



MAKE IT  
COUNT

theme 1

## Community and School Engagement

Educators are familiar with the maxim that community engagement is an important step towards improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. But what does this mean in the classroom day to day? Translating the general directive to 'engage with community' into purposeful action that generates positive outcomes is a challenge for many schools, especially in mathematics and numeracy.

Some effective, practical engagement strategies gathered by the Make it Count project include:

- Being parent and family focussed, rather than beginning with an intention to engage the whole community;
- Recognising that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members have poor perceptions of mathematics in schools and even a fear of the subject, often related to their personal experiences when at school;
- Avoiding and, where necessary, confronting ill-informed generalisations among colleagues and others about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, community and culture;
- Overcoming the fear of 'doing the wrong thing' by asking simple questions of a trusted parent or community member before engaging more widely;
- Spending time and effort to develop a strong whole-school rationale and purpose for community engagement;
- Providing opportunities for genuine two-way learning. Members of the community learn from the educators, and school personnel learn from the community;
- Building the 'pedagogical voice' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait education officers who support teaching and learning in classrooms. They often the interface between schools and the community. Their important role in the classroom can be enhanced through deliberate strategies to build their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and how it is learnt. In turn, this enables them to help build appreciation of school mathematics among community members;

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Supporting  
best teaching  
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## Supporting best teaching of mathematics for Aboriginal learners

- Focussing on demystifying mathematics in community engagement programs through:
  - Processes and activities that connect the worlds of community members with the world of school mathematics;
  - Careful attention to the language of mathematics in order for parents and community members to have access to the mathematical discourse of their young people's schooling;
  - Cross-age tutoring in which older students teach their younger siblings and peers, and even the adults present if that is appropriate; and
  - Active involvement of community members in special mathematics events involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Many incidental opportunities to engage parents and community members become apparent when teachers are tuned in. This occurs when there is a whole-school culture that values and enables strong levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement in mathematics.

There is also another dimension to community engagement and that is with business and industry who have priorities in Aboriginal training and employment. It is important for schools to give weight to the long-term opportunities for Aboriginal learners and how mathematics impacts on life choices particularly in employment. Therefore partnerships with business and industry can offer all sorts of possibilities. Closing the gap in learning outcomes has direct implications for closing the gap in employment opportunities and outcomes.

### Questions for discussion at a school level about community and school engagement.

1. How do we currently engage Aboriginal parents in our school?  
Is it effective? How do we know? Is it based on social inclusion of parents only or do they have a say about their children's learning?
2. How can we involve parents in the mathematics learning of their children?
3. What types of approaches or activities could engage educators and parents in two-way learning and dialogue from each other, for example, us learning from them about their perceptions, understandings and uses of maths and them learning from us about the required curriculum outcomes for their children and the different ways we teach maths?
4. How can we work effectively with business and industry to develop mathematics skills to improve employment opportunities for Aboriginal learners?



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