OPPORTUNITIES:

- Teacher Network
- Students at ACSA Conference

The cover story in this issue (on the Nathalia-Barmah Forest Book project at Nathalia Secondary College) continues the accounts of 'spin-offs' from the visit of Eliot Wigginton, Chris Nix and Lee Carpenter from Foxfire, last July. Hopefully we will be able to report on further initiatives in future issues. Wig indicated his interest in supporting a network of teachers in Australia (similar to several 'Foxfire Networks' throughout the USA). This would comprise a group of classroom teachers interested to learn more about 'hands-on' and student-centred approaches, to apply them in their classrooms, to come together regularly to share and reflect on experiences, and to document processes and outcomes.

Interested?
At this stage we're continuing to explore possibilities, including accreditation with a tertiary institution. So register your interest with CONNECT and we'll keep you up-to-date with developments.

The SPERA Conference in Adelaide in mid-July provides an opportunity for students from all round Australia to come together to talk about student participation in the curriculum. ACSA is most interested to encourage as many students as possible to attend and will be scheduling special student forums and workshops on student participation as part of the Conference. In addition, it is hoped that there can be discussion and social events around the Conference specifically for students.

Students should register for the Conference NOW! Student registration is available at the highly discounted rate of $60. It's suggested that schools, SRCs or community groups/networks could be approached for sponsorship.

Also, if you are a teacher or parent attending the Conference, consider bringing a student from your school with you as part of a team.

Registration forms are available from the addresses listed on page 22 of this issue and should be returned to Ms Sue Moore, Office of Continuing Education, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide 5000 by Friday May 5 (to avoid a late fee).

If students wish to attend, but have difficulties with transport or accommodation - contact CONNECT or the Conference organisers to see what is possible.

Roger Holdsworth
NATHALIA-BARMAH
FOREST
BOOK

Students at Nathalia Secondary College are publishing a book of local interviews and photographs in 1991. This collection of articles from participants provides a feeling for a project in progress:

FOXFIRE CAME TO TOWN
REPORT ON A VISIT TO RURAL VICTORIA

As a student of Nathalia Secondary College, I attended the workshop held in July 1990 by representatives (Elliot Wigginton, Lee Carpenter and Chris Nix) from the Foxfire project, USA.

Knowing nothing about the work and cooperation which had gone into the collaboration of the nine Foxfire books, I left the workshop very impressed with the work of Elliot Wigginton and his students over the last twenty-five years.

The content of the books varies, yet they seem to be based on past experiences of community members and on their traditions and skills. It seems that new and exciting projects like these assist in the education of young people and exist to advantage the students who take part in making the Foxfire magazines and books.

Being a full-time student for so long (I'm in my final year now), I have grown accustomed to the blackboard-and-chalk method of teaching, where learning how to write structured essays is the only way to gain a pass. However, these ideas of teachers and students working together with a more interesting and vivid aim of achievement are great.

While talking to Chris and Lee, I felt that what they had learnt from their Foxfire participation at school was not any ordinary experience, and it was something that gave them an advantage over other students at their school and at other schools who do not have these types of projects. They learn how to use computers, collate ideas, refine their organisational skills, cope with deadlines and, most importantly, communicate with people on paper and verbally. Interviews were conducted with members of the community and Chris and Lee believed that they benefited from this experience - and so too must have the people of the community.

This kind of learning is practical in so many ways and I believe that it must help the students to prepare themselves for life outside school a great deal more than the traditional classes do. Confidence is another gain for participating students - certainly Chris and Lee, through their Foxfire experience, had to talk to complete strangers in the formation of the latest Foxfire book, and the confidence to travel to Australia with Elliot and speak to groups such as ourselves must have individually encouraged them.

Although the participants in the Foxfire project may not necessarily enter newspaper, computer or even typing related jobs after they finish high school, the experiences of making a book must surely have encouraged individual and team skills which they will use in whatever career they do pursue.

Finally, to Elliot, Chris and Lee, thank you for sharing your ideas with us in Australia. Hopefully, your stay will have inspired teachers and others to attempt
original and creative projects like yours, which may help to change our quite rigid system of education. Let us hope that your program in the USA will continue and spread to other schools across the country.

Louise Kennedy
Year 12 student

This is the outline we started with, but the book may evolve differently:

THE NATHALIA-BARMAH FOREST BOOK
- AN OUTLINE

After attending the Foxfire workshop hosted by our school in July 1990, our teachers decided to ask us whether we would be interested in starting a similar book.

They presented their idea to three groups - the Photography class (who else better to take the photos?), the Writers' Workshop and the Barmah Bush Group. They proposed basing the book around the town in which the school is situated (Nathalia) and also include the nearby, much smaller township of Barmah.

When the proposal was presented to the group of students involved, we decided it sounded good. Nearly all of us had heard of the Foxfire project and we were impressed with how well they were going.

It was not exactly a novel idea, starting a book about our district, as some of our school magazines had similar ideas to those that will be in our book. But the thought of actually making a proper book is much more appealing than the good old school mag., isn't it? We were excited and determined to make the book successful to the best of our abilities.

We have 34 students working on this project, nine of whom are in a committee designed to organise things such as photos, interviews, equipment, the spending of the grant that we were given etc. Even though we are a small school, and we have only just started, we are glad to have this chance to experience the great project we are undertaking. We hope to learn much, as the Foxfire students have, about collating our ideas, refining our organisational skills, coping with deadlines and communicating with people both verbally and on paper.

We thank Elliot Wigginton and the two students with him, Lee Carpenter and Chris Nix, for coming to Nathalia and showing us what can be achieved with a lot of ideas and determination.

Giselle McGreevy
Vice-President
Barmah and Nathalia Book Committee

* General introduction and acknowledgements
* Contents page
Historical Buildings: a chapter that will include photographs of historical buildings in the town of Nathalia, the outlying areas and information about their history.
Barmah: a chapter covering the history of the town and the surrounding Barmah Forest. This will include the forest, flora and fauna, its ecology, recreational use, logging and a history of the people in the region such as the Aboriginal people, the pioneers and the sleeper-cutters.
Interviews with People: this chapter will present interviews with a local poet, an artist, senior citizens, a sculptor, an author, an Aboriginal person and a paddle-boat builder.
* Photographs of students involved
* Directory of resources on this topic, including individuals and community groups
Total number of double-sided pages: 40

President Amy Richards (R) and Vice-President Giselle McGreevy.
We have a weekly newsletter for the whole school, so we use it to keep everyone up-to-date:

**NATHALIA & BARMAH BOOK UPDATE**

Zelda Arbuthnott sent a letter away to Rabun Gap School in Georgia (USA). Students there publish their own books under the name Foxfire. Two students from there and their teacher, Eliot Wigginton, visited Nathalia this year and ran a workshop for us. They were one of the reasons we decided to write our own book. Zelda received a letter back from them last Tuesday stating that they would be happy to advise us in any way possible. They also sent us some notes on a project they are running and two of their magazines. Congratulations on making that contact again Zelda!

Giselle McGreevy thanked Mick Kelsall on behalf of our book committee for sending us a $100 donation. Mick has just sent her a letter in return. Thanks Giselle.

Gillian Hibbins, author of a history book on Nathalia, has written back to Deanne Jackson, Renay Handley and Stephen Argus stating also that she will help out in whatever way she can. She is now writing a book on Barmah. Well done to the three of you!

**The 25th Anniversary Foxfire**

Dear Zelda:

In response to your letter, we will be more than happy to give you advice about putting your book together. We are excited to hear about your progress!!

As you all know, this is Foxfire's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary. For our project, Lee and I decided to do a Foxfire Commemorative Knife. The purpose of doing project reports is so that it may give future students advice about how students should form groups. It also includes things like why we chose a knife and what we did to go about getting it.

Please send us any questions that you might have. We are certainly looking forward to hearing from you. Please keep us updated on your work!

Sincerely,

Chris Nix and Lee Carpenter
Foxfire Students

Using the weekly newsletter, we approached parents and guardians for their contributions:

**TO PARENTS**

Students from the Barmah Forest, Writers' Workshop and Photography electives are currently writing a book about the Nathalia district. Part of the book is about 'Nathalia and Me' and we would like parents to write down their thoughts about Nathalia and send them into the school if they would.

We will put all of these together and then we will have a good idea how people feel about Nathalia.

Jeff Zammit

**FOREST BOOK BY STUDENTS**

Three electives - Photography, Writers' Workshop and Barmah, run by Linda Gallus, Lyn Loger and Kath McDonald - have been successful in obtaining $1435 for the development of a book on Nathalia and the Barmah Forest.

The grant comes from the Statewide Initiatives Committee and is part of a Country Education Project. The grant follows on earlier workshops held in Nathalia with American teacher Eliot Wigginton and John Brennan, professional photographer from Melbourne.

These workshops were initiated for us through our local CEP coordinator, Gordon Dowell.
EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEWS

Here are some examples of people that we have interviewed, photographs that we have taken and student work inspired by the project:

We're interviewing Roly McGraw, who was a riverboat captain on the Murray. This is his paddleboat. Mr Lowe (Principal in 1991) took us out in his car one Friday afternoon.

The old footbridge in Nathalia. We spent a day touring the flooded Barmah Forest with John Brennan, a professional photographer.
THE MURRAY

The river is rising even more,
It's almost as if you can walk off the
bank straight onto a platform of
water,
I look across the river where not so
long ago was a bank covered in sand,
But now it's all just water half up the
trunk of the trees that once provided
shade,
A houseboat is on the water,
So wary of the unknown that lies
awaiting under the smooth flowing
surface,
Everything is so green and fresh,
The wind wisps across the surface
leaving only ripples to show its
presence.
Everything seems to be so far apart now,
Such a long way from bank to bank.
The trees are swaying swiftly as the
wind rustles through the branches,
If only there weren't all those trees
blocking my view,
I would be able to see what is there
far beyond.

a student's poem

This is a photo of the flooded Barmah
Forest from a 4-seater Cessna plane. Eddie
Fullagher, the pilot, has offered to take us
up for only the cost of fuel. He gave us
this photo of wild horses in the forest.
BELA ANGYAL

We interviewed Bela Angyal, a local sculptor, about his life and work:

We work out our own questions:

Interview of Bela Angyal, conducted by Stephanie.

1. Would you be able to give us a brief history of your life since you immigrated to Australia from Czechoslovakia? For example, what occupations have you experienced since you began to work?

2. Have you always loved art? What source of inspiration do you try to find when you are creating a sculpture or sketch? Have you ever had an artist's block if so, how do you redeem your frustration or annoyance - does a light-bulb idea come and clear away all the clouds blurring your thought?

3. What is an incident that sticks out in your mind when you think of all your years as an artist, both in Australia and in Czechoslovakia? Are there any weird and wonderful tales that you can tell us?

4. Was it very fulfilling teaching your students at TAFE in Shepparton? Did it give you a sense of satisfaction knowing that you had enriched these young people's minds with your knowledge and expertise?

Bela talks about solving three-dimensional problems in sculpture.
5. How large is your property? What types of animals do you keep? Do you find it relaxing to be outside in the garden or farm each day, or do you feel that you want to return to TAFE, or take time off for travelling?

6. You seem to be very content with your life. You have a very relaxed lifestyle and you seem to be enjoying your retirement. Do you think that you will continue your art, or are you happy enough running your farm?

7. Do you have anything to say to the readers of this book on Nathalia? Any pearls of wisdom?

MICK KELSALL

Mick Kelsall lived in Nathalia in 1918. He is now in his late 70s. He came to our school and talked to us about his book. He wrote us a true story for the book, called 'Nathalia and Me'. This is how it finished:

"This is a district rich in history; the stories of the families who battled fire, floods and famine are yet to be told. One day, perhaps students of this Nathalia High School may get the complete stories of the events together, research them, also the colourful characters whose names have been legend down through the years. Such a book would be a best seller, and Australia would be richer for its publishing."

November 16, 1990:

Students involved in writing the Barmah and Nathalia book were delighted this week to receive more encouragement from Mick Kelsall, author of A Riverman's Country. Mick has continued to send us lots of names of people he knew who would be wonderful for us to visit and interview, as well as sending us stories he has written. But this week he also sent us a donation!

"This donation to help towards the writing by the students (and others) of Nathalia and District Past and Present.

"Here's $100 to show I'm Fair Dinkum."

An amazingly generous offer from a man who, when he supports you, does so all the way.

Amy Richards, President

December 14, 1990:

A good friend of the school has passed away. We were saddened to hear of the death of Mick Kelsall.

Mick recently sent the students involved in writing the Barmah/Nathalia book a $100 donation towards it to show he was "fair dinkum".

He wrote us many stories and came and spoke to the students.

In a letter to Lyn Loger received only this Wednesday, he wrote for the benefit of our students:

"The ability to write is a gift but, like many other talents, it needs the coaching, the encouragement, of those that have travelled the road, overcome the obstacles along that road, and reached the destination named 'success'. Go to it, young people; despite what you may think, we oldies are on your side. You don't know how I long for the success of your project. My forebears were part of your district's struggles. Thanks Lyn and other teachers; thanks young people.

"I look forward to my next visit to Nathalia, and may that be at the launching of the book - the best published in Australia. Cheerio for now."

He has given us a lot. We shall keep alive our memories of him and hopefully also the excitement he found in writing and the loving sense of humanity that he conveyed.

Principal's Bulletin
We were shocked to lose Mick - we have decided to dedicate our book to him.

This is a poem that Tammy Muir, local bush poet, wrote for Mick after he met him. Mick had just finished writing a story for Tammy about an incident that he had told him. We will publish both the story and the poem:

**MICK KELSA LL**

I went to town and met a bloke, Mick Kelsall is his name,  
A fair dinkum sorta bloke, who's in the writing game.  
He wrote a yarn about meself, and praised me bloomin' well,  
As well it wasn't truthful, or it'd get my head to swell.  
Now Mick's a man who loves the bush and always worked with his hands,  
And he's resided amongst the bush, but never a shiny pants.  
He was cuttin' timber at an early age, and rode the barges too,  
Along the Murray's waterways, where the finest redgums grew.  
Now, times were tough during the war, so he headed off to the smoke  
To give his family a better chance, this battlin' bushy bloke.  
He worked as a builders' labourer, earning money from his sweat,  
Eking out an existence, where each challenge he duly met.  
He's had his run of outs, bad luck, trouble and strife  
But I've never known another to look on the brighter side of life.  
At Blairgowrie he's retired now, looking out over the sea,  
Telling stories to his grandkids of his past and their ancestry.  
His memory is a brilliant one, as he recalls the days of yore  
And leaves ya' with such images that you're always wanting more,  
And in his eyes comes a certain look, as he seems to extend his gaze  
To when he was workin' in the bush, back in his river days.  
For once you've been a riverman, no matter where you're at  
You'll always be a riverman and that's a bloomin' fact.  
The love of the bush is a sacred thing, ya' hold dearly to ya' heart  
And nothin' can ever change it, it remains a permanent part.  
Now Mick's a man who's made his mark, and deserves to be admired.  
He's never lost his vital spark; his stories won't grow tired.  
And he calls me a kindred spirit and I'm thinkin' that's just great,  
But nothin' gives me greater pleasure, than to call Mick Kelsall - mate.

*Tammy Muir*
Some students are in an 'On Air' elective and have conducted interviews for broadcast on a local radio station:

ON AIR

Craig Maddigan and Stephen Argus will be on 3ONE FM this afternoon from 4.00 to 5.00 pm. They will be interviewing Peter Hawkey from the Nathalia Tree Group. Make sure you're listening...

Be listening to Andrew Drummond and Matthew McKenzie this afternoon on 3ONE FM from 4.00 - 5.00 pm. They will be interviewing Lyn Loger about the Barmah Book.

Zelda Arbuthnot is helping with the graphics for the book. This is our letterhead:

![NBF Logo](image)

So is Chris Hawks - 'Tammy Muir' heading for the title page of Tammy's poetry:

![Tammy Muir](image)

NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

On 23rd November, Mr Roger Holdsworth visited the school and talked about his magazine CONNECT. He also told us about trips to America to see Eliot Wiggington and the Foxfire school. He also suggested we make a calendar but unfortunately we ran out of time to produce it.

Also on Tuesday, 21st November, we had four more visitors come into the school. They were John Stafford and John Pritchard, both from the State Initiatives Committee who granted us the money to produce the book, Jo Lomond who is Chairperson of the Country Education Program for our area, and Gordon Dowell who is the coordinator. They spoke with us about the Barmah and Nathalia book and wished us all the best with it.

Some graphics by Kathryn Fogarty:
END OF YEAR LUNCH

On December 19th we invited all the people we had interviewed during the semester to lunch at the school. Fourteen visitors came. We made Christmas sweet boxes for each person and thanked them for their participation. We shall continue the work next year.

We set up a display in the Long Gallery of all the work we had done so far in the Nathalia and Barmah Book. We lined two walls of the corridor with photos, rough copies of interviews, letters and our minutes of meetings. Bela provided some sculptures and Marj some paintings. We had a commemorative section for Mick Kellsall.

We shall continue our work in 1991.

Nathalia-Barmah Forest Book
Nathalia Secondary College
PO Box 42, Nathalia 3638

JUNIOR SCHOOL COUNCIL
KINGSBURY PRIMARY

The Junior School Council at Kingsbury Primary School is a very important part of the decision-making process in our school. I think it's very important that all the students, not just the ones on the Council, see that we value student participation in decision making.

So it's very important that I devote the time to the Junior Council. We meet on a fortnightly basis for about half an hour to 45 minutes. It's very important that the children see that I take them seriously, and that staff and School Council take their work very seriously.

The other side of my role is to assist the children in understanding what democratic decision making is all about - how to be good representatives for a grade - and assisting them with committee procedures. By and large it's learning on the job - an apprenticeship in democracy.

The participation of the students in the Junior Council is important for the children's education in understanding what democratic decision making in our society is about. It's also important for the school: the decisions and outcomes of decision making are better because of the input from the children.

Geoff Jones
Principal, Kingsbury Primary School
I have been a School Council representative for almost two years and I understand that my role is to voice the opinions of the students in the year level I represent, and possibly younger year levels - to gather their views if they have any complaints or anything that they want done around the school. At no stage, either at the start of last year or this year, has the role ever been explained to me or made available to me before I was elected for Council.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT OF A SCHOOL COUNCIL

Division 3 of the Victorian Education Act and Part 8 of the Education Regulations 1988 detail exactly what a School Council must do, that is:

* Determine the educational policy of the school within the guidelines issued by the Minister of Education;
* See that the building and grounds are kept in a good state of repair;
* Consider improvements/extensions to buildings and grounds;
* Provide for cleaning and sanitation;
* Draw up an annual financial budget of proposed expenditure;
* Monitor expenditure of the school's money;
* Keep financial accounts and publish audited statements annually;
* Be the employer of any employees at the school other than teachers;
* Stimulate interest in the school;
* Conduct a public meeting each year.

These are the legal requirements of all School Councils. In addition, they may:

* Conduct general educational activities at the school for the community outside school hours;
* Run a canteen or authorise and supervise the running of a canteen;
* Employ staff to assist teachers;
* Allow the use of the school for recreational purposes by outside groups;
* Administer (with prior approval of the Minister) contracts for alterations/additions to buildings.
ROLE OF THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
ON SCHOOL COUNCIL

The student representatives on School Council have exactly the same role and responsibilities as parent and teacher representatives. This means that they have equal votes, can move motions, and comment on every item of business which the Council considers.

It is therefore very important that each representative is aware of his or her role, and the role of the School Council before being elected as the student representative.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
AND PERCEPTIONS

I find it very difficult to obtain any input from the students about any matter, and although I have been up in front of several assemblies and asked for any suggestions, I have received very little response. Therefore there is very little to convey to the School Council and I have to report on what the year level committee may be doing or planning to do at the present time, rather than sitting at Council doing nothing.

School Council business doesn't always directly affect students and when I was first on the Council I found a lot of it went right over my head, but now I understand it a lot more and when it does affect students I give my views and opinions on the particular matter, whatever it might be.

Sometimes I feel that I'm not taken as seriously or listened to with the same attention as other Council members when giving an opinion, as though it is not important, and I feel that people listen just to be polite and then carry on with their own opinions. Student Representatives are very rarely asked for their opinions on any matters that may arise. The people on Council each feel that their opinion is the one that matters the most and there is occasional bickering between them, and very often there is a lot of talk and no action. They often go off the matter at hand and start concerning themselves with matters about the proposal that won't ever eventuate. This makes Council meetings very slow and this, combined with the fact that no-one is prompt in attendance, makes the meetings carry on for much longer than they should.

I find the meetings to be run in a very casual manner considering the responsibility that the Council has. Motions don't appear to be formally presented and, when voted on, the Council members seem uninterested at times.

When I first started on Council last year, I always presented a written report which outlined exactly what I intended to present before the Council, but the other Councillors did not always seem interested, and they most often did not prepare similar reports, so I stopped doing that. I even tried to have the report circulated before the meetings so that the other Councillors would have an opportunity to prepare for my report, but this was never done.

OTHER COUNCILLORS' PERCEPTIONS

Recently, I conducted a questionnaire in order to find out about the other Councillors' thoughts about student representatives and their effectiveness on School Council.

The results of this survey were, in some cases, quite extraordinary. Almost 60% of representatives presently serving on the School Council are not aware of the students' legal role as Council representatives. This could account for the 41.67% being undecided about a Student Representative Council as well as student representatives on Council - if they are not aware of a student representative's role, how are they able to make an informed decision about the benefits or disadvantages of a Student Representative Council either in place of, or as well as, the present representatives?

Several people (approx. 17%) didn't even know that there was a legal role, not only for students, but also for parents and teachers. The fact that, as members of the School Council, they were bound by certain Acts of Parliament, amazed several people.

Although 75% said that the students made a valuable contribution, the question could be asked: "How would they really be able to assess the contribution without knowing what role the students should play?" It is impossible to know how effective someone is, without knowing what it is that they are supposed to be doing.
RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1: Are you aware of the statutory (legal) role of students on School Council?

Question 1 - Student’s legal role on Council

- Aware 41.7%
- Not aware 58.3%

Of the five that answered 'yes' to this question, only three commented that they felt overall that the student representatives' role was to reflect student views and much the same role as a parent representative, having votes that count and making sure that all policies are adhered to and the school is running correctly under the policies and within budget.

Question 2: Do you feel that students make a valuable contribution on Council?

Question 2 - Student’s contribution valuable

- Agree 75%
- Disagree 25%

Those that said 'no' generally felt that student representation needed to cover a broader area of the student body in order for the representatives to make a valuable contribution. They also felt that a more formal presentation is required and not just a report of what has been happening around the school.

Question 3: Do you feel that the students are treated as equal to the other teacher/parent representatives?

Question 3 - Students treated as equal

- Yes 58.3%
- No 41.7%

Although the majority of people believe that students are treated as equal, some of those surveyed indicated that when student representatives have something to say, they are not always listened to or are not taken seriously. Although they feel that requests are acted upon, they are sometimes seen as trivial.

Question 4: Do you believe that there should be a Student Representative Council in addition to the student representatives on School Council?

Question 4 - should be S.R.C. as well as student representatives

- Agree 41.7%
- Undecided 41.7%
- Disagree 16.7%

This question produced some rather interesting results, with a relatively high proportion of Council representatives being undecided about whether there should be a Student Representative Council or not.
The majority of people indicated that there should only be a Student Representative Council if "it was initiated by the students". Those that were opposed to a Student Representative Council in addition to the present representatives, indicated that the present representatives were sufficient.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

Presently at this school there are teachers who are trying to get a Student Representative Council running. I feel that this would only work if it was student initiated as past experience in the school has shown a Student Representative Council to be unsuccessful and it just folded due to insufficient student interest. I feel the same would happen again as it is my experience that it is very hard to get any form of student participation or input.

A Student Representative Council could be beneficial in the way that it could give the students involved the responsibility of running a meeting, determining school uniform and purchasing and selling of uniform (this is apparently what happens in some other schools, however at this school, this sort of decision would be put before the full School Council). Students could also organise fund-raising activities and school socials.

A Student Representative Council could be an advantage by 'taking the heat off' one individual student at School Council meetings, as the SRC representative would be speaking as a representative of the SRC rather than as a virtual individual, as is presently the case. An SRC representative could feel more confident if he or she was 'backed up' by the full weight of the SRC, rather than alone.

A Student Representative Council would also represent all year levels, and therefore possibly present a wider view of the issues.

Although there are several apparent advantages to have a Student Representative Council, there are also some disadvantages. An SRC needs at least one representative for School Council as well as having that representative on the SRC. This would be a big workload for one person and, from my experience, student representatives have enough trouble getting to one meeting (School Council) a month as it is.

Before the SRC can actually achieve anything, it has to go through School Council to be passed first, so there would be a lot of going back and forth to achieve anything.

There would have to be enough student interest to keep the SRC running, and it seems that at present there is not enough interest to give the present School Council representatives any input to present before Council. It would appear, from my experience, that the formation of a Student Representative Council would be unnecessary at the present time. It is more important, and easier, to try to encourage the students to provide the students' representatives on the School Council with some thoughts and ideas on how to improve things in and around the school. There is certainly not enough student interest at the moment to warrant the formation of a Student Representative Council.

THE ISSUES

There are two questions that need to be answered when addressing the matter of the effectiveness of students on School Councils:

(a) Can a Student Representative Council do any better than the present student representatives are already doing? and

(b) Are student representatives effective enough or are they better replaced by some other system?

In response to the first question it seems, from the results of the questionnaire, that some School Councillors think that a Student Representative Council may be more beneficial as student representation on Council, than just representatives from the senior year levels - resulting in a junior levels' input as well. I feel that this is not necessarily how it would work. It is very hard to get any input from the senior levels and I believe that the junior levels are less inclined to suggest anything or speak up.

Committees for years 11 and 12 exist presently and they do what an SRC would do - they arrange social functions and fundraising for the school. If the younger year levels wish to do fundraising, it is taken to Council and there is generally no problem with that. The mothers already sell uniforms and bags, so there would be no need for an SRC to do that.

The second question is best answered by considering the expression 'change for change's sake'. If asked as a student representative what I have done for the school I wouldn't have much to show - at least in the tangible sense. Some of
my achievements have been to organise, and guide through Council, the year 11/12 VCE jumper, new basketball rings on the court and arranging a year 10 social. However, I have gained a sense of achievement in knowing that I have actively participated in the running of the school over the past two years. This may not have been obvious to others within the school community, but it has given me more of an understanding about how the limited resources (particularly money) are used by the school. This, in turn, has allowed me to advise other students regarding why certain things around the school happen - sometimes this has avoided misunderstanding and provided an 'on-the-spot' answer. With that experience, I believe that I have benefited a lot.

In saying that I am not sure what I have achieved, I could equally question what several of the other members (parents and teachers) have achieved during their time on Council as well. I am not saying that anyone does not contribute to the running of the Council, but because the business before the Council is so varied, it is impossible for every member of Council to comment on every issue raised. Therefore, I suppose that when I consider my achievements, I have to really look at what I have achieved as a student 'voice' rather than as a member of the Council generally. In that sense, I must admit that I have at least voiced an opinion when it was required - whether anyone took any notice or not it is difficult to say.

Although quite a few questions have been put to Council on behalf of other students, not many have actually been successful. Most of those that were not successful were fairly outrageous and I don't think the backing of an SRC would have helped with a different result, but who knows?

An SRC is really the only other option to individual student representatives, and an SRC would need at least one student representative anyway to give a report to Council. Student representatives have been found to be the most effective method of communication between the student body and the School Council, whether they be individual representatives or representatives of the SRC. There is nothing to suggest that the quality of representation is improved by someone representing the SRC, as opposed to the individual year level representative.

The real issue at the present time is the importance of encouraging all students to contribute actively by providing information, feedback and suggestions to the present Council representatives so that they can properly put those views to the School Council. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the present student representatives are incapable of putting students' views to the Council, but rather the problem lies in getting the information in the first place. You do not change a system merely because it has been around for a while, and because we haven't tried a Student Representative Council in that time.

The need for students' input into the School Council is not questioned. The input from the present (and past) student representatives has also not been questioned - what needs to be improved is the communication flow between the students so that the relevant information can be presented before the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered all the matters in relation to the issue of students' effectiveness on the School Council, I make the following recommendations:

(a) Student representatives should be specifically asked at School Council for their opinions on matters which would be of concern to them and the students generally;

(b) As the Council is now, there are two representatives from year 12. I feel that this is wrong. All senior year levels should be equally represented and, where a nomination is not forthcoming, appropriate candidates should be identified and encouraged to represent their year level;

(c) Service on Council shouldn't be recognised unless the student representatives have attended at least 50% of School Council meetings, otherwise they are receiving 'false' credit and not properly representing their year level students. This makes the input of those who turn up to all meetings not more important than those representatives who only turn up to a couple of meetings and then get the 'credit' attached to being a student representative on School Council; and

(d) Teachers (who are generally in the best position to do so) should actively encourage all students to participate in the running of the school by informing them of the role of the School Council and the need for student input to provide a better school environment. It has now become obvious to computer programmers that the actual computer program is useless unless it is 'user-friendly'. The same thing can be said about the school. If the students
are not happy with the way things are being done, they should be encouraged to speak up to their School Council representatives who can then take their concerns and ideas to the Council. This would make the school environment more 'student-friendly' - after all, without the students, there is no school!

CONCLUSION

I believe that the student representatives on the School Council are as effective as they are allowed to be by the students they represent, and by the School Council on which they serve. I don't believe that an SRC would do anything to improve the present situation; rather it could be seen as a cosmetic change to the symptom, not the cause.

The only way to improve the students' effectiveness on the School Council is to improve the communication link between the students who they represent, and their elected representatives. Once this is achieved, and the student representatives realise that they have the backing of the students generally, then the effectiveness of their contribution to School Council will improve.

Rebecca Adams

Rebecca was a year 11 student at a Victorian Secondary College in 1990. This investigation and report was her Year 11 English Communication project.

WHO ARE SCHOOLS FOR ANYWAY?

The Student Representative Council at Wangaratta Technical School had not been a successful group for many years. It had little influence on educational decision making in the school, concentrating on fund-raising and organisation of a school social only.

In 1988, the SRC was ceremoniously laid to rest:

We are gathered here today to pay our last respects to the WTS Student Representative Council, the SRC, or what was known to some as 'Who Needs It!'.

1987 saw our SRC catch a terminal case of 'who-gives-a-damn-itis'. In fact, the symptoms were so severe that euthanasia was the only possible treatment.

In its dying moments, we saw the crippling effects of:
1. lack of support and interest by teachers;
2. no reason for existing;
3. limited support by students;
4. its teeth fell out, so it had no real bite in school affairs;
5. no sense of importance etc.

The list of ailments, as you can see, is too gory to go into in greater depth.

My friends, at times like this, we always look to the sky and ask 'Why? Why? Why did it have to happen?' Sometimes the reasons are beyond our control and understanding.

This is not such a case though. Why didn't the SRC prosper and grow? Well, perhaps some people are threatened by students having a say in how the school operates. You know: "kids should be seen and not heard" - that sort of thing.

So, maybe the school didn't want it to work.

A body like the SRC can be very fragile if it doesn't get the care it needs. It will die if it doesn't have:

- a purpose
- enthusiastic members
- support and assistance from staff
- resources of its own
- good leadership
- and, most of all, they feed on success.

But that was not to be.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please stand and let us observe 15 seconds silence for the Tech School SRC.
Who Are Schools For Anyway?

Are schools here so that teachers will have a secure job? Are schools for Principals to improve their public speaking? Are schools large child-minding centres so that your parents can get rid of you each day? Well, not really.

The only complete answer is that schools exist to provide students with an education - an education which helps students to understand and cope with their later life, to fit into a rather complex society and workforce.

This being the case, it's pretty silly not to listen to what students have to say about their own education. And even sillier not to consider their ideas and opinions about the school when decisions are being made.

There are both teachers and students who will say that WTS is a good school. And it is. But that does not mean that it can't be better. Better at providing the type of learning experiences that students need to become mature adults, able to make decisions for themselves.

In order for students to have a say in how their school operates, they need a forum in which they can raise ideas and concerns and reach some agreement on issues of importance to students.

The old SRC didn't provide this sort of opportunity. Obviously we need a forum that is a bit different, that is designed to allow students the freedom to make their own decisions.

In 1988, we are going to try to give students the support they need to develop a real student forum. We don't know what issues are of most importance to students. It could be:

- the quality of food at the canteen;
- that school money could be spent in different ways;
- that there is too much homework;
- that teachers should teach differently.

Whatever the issues, we hope to provide the opportunity for students to decide these things for themselves, and have those ideas heard by the rest of the school, and acted upon.

In place of the SRC was created the Student Forum, a representative body with a clear role in enabling student input on educational matters and issues of concern to students. Its development involved the School Community Officer, a teacher committed to ideas of student participation and four year 12 students contracted as 'advisors' and resource people (as part of their studies) to assist the Forum to undertake its tasks.

The election process was a major one involving discussions with each year level, nominations being made, electoral platforms and elections by ballot. The process was deliberately made very public in the school and local press to alert people to the fact that a major change was occurring in the way the school viewed student participation.

The introductory statement to students said:

Schools are for students. So why shouldn't students have a say in how the school operates! Why should teachers make all the important decisions about your education?

The Wangaratta Technical School policy states that the school will: "establish democratic processes which allow and encourage equal participation of all groups within the school" and "provide the opportunity for students to participate in making decisions relating to the method and content of their own learning".

Teachers have staff meetings; parents have Parent Association meetings; so what about the students? How do they get to have a say about their own learning and how the school operates? How can students attempt to change things they don't like or think can be done differently?

In 1988, a new STUDENT FORUM will be formed to allow students from each year level to come together to express their opinions and ideas. The Student Forum has been designed to give students the opportunity to influence the decisions which are made in the school.

Each form is asked to nominate one person who they trust and believe will best represent their ideas most effectively. From those nominated at each year level, five will be elected by you to be your representatives on the Student Forum.

Students representing years 7, 8, and 9 will make up the JUNIOR FORUM, and those from years 10, 11 and 12 will make up the SENIOR FORUM. In order for students to discuss issues which are of interest to students from all year levels, a STUDENT FORUM EXECUTIVE will meet, which has six representatives from each of the Junior and Senior Forums, making a total of 12 members.

SUPPORT YOUR STUDENT FORUM!
After the elections, a two-day workshop (funded by the local School Community Development Network) was held to enable students to define the role of the Student Forum, to develop decision-making skills, to establish a workable structure and to elect office bearers.

One month after the elections, a Forum Dinner was held for the representatives and their parents. This was firstly to inform parents of their children's role and its importance and to indicate that Forum meetings would be held during class time and that students would be accredited for their involvement. Secondly, the dinner was intended to raise the profile of the Forum as a legitimate decision-making body in the school.

From 1988 to the present, the Student Forum has continued to evolve into a representative and effective voice for students.

Peter Barnes
School Community Officer
Wangaratta Network, Wangaratta SC
PO Box 483, Wangaratta 3677

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**FUNDING**

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANTS**

The Victorian Environmental Education Council (VEEC) was established as one of the major initiatives of Victoria's 'State Conservation Strategy'. This strategy identifies environmental education as:

"necessary to raise public awareness and increase involvement in environmental matters, and to positively influence community attitudes and behaviour."

The VEEC has established a grants program to assist schools and community groups in developing and sharing quality environmental education activities.

The Guidelines for the program include:

* encourage learning through active involvement in caring for the environment;
* involve 'ownership' of the activity by participants;
* involve the participants in learning through doing as much as possible; and
* encourage the formation of youth/student environment groups...

More information is available from:

VEEC Secretariat
Level 22, Rialto South Tower
525 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
Phone: (03) 628 2703

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**FUNDING GUIDE**

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has a 'Youth Funding Guide' available. This includes a wall chart with a quick guide on how to go about seeking funding, and a listing of funding sources, which details current programs with available funds for young people and youth organisations. The wall chart is $5 and the listing is $6 - a package of both is $10. Contact YACVic at:

1/250 Gore Street
Fitzroy 3065
Phone: (03) 419 9122
The Rights Stuff
Grants to Young People

The Bicentennial Youth Foundation Inc. was established in 1989 to benefit young Australians with limited opportunities, up to the age of twenty five years, to improve their lives and to make worthwhile contributions to Australia’s future.

The Foundation is pleased to announce the nationwide grants project, The Rights Stuff which will allow young people to take positive and practical steps to improve their local communities.

The Rights Stuff is the first element of the Foundation’s Initiatives to be announced under the 1990/91 Funding Program.

The Foundation welcomed the news that Australia has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The next step is to ensure that the Convention is ratified by Australia so that present and future governments will be obligated to introduce laws and programs which deliver the protection of these rights to all young Australians.

The Rights Stuff seeks to generate a community approach to achieve an understanding of human rights issues for young people, and the development of initiatives which make use of existing resources in the local area.

It recognises that young people have a leading role to play in bringing these issues to light and in developing and implementing strategies to make positive changes.

Background

Young people have many rights, including: the right to safe and secure housing, to fair and humane treatment by the legal system, to use public and community space, to freely express opinion and to be protected from sexual exploitation and abuse. In some cases young people are unable to exercise these rights due to lack of skills, experience, services, knowledge and support from their community.

The Rights Stuff provides financial support of up to $5,000 to groups of young people to enable them to identify ways of improving the exercise of their human rights.

The grants will be made available to groups of young people to plan, design and implement such projects.

Details

1. Grants are available to groups of young people for projects in local communities across Australia.

2. Each group may apply for a grant of up to $5,000.

3. Grants must be administered by an incorporated organisation.


Further Information

Further Information may be obtained from:

The Bicentennial Youth Foundation Inc.
1st Floor, 109 Norton St
Leichhardt
NSW 2040

Fax: 02 568 2632

Ph: 02 564 2242 or 008 252 316

(This free service is provided for young people, unfunded and minimally funded youth services, outside the Sydney metropolitan area. Available mid November)
STUDENTS: Come to Adelaide for the:

CURRICULUM '91 CONFERENCE

LIBERATING CURRICULUM

11th – 14th July 1991

An enthusiastic team of workers is currently planning the 1991 ACSA Conference in South Australia. Conference organisers are calling for people to conduct workshops and present papers.

For further information, contact:
Ms Leonie Ebert
C/- Christies Beach High School
Beach Rd, Christies Beach, SA 5165
(W) Ph: (08) 3822655
Fax: (08) 3844011

Dr David Prideaux
SA College of Advanced Education
Magill Campus
Lorne Ave, Magill, SA 5072
(W) Ph: (08) 3339634
Fax: (08) 3326122

Discount for students. Ask your school to sponsor you. Contact us NOW!
SPERA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The 1991 National Conference of SPERA - the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia - will be held from July 6 - 9 at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, Richmond, NSW. The theme for this year's conference is 'Rural Education and Local Development' and there are sub-themes around Transport, Curriculum, Enterprise, Technology and Research, and Promotion.

The organisers are interested in making contact with people in rural areas who are involved in pioneering new ways of providing education opportunities for people in rural communities. "For the last five years, SPERA has held a national conference in different states at which we encourage people to present papers on the 'good news' or success stories in education in rural Australia. Over this period of time we have unearthed some pretty amazing stories. These have been printed in the conference publication."

If you wish to present a paper at the Conference, or for further information, contact:

Mrs Marie Dale
Conference Convenor
7 Sanders Place
Gunnedah NSW 2380
Ph: (067) 421 435

LIVING AND GROWING UP AROUND THE WORLD

I AM SEEKING YOUR HELP WITH A PROJECT THAT WILL HELP TO TEACH OTHERS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD.

I HOPE YOU WILL CONTRIBUTE

I am writing a book which will help to show young people what it is like living and growing up in many parts of the world. The biggest part of this book will be personal statements written by young people which tell, first hand, of their way of life, as well as their hopes, dreams and fears for the future. I seek your assistance with this part of the book.

If you are between 10 and 18 years of age, would you please write a page or two about yourself; or, if you are a teacher, would you have your students write about themselves; in both cases explaining:

* a little about you, your family, where you live (city, town, village etc);
* a little about your daily or weekly activities which might be of interest to others who live in other parts of the world. You might explain certain customs, holiday celebrations, responsibilities etc;
* a little about your hopes, dreams and fears for the future, both for yourself and your country, as well as for the world;
* any special messages you might like to share with other young people the world over.

Maybe you know other young people who would be interested in being part of this book. Or maybe you know a teacher who would like to use this as a classroom exercise. I am interested in having as many contributions as possible.

Please forward all contributions to me at the address below. I will keep you informed of the progress of this book project. Thank you for your contribution.

Dr Kenneth Cushner
401 White Hall
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio 44242 USA

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The Youth Research Centre in the Institute of Education at Melbourne University has just completed research into young people's involvement in the environmental movement. The report of the research will be available at a forum in mid to late March.

The research has also resulted in a substantial data-base on conservation and environmental groups in Victoria, and their provisions for young people. Access to this data-base is currently available on a 'user-pays' basis.

For more information, contact the Youth Research Centre on (03) 344 8251.
DIRECTORY OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

The US-based National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools publishes a 'Directory of Alternative Schools' and would like to include as much information as possible about schools around the world.

"Our members are very interested in educational change in other countries. An entry in our Directory will open you up to contacts with schools and individuals from the US and other countries. We would be glad to list your school - name address and contact person - without charge, but we would rather have a full description of your school or program, so that our readers can learn more about you. The cost of placing such a description is US$50, which also makes you a Voting Member of NCACS for one year and entitles you to receive a one-year subscription (four issues) to our NCACS Newsletter, plus your own free copy of the Directory."

For a free listing, send: Name of school; address; contact person. The expanded description includes: number of students; age/grade; public/independent; cost of tuition; scholarships; description of program (about 100 words); service to home-schoolers; unique aspects; reference to other alternatives.

Contact the NCACS at:
58 Schoolhouse Road
Summertown TN 38483 USA

YOUTH AGENDA CONSULTATION

The Victorian Government has published its Youth Agenda - a 'policy framework for young people'. The Office of Youth Affairs is initiating a consultation process on the Agenda with young people throughout Victoria.

Groups of students and other young people are encouraged to plan ways to take part in this consultation. There is a possibility that a limited number of small grants may be available to assist this process. Student networks in particular might consider whether they wish to make the Agenda a focus of a meeting - there is a substantial section on Education and Training.

Copies of the Agenda and information about the consultation and grants from:
Office of Youth Affairs
Level 4, 500 Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000

Phone: (03) 602 8300

SRC PAMPHLETS RE-WRITE

The set of six SRC Pamphlets published by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria have been widely popular. YACVic and CONNECT are now considering revision and reprint of these pamphlets.

If you have used the pamphlets, we would welcome your passive or active input to the re-writing:

Passive: Send CONNECT any comments you have about the pamphlets. What should be changed, added, removed? Should we do an extra topic instead of just reprinting these?

Active: The pamphlets were originally written in collaboration with students. Is there an SRC or group of students who would like to work on a re-write of the series or of new pamphlets?

Contact CONNECT (address page 2).

LIB ED

The latest issue of Lib Ed (a British magazine 'for the liberation of learning') focuses on young people's views on their lives and their futures. A number of Australian students are included - the initial contact came through CONNECT. Thanks to all those who responded.

To get a copy, contact Lib Ed at:
The Cottage
The Green
Leire
Leicestershire LE 17 5HL UK
**From The Kids Contact**

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- Education

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- "LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN INDIA"
- "THE CLASS THAT LEARNS TOGETHER LEARNS ... FAST"
Local & Overseas 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) 489.9052:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Rave (Winlaton, Vic) No 43, December 1990

OVERSEAS STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Noun (Burlington, Vermont, USA) Vol 13 No 1; Summer 1990

Salt (Kennebunkport, Maine, USA) Nos 36, 37; August, November 1989

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Youth Issues Forum (YACVic, Fitzroy, Vic) Summer 1990

NIE Update (ANPA, USA) Vol 16 Nos 5, 6; Sept/Oct, Nov/Dec 1990

Hands On (Foxfire, Georgia, USA) No 35/36 Spring/Summer 1990

The REAL Story (REAL, Nth Carolina, USA) Vol II Chapter 3; Fall/Winter 1990

Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) November, December 1990

Kids Contact (Freedom From Hunger, Adelaide, SA) Nos 1, 2, 3

Collective Notes (COSHG, Vic) Nos 56, 57, 58; Nov, Dec 1990, Feb 1991

Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) Dec 1990

Communication and Research Trends (London, UK) Vol 10 No 4

Retention Matters (Staying On, Met SW, NSW) Vol 1, Spring 1990

SCIP Newsletter (SCIP, Red Cross, Vic) No 12, November 1990

Media 3 (Rusden, Vic) No 35, Nov 1990

Lib Ed (Leicestershire, UK) Vol 2 No 15, Winter 1990-91

Articles:

The articles listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of Connect. However, they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A fuller listing is available in Connect 46/47 - to October 1987.)

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<td>Workbook for 1990 SRC Camp for Gippsland Region (Vic).</td>
<td>22 pp</td>
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ACSA CONFERENCE:

National Student Forums: see advertisement page 22 this issue.
Materials Order Form

Connect has some material available for sale. Use this form to order:

To: CONNECT, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 Victoria Australia

From: Name: ................................................................. Postcode: ...........

Address: ...................................................................................

* Back issues of CONNECT ($2 each) Circle issue/s required: $ ...........
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* Students Publishing - Connect reprint #2 ($2) ...........
* Students and Work - Connect reprint #5 ($3) ...........

* 'Youth Radio' issue of the CRAM Guide (3CR) ($1) ...........

* The Foxfire Book (Doubleday Anchor) ($30) ...........
* Foxfire 9 (Doubleday Anchor) ($30) ...........

* Sometimes a Shining Moment (Elliot Wigginton) ($25) ...........

* SRC Pamphlets Set (6 pamphlets; Youth Affairs Council) ($5) ...........

* Photocopies of the following articles (see index in issue 46/47) ...........

(All prices include postage and packaging) TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ ...........

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