

Youth participation: some of the underlying ideas

In areas of youth policy, program development and delivery, as in the broader community sector, the importance and value of participatory approaches in **delivering improved outcomes** for young people, either as individuals or as populations, is now widely recognised. A huge body of evidence, much of it from the health promotion and prevention fields (in the areas of resiliency, health and well-being, morbidity etc), emphasises the critical nature of participation to individual and societal health.

In addition, there are organisational studies that emphasise the value of 'client participation' in **effective decision-making**. Better decisions are made if young people are actively involved in those decisions – and there is greater likelihood of successful implementation of programs if participants have an active role in making decisions about program directions.

Other approaches are equally important in highlighting the active and meaningful participation of young people in all aspects of their lives as a **democratic right** and as underpinning the development of **peaceful, tolerant and productive communities**.

Active participation is vital within the development processes for us all – as individuals, and as a society. It is central to ideas of 'youth development'.

Underlying these principles are larger debates about how **young people's roles** are constructed by our society ... and about how we **want** to construct them. Such roles are, in part, constructed by the way in which we (organizations, society) treat young people: when we hold them in passive roles, in which they are perceived (by themselves and others) to have **no value except in terms of what they will become**, then young people learn powerful messages about their on-going self worth and about their contributions to collective roles within society; when we

regard them as not competent in decision-making, then young people learn lessons about incompetence that limit their broader and on-going participation.

Despite such commitments, reflective practices of youth participation often lag far behind the rhetoric. Wierenga et al (2003) has pointed out that "the upsurge of interest in youth participation is more politically driven than evidence based, although the evidence is beginning to emerge" (eg see Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Hannam, 2002; Holdsworth, 2003; Holdsworth *et al*, 2003). It is important to keep analysing and reflecting on practice; it is important to keep working toward contextually sensitive social frameworks for making sense of what we are doing.

A framework for participation

Nancy Phillips in the early 1990s summarised research that pointed to three central and inter-related factors in the development of strong self-concept for young people, and this has since been further endorsed by many other writers. For example, Walker and Kelly (2002) suggested that student motivation to learn depended on three key student needs:

- to feel in **control** of their learning (significant input to rules and procedures, establish learning goals and tasks, decide how to work);
- to feel **competent** (investigating and responding to issues of survival and quality of life, solving real problems, creating real products); and
- to feel **connected** with others (cooperative and collaborative learning, peer support, community linkages, mutual respect).

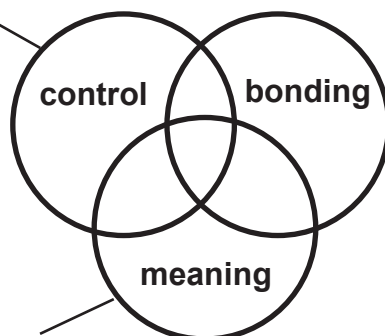
Earlier, Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992) similarly said that learners needed to have a **clear purpose**, **be valued** and be treated with **respect and fairness**.

However, Phillips' diagram strongly represents the relationship and seems to be validated in practice (see Holdsworth et al, 2003).

Here the three interacting areas of 'sense of control' (ie decision-making), 'sense of bonding' (ie working collaboratively with others) and 'sense of purpose/meaning' (ie doing things that make a difference) underpin both individual development and also effective program approaches.

Sense of control:

capability, competence, impact on one's own environment, power over one's self, use of social/life skills, power to change one's self and environment, effective decision-making



Sense of meaning:

to feel important, to feel relevant, self-esteem, sense of dignity/honour, able to accomplish tasks, experience of purpose

Sense of bonding:

with family/peers/community, to feel/be wanted, to feel/be loved, to belong, to have basic needs met, working with others

There have also been numerous attempts to develop a specific framework for categorising the degree of youth participation in organisations, projects and approaches. Best known is the work of Hart (1992, 1997) in defining a 'Ladder of Youth Participation'.

This builds on earlier work around a 'continuum of youth involvement' (Westhorp, 1987; Kaplun, 1995, in turn building on the work of Arnstein, 1969) and has since been further developed and extended by de Kort (1999) and Holdsworth (2001; 2003) to form a set of indicators that can be used by and within groups.

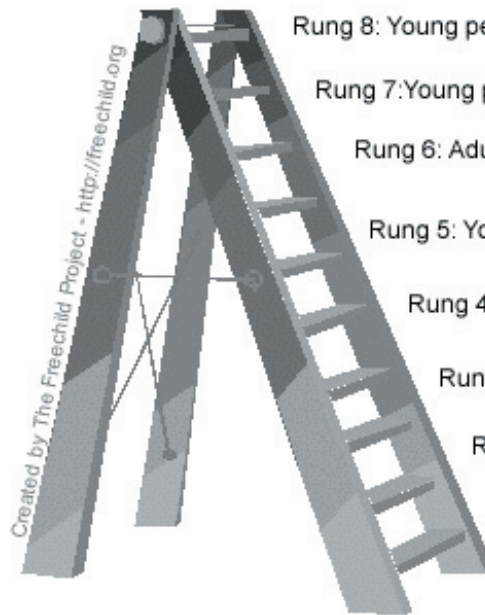
In this latter approach, five levels of youth participation are defined (see the boxed text on the next page for more details):

1. Non-participation
2. Passive involvement
3. Influence
4. Partnership
5. Self-mobilisation

De Kort also identifies nine **organisational areas** and establishes criteria within each, for each level of participation. This extends Hart's one-dimensional continuum or ladder into a more complex two-dimensional structure or grid - with each cell of the grid described by an indicator.

This framework has subsequently been used by others (eg Wierenga *et al*, 2003) to provide a tool for reflection within organisations, and as a framework to examine the work of programs. In this work (particularly Holdsworth, 2003) there is recognition of a third dimension: that there can be different responses to this framework from different people within a program, and this enables the useful comparisons of responses from adults and from young people, or of responses from different groups of young people (along lines such as gender, ethnicity, location, class etc). Such developments

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making

Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3: Young people tokenized*

Rung 2: Young people are decoration*

Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are *non-participation*

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

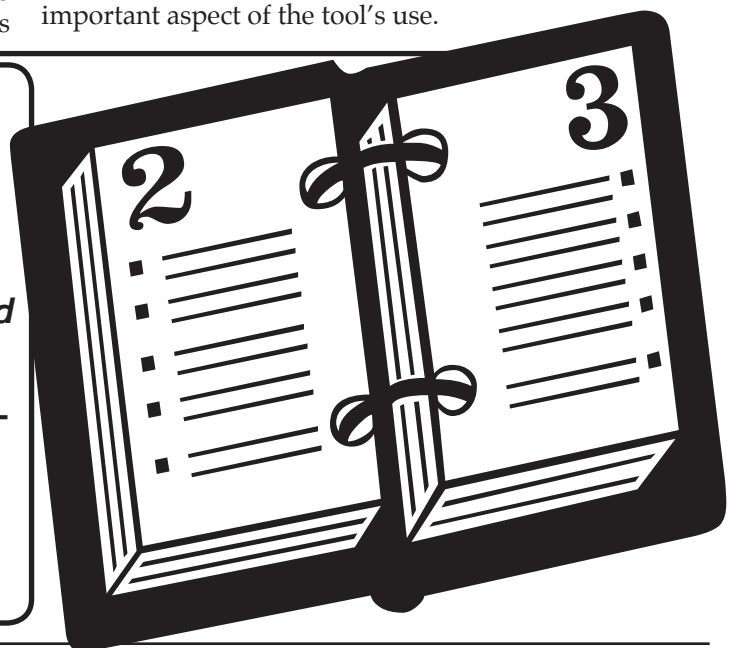
recognise that perceptions of youth participation depend on **who** is responding and respondents' different experiences, and that the discussions and action resulting from the comparisons of different perceptions are as important as the characterisation of a 'level of participation'. Holdsworth (2001; 2003) then takes this further, suggesting that it is less important to see this tool as characterising a sense of 'absolute truth' about the level of participation, than to use it as a **starting point** for discussions between participants about their different perceptions and what can be changed. This introduces a time-dependent variable, where changes in responses over time - in response to those discussions - are the most important aspect of the tool's use.

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It should be noted that such categorisation remains contentious, with some argument about whether 'shared decision-making with adults' or 'self-mobilisation' is the highest level (Broadbent *et al*, 2003), and about whether, in fact, such attempts simply define a structure of **adult perceptions** and **constraints** of youth participation:

The Ladder of Participation by Roger Hart is often used to represent levels of children's participation. However what it depicts are not levels of children's participation but the varying roles adults play in relation to children's participation. **It denotes the control and influence adults have over the process of children's participation. It also indicates adult responses to children's participation.**

The term 'Ladder' is a misnomer as it implies a sequence, whereas in reality one level may not necessarily lead to the next level; for instance, manipulation of children may not lead to children being used as decoration as a natural next step. (Reddy and Ratna, undated).

However, while noting such arguments, it is still useful to use the tools that derive from this 'continuum' approach. On the next page, the model developed by de Kort is adapted to provide a simple quiz-based tool. It could be copied and completed by various participants in a Student Council, a school or a specific project, and different people's perceptions of the nature of student participation compared.

Roger Holdsworth

Levels of Youth Participation: after de Kort

Levels of Participation	Elements/indicators
1: Non Participation	<p>Adults are in full control and make no effort to change the situation. Adults define and implement policy without any youth input. Adults' agenda takes precedence over that of young people. There is information giving, but no information sharing <i>Various nuances include:</i></p> <p>Manipulation: young people may be engaged only for the benefit of the adults and may not even understand the implications Decoration: young people may be called on just to embellish adult actions, for instance through song, dance and other entertaining activities.</p>
2: Passive Involvement	<p>Minimum effort is made to inform and involve young people. There is a lack of important information sharing. Young people are listened to but only superficially Tokenism: young people may be given a voice merely to create a youth friendly image for adults.</p>
3: Influence	<p>Young people are consulted and involved, and taken seriously Young people have a sense of influence that can encourage the development of ownership Information sharing in a two way flow <i>Sub-stages include:</i></p> <p>Assigned but informed: adults take the initiative to inform young people. Only after the young people decide whether to become involved. Consulted and informed: young people are extensively consulted on projects designed and run by adults</p>
4: Partnership	<p>Collaboration: young people have increasing control over decision making Adults and young people form meaningful partnerships with negotiation on and delegation of the tasks Adults-initiated, shared decisions with young people: initiators such as policy makers, community workers and local residents frequently involve interest groups and age groups</p>
5: Self Mobilisation	<p>Empowerment: transfer of control over decisions and resources to young people. Young people are in full control and may choose to seek adult assistance, if necessary and desired. <i>Nuances of this:</i></p> <p>Youth-initiated and directed: young people conceive, organise and direct projects themselves, with out adult assistance. Youth initiated, shared decisions with adults: influence is shared between young people and adults as the final goal of participation.</p>

A Quick Quiz: Rate Your Participation

Copy this page of the quiz and give it to each person.

Tell them: *Think of a specific project ... or it can be your Student Council or your school as a whole ... but everyone needs to be thinking of the same thing. We'll call it a 'project' here. For each of the nine questions, choose the answer that most closely describes what happens in your project at the moment. Circle the letter.*

Then look at the key on the next page. In the table write down your score for that question.

Question 1: How are students involved in **analysing needs** and **setting objectives** for the project?

- a) Teachers design and carry out the project and might tell students about it as the target group
- b) Students are consulted in the early stages but ignored later; teachers then design the project
- c) Students are consulted and involved in carrying out the project, but the design and objectives are set by teachers
- d) Students are consulted, define the objectives of the project and carry it out together with teachers
- e) Students plan and carry out the project and can choose to involve teachers

Question 2: How are students involved in **communication** about the project - in receiving or giving **information**?

- a) Students are not informed or consulted about the project at all
- b) Information about the project is easily accessible and student-friendly (but one-way information)
- c) Regular meetings are organised to consult about the project (two-way information)
- d) Meaningful exchanges occur between students and teachers (collaboration)
- e) Students inform each other and possibly teachers about the project

Question 3: How are students involved in the project's **decision-making**?

- a) Students are not consulted and they are not involved in any other way either
- b) Students are consulted but their views are not taken seriously by teachers
- c) The views of students are listened to by teachers and regularly acted upon
- d) Shared decision-making and action occurs between students and teachers, and feedback from students is sought
- e) Students have power over the allocation of resources and the direction of the project, but can seek the assistance of teachers

Question 4: How are students involved in the project's **administration**?

- a) There are no student administrators
- b) Students occasionally help in the project by doing menial tasks on a voluntary basis
- c) Student roles are built into the project's administrative activities ranging from book-keeping and typing to conducting research and collecting data
- d) Students play an integral part in the day-to-day running of the project
- e) Administration is effectively controlled by students, possibly aided by teachers

Question 5: How are students involved in **the design** and **implementation** of the project's activities?

- a) All project activities are designed and run by teachers
- b) Students are consulted about activities, but teachers design and run them
- c) Students partly design and run some of the activities, overseen by teachers
- d) Students design and run activities in cooperation with teachers
- e) Students design and run all activities, possibly aided by teachers

Question 6: How are students involved in **advocacy**?

- a) There is no involvement of students in speaking for the project or its views
- b) Students are present at the project's public events, but are not involved as organisers
- c) Students are encouraged to provide input on running campaigns or events
- d) Students take a significant role in forming organisations or unions, or taking part in public rallies and campaigns, or contributing to policy papers and public debates
- e) Students handle all advocacy issues, possibly aided by teachers

Question 7: How are students involved as **service, support** and **education personnel**?

- a) Support within the project is only provided by teachers
- b) Students are consulted on support, service and education-related issues
- c) Students are consulted and occasionally made counsellors, supporters or educators of other students
- d) Students from the target group are trained to become counsellors, supporters or educators of other students and work alongside teachers in these roles
- e) Students are the only counsellors or educators available to the target group, possibly trained or assisted by teachers

Question 8: How are students involved as project **employees**?

- a) There are no students or other young people employed in the project
- b) Students are employed in jobs not related to the project's objectives
- c) Some students are employed as experts in peer-related aspects of the project
- d) Students are employed as experts and may be project managers
- e) The project is effectively managed by students as young professionals

Question 9: How are students involved in **monitoring** and **evaluation** of the project?

- a) Project monitoring and evaluation is undertaken by teachers or adults only
- b) Some students are involved in providing information for monitoring and evaluation
- c) Students are involved in implementing monitoring and evaluation of the project and in assessing its outcomes
- d) Students design monitoring and evaluation tools and work with teachers to implement these
- e) Students initiate, design, execute and report on projects, possibly aided by teachers and other experts

(adapted from: Gerard de Kort, in **Youth Participation Manual**, United Nations, 1999)

For each question, give yourself a mark for your response according to this scale:

Key:

- a) 0 points
- b) 1 point
- c) 2 points
- d) 3 points
- e) 4 points

Enter your mark in the table below.

Add up your marks and check your total score on this table:

Also, set up a discussion between teachers and students to talk about any differences between the ways in which teachers and students - or different groups of students - see their participation. What comments do you have? What action is suggested?

Total score	Level	Assessment
0 - 7	0	Project is completely teacher driven.
8 - 15	1	Project is teacher driven, but students are informed and possibly consulted at crucial stages and on important aspects of it. But students do not have a real voice.
16 - 23	2	Students are significantly involved in the project and are likely to develop a sense of ownership.
24 - 30	3	Students are involved at all stages and in all aspects of the project and have a strong sense of ownership. A meaningful partnership with teachers is achieved.
31 - 36	4	Students initiate and are in charge at all crucial stages and of all important aspects of the project. Teachers play a minor and supportive role, if any.

Youth Participation Indicators: Assessment sheet

Indicator	Student score	Teacher score	Comments	Proposed action
1. Analysing needs and setting objectives				
2. Information and communication				
3. Decision-making				
4. Administration				
5. Design and implementation of activities				
6. Advocacy				
7. Service, support and education personnel				
8. Employees				
9. Monitoring and evaluation				
Total score				

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Connect has a website:

<http://www.geocities.com/rogermhold/Connect>

*Not much there at the moment - information about subscribing, some back issue contents and a summary of **Student Councils and Beyond** - but it'll grow.*

Check in occasionally!

News and Reviews

ruMAD? & Values Education

Welcome back from the school holiday break! I just got back myself this week and I must say ... sitting in front of a computer getting back to work is not one of my ideal actions in life! However, my vision of you and the students taking powerful actions that will make a difference for your communities does get me off my butt!

2006 is shaping up to be a big year in the implementation of **Values Based Education** throughout our schools.

One of the biggest challenges that teachers face as they look at implementing Values Based Education is: "how do I?". Many of the suggestions I have seen don't address that a paradigm shift is required in the teaching methodology to be effective in ensuring that particular values are being developed. It is similar to trying to teach that the earth is round (or spherical if you want to be rigorous!) whilst believing that the earth is flat. It doesn't translate very well.

That's where the **ruMAD? Program** is different to most other programs. It is a framework whereby teachers can deliver the values while the students create real-life projects that enable them to learn literacy, numeracy, etc, whilst tackling activities and issues that matter to them.

MAD Day on April 6th is a nationwide day where schools from around Australia take the opportunity to implement a simple **Make a Difference** activity using the principles of the **ruMAD?** program. The kit takes the teacher and the class through a simplified version of the **ruMAD?** program.

If you are interested in getting a copy of the **2006 MAD Day Kit**, please email me:

rumad@educationfoundation.org.au

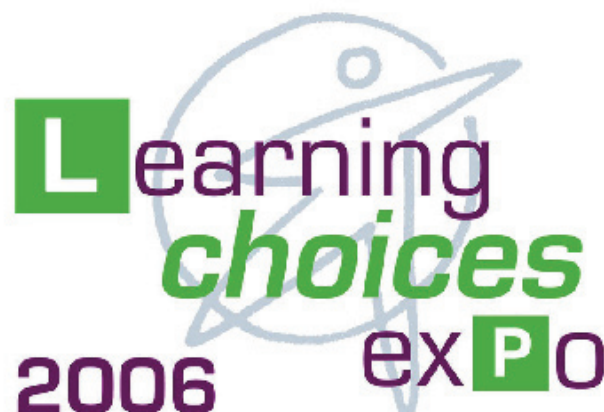
with information about your name, school, address, e-mail and phone contact. I will then email you a MAD Day Kit which will contain all the material you will need to run a successful MAD Day in 2006.

The cost to you is **ZERO**. I just require feedback about what you and the students are creating for the day.

If you would like more information about the **ruMAD?** program, feel free to contact me at the above email address or check out:

www.educationfoundation.org.au

Adrian Bertolini
ruMAD? Program Manager
Education Foundation, Melbourne
(03) 9665 5904



24 - 25 MAY 2006

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Student Participation Support Materials

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Form One Lane is a professional development seminar offered to teachers and students working with a Student Representative Council (SRC).

These seminars have been run for over six years in several states of Australia – more than 30 different seminars for primary and secondary schools. In semester 1, 2006, **Form One Lane** will be hosted at least once in every State and Territory in Australia. See below for a list of dates and locations. If the seminar closest to you is in a different state from that of your school, you are welcome to attend that one instead.

On evaluation forms participants have written:

"I was on the verge of quitting my role as SRC co-ordinator, but now I feel better able to cope and am excited about next year."

"I wish I'd brought my students with me! This was fantastic. I expected a really dull PD seminar and was pleasantly surprised. I'll definitely be attending again."

The program of **Form One Lane** has been carefully developed over these last six years and reviewed after each event. The program contains exciting presenters, including recent ex-student members of an SRC. Your participation is a key part of the program as facilitators will be drawing on your experience and ideas: the best resource we have is each other. With current SRC students as part of the program, all the material can be instantly tested against the only true authority: the people who are actually supposed to be running the student council.

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Second Strike, based in Victoria, has produced a set of **resource or training kits** for Student Representative Councils (SRCs). There are currently eight titles in the series:

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Members of the Institute of SRC Teacher Advisers for their state or of the VicSRC receive a discount for every participant they bring. Members are entitled to a 20% discount ie \$85 pp reduced to \$68 pp.

For more information please contact David or Teigan:
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Date	Location	Venue	Type
21/02	Melbourne	Kensington Centre, Kensington	Primary
02/03	Melbourne	Kensington Centre, Kensington	Secondary
08/03	Sydney	Y Hotel, City	Primary
09/03	Sydney	Y Hotel, City	Secondary
10/03	Canberra	Rydges EagleHawk, Nth Canberra	Primary & Secondary
04/03	Cairns	Cairns City Library, Cairns	Primary & Secondary
16/03	Brisbane	Riverside Hotel, Sth Brisbane	Primary
17/03	Brisbane	Riverside Hotel, Sth Brisbane	Secondary
22/03	Darwin	Darwin Exhibition Centre, City	Primary & Secondary
30/03	Hobart	Hobart Function Centre, City	Primary
31/03	Hobart	Hobart Function Centre, City	Secondary
27/04	Shepparton	Sundowner Parklake, Shepparton	Primary
28/04	Shepparton	Sundowner Parklake, Shepparton	Secondary
02/05	Knox	Knox City Arts Centre, Bayswater	Secondary
05/05	Knox	Knox City Arts Centre, Bayswater	Primary
15/05	Adelaide	Enterprise House, Unley	Primary
16/05	Adelaide	Enterprise House, Unley	Secondary
18/05	Perth	Home Base Expo, Subiaco	Primary
19/05	Perth	Home Base Expo, Subiaco	Secondary
01/06	Geelong	Newcomb Library, Newcomb	Primary
02/06	Geelong	Newcomb Library, Newcomb	Secondary

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Australian:

Snapshots from the Edge: Young people and service providers on the urban fringe of Melbourne (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) 2004

Teacher Learning Network Journal (TLN, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 13 No 1, Summer 2006

Yikes! (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 4 Edition 5, December 2005

Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas) Vol 24 No 4; December 2005

International:

Agree to disagree: Citizenship and controversial issues (Julia Fiehn; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2005

Breaking down the barriers: success in widening participation - a toolkit approach (Jan Champney, Margaret Davey and Sandra Lawrence; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2005

Briefing (Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) November 2005

Citizenship News (Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) Issue 13; October 2005

Education Revolution (AERO, New York, USA) Issue 43, Winter 2006

Establishing a Network of Schools (Networked Learning Communities, Cranfield, UK) 2005

Get up, stand up: Citizenship through Music (Kenneth During and James Barber; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2005

More than words: Citizenship through Art (Sharon Walters; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2005

Network Leadership Roles (Networked Learning Communities, Cranfield, UK) 2005

Network Snapshots (Networked Learning Communities, Cranfield, UK): DVD, 2005

Staff development for post-16 citizenship: Guidance and materials for citizenship coordinators and staff developers (Lin Norman and Alan Wilkins; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2005

The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business (Dennis Littky with Samantha Grabelle; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, USA)

The Real Picture: Citizenship through Photography (Chris Rowe and Martin Bou Mansour; Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK) 2004



Documents

The documents listed in this column may be of general background interest. A photocopy is available for research purposes. The length and cost (to cover copying and postage) is listed. Please order by code number.

A full, computerised index of these documents is now available from **Connect** for \$3; this can be accessed and printed by topic, key-word etc or simply sequentially.

Code Description/Pages/Cost

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 571 | Tough Talk About Student Responsibility: Growing Student Leaders in Oakland, California (What Kids Can Do, October 2004) (4 pp; \$0.90) |
| 572 | Student Voices Count: A Student-led Evaluation of High Schools in Oakland (Oakland Kids First/Real Hard, May 2003) (9 pp; \$1.30) |
| 573 | Student Dilemmas - responses to systemic policy change at the grassroots (Karin Oerlemans and Lesley Vidovich, University of Western Australia; paper at NZARE-AARE Conference, Auckland, NZ; December 2003) (8 pp; \$1.20) |
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