Parents’ experiences of teacher outreach in the early years of schooling in Australia

Graham Daniel, Charles Sturt University

Background

Based on growing evidence of the benefits of parent involvement, there has recently been renewed interest in the engagement of families and schools in partnerships in the education of children (Borgonovi & Moritt, 2012). These relationships are particularly important in the early years of schooling where the benefits of parent involvement may be strongest (Steinberg, Brown, & Dombusch, 1997). The benefits of family-school partnerships continue throughout the child’s education (Borgonovi & Moritt, 2012; Pomerantz, Mooman, & Litwack, 2007).

Parental engagement in family-school partnerships is strongly related to teacher facilitation, or teacher outreach, with this relationship holding true regardless of family socio-economic or cultural background (Patrikakou & Weisberg, 2000). Although international research has investigated teacher outreach, there is a need for research in the Australian context to inform the development of policies and practices that meet the needs and interests of Australian families and their children.

Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate parents’ experiences of teacher outreach in the early years of formal schooling Australian context, and in particular:

- How these perceptions change as children move through these early years;
- The extent to which these perceptions vary for families from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds where lower levels of parent involvement have been reported.

Method

Data was drawn from the K-Cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). The LSAC project provides extensive data for a randomly selected sample of children with families that are “broadly representative” of the Australian population for sex, cultural background, and socio-economic status (Gray & Smart, 2008). Participants in this study were parents from the LSAC K-Cohort with children in Grade One in Wave 2 and Grade Three in Wave 3 of data collection who had completed the teacher outreach measure (n=1863).

The sub-sample for this study was similar to the LSAC K-Cohort at Wave 3 in relation to the number of boys (51.6%) and girls (48.4%) (χ² = 506, p < .05), but there were fewer families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (2.5%, n = 47) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (2.5%, n = 47). The differences in representation of these groups were not significant (α = .75) to Year Three (M = 1.78, SD = .80), (t(1862) = 5.87, p < .001, with a small to medium effect size (d = .18).

Along with analyses of the experiences of families based on socio-economic status, the experiences of families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds are reported.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Mean ranking of teacher outreach overall and by demographic grouping (n/3)**

Changes in teacher outreach scores between Grade One and Grade Three for the study sample and each demographic group.

Results

- Parents experienced a significant decline in teacher outreach from Year One (M = 1.92, SD = .75) to Year Three (M = 1.78, SD = .80), (t(1862) = 5.87, p < .001, with a small to medium effect size (d = .18).
- Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds reported similar experiences of teacher outreach to families from more advantaged SES groups in both Year One (t(1, 1860) = .94, p < .05, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds represented families where the mother of the focus child speaks a language other than English when at home.

Mean ranking of teacher outreach overall and by demographic grouping (n/3)

**Conclusions**

- Similar to international findings, Australian parents report a decline in teacher outreach as children move through the early years of formal schooling.
- Despite previous reports showing lower parent involvement in families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, this study found no differences in teacher outreach for parents from different socio-economic groups.
- Differences in experiences of teacher outreach for families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in Year One indicate an early discrepancy in the facilitation of family-school partnerships.
- These findings indicate a need for improved teacher outreach practice as children move through the early years of formal education, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Further investigations of effective teacher outreach in initiating and maintaining parental involvement in family-school partnerships within diverse school populations and as children mature is recommended.

References


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