



Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

Learning Together

Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning

SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR SCHOOLS



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Mother of God Primary School, Ardeer

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St Brendan's Primary School, Flemington

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Partner Organisations:

Berry Street – Early Learning is Fun (ELF)

Victoria University – Kinda Kinder

Meadow Heights Learning Hub – Adult English Class

CEOM National Partnership – Family School Partnership Convenors



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Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

Foreword

NOW WE ARE LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning happens all around us all the time.

As partners in Catholic education, we are responsible for ensuring the learning that happens at school is of the highest quality, and grounded in strong relationships with both students and their families.

When parents are valued as the primary educators of their child, and schools work strategically to develop strong partnerships with families, academic outcomes and achievement for all young people can improve.

In the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, schools in the *Smarter Schools – National Partnerships: Family School Partnership* initiative have focused on developing this relationship. This is showcased in a special DVD: 'Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning.' The DVD presents a snapshot of this work in ten schools across Melbourne, and some of the impacts on teachers, parents and students' capacity to support school learning.

The DVD highlights the value of working strategically, and responding locally. It presents six key dimensions of an ongoing, cyclical process for school communities to consider:

- **Leading** for family engagement
- **Listening** to develop a deep knowledge of their school community

- **Planning** strategically to engage families at all levels of the school's structure
- **Building Capacity** of parents and staff to support school learning
- **Reflecting** on the strategies and processes to inform ongoing practice
- **Relationships** building to nurture learning for all.

The *Support Materials for Schools* resource booklet is designed to complement the DVD. It offers guidelines for leaders working with staff groups to promote discussion and provoke broader conversations within each school community. It supports school improvement and the engagement of staff in the core work of nurturing the relationship between parents and schools to improve learning outcomes for all young people.

I commend *Learning Together Support Materials for Schools* to you as an excellent resource to support your community's continued endeavours to strengthen genuine parent-school partnerships for learning.



Stephen Elder
Executive Director Catholic Education

Use of the Support Materials

The *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD illustrates one aspect of the work of engaging families in learning in a number of the Family School Partnership schools. It is work that is relevant to all school communities. Depicting a process rather than a series of projects, the DVD should be viewed to prompt questions and discussion about the 'what' and the 'why' rather than provide answers about the 'how'.

This booklet, *Learning Together Support Materials for Schools*, is a complement to extend the thinking process, offering guidelines for school leaders to strengthen their work in engaging parents in school learning.

The six dimensions are explored through their definitions, questions to provoke thinking and promote reflection, supported by quotes from the school communities in the DVD and researchers on parent engagement. Leaders and teachers can consider the schools and communities presented in the DVD, and then consider their own context and the implications for staff, students and families.

Activities are included as guidelines for leaders working with staff groups.



Preamble

Parents are partners in the learning journey of their children.
(CECV 2007)

CONTEXT

The Catholic Education Office Melbourne's (CEOM) 2011–2015 *Directions for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* identifies 'Partnerships' as one of the five key action areas. One of the stated objectives is 'to increase the active engagement of parents in their child's learning' (CEOM 2001, p.15).

The education of each student in a Catholic school is viewed as a partnership between parents as the first educators of their child and the school. Catholic schools are called to assist parents in fulfilling their obligation for the Christian formation and education of their children. The Catholic school respects parents' fundamental right to know, understand and share in decisions that affect the education of their children.

SMARTER SCHOOLS NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – FAMILY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The CEOM Family School Partnerships initiative (2010–2013) is part of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNP) Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Communities reform agenda. Thirty-five low SES school communities are supported to build effective relationships with parents and communities as key partners in children's and young people's learning. Participating schools are supported by a Family School Partnership Convenor, professional learning and resources through the CEOM, as well as brokerage funding from the SSNP initiative.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* package (DVD and Support Material booklet) is to promote conversations in school communities. It is intended to provoke deep, reflective thinking, and challenge assumptions about the roles families can play in their child's school learning.

The DVD provides a glimpse into the strategies and processes to engage families in school learning

that were instigated by ten schools involved in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships – Family School Partnerships initiative in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The Support Material booklet enables detailed extension of the process.

PROCESS

The *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD depicts the six key dimensions of the parent engagement process that interweave and overlap. Rather than a set of steps to follow or activities to implement, it highlights a non-linear process. The starting point will not be the same for each school community but the process will be most effective when it includes all dimensions and is ongoing.

The six dimensions are:

Leading: lead to develop a culture that supports and enables parent and family engagement in learning.

Planning: plan for enhancing parent engagement with the knowledge gained through listening.

Listening: know the community and their needs and aspirations.

Relationships: are fundamental to all learning and critical to the success of parent engagement in school learning.

Building capacity (of parents and staff): delivery and implementation of actions and initiatives.

Reflecting: review what has happened, listen again to the community, adjust and respond.

KEY CONCEPTS FOR ENGAGING PARENTS AND FAMILIES IN SCHOOL LEARNING

School Learning

While learning happens at any place and any time, the *Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD focus specifically on the learning that happens at school, and looks at how school communities can nurture partnerships with parents to build the capacity of both families and the school to support school learning.

School community

For the purposes of the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD and the accompanying support materials, the school community is considered to include school leadership, staff, students, parents, the broader local community and outside partners and/or agencies who support learning.

Parents

'Parent' refers to the primary caregiver and is often used interchangeably with 'family'. While engagement of the broader family unit has a significant and positive impact on the development of children and young people, the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD with the accompanying support materials focuses on parents or primary caregivers as the first point of contact (where possible) for targeted engagement strategies. This is not to exclude other members of the family (e.g. grandparents, siblings) but recognises the fundamental role that parents or primary caregivers play in maximising learning and development outcomes for children and young people.

Reciprocal Learning

Reciprocal learning requires that schools have a deep understanding of their communities: that they know their needs and aspirations, and are listening and open to ongoing conversations with a diverse range of people within the community. Engagement strategies are more likely to be successful when they are designed to suit the local context. Staff are more likely to be engaged in working with parents when they know and have listened to the community and use this knowledge in planning and reflection. Parents are more likely to be engaged when they have had input into the design of the initiatives offered by the school.

Engagement vs Involvement

Involvement refers to any activity designed by the school where parents are invited to attend or participate, and the emphasis is on assistance for the school, or information giving. Activities that involve parents are important to schools and parents. They might include assistance in the classroom, attendance at information sessions, meetings and working bees, or involvement in committees that support school infrastructure. Schools are very effective at *involving* families in school communities, and families are usually comfortable connecting with their child's school in this capacity.

Engagement is about 'enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning with teacher's knowledge'. (Pushor 2007, p. 3) Parents are more likely to engage in their child's learning when they feel empowered to support learning in a way that is both complementary to the school and respectful of their circumstances. Evidence indicates that learning outcomes improve when schools support family and parent *engagement* in learning.

Evidence and research

'Where child learning becomes family learning, and where educators understand that they cannot meet the needs of children and young people alone, true engagement and shared understanding are developed.' (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services 2010, p. 1)

The growing body of evidence on parent engagement from both within the Australian context and internationally is clear: when schools focus on engaging parents and families in learning, outcomes and achievement for all young people improve. Researchers from around the world, such as Farrar and Henderson, are unequivocal in emphasising the importance of the responsibility of schools to engage in this work as a part of school improvement and as core business.

The *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD and its support materials draw on this research.

Leading

KEY MESSAGE

School leaders create a culture that engages parents as partners in learning by understanding and the broad educational and unique local context. They can achieve this by leading the conversations, nurturing openness and creativity, and through collaborative leadership.

PROVOCATIONS

- How can we connect learning at home and learning at school?
- What would a learning partnership with parents look like at our school?
- What kind of learning community do we want to create? How will we build this in partnership with parents and children?
- How do we support teachers to develop their skills to more effectively engage parents?
- What data do we currently collect to inform planning for family engagement? How can we use this more effectively? What other sources of information may be helpful?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'... it would appear critical that leaders are directly engaged in modelling, monitoring and dialogue. This means they model the behaviours that create effective relationships, such as listening and talking with rather than to parents, supporting and encouraging staff to work effectively with parents, and monitoring the impact of the work. It is equally important to ensure that a range of measures is in place to track progress, collect evidence and analyse outcomes that enable the organisation to be clear about the difference such work makes. This work involves engaging directly in dialogue with a range of partners involved in supporting children and parents, including the children and parents themselves and other agencies that work with children and families'. (*National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services 2010, p. 8*)

'A great deal has also been learned about how to engage parents more effectively... Most important is a genuine commitment to partnership coupled with respect and ongoing effort to create dialogue and mutual understanding.' (*Levin 2008, p. 112*)

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- The Most Important Dimension Great Debate
- Traffic Lights
- Scrunch and Share

*See pages 16–20

VOICES FROM THE DVD

‘We know that when parents are engaged in their kids’ learning, when the kids are engaged, then their learning is enhanced. So everything we do is around that premise.’ SCHOOL LEADER

‘Our commitment has really been about engaging parents in learning and trying to get them into the circle of understanding about contemporary learning.’ SCHOOL LEADER

‘...because we know that when we get the message to the community in a way that is acceptable to them, that the kids learn from birth, and that they [parents] are the children’s first and best teachers and we support them with that, then those children are going to engage well with school and with learning.’ PARTNER AGENCY



Planning

KEY MESSAGE

Activities and initiatives designed to connect learning at home with learning at school will have the greatest impact when planning is informed by parents' needs, skills and aspirations, and when staff work strategically and collegially.

PROVOCATIONS

- How can we link what children are doing at school with what parents do at home?
- Do we plan with the children's home and community environments in mind? How could we do this more effectively?
- How can we build on existing strategies to strengthen family engagement?
- What resources are available in our community to support parents and families as learners?
- How can we connect with as many families as possible?
- How can we develop a shared vocabulary of learning across the school community?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'It is the school's job to help parents raise good future citizens, to locate children within these changing social contexts and help them see a productive and loving future for themselves.' (Edgar 2011)

'Do focus on the right priorities. Do attend to relationships. But get to action sooner and treat it as a learning period. Go light on judgement at this stage.... do not load up on vision, evidence and sense of urgency.' (Fullan 2010, p. 24–25)

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- Ball of Wool, Web of Connection
- Provocation Gallery Work

*See pages 16–20

VOICES FROM THE DVD

Now when I plan, I've always got my families in mind. TEACHER

... one of the biggest revelations for me was that it's not about how often they turn up and how we help out and those sorts of things, but how we actually link the information that we're giving to the children and what we're doing, so that the parents know. TEACHER



Listening

KEY MESSAGE

Parents are the first educators of their children and have a deep knowledge of them as learners, and as well as aspirations for their academic success.

They are interested in how their children learn, in how and what teachers teach, and how they can work as partners to support their children.

PROVOCATIONS

- How can we partner with parents as the first educators of their children?
- How can we establish in-depth conversations with our parent community?
- How do we ensure that every interaction between parents and teachers includes opportunities to listen and respond?
- What may be holding parents back from engaging with their children's learning? What can we do to address these barriers?
- How can we tap into cultural and community resources to build our capacity?
- What gifts or talents do our parents have? How do we know, and how does our school culture encourage parents to share these?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'Are you working with the community you have or the community you wish you had?'

'How can we move from information giving to information sharing with parents – working as equals?' (Farrar 2011)

'Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs.' (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997).

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- Multiple Perspectives
- Provocation Gallery Work

*See pages 16–20



VOICES FROM THE DVD

‘When we’re in genuine conversation with the community... we’re listening very carefully to the aspirations that these families have for their own kids, and how we [can] work out how to do that together.’ TEACHER

‘... how to teach and what to teach, that’s why I come here and ask.’ PARENT



Relationships

KEY MESSAGE

Building a culture where parents are true partners requires a focus on positive, open and inclusive relationships among staff, students and parents. It is the school's responsibility to nurture these relationships so that everyone is learning together.

PROVOCATIONS

- How do we establish the positive relationships needed to build our capacity to engage parents in learning?
- What role do relationships play in building collaborative partnerships with parents?
- How can we create an environment that focuses on positive relationships?
- How can we listen to and engage with parents more effectively?
- How do we facilitate interaction between parents?
- How do we build parents' confidence to engage in their children's learning?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'Parents tell us that feeling welcome and being treated with respect by school staff is the number one key to their connection with the school.'
(Henderson et al. 2007, p. 47)

'... an ongoing conversation between parents and teachers about the role of each in learning is central to building the relationships and understanding that enhances school performance.'
(Harris, Power & Goodall 2009, p. 24)

'... the importance of relationships – grounded in equitable, fair and respectful discourse – to the development of a culture of participation and learning, cannot be over emphasised.'
(West Burnham, Farrar & Otero 2007, p.94)

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- Ball of Wool, Web of Connection
- Thinking Colours and Inside-Outside Circle

*See pages 16–20

VOICES FROM THE DVD

One of the biggest changes that I've noticed is the willingness of parents to come and talk with us. TEACHER

I've been extremely surprised if you give parents a chance they have so much to offer... I don't think we've every actually allowed them to come in and teach and work with us and be involved with us. And I think that's made me more humble and appreciative of the gifts and the talents they have. TEACHER

We know what kind of learning community we want to create but we don't know right now what it's going to be, because it's in conversation. SCHOOL LEADER



Capacity Bui

KEY MESSAGE

Parents care deeply about their children's learning and want to help them. Teachers can work with parents to empower them to take their place as partners, engaging them in their child's learning. Building the capacity of parents and staff is vital to success.

PROVOCATIONS

- How can we create opportunities for parents, teachers and leaders to plan, reflect and learn together?
- How can we support parents to better understand, and feel comfortable with the contemporary language of schooling?
- How well do our parents know and understand contemporary approaches to teaching and learning? What can we do to bridge any gaps in understanding?
- What role do school leaders, staff, parents, students and the broader community play in building school and community capacity?
- How do we support teachers to develop their capacity to engage parents in learning?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'There is clear evidence that teachers' understanding of their local communities, including families and the wider communities, relates to the efficacy of their teaching and their sense of satisfaction in their work.' (Freebody & Freebody 2010, p. 3)

'... the most powerful examples of effective parental engagement work indicate that distributing the leadership and enabling others to develop leadership skills make a real difference.' (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services 2010, p. 8)

'... by focusing on and improving relationships, schools can begin making a contribution to developing the entire community's capacity to learn.' (West Burnham, Farrar & Otero 2007, p.62)

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- Traffic Lights
- Multiple Perspectives
- Snowballing

*See pages 16–20

Iding

VOICES FROM THE DVD

‘Coming to these sessions you get to learn how they’re teaching today and how you can help your child at home today, rather than trying to teach them something that we learned many years ago.’ PARENT

‘Now I can go home and say “what did you do today?” And I know exactly how to talk to her about it and get that kind of reaction from her, what she’s learnt and then you know exactly what’s going on in the classroom.’ PARENT

‘When I first started teaching I was always a little bit frightened or hesitant about parents coming into my room or communicating with parents, but now I have a different view.’ TEACHER



Reflecting

KEY MESSAGE

Schools improve the effectiveness and impact of parent engagement in learning when staff and parents openly reflect on what they do, when this informs planning, and is considered core work of the school.

PROVOCATIONS

- What forums do we have to talk with and listen to parents about learning?
- What successes or surprises have we had in our efforts to engage families in learning so far? How can we build on and learn from these?
- What would parents say about our approach to engaging them in their child's learning? How will we know?
- What data do we collect? How can we use this to plan for, evaluate and improve family engagement?
- How do we know what we're doing is effective? What can we do to measure and improve the impact of our current family engagement strategies?
- Who is missing in our parent engagement activities? What can we do to reach out to and engage these groups?

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

'... engagement with parents requires schools to think and behave differently: to think innovatively and deliberately try out something different. For many it is a trial and error approach; for all it is an ongoing conversation. For most it is something that cannot be planned but emerges through the developing relationship.' (West Burnham, Farrar & Otero 2007, p.80)

'We need however to be careful about assuming that the very existence of opportunities for participation results in actual participation...' (Bottrell & Goodwin 2011, p. 169)

ACTIVITIES TO TRY*

- Temperature Reading
- Expense Account
- Where do I Stand?

*See pages 16–20

VOICES FROM THE DVD

‘We realised that if we kept on doing what we’ve always done we’d get the same results.’ TEACHER

‘Some of our survey data was saying that parents are wanting to know what goes on in the school, what are the expectations upon them, what are the expectations on the children.’ SCHOOL LEADER

‘You think you know what you’re doing but it’s nice to be reinforced.’ PARENT



Suggested Activities

THE MOST IMPORTANT DIMENSION GREAT DEBATE

This activity should follow a general discussion about the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD. It could be used as a before and after activity or on its own.

The object is to focus staff attention on the six dimensions as presented in the DVD, and deepen their understanding that engaging parents in learning is a cyclical process where each dimension is as significant and valuable as the other. This work should not have a beginning and an end but be an ongoing, evolving process.

Procedure:

1. Print/write each of the six dimensions on a large card.
2. Divide the staff into six groups, each group taking one of the cards. The groups could be randomly chosen or made up through staff preference but numbers should be as even as possible.
3. Each group must develop an argument explaining why their dimension is the most important dimension of all six when a school is working to engage parents and families in school learning. They must be prepared to argue their case to the whole group.
4. Allow time for groups to develop their response, and plenty of time for the debate. Each group has a limited time of no more than three minutes to present. The leader may decide whether or not groups can access outside resources to support their argument (e.g. books, props, human resources). All other groups have the opportunity to ask one question. The leader can decide whether or not there is a 'winner'.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS

This activity is designed to focus attention on managing the work. It may be best done once staff are familiar with the dimensions and the school's vision for what it can achieve in engaging parents in learning.

Procedure:

1. Print out a simple traffic light with a red, yellow and green circle on a large card.
2. Explain the following:
 - The red light indicates the kinds of activities, policies and practices if any, that do not necessarily add to the school's capacity to engage parents in learning and should therefore be stopped.
 - The yellow light indicates those activities, policies and practices that may be helpful but need reviewing before continuing.
 - The green light is the one that gives the go-ahead to existing work and to new activities that support and enhance the school's capacity to engage parents in learning.
 - Allow time for small group discussion. Staff then write their group's ideas on sticky notes and place them next to the appropriate colour. Further discussion will be needed to clarify and record what has been presented.

BALL OF WOOL, WEB OF CONNECTION

This activity allows time for reflection and gives staff time to consider how their thoughts connect with other members of staff. It is best conducted following a discussion about one of the dimensions or a general discussion where, through deliberate design, every staff member has had the opportunity to voice his or her opinion, puzzlement, appreciation, wonder etc. (see the Temperature Reading activity).

Procedure:

1. Staff need to be seated or standing in a circle.
2. The leader begins with a large ball of wool and holding on to one end, names another staff member and throws the ball of wool to them. As this happens he or she says, 'I relate to/connect with what Jo said about X because Y.' Responses are accepted and there is no discussion during the activity.
3. That person then does the same, holding on to a section of the wool and throwing the ball to someone else, choosing a different staff member. It may go back and forth to the same person a few times however the idea is that in the end all will be connected to the web, have heard what others have to say again, and perhaps see connections or consider aspects they have not yet thought about.
4. It may end with someone taking a photo to keep as a simple record of where the staff was in their thinking at that point in time.

SCRUNCH AND SHARE

This activity is a quick and fun way to share reflections on the DVD as a whole, or any of the dimensions in more depth. All you need is a piece of scrap paper per person (A4 size works well), textas, and a space large enough for the group to stand in a big circle.

Procedure:

1. Ask each person to reflect on their experience of the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning DVD* (or one dimension of it), then write on scrap paper their responses to the following:
 - What was the key message?
 - What aspect did you find the most challenging, inspiring or thought provoking, and why?
2. Form a large circle and ask each person to scrunch their paper into a tight ball
3. Spend one to two minutes throwing the paper balls at each other until they are distributed randomly around the group. Be as boisterous as you like!
4. Take turns to read each response to the whole group. If time and group size permit you may choose to ask for comments before moving on to the next person.
5. Collate reflections for ongoing discussion and to inform future planning.

TEMPERATURE READING

The purpose of a temperature reading is to give every participant time and opportunity to say what is on their mind. The process can be used for general reflection after watching the DVD, or to explore a particular dimension in greater depth. It consists of five categories: Appreciations; New Information; Puzzlements; Concerns with Recommendations; and Hopes and Dreams. You may decide to use any or all categories to suit the needs of your staff, but you should always include Appreciations.

Procedure:

1. Ask the group to sit in a circle, then introduce the process by explaining each category and the guidelines for participation. These include:
 - Participation is invitational – anyone can choose to pass at any time.
 - This is not a discussion, in the normal sense. Participants should listen to rather than respond to others' comments. Some groups find it helpful to jot down questions or thoughts as they occur, to share when it is their turn.
 - Whoever speaks first begins the process, participants then take turns moving in a clockwise direction around the circle.
2. The simplest method is to complete each category in turn – i.e. start with a round of Appreciations, followed by Puzzlements etc. Alternatively, you may ask participants to comment under any of the categories described. In this case it may be helpful to set a time limit for the process.

EXPENSE ACCOUNT

This is a useful process to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to participate. It works best with six to ten participants per circle, but will also work with a larger group if there is adequate time. You will need three icy pole sticks per person and enough space to form one or more circles.

Procedure:

1. Sit in a circle and hand around three sticks per person. Each stick equals one opportunity to contribute to the conversation. Choose one or more provocations from the resource booklet and invite comments, questions or reflections from the group.
2. Each time a person contributes to the conversation they throw one stick into the circle, until they have run out. The conversation concludes when all the sticks are gone.

PROVOCATION GALLERY WALK

This activity enables staff to express their opinions on an individual basis, to listen to others and to see the emerging issues for their community around parent engagement.

Procedure:

1. Provocations are written on cards and tacked on the wall. Provocations could be questions from this booklet, expert quotes, or quotes from the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD.
2. Ask participants to walk slowly around the room and read all the provocations.
3. Stand in front of the one that speaks to you the most and be prepared to share why you chose that provocation.
4. Allow time for each participant to share.
5. The leader can write on the whiteboard any common themes that arise.
6. Open up for a whole group discussion.

WHERE DO I STAND?

This activity provides an opportunity for staff to share their opinions by lining up along a continuum to represent their point of view. It is especially useful when trying to discuss an issue, where people are likely to have a wide range of viewpoints. You will need a space large enough for teachers to create one continuous line (or U-shape) and 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree' signs.

Procedure:

1. Place the signs at opposite ends of the room
2. Using the provocations or quotes as a guide, pose a strong statement to the group (for example, in the Capacity Building dimension: *building the capacity of teachers is vital to the successful engagement of families in learning*).
3. Give teachers a minute or two to consider this, then ask them to stand on the spot of the line that represents their opinion, reminding them that if they stand on either extreme they are absolute in their agreement or disagreement.
4. Once teachers have lined up, ask them to explain why they have chosen to stand where they are. Encourage the use of evidence and examples to support their stance. Seek alternative responses moving from one end to the middle, then to the other end, to avoid one stance from dominating.
5. After three or four viewpoints are heard, ask if anyone wishes to move. Encourage teachers to keep an open mind; they are allowed to move if someone presents an argument that alters where they want to stand on the line.
6. Continue until you feel most or all voices have been heard, making sure that no one person dominates.
7. Debrief by asking teachers to reflect on the experience of sharing and listening to a range of viewpoints.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

This activity enables staff to 'stand in someone else's shoes'. It encourages empathy and makes room for broader perspectives to enter the discussion in a safe environment.

Procedure:

1. Staff members sit around a table in groups of four or five.
2. Each person thinks of the title of a role in the school community and writes it on the post-it note e.g. principal, teacher, student, parent, agency worker, priest, etc.
3. Place those sticky notes in a circle around the table.
4. Participants stand behind the role they wrote and take on that persona
5. Place a question in the middle of the table (the facilitator can give each table a different question or all tables can be given the same question) e.g. *How do we foster collaborative partnerships that empower parents to understand the language of school learning?*
6. All participants have a turn to answer the question from the perspective of the role they are standing behind.
7. All participants move one place to the right and answer the question again from their new perspective – ensure that your view has not already been stated by the previous person in the role.
8. Continue the dialogue until participants have spoken from every perspective.
9. The leader debriefs by asking – *What did you learn? How did it feel to stand in others' shoes? What can be gained, individually and collectively, by taking the time to hear multiple perspectives?*

SNOWBALLING

Developing a shared perspective is not always an easy task. This activity provides a structure and focus for staff.

Procedure:

1. Use one question from the Provocations section in this booklet about the topic viewed or discussed in the *Learning Together – Engaging Parents and Families in School Learning* DVD and ask everyone to write down their responses individually. Make the question open-ended enough for varied responses. Invite staff members to pair with another person and share what they have written. Get them to come to a consensus about what they both think and write it down.
2. Ask pairs to join together to form groups of four. Allow time for each pair to share what they came up with together. Invite them to form a consensus within their group of four.
3. Depending on the size of your staff meeting you could then join groups to form groups of eight or you can share to the whole group at this point.
4. The facilitator should then finish the discussion by focusing on the major ideas that emerged and allow the whole group to discuss.

THINKING COLOURS AND INSIDE–OUTSIDE CIRCLE

This activity, based on de Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats' concept, encourages structured and focused discussion.

Prepare a chart listing five of the Thinking Hat Colours (**White** – information; **Red** – feelings; **Black** – judgements/negatives; **Yellow** – positives; **Green** – creative thinking)

Procedure:

1. Ask staff members to pair off and number themselves either one or two.
2. All number ones form a large circle facing inwards.
3. All number twos come and stand facing their partners forming an inside circle.
4. Ask a white hat question e.g. *What new information did you hear in the video?*
5. Each partner has one minute to respond. The leader calls out when to change over.
6. Get the inner circle to move two places to the right. Each person should have a new partner.
7. Ask a red hat question e.g. *How do you feel about parent engagement?*
8. Each partner has one minute to respond.
9. The outer circle moves three places to their right.
10. Ask a black hat question e.g. *What barriers would we need to overcome to engage parents in our school?*
11. The leader asks one of the circles to move again. Each time the outer and inner circles have a new partner.
12. Ask a yellow hat question e.g. *What benefits would there be in engaging parents in your room?*
13. The leader asks one of the circles to move again.
14. Example of a green hat question: *What parent engagement strategies could we do at our school that would work with our community?*
15. The leader then asks for comments and debriefs the activity.

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