

Connect

supporting student participation

ABN: 98 174 663 341

ISSN 2202-4980

Number 205

February 2014



Engaging Leaders!

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Cover:

Engagement, leadership and participation

An image from the 2013 Victorian State JSC Congress.

Cover photo by Piper Huynh.

Why does Connect exist?

Connect has been
published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

- document student participation approaches and initiatives;
- support reflective practices;
- develop and share resources.

Connect:

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This Issue:

Welcome back to the 2014 school year - *Connect*'s 35th year of publication! This on-line journal is now reaching even more people - including large numbers around the world - as you'll see from articles in this issue.



In this issue... we start with some stories of schools reviewing and renewing their **Student Council** and **Student Voice** structures. There's a strong sense of needing to question, challenge and re-invent what we do. There's also a strong sense of not being alone: of an increasing international recognition of the importance of 'student voice'.

However we need to remind ourselves that there are various understandings and interpretations of what 'student voice' can mean. At its most basic, people talk of 'listening to students' in order to help teachers (and others) make better decisions and to improve teaching (and hence student learning outcomes). In a larger sense, however, understanding 'student voice' as a **partnership in learning**, has the potential to enable us to rethink and transform our classrooms and schools. (Go back to *Connect* 197 of October 2012, and re-read **Michael Fielding**'s elegant typology of Student Voice as **Patterns of Partnership**: <http://research.acer.edu.au/connect/vol2012/iss197/> - pages 10-15.)

Alongside and interwoven with ideas about 'student voice', increasing attention is again being paid to ideas of '**student engagement**'. For many years there has been recognition that this is also closely tied with students' '**ownership**' of what they are doing: for example, **Brian Mull** writes that: "*The most successful students are those who feel real 'ownership' of their education.*" (<http://novemberlearning.com/successful-students-feel-real-ownership-education>)

However, at a Victorian education conference late last year, **Aaron Tait** galvanised many participants with the comment: "**The only thing more powerful than ownership is authorship**" - and there were a few tweets about the importance of this observation. (See also: **Taking Change to Scale** at http://learningcentre.aitsl.edu.au/lc/pluginfile.php/43/mod_page/content/9/Aaron%20Tait%20AITSL.pdf)

I reflected that, in the mid 1970s, when I initiated a cross-age tutoring program (in which students were employed to teach other students, often in subjects in which they were themselves struggling), this certainly **engaged** the tutors, who felt a strong sense of **ownership** of their roles and of the program - but it didn't allow participants to necessarily feel a sense of **authorship** of what they were doing. It wasn't a program that they felt they had developed or in which they shared determination of directions. *I needed to learn to go further.*

So I think that's the next challenge for us when we think about true **partnerships in learning** - partnerships that involve students as active contributors: **how can we ensure that students are authors of their learning, and of what they are doing at school?**

We might also recognise that it's all very well to do this with students who are already cognitively, affectively and behaviourally engaged, but the real challenge is to ensure that such **authorship** is **inclusive**: **how can we ensure that ALL students are authors of their experiences and learning?**

Those are challenges for us in all our work - with Student Councils, in project-based learning approaches, in every-day classrooms - and right across our schools. **How are you doing that?**

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #206: April 2014

Deadline for material: end of March, 2014

Reviewing student leadership - a new journey for one school!

Whilst student leadership in the school context is only one aspect of providing **Student Voice: 'a policy of empowering the perspective and actions of students within the context of their learning'** (Kellahan, *The Age*, 2013) in the school, it can be perceived as symbolically the flagship for empowering students and their opinions to be taken more seriously.

Throughout 2013, Camberwell South Primary School in Melbourne's eastern suburbs reviewed their well-established and traditional student leadership program. The intention was to transform the image of, and commitment to student leadership and go beyond what Roger Holdsworth, University of Melbourne and editor of **Connect** rightly suggests as stereotypical: "a few motivated students, meeting at lunchtimes to raise funds for charity, proposing changes to school uniforms or complaining about litter or the state of the toilets."

The calibre and potential of student leadership capacity at the Camberwell South Primary School needed to be extended well beyond the above examples and be acknowledged, nurtured and developed through a range of opportunities.

The school leadership was also well aware that the parent community had many concerns about student leadership at the school, as evidenced by one parent's written thoughts: "*there are plenty of students who are very capable of being a leader for the right reasons but too often overlooked due to it being a popularity contest rather than a whole student's attributes, ie maturity, fairness, ability to include and communicate to other students and parents*". The concern of student leadership being a 'popularity contest' was widely shared by the community.

The review process involved investigating other schools' models, examining relevant research and published information, surveying

students, seeking parental feedback and regular workshop discussions with staff to capitalise on their experience, knowledge and opinion.

Whilst healthy debate ensued about the various student leadership models operating in Australia and other countries, it was unanimously decided that a new student leadership framework was required. It was crucial that the students and the school community had ownership, both of the process and the outcome/s, thus the review process needed to be taken slowly and be both inclusive and thorough.

That review is now completed, and its outcomes include:

1. Shared Understanding

Developing a shared and aligned understanding of the elements of effective leadership was imperative. Student leaders participated in a range of externally run leadership forums, attended the Victorian Junior School Congress and participated in curriculum inquiries focusing on leadership qualities. Student leaders shared their knowledge and experiences with peers in the classroom, at school assemblies, in the weekly school community newsletter and at School Representative Council meetings. If students were indeed selecting their representative leaders based on a person's skills and attributes as a leader, not personal popularity, then they needed to have the knowledge to do so.

2. Expanded Student Leadership Structure

An expanded student leadership structure should be developed and implemented. The challenge was to embrace the best elements of the school's existing structure, expand student involvement and connect more fluidly with whole school thinking.

So, in 2014 there will be three components of the student leadership model:

A. Traditional School Captain Roles

The tradition of School Captains and Vice Captains (two boys and two girls) will continue. These four students will be the figurative student leadership representatives for the whole community.

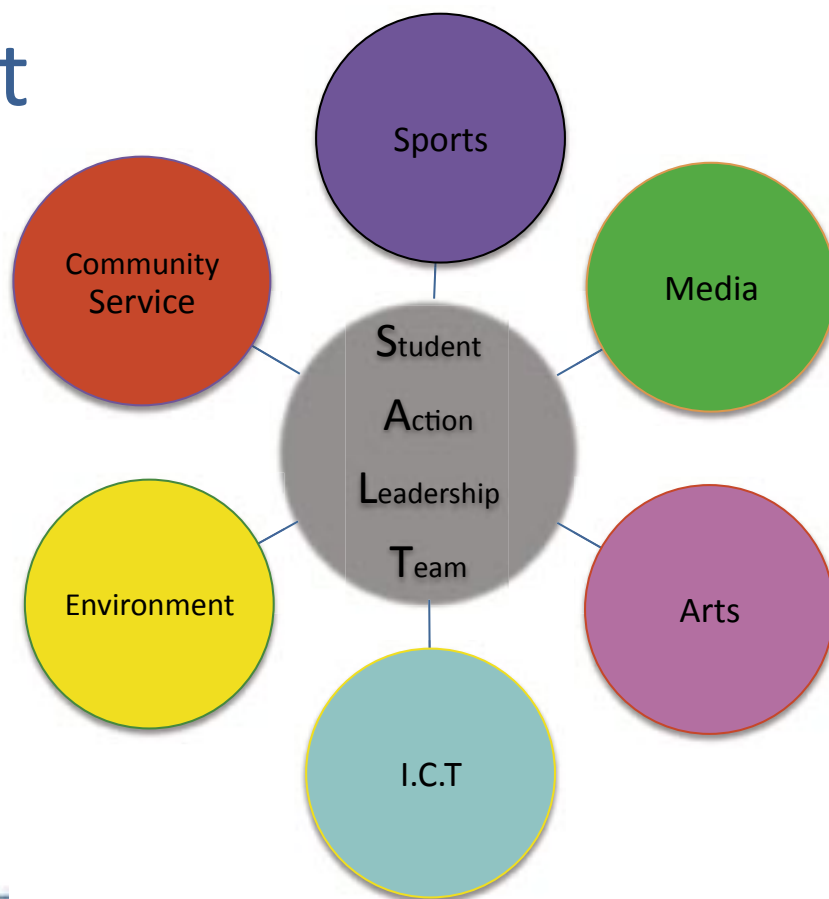
The primary role of the Captains and Vice Captains will be as key spokespersons on behalf of the whole student body, Prep to Year 6, and represent them in this role as required, such as at School Council meetings. They will be key ambassadors for the school within and beyond the school environment and an important link between all teams and students.

B. House Captains

The leadership role of the House Captain/Leader will continue as an integral part of the leadership program for Year 6 students and will be supported by Vice Captains/Leaders who are a current Year 5 students. This will provide effective succession planning for the future. The review recognised that House activities were distinctly biased towards sporting related events, so in 2014 there will be structures introduced to encourage intra-house and inter-house activity beyond the limitations of sport.

Every classroom will have elected House Representatives who will provide feedback and help plan meetings,

Support



Challenge

activities and events with the senior leaders. A designated teacher will be mentor for the House Leaders and will provide advice and organisational support. There will be whole school House meetings twice a term at the end of a midday recess break. The meetings will be student led and have specific agendas and activities.

C. Introduce the concept of SALTs – Student Action Leadership Teams

For many years the school had identified roles of responsibility for Year 6 students. These students were excellent exponents of student leadership and ambassadors for their peers and the school. However, their roles were limited in both opportunity and expectation.

The concept of the **Student Action Leadership Teams (SALT)** was chosen as the best fit to support the review recommendations.

Student Action Teams were initially set up in 1998 as a collaborative project between the Department of Justice – Crime Prevention Victoria and the

Department of Education and Training. This model was chosen by the school because of its underlying beliefs:

- Students can make serious and important decisions;
- Students can do important and valuable things: they have skills, expertise and a knowledge of their peers needs;
- Important actions can be taken as part of their learning within the school curriculum, using an inquiry approach.

Camberwell South Primary School will have six Action Teams operating in 2014: Information and Communication Technology, Arts, Sports, Environment, Media and Community Service. Each SALT will be encouraged to identify and tackle a school or community (if appropriate) issue; they will identify an issue, research it, propose a plan, seek permission to proceed from school leadership or School Council, identify intended outcomes and benefits, then take action.

The teams have been identified, honouring existing commitments and passions of the school community. All senior students (Years 5 and 6) will nominate to be a member of a team and will be allocated within their preferences.

SALT Features

SALT features include:

- Each team, with the support of a mentor teacher from the senior unit, will develop a plan of action for the year and be accountable to reporting to, and including the whole student body in their processes.
- Time will be provided within the timetable to honour the importance of the work of SALTs.
- As with all the school's team structures, there will be elected leaders of each team and other roles of responsibility. During the scheduled action team meetings, there may be guest speakers, workshops or field trips to other organisations. The possibilities are endless and will be proposed by

the action team themselves, not imposed by the school or class teachers.

- Students will be enabled to explore being an active participant in the wider community and to feel valued and confident that they are able to make a difference both at school level and beyond.
- Each senior student will be provided with a SALT badge representing their team.

An initial overview of action team roles suggests that:

- The **Arts** action team will be responsible for coordination of whole school Arts events and performances at the school assembly.
- **Sports** will support the PE teacher in the wide range of inter-school and intra-school events, as well as highlighting and supporting the importance of fitness and active leisure time.
- **Media** will coordinate the publication of the school magazine, a term newspaper for students, and develop a lunchtime radio channel.
- **Community service** will coordinate all fund raising events for charities and special causes, visits to local community services and facilities.
- **ICT** will develop movies to support other action team work, support the ICT Manager, be mentors or coaches for other students and teachers.
- **Environment** will lead environmental sustainability and playground beautification projects.

As we embark on this exciting endeavour, Camberwell South Primary School is harvesting the enthusiasm of the students, teachers and parents, the expertise of other colleagues and examples of best practice gained from research.

It is only the beginning of our journey using this broader distributed student leadership model but we are happy to share any of the above information and will keep you informed of our progress! We also welcome and appreciate advice and feedback from other schools that are more advanced in their development of student action teams.

Coralee Pratt
Principal

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Choosing an issue

How can a team of students choose an issue for action? Some ideas and resources from recent conferences and workshops provide some starting points.

First, at last November's Catholic Education Office Conference in Melbourne: *Innovate, Create, Relate*, a speaker suggested that a powerful starting point was to complete the statement:

"It is unacceptable that ..."

Students could respond to this at a school, local or wider level eg *"In this school, it is unacceptable that ..."* or *"In our country, it is unacceptable that ..."* Students could then use this to brainstorm possible issues of concern to themselves and other students - issues about which they are passionate and want to see some change.

It is likely that such an approach would then generate a large list of issues. On what basis do we prioritise one issue for action?

At January's Strategic Planning Days for the **VicSRC Executive** and supporters, the facilitator (Helga Svendsen) presented the following checklist adapted from an ACTU planning document. This can be used as a framework to examine and prioritise various ideas:

Issue: _____

Will the issue:

- ☐ be widely felt?
- ☐ be deeply felt?
- ☐ be winnable or partly winnable?
- ☐ result in real improvement?
- ☐ give students a sense of their own power?
- ☐ be easy to understand?
- ☐ increase the visibility of the student group?
- ☐ be non-divisive among students?
- ☐ build student voice and organisation?

What other reasons would make this a good issue around which to organise and take action?

Student Action Teams

More details about Student Action Teams (SATs), including comparisons with Student Responsibility Groups (SRGs) can be found at: www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams

Engaging leaders of the 21st century

When we encourage active and meaningful opportunities for students to participate, contribute and provide feedback about their schools, we ensure that students feel both valued and empowered, which will in turn improve wellbeing and learning outcomes (DEECD, 2009).

Student voice and leadership are strongly linked with student engagement in schools: when students are given a voice, they become more engaged with their learning. Furthermore, student voice allows teachers to gain insights into how to support student engagement and build more positive and collaborative relationships with their students (Department of Education, 2007).

In 2013, I have been involved with an action research project at St Dominic's Primary School, East Camberwell, to improve student engagement by implementing a student leadership program. The school's previous leadership program was thought to be tokenistic, lacking in student voice and action. 'They were given a badge, but there was no drive, pride or passion behind it.' (5/6 teacher) A recent school review had noted low scores in the area of student engagement. So, it was time to take action; but would a new leadership program be enough to obtain the desired outcomes?

School Context

St Dominic's is a Catholic primary school located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It has an enrolment of 301 students in 12 classrooms, with 21 teaching staff and two support staff. All classes are multi-age with the exception of Prep. The majority of students are Anglo-Saxon with many being of second or third generation European backgrounds, predominantly Italian and Greek. There is a small proportion of students with Asian backgrounds, which is growing slightly each year. The students attending are highly motivated and there are minimal behavioural issues. The parent community is very supportive and eager to assist in all aspects of school life. There is real sense of community, as well as strong links between the school and parish. The school has a high socio economic profile and education is highly valued, which

means that parents at this school have high expectations of their children.

The 2012 school review revealed that, whilst student wellbeing and behaviour scored high on all surveys, the area of student engagement showed inconsistencies. While students were motivated (66%) only 35% felt that their learning was stimulating and 41% found their teaching purposeful. Teachers also agreed that student motivation was high (74%) but only 45% felt that their practices were engaging. On the other hand, only 16% of parents felt that their children were motivated and 17% found that their children's learning was stimulating. The CEO consultants summed this data up by saying: 'Your students are telling you they want to learn but the way you are teaching them is boring – and the teachers and parents agree.' It was from this confronting statement and research, that the leadership team agreed we needed to make student engagement a major focus on the 2013 Annual Action Plan.

My Role

I am a Year 5/6 classroom teacher and Mathematics and Professional Development Leader, making me a member of the Leadership Team. I was also my level's representative on the Student Wellbeing Team.

As a Year 5/6 classroom teacher, I became aware that the current leadership program for Year 6 students was thought by students, parents and teachers to be inactive and tokenistic. In this current Year 6 leadership program, students were placed into one of the following teams:

- Civics and Citizenship Team (four School Leadership positions)
- Community Team
- Active Australia Team (eight Sport Leadership positions)

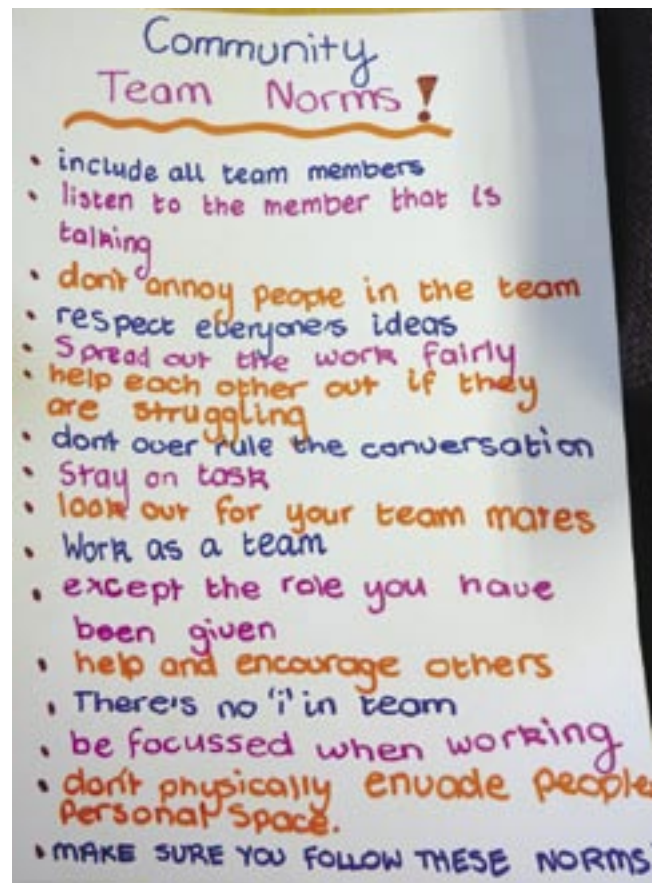
- The Arts Team
- Technology Team
- The Environment Team

This system was introduced by our former principal in 2006 to recognise all Year 6 students as leaders and removed the term 'Captain'. It is assumed that all students would like to be part of the Civics and Citizenship Team and therefore they presented a speech to that year's 5/6 cohort plus the current Civics and Citizenship Team who voted for their preferred leaders (one boy and one girl). The votes were tallied and the 5/6 teachers also had input to alleviate the 'popularity contest' and to ensure the students selected had shown leadership qualities (as this was not always the case in the past).

The Active Australia Team was also selected on a combination of votes and teacher discretion and the remaining students were placed in teams based on their second or third preference. Each team was assigned a teacher mentor, however this never impacted on the involvement of the teams taking action. Whilst belonging to a team was a privilege of a Year 6 student, both teachers and parents felt that this system was tokenistic for those students not part of either the Civics and Citizenship or Active Australia Team, because these two teams were visibly 'active' making speeches at assemblies and sports days and representing the school at various events, such as the Young Leaders Conference.

One of the key improvement strategies in the Student Wellbeing domain of 2013's Annual Action Plan was to implement a more active Year 6 Leadership Program. After some research of student leadership programs, we decided to use Student Action Teams (SATs) to assist with the implementation of the program, with the hope that this would increase student engagement levels. By implementing SATs, we felt that this would provide an opportunity for all Year 6 students to be active and have a voice within our school.

To measure the effects of SATs on student engagement, we planned



to collect quantitative and qualitative data from students and teachers late in September, at the end of Term 3. This would in turn assist us to plan the leadership program for our 2014 student leaders, by analysing whether the SATs had achieved our desired outcome.

Implementing Student Action Teams (SATs)

SATs are a group of students who identify and tackle a school or community issue. They research the issue, make plans, create a proposal and then take action on it (Holdsworth, Cahill & Smith, 2003). Schools that have implemented SATs indicate a substantial positive change in areas such as knowledge, skills, attitude and connectedness, and students who took part specifically identified their increased level of engagement at school (Holdsworth, Cahill & Smith, 2003; Holdsworth, 2012).

In order to achieve our short term goals, we used the Student Action Teams Manual (Youth Research Centre, 2003) to plan and teach our lessons. The lessons were taught weekly for 45 minutes, by myself and another 5/6 colleague, whilst the Year 5 students were taken for Religious Education lessons by our remaining 5/6 colleague. The six student leadership

teams were already established at the beginning of the year and varied in size. We were concerned about the size of some groups (the groups ranged from 3-11 students), as we knew that the research showed that smaller groups of between three and eight are faster at completing tasks and more effective at making decisions (Pennington, 2004). However, as the students had elected to be in these groups, we did not want to change them. Therefore, we began our lessons by focusing on building teamwork and identifying the skills and talents of each team member. Each team developed a set of norms that they would follow in all leadership lessons (examples above) and a poster displaying all team members and the qualities and skills they brought to the group.

In the first few weeks of Term 3, the students were ready to develop a project proposal. In fact members of one team were so excited to get started, they had written a proposal over the holidays and were constantly inquiring when the next leadership lesson was to be held. However, we wanted to ensure that all the projects were well thought out and planned using the 'Project Planner' from the Student Action Teams Manual. This would ensure each team developed a common understanding of the project

and all of the details required. Prior to this, the students brainstormed a range of ideas, rated them and stated what they wanted to achieve and why. This allowed us to monitor the size of their project and if it was achievable. Brainstorming also allowed teams to have a 'back-up plan' if their project was not approved by the principal. By the end of August, most teams had written their proposal and had either had their project approved or had a scheduled meeting with the principal. Feedback from the principal was extremely positive and communicated at a staff meeting: "I wanted to congratulate the Year 6 student leaders for their professional attitude and preparation for our meetings. They always had an answer if I asked and what if..." (Principal)

Student Action Teams: are you sure?

In late August, and thinking further about what we were doing, I wondered whether our Student Action Team approach was on track. Roger Holdsworth directed me to further research in this area, which lead me to the belief that, on several points, we had not truly implemented SATs, but instead were supporting what was referred to as Student Responsibility Groups (SRGs) – groups or teams of students who take on responsibility for the

implementation of something within the school (Holdsworth, 2010) but without expectation for making changes.

These students have important responsibilities, have to make decisions and carry out valued roles within the school. However, they neither investigate much about their area of responsibility nor are expected to make changes. Their areas of responsibility are defined by the school, by teachers or by tradition, and their roles are to ensure that they are carried out (Holdsworth, 2010).

In follow up phone conversations, I realised that this is what we had implemented. Students working in a team to implement something or take responsibility for something, can still have a strong student participatory focus, while not strictly perhaps being a SAT (Holdsworth, 2010), but we needed to reflect on where the project was going.

What was the objective now? How could we make changes to what the students were already doing, to allow their projects to be more 'action research based'? Would the students have enough time to change what they were doing? Were SRGs enough to increase student engagement levels?



SRGs in action

By mid September, two of the six SRGs had implemented their proposed action and two others were preparing for their action which would take place early Term 4. The two teams that had implemented their action varied in size and were a mix of both boys and girls. One team had held a 'Make a Difference Day' that involved whole school participation and the other had begun a 'Mini Vinnies Group' that included students from Years 3-6. The latter was a continuous action that would carry on for the rest of the year, with fortnightly meetings. The remaining two teams, which were both small groups of 3-4 students and included only boys, were still struggling to get their proposal completed.

Roger visited for a 45 minute session with the students in September, speaking to four of the six SRGs. He challenged each group using the '5 Whys' activity, which allowed the students to think about the deeper purpose behind their project. He also asked the SRGs the following two questions:

- What evidence do you have to support the importance of what you are doing/did?
- How will/do you know your project will be/was successful?

We met after school to discuss observations about the student teams, the core processes of SATs, and how we could incorporate some of those ideas into the current SRGs. This meeting would lead us into our next cycle.

Revised Plan

To move forward with this project, we needed to revise our original plan in light of the new information we had discovered about SATs and SRGs. With the end of Term 3 fast approaching, we decided to continue with SRGs but change our focus for data collection. Given the multifaceted nature of student engagement, we planned to collect data on three components that would indicate engagement: enjoyment, student voice and connectedness to school. Out of the three types of engagement: behavioural, emotional and cognitive, our focus was on emotional engagement, which Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004) suggest includes affective reactions in the classroom, along with a sense of belonging and being valued. By doing so, we anticipated that we would gain an insight into how to support student engagement and build more positive and collaborative relationships with students (Department of Education, 2007).

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from students and teachers who were closely linked to this project to give an informed perspective of the leadership program.

Student Survey

During a leadership lesson in September, quantitative data were collected from all Year 6 students on the aspects of enjoyment, student voice and connectedness to school in relation to SRGs and leadership lessons. The students completed 14 questions by ticking their response on the scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Student Focus Groups

Four leadership teams were selected to participate in focus groups, held in the first week of Term 4 (October). These provided qualitative data on the impact of SRGs on the students. The teams selected varied in size and proposed action achievement. The focus groups provided a detailed discussion, with students feeding off each others' comments and allowed each student the opportunity to speak and share their opinions (Mertler, 2006). Responses were recorded and common themes were identified. In order to make the students feel more comfortable I began the session with an activity- oriented question called 'free listing' (Colucci, 2007), in which the students listed the pros and cons of being a leader. I then moved onto guiding questions, noting that only two out of the four groups could answer question six, as Roger hadn't met with all SRGs:

1. Did this project make you feel like you had more of an opportunity to be heard and listened to?
2. Does this project make you want to do more of this at school?
3. By doing this project, does it make you feel more connected to the school?
4. Have you enjoyed what you are doing?
5. What could we do next year to improve the leadership program?
6. Did speaking to Roger make you think differently? So what do you want to do now?

Staff Survey

A staff survey collected qualitative data in September. Staff was asked:

1. Has the way we have run the Student Leadership Teams this year allowed the students to have more of an opportunity to be heard and listened to?
2. In your observations have you seen evidence that students feel more engaged because of the changes we have made to our leadership program?
3. Do you think our students feel more connected to the school?
4. Has this lead to other areas of school life?
5. Can you think of other ways of enhancing the Student Leadership Program?

Outcomes

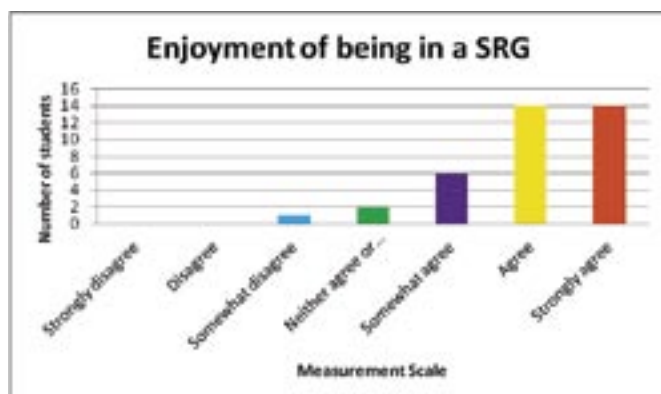
We then collated and organised the qualitative and quantitative data collected from students and teachers into themes: enjoyment of the leadership program and project, student voice, feeling connected to school, views on being a leader and ideas for the future.

Student Survey

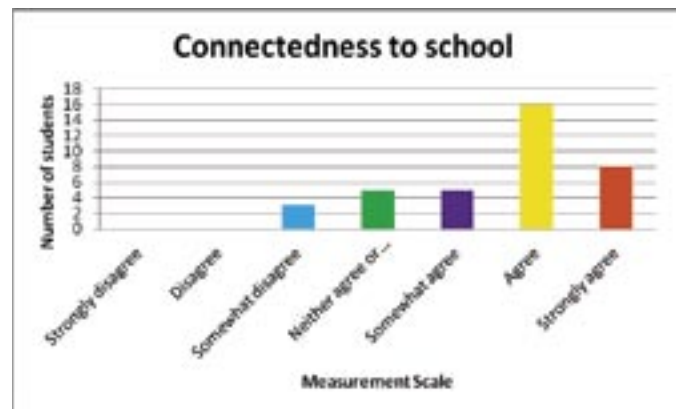
Results from the student survey were, overall, very positive. Questions relating to the theme of enjoyment of the leadership program and project showed that the majority of students had enjoyed being a leader and being part of a team.



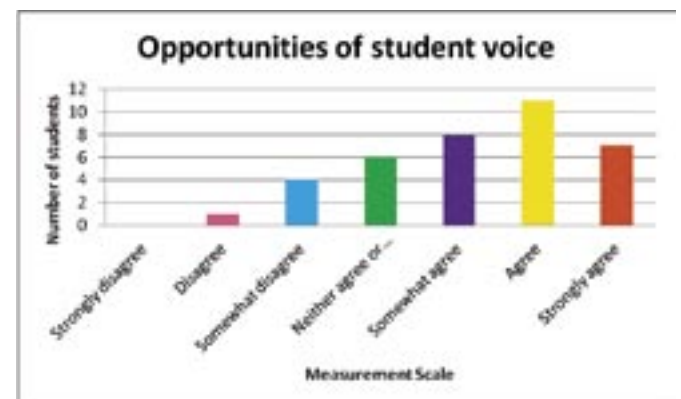
Results of the questions relating to enjoyment of the leadership lessons and the students project were not as strong with only 19 out of 37 students agreeing that the leadership lessons were enjoyable and 26 out of 37 students agreeing that they enjoyed having a project to work on. Finally, only half of the students agreed that being a leader (22 out of 37) and working on a project (21 out of 37) made school more enjoyable. The number of students who disagreed in these areas of enjoyment was not significant.



Students responses to the theme of feeling connected to their school as a result of the project they undertook showed only 3 out of 37 somewhat disagreed and none disagreed.

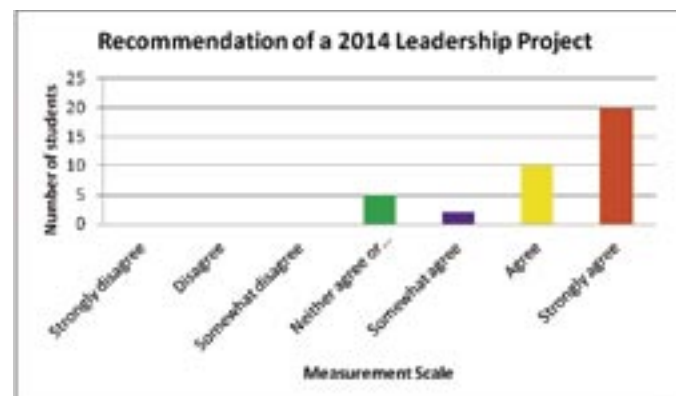


The results of the question relating to the theme of students' voice in relation to feeling more listened to by teachers showed a range of responses.



Over half of the students agreed that being a leader made them feel special (26 out of 37) and approximately half (23 out of 37) felt that being a leader made them feel important and responsible.

Interestingly, responses relating to the theme of ideas for the future showed that the majority of students agreed (30 out of 37) that the 2014 student leaders should work on a project with their leadership team.



This data assisted with the formulation of the questions that were to be used with the student focus groups, as we felt some of the information gained from the survey needed further explanation and exploration.

Student Focus Groups

Students were informed that the discussions in the focus groups would be recorded and used for later playback and analysis. They were invited to leave if they were uncomfortable with this process, but all chose to remain. Recordings of the focus groups were listened to again in order to identify themes.

The four groups chosen varied in the success of the implementation of their project. Two teams had carried out their action; one group had planned and met with the principal, setting a date for the implementation of their project and one had not yet progressed past writing their proposal, as they were waiting to hear from the principal in regards to a meeting. Due to this, the questions for the latter group had to be altered slightly.

All four groups expressed positive responses to 'being a leader', through the free listing exercise, where they named the 'pros and cons' of being a leader. Common responses amongst the groups were:

- Being the children's voice of the school
- Having an opportunity to change or run things in the school
- Students in the school find it easier to talk to the leaders than the teachers
- Enjoyment/opportunities of being a 'mini teacher'
- Getting more of a say and feeling important
- Being looked up to by younger students
- Working in a team

All groups explained that feeling more responsible was both a positive and negative of being a leader. They felt more respected by teachers and students: "It's cool because you know people look up to you because I remember in past years you used to watch the leaders and it's good to finally be able to be a leader and a role model." They also felt there was too much pressure on them to behave: "If you do something wrong everyone is watching you and you could be a bad influence on others because you are a role model."

Two of the teams expressed that it was hard working in a team because;

- It was hard to come to an agreement
- No-one listens to you
- People don't always stay focused and on task
- The boys and girls stick together
- Don't always feel involved

Three out of four groups agreed that they had more of a chance to be heard and listened to by both students and teachers due to the leadership lessons: "I feel like the leadership classes encouraged us to get our ideas out, if you were in Year 5 and suggested it, it may not have happened." The remaining group only felt as though they were listened to when students and teachers needed help in their leadership area, being technology: "I don't think the others (students) see us as being as cool as the other teams." One of the groups expressed that they felt limited to having an opinion only in their area (sport) and expressed the desire to have an opportunity to be heard across all areas of the school.

Three out of the four groups strongly expressed feeling more connected to the school as a result of their project. They enjoyed being able to represent their school and felt more comfortable talking to teachers and the principal. They also felt like being a leader allowed them to be more 'in the know' about what was happening around the school: "You get to find out more about what St Dominic's is actually about, like it's



about the whole community." Perhaps what was most evident, was that students felt more connected because they felt like they were leaving something behind that was lasting: "Then you could say like in 2030 they're still doing Mini Vinnies and then you can think, oh my God I started that."

Finally, all groups agreed that the 2014 leaders should have a project to work on. The groups suggested the leadership lessons could be improved by:

- Giving students more time – maybe two sessions a week
- All teams assist with the implementation of each other's projects
- Start earlier in the year
- Cover skills and teamwork at the end of Year 5 and then revise in Term 1 Year 6 so you have three terms to implement project
- Keep the whole school updated on what each team is doing
- Each team keeps a folder of what they have accomplished and passes it on to new leaders
- Each team speaks to the new leaders before they decide what team they want to be in

Staff interview

All of the teachers interviewed believed that students had had an opportunity to be heard and listened to due to the timetabled leadership lessons: "Timetabling Student Action Leadership Team time to work together and plan sends the message that it is a valued activity." All of the teachers surveyed believed it was important the students had planned, led and implemented a project for the school, which enabled them to work with teachers and the principal and therefore promote student voice.

Teachers were unsure whether the leadership program made students more connected to our school – because they felt they were already connected: "I think our students have always felt strongly connected to St. Dominic's – I'm unsure if they would feel more connected now." However, some believed the feeling of connectedness had strengthened: "They have been asked to consult with the staff and parent community. In doing this, I am sure their connection with St Dominic's has strengthened considerably."

All teachers agreed that the students were feeling more engaged due to the leadership program as they had had more of a say in their learning and the type of place they want their school to be: "If you raise the bar and expect them to be responsible for their learning, they will rise."

Finally, all teachers gave feedback about how we could improve the program for next year:

- Allow more time for teams to meet to work on their leadership skills and to plan and implement initiatives
- Meet with their teacher mentors on a regular basis and extend the responsibility to more staff not just the 5/6 teachers
- Connecting to organisations or people in the community that could assist them
- Hold and lead student forums to involve all students in the school

Reflection on the impact of the project

The first two cycles of this action research project are only the beginning of the change process at our school. They show how an effective student leadership program can be used as a vehicle to increase student engagement. The project's short-term goal of teaching the students leadership skills was achieved through weekly 45 minute leadership sessions, however results from the student focus groups showed that perhaps we spent too long on skills based lessons. This may suggest that we could be re-teaching skills the students already have acquired.

The project's second short-term goal – students planning and implementing a project relating to their area of leadership – was met by the majority of student leadership teams. However some teams did not achieve this goal, perhaps because of:

- the size and gender mix affected the ability to come to a consensus
- the ability to stay on task
- need for more time

We have taken positive steps toward our long-term goal of improving student engagement through the implementation of a student leadership program. For many students, there was an increase in their enjoyment, student voice and connectedness to school – which are indicators of engagement. Most students reported that they enjoyed being a leader and belonging to a leadership team. Students enjoyed being the 'children's voice' of the school, having an opportunity to change or run programs in the school and feeling important. Many students also reported feeling more connected to the school (24 out of 37 on the student survey) as a result of the SRGs.

During focus groups, students named being able to represent the school, being more 'in the know' and feeling more comfortable to talk to teachers and the principal as indicators of feeling more connected to our school. According to Mitra's Pyramid of Student Voice (2006) collaborating with adults is the second level of student participation and is deeper than just being heard. The students saying they feel more comfortable talking to their teachers and the principal shows we have made progress to building closer and more intimate relationships (Mitra, 2006), which will allow us to work collaboratively with them to make our school a better place. Interestingly, only half the teachers interviewed felt as though the students' connectedness to school had improved as a

result of the SRGs, as they thought our students already felt connected. Our school survey data did not support this and perhaps suggests that the teachers and students may view the concept of 'connectedness' differently.

The few negative students responses to the SRGs could be attributed to groups that did not implement their project, lack of teamwork and consensus, and the amount of pressure students felt being a leader. Another issue to consider is the stigma that some students felt came with being a member of a certain team: "I don't think people think this team (technology) is very cool; we are not as respected as others" (student in focus group). This section of data may also suggest that not all students want to be leaders: "Leadership is hard work - you need to think about others and not yourself and sometimes it may feel like you're a servant to those you are leading. I feel the negative results may be a result of this." (5/6 Teacher).

Future Planning

There are a number of considerations from our results that assist us with future planning. Firstly, group size does matter. Pennington (2004) suggests that groups of between five and seven are ideal for decision making and taking action. Some of the student leadership groups were as large as 11, which led to their break-down into smaller sub groups, often boys and girls separately. In the larger groups, students admitted that some members were off task, leading to an inability to complete tasks.

Furthermore, the opportunity to contribute to group discussion declines in larger groups (Pennington, 2004). This was evident in data collected from students in focus groups who reported feeling left out and not listened to. Constructing roles for each member of the group would be highly valuable and assist in creating an effective team. Roles, such as team leader, reporter/speaker/, writer/scribe, publisher, materials collector and researcher have been used effectively in SATs (Holdsworth, 2012). If students in each team could identify their strengths and take on a role, this would allow them to take responsibility and feel like a valued member of their team. Therefore, group size and the allocation of roles for each team member, must be considered when constructing future leadership teams.

Another issue for consideration, reported by both students and teachers was the need for more time. This is important if we are to develop more active SATs in the future, as students will go through their own action research process and this needs time.



Overall, the positive response from both students and staff demonstrated the importance of an effective student leadership program in building students' agency, self-worth, respect, and sense of membership in the school (Mitra, 2004). It has also shown that student leadership will promote students to think about and engage in their own learning in a far more productive way (Raymond, 2001). This process has allowed us to see the potential of where we can take student leadership and the impact it can have on student wellbeing and our school.

After all, as teachers it is our job to ensure all young Australians become active and informed citizens and we need to engage our leaders of the 21st century in this process (Black, 2011). It is young people who have the power to influence changes across a wide range of domains, for example their own learning, within their school and the wider community and in ways that affect and matter not only to themselves but their school as a whole and the community that it serves (Walsh & Black, 2009).

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This work was originally carried out as part of an action research project within studies for a Masters of Education (Student Wellbeing) at The University of Melbourne.



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Young leaders show Penrith how it's done

On the 6th September 2013, a group of nine students from McCarthy Catholic College hosted the inaugural **IGNITE Student Leadership Conference**, an event designed to make today's young adults more proactive about the concept of leadership. Students from several schools around the Penrith area arrived at McCarthy at 9:30 am and then spent the whole day working on developing leadership skills and qualities. Keynote presentations by David Bradbury, former Assistant Treasurer and Federal MP for Lindsay, and Philip Chan, UNICEF Youth Ambassador for NSW, kicked off the day, and afterwards everyone selected two workshops to attend from a list that included Environment, Writing and Drama, Charity, Community, Community Development, Hospitality, Armed Forces and Music.

The final part of the day, and the most exciting, was called **'The Great Debate.'** Here, students returned to the main hall with resolutions about how they could show leadership in the local community. These resolutions were presented to the **Ignite** students, and they were then debated, before students voted on the three best resolutions, which were sent off to the appropriate authorities.

'We were excited but a little bit nervous about this part,' said Thomas, one of the team. *'We wanted people to debate and argue, but we were worried they would just*

sit there and say nothing.' In the end, the debate was the biggest part of the day, as environmental issues and the role of the armed forces, amongst other topics, were discussed in detail.

Why did we do this?

The **Ignite Organising Committee** believed that the children of modern society required assistance to develop a vision for the future and also practice to develop the leadership skills to make that vision a reality. The leader of **Ignite**, Jeremiah, thought it would be a great idea if the conference could be

something to help young adults realise their potential, and fully grasp the idea that someday they could be a leader – in the community, in business or even in politics. Who knows? Every journey has to start somewhere, and for some young leaders in the community, the **Ignite Organising Committee** hoped that the starting point would be this conference.

Another reason, according to Jorge, one of the members of the committee, was the hope that they would be able to produce something more relevant to their lives than the current school work. *'We were looking for something that meant something to us now, rather than what we were studying at school. We think young people can be leaders in their community now, so that was what we tried to do.'*

What went well on the day?

Overall, the conference was a huge success. Kiara, one of the organisers said, *'I think we managed to smooth out all the little bumps we encountered quite well: one of the presenters was not able to attend, and we had issues with the projector. The students were mature and understanding, and our own facilitators kept everything in check.'*



Part of the leadership shown by the **Ignite Organising Committee** was organising everything. This included booking speakers, and meeting with them to prepare them for their sessions, setting up all the audio-visual equipment, writing the conference booklets and facilitating the Great Debate. In addition, the **Ignite Organising Committee** had to cater for the whole event, too. The best part, according to Glen, was the interaction between the students. *'They came to the school as strangers, but I think after the debate, they left as friends'*, he said. The writing and drama workshop was very well received too – it was interactive, involving students building things out of marshmallow and spaghetti.

What are we going to change next time?

Next time, the **Ignite Organising Committee** will try to book a bigger place to hold the event – with an equally large group of students. They are already planning to expand it beyond just Year 8, and hopefully include more Western Sydney schools. In addition, the **Ignite Organising Committee** acknowledges that there are improvements to be made. Sam said, *'I hope that, next year, we can be a little more organised with our presenters, so they know what to expect.'*

Zac, on the other hand, sees real opportunities for the use of social media next time. *'I think it would be great to have a twitter backchannel, so people can tweet about the conference - as it is happening!'*

What were our resolutions for the day, and what action are we going to take?

Overall, three resolutions were passed by the **Ignite** student body on the day. They were:

Environment: The Ignite Student Leadership Conference calls on the Federal Government to continue to explore opportunities for alternative, renewable sources of energy.

Armed Forces: The Ignite Student Leadership Conference calls on the Australian Defence Forces to make a concerted effort to educate the general public about the role the ADF plays in disaster relief and management.

Hospitality: The Ignite Student Leadership Conference calls on the Board of Studies to make the Hospitality Syllabus more closely linked to the whole range



The Ignite Leadership Committee

of hospitality and event management opportunities.

Ignite Leadership Committee:

The Conference was organised by: Jeremiah Gomes, Zach La Rosa, Isaiah Butterfield, Thomas Duggan, Elayna D'Ermilio, Kiara Auddino, Ethan Torr, Glen Wambeek, Samuel Kanaan-Oringo.

Schools attending the Inaugural Ignite Student Leadership Conference:

- McCarthy Catholic College
- Caroline Chisholm College
- Emmaus Catholic College
- Cerdon College
- St Agnes College
- Delany College
- St Columba's College
- Xavier College
- Gilroy College
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
- Bede Polding College

Partners:

The following organisations helped make Ignite a reality. The Ignite Organising Committee would like to thank them for their assistance and support:

- McCarthy Catholic College (hosting the event).
- Catholic Education Office, Parramatta (advertising materials).
- Penrith City Council (printing)
- NGS Super (promotional materials)
- White Rock Design
- John Thain
- Education4u
- Nepean Regional Security

Quotes from participants:

Mr Heggart: 'I was so impressed at the maturity shown by the Ignite committee and all the participants.'

Jeremiah: 'I think everyone who attended - young and old (and middle-aged) - left inspired and with ideas bubbling in their mind.'

Samuel: 'I didn't think it would work the first time - but I've no doubt we can do it next time.'

Elayna: 'The best quote of the day was this: without someone like you, who cares a lot, nothing is ever going to change.'

Ms Marathakis: 'The conference was proof that we should never underestimate the abilities of our young people.'

Ethan: 'The conference leapt beyond anyone's expectations.'

Zac: 'True leaders don't create followers. They create more leaders.'

Jorge: 'All great things begin with a spark.'

Elayna: 'Some people say that knowledge is power, but we think leadership is power.'

Jeremiah Gomes, Year 8
assisted by Keith Heggart

Contact: keith.heggart@gmail.com

Bringing student voice to student wellbeing

Principals
Australia
Institute
Learning. Leading.

KidsMatter
Australian Primary Schools
Mental Health Initiative

Sometimes in schools we talk about student wellbeing and mental health ... but forget to talk with students themselves about these issues.

The voice of students should be central to our conversations and our plans as we work out how to nurture happy, balanced kids. In an attempt to help student voices get heard in the roaring busyness of schools, KidsMatter have developed a curriculum resource for teachers.

This resource aims to provide and support opportunities for class/year level groups to undertake a curriculum-based enquiry unit that audits how the school is going in the provision of mental health education and support ... from the perspective of the students. It aims to encourage student inquiry into mental health and wellbeing, provide an opportunity for student attitudes, voice and thought to be included at the 2014 KidsMatter state conference, and provide a leadership opportunity for a small group of student who will take the information from their school and work on it in a conference setting with students from other schools.

Here's a quick snapshot of the resource to give you a taste of how we hope schools can engage students in thinking about wellbeing, and prepare them to take an active part in **Partners in Wellbeing KidsMatter Victoria** Conference on **May 5 and 6** this year.

Student-led Inquiry:

Your challenge ... should you choose to accept it ...

Step One: Integrate the Student-Led Inquiry task into the curriculum

So ... what do the students do?

Breaking down rich and complex concepts of wellbeing into a language that can be spoken and understood can be a challenge for anyone. In order to provide a structure around this conversation, the inquiry asks students to think about four broad questions based on the KidsMatter Primary components:

1. *What is a positive school community?*
2. *What are the skills I need for wellbeing?*
3. *How can families and schools work together to promote mental health and wellbeing?*
4. *What makes it easy to get help?*

Working through the inquiry task will enable you to have students shape the way wellbeing looks and sounds. It opens the way to walking the talk by inviting students to be partners in decisions about wellbeing practice.

If they are ready to take their involvement further, perhaps the time is right for step two...

Step Two: Participate in the 'Voices from the Schoolyard' student session at the Conference on May 6

Armed with new knowledge and perspectives gained from their inquiry unit into 'what makes good mental health and wellbeing?' at their school, students are invited to participate in a *world café* session as part of our Victorian state conference proceedings. This session will encourage students to share, expand, clarify and cultivate their knowledge, perspectives and awareness. It will be an opportunity for the voices of students be heard in a state-wide conference, contributing to wider conversations around mental health and wellbeing.

To support their participation in the conference, students will be able to make use of an online chat forum. This is an opportunity, both before and after the conference, for students to connect with others, to share views and begin to unpack concepts around mental health and wellbeing in schools. Accessing the chat forum before the conference can also be a great way to connect with speakers and begin to gather information or ideas to build-on their inquiry.

We hope that by providing some simple tools that integrate easily into the curriculum, student voice will be a regular feature of wellbeing in every school.

For more information on the **Partners in Wellbeing Conference**, or to register students for the 'Voices from the Schoolyard' session on May 6, go to our Conference website (below).

Caroline Heysen (Project Officer)
and **Rob Mason (Coordinator)**
KidsMatter, Victoria
caroline.heyson@pai.edu.au
rob.mason@pai.edu.au

[www.kidsmatter.edu.au/
primary/vicconference](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/vicconference)





www.vicsrc.org.au

VicSRC Strategic Planning Days

On the warm, sunny days of the 22nd and 23rd of January, at the Bastow Institute in North Melbourne, the VicSRC Executive team joined together with supporters and former Executive members to re-create the VicSRC strategic plan.

Over the course of the two days, we discussed and mapped out guidelines and plans for the next five years to help future Executive members and to set specific goals for the upcoming years. This included discussing:

- the VicSRC as a role model organisation;
- promoting the Executive team;
- promoting a better understanding of student values and the importance of student leadership in schools;
- working with others in collaboration to help improve the VicSRC;
- how we can help empower students and their voices;
- involving students from across Victoria in decision making
- the partnerships we have and the possibility of building new ones;
- issues of geography and encouraging other states and countries to have their own state SRCs; and
- our hopes for finding ways to bring in more funding.

The days were interactive, interesting and everyone came home with a larger understanding of and confidence in the future of the VicSRC and how important we are to Victorian students and fighting for their voice in education.

On behalf of the Executive I would like to give a big thanks to the Bastow Institute for sharing their incredible facility with us, as well as Helga (for facilitating the days), Krista, Roger, Dave, and many other supporters and past Executive. With their help



we achieved our goal of creating a realistic yet challenging strategic plan and are very proud of the work we have done.

Tess Shacklock
VicSRC Executive



The VicSRC has rebranded!

To sign up to the new VicSRC
online e-newsletter ... visit:

www.vicsrc.org.au/joinin/maillinglist

The VicSRC receives funding support from the **Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** and is auspiced by and based at the **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**. It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

Coming up

VicSRC Regional Conference 2014

VicSRC Conferences allow students to meet together across schools, learn from each other, gain new skills and work together on common issues.

Our experience shows that creating these spaces for students and teachers to meet is a very empowering opportunity for all involved.

www.vicsrc.org.au

Cost
\$35 per student for
VicSRC Member Schools

\$45 per student for
non-VicSRC Members

Register online via our
facebook event page
on.fb.me/1d9fCV3

VicSRC Victorian Student
Representative Council

Conference Outline:

- Twelve Regional SRC Conferences throughout Victoria: May 6 to June 19
- 1 day conferences (9 am - 3 pm)
- Network with other students and teachers in your region
- Learn how to be more effective student representatives
- Take action on issues you care about
- Special side PD and resources available for teachers



Online Registration !

Online Registration: links for each conference at: on.fb.me/1d9fCV3

No payment is required when booking. Payments can be made via invoice, cheque or Credit Card.

Bookings close: **Friday 4th April 2014**

Locations and dates:

GIPPSLAND

Tuesday, May 6, 2014
Yarram, VIC | Yarram Secondary College

BALLARAT

Thursday, May 8, 2014
Wendouree, VIC | Ballarat Grammar

BENDIGO

Friday, May 9, 2014
Flora Hill, VIC | Bendigo South East College

SOUTH EASTERN SUBURBS

Tuesday, May 20, 2014
Berwick, VIC | Nossal High School

INNER MELBOURNE

Wednesday, May 21, 2014
Melbourne, VIC | The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School

EASTERN SUBURBS

Friday, May 23, 2014
Heathmont, VIC | Heathmont College

WANGARATTA

Monday, May 26, 2014
Wangaratta, VIC | Wangaratta High school

GEELONG

Wednesday, May 28, 2014
Geelong, VIC | North Geelong Secondary College

NORTHERN SUBURBS

Friday, May 30, 2014
Fawkner, VIC | John Fawkner Secondary College

FRANKSTON/MORNINGTON

Monday, June 16, 2014
Frankston, VIC | McClelland College

PORTLAND

Monday, June 16, 2014
Portland, VIC | Portland Secondary College

WESTERN SUBURBS

Thursday, June 19, 2014
Kings Park, VIC | Copperfield College - Kings Park Junior Campus

Glimpses of student voice and action in SA

Student Voice at Langhorne Creek Campus

At Langhorne Creek Campus (Eastern Fleurieu School), we believe that students learn best when they are actively involved in their learning and when their learning is meaningful. The only way to ensure that the learning is meaningful is to consult and involve the students in the learning program. To enhance the feeling of community at the campus also, students are very involved in the planning and development of facilities and resources.

Students are formally involved in decision-making and planning through a **Student Representative Council**, an **Environment Committee** and **Class Meetings**. Students are informally involved through effective teaching methodologies.

The **Student Representative Council** consists of representatives from each of the three classes and is chaired by one of these students. They are spokespeople for the students in formal decisions, they make recommendations, plan events and manage some fund raising. The **Environment Committee** helps to manage the many environmental projects the campus is in, they collect information and lead students towards greater involvement. This group also attends monthly meetings of the Lower Murray Junior Youth Environment Group.

More at: www.easternfleurieu.sa.edu.au/index.php/langhornecreek/studentvoicelang



Student Voice at Willunga PS

Student Voice comprises of an **Executive Committee** of 10 year 7 students including elected role holders of Chairperson, treasurer and secretary, and **Committee Members**: Year 6 / 7 students who nominate to be on a specific committee for the year.

Committees include:

Transition: take part in transition activities and welcome new students to our school. Participate in parent information sessions for new kindy parents.

Fundraising: work with Governing Council fundraising committee to raise funds for the school. This includes running as a group the school disco held twice a year at recess and lunch time.

Community Events: provide a link to community events and fundraising – raise money for cancer research, collect cans at Christmas for local church group.

Being Active: schedule and hold active events over the year including coordinating a once a term Being Active day session for R – 2 students.

ICT: work with technician and Deputy to ensure upkeep of equipment in the school. Trial new games / online activities. Support classes with new programs.

Grounds: consider feedback from classes about use of facilities.

In addition, two Class Representatives from each class in the school report to the Executive Committee about issues and ideas arising from class meetings.

Student Voice plays a very active role at Willunga Primary, hosting major events, contributing to major fundraising commitments and ensuring the successful voice of students is heard. In 2011 they contributed towards ensuring a new swing was built at the wooden playground and fundraised for the chair around the tree on the small oval.

More at: www.willungaps.sa.edu.au

Student Action Committee at Victor Harbor High School

The purpose of the **Student Action Committee (SAC)** is to voice the view of the students on a variety of matters including the learning environment, school procedures, curriculum, fund raising, canteen, school grounds and social functions. Representatives serve the school body by gathering opinions, encouraging involvement in school issues and aiming to make school a better place for all. We encourage all interested students to be involved.

If you wish to be a school leader, all you need to do is to volunteer to be a member of **SAC**. There are no elections except for executive positions of the male and female school leaders and sub-school leaders.

SAC has several sub-groups such as Sustainability, Canteen, Grounds beautification, Fund raising and Amphitheatre. Each student can have input into these groups through their class representatives and their sub-school leaders. Staff members work with each sub-group.

Whole group meetings occur twice a term and occur during lesson time. Each subgroup has meetings during mentoring. **SAC** members are expected to adhere to a code of cooperation and attend all required meetings.

A **SAC** newsletter is published twice a term. This is read out at sub-school assemblies. Regular articles appear in the school newsletter written by various students.

More at: www.vhhs.sa.edu.au/student-action-committee



Students are helping set educational policy in KY

For years, while mobilising parents and civic business leaders to push for better Kentucky (USA) schools, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence had considered the idea of including students in its work.

But it took young people themselves, in sync with adult leadership, to make the concept a reality.

When 14 Central Kentucky students worked for the better part of the 2012-2013 school year to gather research, observe policy-makers in action, reach out to other young people across the state and confer with allies across the country, the result was a compelling presentation at the committee's spring meeting.

The teens laid out their argument for student integration: *"In school, we learn about democracy,"* said Ross Boggess, a Henry Clay junior. *"Why don't we work with the Prichard Committee and do democracy?"*

It was a significant moment in the organisation's 30-year history and led to the vote to inaugurate the **Student Voice Team** as a component of the broader organisation. The embrace of students as policy partners speaks to the value of engaging young people in substantive efforts to improve our schools. And the benefits are mutual.

There is mounting evidence that the most successful students are those who feel some level of ownership in their education, and there is also a growing understanding that any school looking to improve achievement is well served by soliciting feedback from its students.

Only a few months into its pilot year, members of the **Student Voice Team** have conducted roundtable discussions with middle- and high-school students from Whitesburg to Bowling Green about a variety of education issues that affect them. But the conversation doesn't end there. These young leaders have also:

- Testified before the Interim Joint Committee on Education in Frankfort about the importance of student observations in the teacher evaluation process.
- Shared student perspectives about inadequate funding at a statewide summit and community rally.

- Created a presentation incorporating student voices on the impact of effective teaching for a professional development conference for hundreds of Kentucky teachers.

They may be too young to vote, but, clearly, these teenagers are not too young to make a contribution to the public discourse on improving Kentucky's schools.

Prichard Committee adults have welcomed this initiative and have guided the **Student Voice Team** to continue to test what is possible. Beyond installing the first high school student as a full member, the committee is nurturing a larger cadre of youth as informed advocates for improving the education experience.

At the heart of the **Student Voice Team** is an abiding belief that education is a civil right. To realise the democracy we deserve, we must support our young people to own their own learning. *"Students have the ability to be more than just beneficiaries of a strong education system,"* said Andrew Brennen, a senior at Paul Laurence Dunbar. *"Many of us also have the desire to be partners in making it better."*

Rachel Burg Belin

*Rachel Burg Belin co-founded and co-directs the **Student Voice Team** at the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.*

Reach Rachel Belin at: studentvoiceteam@prichardcommittee.org



Read more here:

www.kentucky.com/2014/02/01/3063219/students-are-helping-set-educational.html#storylink=cpy

Student Voice Ontario, Canada

A collection of videos about the reasons for and operation of **Student Voice** in Ontario, Canada are now available on the Ontario Ministry of Education website. These are presented in both English and French at:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/OntarioEDU>

Have a look at these (English language versions - French language versions also at the above site):

Calling all Students! Help Shape the Future of Ontario's Education System:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRdx1-fTEU>

Student Voice Overview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWbfCKc896s>

Student Councils and Student Voice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmSKG0MQQU4>

Student Voice for Student Councils - Kit Overview:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_FX2Ys-kho

Student Engagement: Students as Partners in their Learning:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yQr1557ndl>

Student Voice Seminar - June 2014

& Areas of Strategic Work

from the 2013 Cambridge Student Voice Conference

You are receiving this message because you participated or indicated an interest in participating in one of the **Student Voice Seminars** held at the University of Cambridge in 2011, 2012, and/or 2013, or because of your general interest in student voice.

We are planning a fourth gathering: **June 24-26, 2014**. It is my hope that we will be able to use the time in ways that best meet participants' needs. I am therefore writing to you now with two questions:

- 1 Will you be able to participate in some or all of the conference?
- 2 Do you have suggestions or requests for how we might spend our time?

We have developed a different format each year we have convened this group. My plan is to learn from you who intends to participate and what ideas you have for how we might spend our time and then work to develop a plan for the 2 1/2 days that includes formal and informal opportunities for sharing of research, projects, and resources.

Please respond as soon as you can. I hope to see many of you in Cambridge in June!

Alison Cook-Sather

Jean Rudduck Visiting Scholar

Homerton College, University of Cambridge, UK

Mary Katharine Woodworth Professor of Education

Coordinator of the Teaching and Learning Institute

acooksat@brynmawr.edu

Strategic Work Areas

At the 2013 **Student Voice Conference** at Cambridge, participants discussed useful strategic directions and tasks that would support and advance 'student voice'.

Nine portfolio or strategic work areas were identified and volunteers undertook to virtually 'convene' interested participants around the world to explore these. The nine areas, and their contact people, are shown on the opposite page. Further development of these areas has been happening - and the descriptions here are just brief summaries of possible tasks and questions.

Further information, including a summary of presentations and discussions at the Conference, are available in **Connect** 202 (August 2013: 11-16).

Are you interested to be part of this development?

Do you feel that you are primarily working around 'Student Voice' in one of these areas?

Contact the convenor/s and let them know of your interest.

Hopefully, the 2014 Student Voice Conference will be able to build on these directions.



1: Research and evidence:

Developing quality research around Student Voice to support policy and practice. What defines 'student voice' research? What research around 'student voice' is most worth pursuing? What is the connection between research, policy and practice? Articulation of arguments for change.

Dana Mitra
dmitra@psu.edu

Alison Cook-Sathers
acooksat@brynmawr.edu

2: Document practice:

Sharing examples and models of practice; sharing resources. Encouraging reflection; developing frameworks for reflection. Testing the assumption that reflection and shared documentation is effective in encouraging and supporting practice.

Roger Holdsworth
r.holdsworth@unimelb.edu.au

3: Monitoring and focus:

Maintaining a focus around 'student voice' - keeping us 'on track'; raising the difficult questions such as 'power', 'relations', 'identity', dangers of co-option and tokenism, exclusions. Alerting us to unintended consequences and multiple perspectives.

Eve Mayes
eve.mayes@det.nsw.edu.au

Emily Nelson
e.nelson@xnet.co.nz

4: Policy development and defense:

Working with policy makers to develop initiatives for the systematisation of 'student voice' and for partnerships between systems and students; areas of school review, 'feedback' etc.

Ari Sussman
asussman@schools.nyc.gov

5: Supporting practice:

Areas that are needed to support 'student voice' initiatives: funding; pre-service teacher development; in-service professional learning.

Helen Beattie
hnbeattie@gmail.com

6: Student collective action:

Supporting and building students' knowledge, power and voice within the movement in order that they are active partners; initiatives to meet the needs of student activists eg 'translation' of academic research. Sharing perspectives on the development of student-led initiatives including local, regional, national and international organisation.

Luke Shore
luke.shore@studentvoice.co.uk

7: Linking and integrating:

Connecting concepts and people within the area of 'student voice'. Objectives and procedures in short and longer terms eg electronic networks, conferences.

Jane McGregor
jane.mcgregor@educationresearch.co.uk

8: Publicising:

Raising broader awareness of 'student voice' and initiatives; developing broader community awareness of and support for ideas around 'student voice'; forms of communication outside the existing networks.

Jean Courtney
jean.courtney@ontario.ca

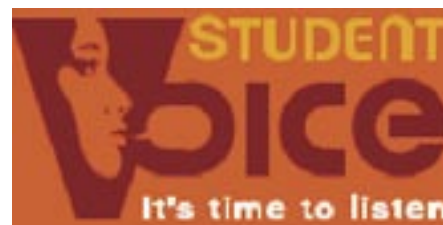
9: Memory, history and blue-sky thinking:

Location of current 'student voice' work within a historic and conceptual framework: reminder of where we've come from - links to national and international historical context - continuities and discontinuities? Development of visions for future directions: extrapolation and imagining: what we should remember and retain; what we could do.

Derry Hannam
derry.hannam@yahoo.com

Time for the UK Government to listen to school students

The UK Government has rejected the idea of a National School Student Association in England. The Department for Education (DfE) has repeatedly refused to listen to students who want a greater say in their education. To us, as school students, this demonstrates Michael Gove's DfE does not have students' best interests at heart. It shows that they are opposed to democracy in schools and inclusive education policy making.



The **School Student Working Group**, founded and led by students themselves, has been in talks with the Government about students' campaign to establish a National School Student Association. The prospective Association would represent school students' interests to regional and national policy makers and contribute to the European education debate. It would develop and promote student democracy practices, campaign against discrimination of and between students and defend school student rights. The campaign carries the support of 19 national school student unions from around Europe and the encouragement of the European Commission.

On October 3rd 2013, the **School Student Working Group** met with a senior official of the DfE's **Curriculum Policy Unit**. The official himself was interested in the campaign, believing that the Association would be a practical way of teaching citizenship. He then went on to say 'this is the kind of thing that would have been great for me when I was school!'. However he soon checked his personal interest by saying that school student representation was not in line with the Government's political interests. He highlighted the Government's 'anti-regulation ideology' including its 'one-on, two off' policy and said that 'the Department is at the forefront of that'.

Following the cold reaction of the official, the Working Group invited Education Ministers to clarify their position. The Working Group also approached the Cabinet Office, the Department now with responsibility for Youth and Civil Society. Both

Government Departments rejected the Working Group's invitation for further discussion, a DfE minister refusing to meet with the Working Group and the Cabinet Office failing to reply to a single one of the Working Group's approaches.

In a vibrant democratic system, all stakeholders are represented in the discourse regarding policy development and implementation. However, with no national, independent, democratic organisation specifically dedicated to representing school students, the direct self-representation of school students is lacking, both in policy making and the wider public education debate.

Luke Shore (16), Chair of the **School Student Working Group**, said: "Michael Gove's Department for Education refuse to listen to school students, and in so doing are perpetuating a democratic deficit in the education system. School

students will continue to fight for their right to associate and build a national school student association to protect their interests.'

Yasmin Rufo (16), Co-Vice Chair said: "The Working Group remains committed to building a meaningful dialogue between school students and the Government, but Ministers must have the humility to listen."

The School Student Working Group is a pan-European working group dedicated to greater school student democracy in the UK. Founded and led by students themselves, it works for the establishment of a National School Student Association that would represent students aged 11-19 in schools and sixth-forms around England.

For more information, please contact:

Yasmin Rufo
Co-Vice Chair, Working Group
yasminrufo@yahoo.com



StudentVoice (UK): Planning strategies and aims

In November, **StudentVoice** leaders Yasmin and Luke met up and had a strategy weekend, which was facilitated by volunteers from the London Roots Collective. Raj Dey, the founder of ESSA, and Nabina and Isra, two members of the **StudentVoice** steering group, also joined them. Over the course of two days, the group deliberated over what aims ought to be the focus of **StudentVoice**. They came up with five aims that they will implement and put into practice.

These aims are:

- 1 Represent the diversity of secondary students in England as stakeholders in their educational systems.
- 2 Provide a space for secondary students to come together to share and discuss ideas about their education.
- 3 Represent secondary students' interests in the policy making that affects their education.
- 4 Provide secondary students with the skills to impact their educational communities.
- 5 Be run by students and be accountable to students.

Not only did they think of five new aims for the organisation but they also thought of many different ways to achieve them. They want **StudentVoice** to be run by students like you, which is why they will be recruiting a National Council in the new year. If you think that you have the drive and can take the responsibility of helping to run a

student-led organisation, keep an eye on the website, newsletter, Twitter and Facebook as the application form will be up in the New Year.

Luke and Yasmin are looking for students who come from various backgrounds and attend different types of schools. They want students who are willing to create policies on education and talk to other students about what changes they want to be made to education. If you feel passionate about education and are willing to lobby and create political change, a place on the National Council may be for you!

www.studentvoice.co.uk



Student Voice Research and Practice Facebook Group

www.facebook.com/groups/studentvoicepage/

This open **facebook** group was initially established by Dana Mitra, and is now supported by the work of academics, practitioners and students throughout the world. It provides a valuable community of people working and interested in the area of 'Student Voice' - in Australia, USA, UK, Italy and elsewhere – as well as access to useful resources and examples, and up-to-date information about initiatives. You can easily log on and join the group at the above address.



Connect on Facebook

Connect has a presence on **facebook**. Find us at:

 www.facebook.com/pages/Connect/360372760717566

We've been posting some news and links there to complement what you see in the on-line version of **Connect**. It would be great if you could go there and 'like' us, and watch there for news of each **Connect's** availability on-line - for FREE - since we started in June 2013!

News and Reviews

Sydney Road Community School: *a small Government secondary school in Brunswick, Victoria*

Students are the centre of everything we do at our school.

We are renowned for the close, respectful, supportive connections between students and staff and for our efforts to create a sense of belonging and success in every student.

With the exception of compulsory VCE exams, we do not have competitive assessment or competitive ranking of students and avoid these practices unless they are mandated.

Our school has a tradition of excellence in equality, diversity, individuality, community and student safety.

SRCS is committed to the idea of accessible education for all, which means that we have no fees, no book lists, no uniforms and the cost of camps, excursions and senior subject materials are kept to a minimum.

At SRCS we provide a broad general curriculum catering to a wide range of student interests and abilities. The curriculum in Years 7-10 is drawn from the VELS learning domains of The Arts, English, Humanities,

Maths and Science. As well as providing a solid generalist grounding there is an emphasis on encouraging student self-expression through music, art and film making. Aspects of multimedia are incorporated throughout the curriculum.

In Years 11-12 students are able to negotiate a flexible program to meet their particular needs. Subjects may be selected from VCE, VET and VCAL. This allows for a variety of post-school outcomes including TAFE, university or as a productive member of the workforce.

VCE subjects offered include General Maths, Psychology, Music and Studio Art. VCAL is offered at the Intermediate and Senior levels. As a part of VCAL students may opt to take on a VET certificate in the areas of Hospitality or Music Industry (Certificate III in Technical production).

Students also have the opportunity to engage in a number of physical activities including sports, outdoor education and camping.

Contact us: 03 9380 9417

<http://sydneyrdfs.wordpress.com/about/>



2014 Victorian Junior School Council Congress



Save the date! The 2014 Junior School Council Congress is booked for **Friday September 12th** at the Victorian Parliament House, Spring Street, Melbourne.

The JSC Congress is the peak event for students to represent their school in debating and voting on motions that are important to Victorian primary school

students. Students will conduct a survey of the school, so they represent other opinions when they stand up in the chambers of Parliament to make a



speech. It is an opportunity that should not be missed. Plan your calendar to include the JSC Congress.

More information from David Mould, Second Strike: phone: 0412 743 951 or **David.Mould@second-strike.com**



Social Action Toolkit

The **Make it Happen! Social Action Toolkit** is designed and published by the UK Association for Citizenship Teaching for use by learners with activities and tips for organising successful social action undertaken as part of their citizenship curriculum.

The toolkit has also been designed to fit with the requirements of the UK's GCSE Citizenship Studies qualification where that is used. This toolkit is part of the NCS and Citizenship Curriculum Materials written and developed by ACT in partnership with the NCS.

The Toolkit can be downloaded from: www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/resource/social-action-toolkit



Student Voice

What is student voice and why is it important? **Student Voice** is a place for students, teachers, and parents to share and reflect on the ways in which young people are being empowered to influence their own learning.

From teachers sharing the ways in which they are developing learner agency by empowering students to manage their own learning, to students reflecting on what engages them in learning and why, the videos shared on the AITSL Student Voice website provide a chance for all members of the education community to demonstrate the value of meaningful learning partnerships with young people.

www.studentvoice.aitsl.edu.au

All about Student Action Teams, including some hyper-linked mini-case studies, at:
www.asprinworld.com/student_action_teams

Students Improving Schools facebook page

Students are changing schools in countless, positive, powerful ways that are forever altering education.

Join the conversation to learn how, when, where, why, and what is happening! This US-based *facebook* page is brought to you by *SoundOut.org*.

<https://www.facebook.com/StudentsImprovingSchools>



Student Action Teams in NSW government schools

Student Action Teams have been trialled in NSW government schools since 2007. An overview is available at:

www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsr/getinvolved/studaction-team.php

A **resource kit** for students and teachers interested to implement a *Teach the Teacher* program at your school has been developed by the VicSRC. It is part of the *Represent! Plus* resources on the VicSRC website: www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/representplus

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(\$ check availability before ordering; * discounted rate for subscribers to **Connect**)

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Donate to support *Connect*

Connect now has no income except donations and sales of literature (opposite). By supporting *Connect* with donations, you keep us going. To make a donation to the work of *Connect*, use the form in this issue or contact us for bank account details in order to make an electronic transfer of funds. We gratefully acknowledge all contributions in *Connect*.

ASPRINworld: the *Connect* website!

www.asprinworld.com/connect

Connect has a website at *ASPRINworld*; *ASPRIN* is the *Australian Student Participation Resource and Information Network* ("a cure for your student participation headaches") – a still-emerging concept. The *Connect* section of the website is slowly growing, with information about subscribing, recent back issue contents and summaries of and order information for *Student Councils and Beyond*, *Student Action Teams*, *Reaching High* and *Switched On to Learning*.

There are also links from the indexes of recent issues to their archived PDFs (see below).

Connect is now also
archived and available electronically:
research.acer.edu.au/connect

All issues of *Connect* are being archived through the ACER Research Repository: *ACEReSearch*. *Connect* issues from #1 to #194 are available for **free** download, and recent issues can be searched by key terms. See the *ASPRINworld* site for index details of recent issues, then link to and download the whole issue you are interested in.

www.informit.com.au

In addition, current and recent issues of *Connect* are now available on-line to libraries and others who subscribe to RMIT's *Informit* site – a site that contains databases of many Australian publications. You can access whole issues of *Connect* as well as individual articles. Costs apply, either by a library subscription to *Informit*'s databases, or through individual payments per view for articles.

www.asprinworld.com/connect
&
research.acer.edu.au/connect

Local and International Publications Received



Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on:

(03) 9489 9052 or (03) 8344 9637

Australian:

Learning Frontiers (AITSL, Melbourne, Vic) Application pack for organisations and individuals to participate in Learning Frontiers Community of Engagement: www.aitsl.edu.au

International:

Forum (UK) Vol 56 No 1; 2014. Available at: www.worldwords.co.uk/forum/content/pdfs/56/issue56_1.asp

Making It Happen: Social Action Toolkit (Association for Citizenship Teaching, London, UK) November 2013

ReThinking Schools (Milwaukee, WI, USA) Vol 28 No 2; Winter 2013-14

Students as Researchers (Speak Up/Ontario Ministry of Education, Canada) Collaborative Inquiry Action-Research Toolkit, January 2013

Student Councils and Beyond' On-Line!

We've almost run out of print copies of the first *Connect* publication: *Student Councils and Beyond* (from 2005). And many of the ideas have subsequently been reflected in the *Represent!* kit from the VicSRC (www.vicsrc.org.au/resources/represent).

So we have made all of *Student Councils and Beyond* (a compilation of articles and resources from many earlier issues of *Connect*) available on-line for **FREE**. It can be downloaded (as one document or in sections) as PDFs from the *Connect* website. Find it at:

www.asprinworld.com/connect



Articles from *Connect* are now discoverable through **EBSCOhost** research databases.

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Connect On-Line!

Free subscription and materials order form: **page 26**

All back issues of **Connect** from 1979 to the present (that's 34 years!) are freely available on-line! Thanks to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), all back issues of **Connect** have been scanned or up-loaded and are on the ACER's Research Repository: **ACEReSearch**.

You can find these issues of **Connect** at:

research.acer.edu.au/connect

The left-hand menu provides a pull-down menu for you to select the issue number > **browse**; the front cover of the issue is displayed, and you can simply click on the link in the main body of the page to download a PDF of the issue. Recent issues are also **searchable** by key words.

Connect has a commitment to the sharing of ideas, stories, approaches and resources about active student participation. We are totally supported by donations!



Let us know

There may be some gaps or improvements necessary. As you use this resource, let us know what you find. (If an issue of **Connect** seems to be missing, check the issues either side, as **double issues** show up only as one issue number.) If you have any ideas for improving this resource, please let us know.

Most importantly, please USE this resource.

All back copies of **Connect** are available on-line ... for free!

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