hunches about what's happening; generate new data; and build a more complete picture at macro, meso, and micro levels.

EPIC Research Snapshots



New and different roles

Generative collaboration among teachers



Generative collaboration is about interactive social spaces into which school leaders, teachers, parents and students enter to understand and learn more about engaging parents in their school context.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
G1 Form a group of parent engagement champions such as a Parent Engagement Leadership Team (PELT) with representatives from across the school. Use cogenerative dialoguing protocols to encourage productive conversations among group members (Willis, 2013; Willis & Exley, 2020, 2022; Willis et al., 2021).	Encourage diversity in the PELT (e.g., school leaders from different areas of the school; teachers from different year levels or those who teach day students or online students; parents of primary and secondary students; parents in different locations; staff in specialist roles such as parent and community engagement, pastoral care/wellbeing, marketing/communication). Discuss key roles and goals for the group.
G2 Schedule regular times that all parent engagement champions can attend in-person and/or virtually to dialogue cogeneratively about parent engagement.	Safeguard meeting times of parent engagement champions from possible disruptions (e.g., clashes with teaching commitments). Be flexible when members cannot attend regular meetings (e.g., parent engagement buddies might catch up at other times to talk about the group's work). Create opportunities for members to contribute between meetings (e.g., use an online collaboration platform such as Miro board).
G3 At the curriculum planning stage, invite parents/community members to cogenerate with teachers about avenues for input. Adopt horizontal and vertical approaches that tap into parent/community interest/expertise at class, year, or school levels.	Share curriculum ideas (e.g., inquiry questions) and resources (e.g., parent surveys/results) with colleagues. Form communities of learners horizontally and/or vertically (e.g., year-level colleagues teaching the same subject or teaching the same students in different subjects; colleagues teaching particular subjects across different year levels).
G4 Year level teachers cogenerate to reflect on the parent and community engagement initiatives connected to a unit of work.	Discuss suggestions for engagement at the end of term to gauge: what ideas were helpful; how ideas were taken up; benefits for students/parents/teachers; and ways to improve future planning documents.
G5 Recognise the power of 'word of mouth' to generate a positive ripple effect about: how the school values parents; benefits of engaging parents; impactful parent engagement practices; and the work of parent engagement champions.	Take opportunities to discuss with colleagues about parent engagement or what parent engagement champions are doing (e.g., aims, current initiatives). Help colleagues to understand that engaging parents is not something that needs to be scary or big, but often involves gentle shifts in existing practice (e.g., a short, regular message rather than big events).
G6 Set up academic conversations with day/boarding students to build their agency for enhanced learning and wellbeing. Academic conversations use student data to discuss: progress in different subjects, observable trends, possible strategies to use, and available support.	Let parents know about upcoming academic conversations and explain their purpose. Talk with students about their data. Discuss what's working well, what they'd like to improve, strategies they can adopt (e.g., asking questions more in class). Help students action their plans (e.g., email tutorial teachers with the student if they don't feel confident). Encourage parents to talk with their child throughout the process.
G7 Host periodic gatherings of alumni students and families for the purpose of keeping conversations going with them about connecting with the school and staying involved.	Collaboratively discuss how alumni might contribute to student learning and wellbeing through: participating in school celebrations; facilitating workshops; giving guest speeches; providing career guidance; and becoming co-collaborators with students on inquiry projects.
G8 Use on/off campus and online places and spaces to encourage generative collaboration among parents.	Libraries, virtual rooms, community centres (e.g., museums, art galleries), a Family Resource Centre, and meetings of parent groups (e.g., Parents & Friends Association, Friends of the Arts) afford spaces for cogenerative dialogues about student learning and wellbeing.
G9 Encourage positive relationships through dialogic conversations focused on student learning and wellbeing among students, families, and teachers.	Invite parents into listening and learning conversations about aspects of student learning and wellbeing. Create conducive environments for substantive conversations between parents and their child (e.g., a pancake morning or philosophy café).

EPIC Research Snapshots



Generative collaboration among teachers

Empathy



Empathy is about parents, students, teachers, and schools recognising and respecting how the diverse perspectives and circumstances of others can influence possibilities and opportunities for agency and engagement.

Practices	Suggestions and examples
E1 Encourage a listening pedagogy at macro, meso, and micro levels.	Conduct listening tours with different groups of parents (e.g., meet in different locations/regions to accommodate boarding or distance education families). Gather information formally/informally about what parents say are harder issues to navigate with their child (e.g., safe technology use). Onboarding sessions could include opportunities to listen to parents, for parents to connect with one another, and for parents to connect with their child.
E2 Shift from a school/teacher perspective to a parent/family perspective. Family dynamics, childcare, travel distance, ability to join online, and duration/timing of events all affect possibilities of parent engagement. Think about the shift like adjusting a camera lens.	Interrogate documents, processes, and systems designed for parents to use and understand with your parent hat on. Ask: Is the document user-friendly? Is the process clear and simple? What support do parents need to navigate curriculum change or new systems? Have we made the invitation for parents to engage explicit?
E3 Recognise the effects since 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic on families which continue to impact life, work, and study. Equally recognise the power of positive relationships to enable parent/community engagement and support individual and collective wellbeing.	Envision ways for school communities to connect emotionally and engender a sense of belonging. Facilitate more parent engagement opportunities through discussion (face-to-face/online) (e.g., incorporate stories of the school's history/culture; invite parents and students to reminisce about their school experiences; ask students, parents, teachers to share their hopes and dreams for themselves, one another, and the world).
E4 Support parents and students who are new to learn about the school and connect with others.	Buddy new parents with existing parents who volunteer to support new families. Having parent buddies for all year levels (K–12) (at least one per year level) ensures parents of students who enrol outside typical transition points also learn about the school and can connect with others.
E5 Consider ways to support parents with changes in the curriculum, service delivery models, operating systems, and new digital technologies.	Develop short videos to support parents to manage changes at the school which affect them/their child. Hold regular online parent sessions which provide personalised technical support. Include information on the school website to address frequently asked questions from parents or set up a school News Desk, Distance Education Diary, or a school radio station.
E6 Design parent engagement activities that don't add more to teacher workloads, but do things differently in ways that everyone benefits.	If the activity involves busy work such as catering, collecting RSVPs, picking up resources from the museum, or going to the local creek to photograph new foliage, invite parents to be involved. Over time, you'll get a good sense of what's possible.
E7 Discuss with parents the pros/cons of different forms of communication/digital platforms for facilitating engagement in their child's learning and wellbeing.	Work with parents to make decisions about fit-for-purpose forms of communication and technology to support engagement in their child's learning across the years of school (K–12). Be consistent across the years of schooling. This helps parents with two or more children of different ages.
E8 Recognise that schools are complex organisations and parents have to collaborate with many different people (e.g., school leaders, teachers, auxiliary staff, parents, students).	As you seek to engage parents, ensure all the school staff know about the initiatives so they can promote them positively. Create measures so staff can see demonstrable outcomes of parent engagement initiatives.
E9 Recognise that parents and families may be influenced by their own experiences of school which can impact possibilities of engagement.	Parents and families appreciate schools/teachers who show professionalism, respect, care, and compassion and invite them to engage in their child's learning in simple, authentic, and practical ways.

EPIC Research Snapshots

E

Empathy

C-H-A-N-G-E Framework EPIC - Engaging Parents in Curriculum



EPIC Research Snapshots

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Appendix 3

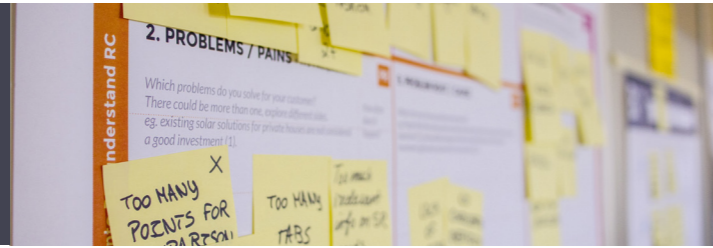
Glossary of Terms



TERM	DEFINITION
Affinity space	An affinity space may be physical and virtual. These spaces extend possibilities for learning and connecting within and beyond traditional classrooms (Gee, 2004). An example of a physical affinity space is a school library where students, parents, and teachers meet to read together (Exley et al., 2024). An example of a virtual affinity space is the use of digital applications such as Seesaw® to enable students, parents, and teachers to share information and photographs and/or comment on aspects of a child's learning (e.g., Exley et al., 2017; Willis & Exley, 2018, 2022).
Cogenerative dialogues or cogens	Cogenerative dialogues or cogens (short version) refer to collaborative social spaces which support substantive conversations among participants (e.g., school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and researchers) who share similar goals for student learning and/or teachers' professional development (Willis, 2013). These conversations enable participants to: better understand and explain aspects of learning and teaching, clarify ideas, develop plans, and make decisions about future individual and/or collective actions. They are characterised by inclusive, respectful practices designed to minimise traditional barriers to participation such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, profession, qualifications, or educational background (LaVan, 2004; Shakhovskoy, 2021; Tatum, 2017; Willis, 2013).
Cogenerativity	The idea of cogenerativity comes from the work of cogenerative dialogues. The concept describes the process where understanding and ideas continue and expand as individuals in a community of learners interact with others (Willis, 2016). As long as the community of learners operates, the continuation and expansion of understanding and ideas is potentially indefinite (Willis, Grimmer et al., 2018).
Co-responsibility	The notion of co-responsibility refers to partners in education such as teachers and parents playing different but equally important roles in sharing responsibility for a child's learning and wellbeing (Willis, 2013).
Engaging parents	Engaging parents refers to the process of bringing parents and their child's learning and wellbeing closer together (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).
Inquiry curriculum	Inquiry curriculum refers to inquiry-based learning and teaching approaches. Aligned with the Australian Curriculum, these approaches contrast with traditional approaches where information is presented as given, rather than teachers providing a range of scenarios, questions, and problems for students to investigate (Department of Education, 2021).
Metalogues	Like cogenerative dialogues, metalogues are substantive conversations. However, these conversations focus on subjects, ideas, and even feelings which emerge from previous conversations to analyse, problematise, and scrutinise them at deeper, more reflexive (i.e., meta) levels (Willis & Exley, 2021a; Willis, Grimmer et al., 2018).
Mini-gens	Mini-gens are short cogenerative dialogues (Willis, 2016; Willis et al., 2014). These opportunities allow participants who co-generate about aspects of teaching or education (e.g., co-teaching with a community member; a parent engagement initiative) to quickly touch base, reflect on progress, and adjust plans if necessary. Hence, mini-gens explain why a quick chat or catchup continues cogenerativity among a community of learners.
Parent	Parent refers to a child's biological parent or grandparent, family, relative, guardian, caregiver, or other person or persons such as Elders in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family or community with primary care and responsibility for a child's health, wellbeing, and education (Barker & Harris, 2020; Constantino, 2003).
Pedagogical practice	Pedagogical practice refers to a teaching strategy informed by education theory or concepts.
Voice	The idea of student or parent voice is connected to individuals being able to initiate actions, participate actively, and make decisions about their participation and/or learning. Student or parent voice is invoked when they are enabled to express and/or demonstrate their likes, dislikes, interests, beliefs, values, world views, opinions, customs, practices, and social and cultural norms. Student or parent voice can be fostered through: certain contexts (e.g., participation in a community of learners); the design of classrooms or school environments; and pedagogical practices of teachers and school leaders such as the use of active listening and cogenerative dialoguing approaches (Willis, Exley, Singh et al., 2022a, 2022b).
Wellbeing	The concept of student wellbeing refers broadly to a student's enjoyment of life that includes their school experiences. A student's wellbeing is not only connected to positive relationships with teachers and others in the school community, but also the engagement of parents in the student's learning (OECD, 2017).

Appendix 4

List of acronyms



ACRONYM	MEANING
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment, & Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALEA	Australian Literacy Educators' Association
CARP	Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Program
EPIC	Engaging Parents in Inquiry Curriculum
F-10	Foundation Year to Year 10 (students approximately four years to 15 years)
GIER	Griffith Institute for Educational Research
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
HPE	Health and Physical Education
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ISQ	Independent Schools Queensland
K-12	Kindergarten (Kindy or Pre-Prep) to Year 12 (students approximately three years to 17 years)
NASAB	Non-State Schools Accreditation Board
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PELT	Parent Engagement Leadership Team
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QIS Parents Network	Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network
QR code	Quick Response Code
S-E-L	Social and Emotional Learning
SET planning	Senior Education and Training planning procedure
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Appendix 5

List of transcription symbols



SYMBOL	MEANING
(...)	Indicates words of speech have been omitted if considered irrelevant or repetitive in the transcription.
(...)	Indicates sentences of speech have been omitted if considered irrelevant or repetitive in the transcription.
[]	The addition of text to clarify meaning of the speech or to assist with readability.
()	The addition of information to clarify the meaning of speech.



DECEMBER 2023