STUDENTS AND ...

Public Television ..
Swamps .. JSCs ..
Green Strategy ..
Christmas Cards ..
IN THIS ISSUE ...

Regular and attentive readers of Connect will notice a change in style in this issue - computer technology has caught up with us (or vice versa perhaps). No, we haven't bought a computer, and that accounts for the strange mixture of screen-based layout and cut-and-paste. This issue has been largely produced on equipment at the Youth Research Centre at Melbourne University (for which much thanks). While we are learning on-the-job, and having to move back and forth for the insertion of graphics, there will be some accommodation and adaptation needed. Bear with us.

We'd previously defended a typed Connect as conveying an accessible 'work-in-progress' image. Connect is still accessible - it's still a newsletter that aims to publish informal accounts of what's happening - you don't have to feel that a final and polished piece of writing is required.

What do you think? Do you like the new style? What suggestions do you have?

ACSA CONFERENCE

Registration forms for the '91 ACSA Curriculum Conference in Adelaide are enclosed. We continue to encourage you to support the attendance and participation of students at this Conference. Please note the May 5th deadline for registrations.

FOXFiRE RETURNS

Eliot Wigginton from Foxfire will be back in Australia in mid-June. The visit by Wig

and students last year was exciting and inspiring and this return promises to meet and exceed expectations.

Victoria's Country Education Project will be sponsoring this year's visit - probably offering extended workshops in about three centres in rural Victoria. As we go to press with this Connect, details of Wig's schedule aren't available. However, contact Connect or the Country Education Project (03.329 5677) for more information.

We'll again be looking at the possibilities for a public meeting or at least a meeting with teachers interested to join an on-going Foxfire-sponsored network. In which case, we'll attempt to publish an early June issue of Connect with all the news.

Foxfire has, as part of its 25th Anniversary celebrations, produced another book: Foxfire: 25 Years and a video-documentary: 'Shining Moments': The Foxfire Approach to Instruction. Wig will be bringing both with him - we'll let you know more details of their availability. We're also assured that some more copies of Sometimes a Shining Moment are on their way to us!

NEXT ISSUE

Follow-up articles to several featured in this issue of Connect are in hand or promised: an up-date on Sherbrooke Community School's swamp project, a further account of the ISC training days in Footscray/Yarraville/Braybrook; a report on SCOFS Conference of December 1990. Due - early June. Deadline for material: end of May.

Roger Holdsworth
NORTHERN ACCESS TELEVISION

If you lived in Preston or Reservoir, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, you could have tuned your TV to Channel UHF 31 (next to UHF 28) in late November 1990, and seen programs made by students from local schools.

You would have seen, among other programs, primary school students conducting a Junior School Council meeting and then discussing why it was important to have students as active participants in school decision making, secondary school students talking about their environmental action program and how it related to their school curriculum, students interviewing each other about the process of their presentations in the Rock Eisteddfod.

What you might not have seen, however, was the central and exciting roles that students played in producing these programs and getting them broadcast publicly within their communities.

This was the first test broadcast by Northern Access Television (NAT). The broadcast involved school community members - parents, students, teachers and consultants - from four School Community Development Program Networks in the area. How did the broadcast come about? How were students involved? What further plans exist?

Background

Opportunities for students to present results of research, opinions, information and so on to a wider audience have been provided, for many years, through school/community newspapers and public radio stations. These projects have been characterised by two important distinctions:

1. The engagement of students with their community - thus the importance of school/community papers rather than simply school or student newspapers, and the importance of broadcasting programs to a broad community audience rather than limited access through (say) a school's loudspeaker system. Audience and interaction are vital.

2. The control and decision-making role of students in the presentation of media production - in contrast to occasional attempts by commercial or national media to include student comments but on terms dictated by the adult controllers of the medium.

Yet it's been noted that the medium that has most impact on the community (including students) is television. Until recently, there has been little opportunity for Australian students to have access to this area in ways that reflect the above criteria.

Certainly, students have produced video reports, yet have shown these only to other students and teachers. Alternatively, students have been actors and participants in TV broadcasts which have been set up and controlled by others. This is not to say that these examples haven't been useful, but in terms of student participation in television production, they have rapidly reached limitations.

Maria Savarino (a VCE teacher), in a report for a public television station in Melbourne, has noted an example of this:

Students at Tottenham Community Secondary College produced a video dealing with Youth Unemployment and Homelessness in 1990, as part of their Australian Studies Units 1 and 2 Course. This video was the result of researching the work ethic and youth unemployment in an increasingly automated and computerised society, within the area of study 'Australia: A Fair and Equitable Society'. The students discovered that youth unemployment often led to family conflict and homelessness. They decided to present their findings in a video format so that it would be more interesting and more accessible to other students in the school. Unfortunately, opportunities to show the video to their community are limited, as the large television networks are not interested in broadcasting student video.
Some attempts have been made to overcome these limitations, through production of student video magazines, both in Victoria's Western Metropolitan and Central Highlands-Wimmera Regions and, most recently, through Metropolitan East's DSP Resource Centre at Erskineville (Sydney) (see Connect 39 and 56). These magazines are assembled from programs put together by students from schools in those areas, and copies are then sent back for circulation within and through the schools.

However, possibilities for more widespread development and broadcast of student video programs have existed elsewhere for some time. The existence of a public broadcasting television network in the United States has enabled students to produce television for their local communities. This has been through partnership arrangements between the networks and the schools, through requirements that networks allocate educational access time, and through negotiation with individual local community stations for students to present products (e.g., tapes of 'oral history' interviews) of classwork. Examples have been documented in earlier issues of Connect - Project Blueberry and McKinley Mass Media (Connect 27/28), Foxfire (Connect 54/55 and 63) and, more generally, TV networking (Connect 24).

Public Television in Australia

In 1987, RMITV was the first broadcaster of public television in Australia. Since that time, there have been around 20 test transmissions throughout the country. Recently, federal legislation has been adopted to allow for sponsorship on test transmissions.

As a result of these activities, the Department of Transport and Communications has commissioned a report on the evaluation of the transmissions. The Public Broadcasting Association of Australia has further added to this evaluation and has drafted a report which outlines the practical implications of how a service such as Community Television (CTV) could be introduced and sustained. In this report, an allocation has been made for a cross-section of the community to participate.

Recently the Australia Council approved funds for a national coordinator of community television. (Contact Greg Hoy on (02) 211 3288 for further details.) Given the limited local content on commercial television, particularly in rural areas, it is hoped that a national coordinator will be able to influence government policy in regards to the licensing and resourcing of existing and future groups.

In November 1990, a Melbourne Community Television Consortium (MCTC) was formed, comprising RMITV, SKA (St Kilda Access), RAT (Richmond Access Television), ERA (Eastern Region Access) and NAT (Northern Access Television). (Contact Michael Butson at Open Channel on (03) 419 5111 for further details.)

Northern Access TV

Northern Access Television (NAT) began with a group of people based in four School Community Development Program Networks in the northern suburbs of Melbourne mid-way through 1990. It had its first test broadcast in November 1990.

The SCDP Networks of Preston, East Preston, Reservoir and West Heidelberg cover approximately 30 schools and share many characteristics: they are in close geographical proximity, they have similar school/student/parent/community needs, they have a history of joint action, and they share common perspectives on Network priorities and approaches.

The idea of the Networks using a television broadcast was introduced by one of the School Community Officers:

I believe it would be possible to produce a broadcast for this area... for, say, three days (three hours per day).... This would total some 30 schools and therefore a significant home audience.

What's the purpose? Essentially the focus would be education, but would also allow for input on community health, local government, migrant services etc... Other programs might relate to student democracy, environmental studies, VCE and District Provision, music and drama. Most importantly, it would have a curriculum focus and would be produced by and for our local school communities. One broadcast would establish a precedent and then provide a focus for subsequent events for which students and school communities would finally become responsible for developing programs... It's all about communication, education, and school community development.

The aims of the project were formalised:

1. To provide information to members of the school community networks for Preston, Preston East, Reservoir and West Heidelberg about what's happening in schools today;
2. To provide a forum for expression and debate concerning issues of educational and social importance in the community within the immediate telecast area;
3. To produce programs about subjects related to schools and education, the local community, social justice issues, music and the arts. Efforts will be made to include a wide range of programs from community groups whenever possible.
The local School Council Liaison Officer, Rob Fearnside, saw the possibilities:

One of the difficulties of operating effective School Councils is of ensuring that the school community is well informed of current Ministerial guidelines, educational philosophies and the ways in which individual schools approach these in their own creative and specific ways. The television broadcast is basically a communication exercise to our school communities and has the advantage of telling the broader community about the great things we're doing in our state schools.

The SCDP Networks, now formalised through Northern Access Television, applied for and received permission to carry out a test broadcast of television programs for a week in late November 1990. A transmitter was hired, the studio at Preston Secondary College booked for several weeks beforehand, and Network schools were invited to participate in program making.

Over 150 members of school communities came through the studio to make programs and many more (perhaps 600) were filmed at local and school events.

Programs were taped on ordinary half-inch VHS format - the sort that many people have at home and that schools use. This meant that program-making was very accessible to ordinary members of the community. It is estimated that currently available VHS equipment provides a picture quality that is twice as good as that from television studios in the early days of Australian TV. However, because there was uncertainty about how well half-inch edited programs would transmit, it was decided to make almost all programs in 'one take' and to test a small number of edited cases.

The programs covered a broad range of curriculum issues, enabling students and other members of the school communities to discuss, share and reflect on information about their curriculum and Ministry priorities. Over 20 hours of programs were developed, including topics of:

* student organisations (JSC/SRC)
* local government and democracy
* music, drama, dance in the Rock Eisteddfod
* Activity Maths and Family Maths
* women on School Council
* equal opportunity
* Reading Together
* Health in Primary Schools
* Family Science
* VCE
* District Provision
* the School Community Development Program
* the Greenhouse Effect
* multiculturalism
* motor development programs
* media studies
* Languages Other Than English
* bicycle education
* Police in Schools Program

For the group, there were particular and technical aims to the broadcast:

1. To test the effectiveness of a 10 watt transmitter (the cheapest available) compared to a 20 watt transmitter (which could be tried at a later date);
2. To test the effectiveness of half-inch standard VHS tape - transmitted in original and edited format. If this were successful, it would be particularly significant in enabling community, school and student access to program production. A totally half-inch format had not been used before;

3. To test the practicality of producing half-inch standard VHS programs at the studio (a two-camera operation at Preston Secondary College) with predominantly studio crews and participants;

4. To promote the idea of Public Television, raising the awareness of it in the local community, local school-community networks and within the Ministry of Education at the School Support Centre, Regional and Central levels;

5. To establish Northern Access Television as potential licence-holders for Public Television.

Student participation was particularly featured in programs on many of the curriculum projects, on JSCs and on SRCs. Making these programs encouraged and enabled students to choose and present information thereby reflecting upon their school activities.

Students were also active participants in the production of the programs for broadcast. They played many roles in which they were valued, given responsibility and treated as 'adults' in the project:

* presenting information

Students were frequently the subjects of programs, but this also meant that they chose what to present about the programs. Scripts on subjects such as 'how we do maths', 'bike education', 'JSCs' and 'camps' were developed collaboratively and students decided, by a 'brainstorming' process, about the important aspects of their learning that should be featured in the program. More formally, students were interviewed, either in classroom settings or in a panel discussion. These processes also meant that students were developing increased 'ownership' of their curriculum programs.

* interviewers

Students interviewed (both in schools and in the studio) other students, parents, teachers, community members, local government officials, Ministry of Education personnel and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. They researched topics, worked out questions (often collaboratively with interviewees), and conducted interviews. Much of the preparation for these interviews was done in classes in the schools, and became part of the public speaking and communication skill development valued by the schools. Because of technical limitations, interviews and panel discussions were repeated several times until a single, unedited 'take' satisfied all participants.
Primary and secondary school students were also directly involved in the transmission of programs. This involved switching tapes between machines, cueing programs in very short times, operating transmission controls and going live-to-air between pre-taped programs. This latter area developed unexpectedly, when it was discovered that only one tape input was available. Students then appeared on camera live in the transmission hut, while tapes were switched, to thank sponsors and introduce and link programs. Much of the script for these segments was made up by students on the spot.

organisation

Students played important 'behind the scenes' roles in ensuring the project went ahead smoothly. They were telephone operators in the transmitter hut and in the studio, and also phoned out to target audiences during transmission to determine picture and sound quality. Many schools include 'telephone practice' as part of their curriculum - this project provided such experience 'for real'.

A TV Guide was produced and distributed through all schools. This Guide was designed and produced by students and printed by one of the schools on paper donated by APM.

Students often filled these roles in groups that cut across friendships, schools and year levels. This led naturally to inter-school and mixed-age discussions on curriculum and skill issues within the schools - "do you really do that?", "how did this program start?" and so on.

Students' participation in the project encouraged them to investigate these curriculum areas, ask questions of themselves and others and to present their views on these matters. It encouraged self direction, self confidence, research, presentation, group learning and activity-based programs that had a real world outcome.
Broadcast Outcomes

The test broadcast of Northern Access Television was seen widely through the Preston/Reservoir/West Heidelberg area. The following diagram indicates reports of signal quality in various locations:

The group has, in its draft evaluation, pointed to the following achievements:

We learnt what were (and how to enact) the components of a broadcast, including: licence, equipment, transmitter site and hire, sponsorship, school contacts, studio operation, technical possibilities, media/publicity and follow-up/evaluation, letters of thanks.

We came to understand studio operation.

We involved around 150 people in the studio and put around 600 people (from our school community networks) to air.

We promoted a buzz of excitement about the idea of Public TV and about Northern Access Television in particular - at a local community level and bureaucratically at the School Support Centre, Regional and Ministry levels.

We made lots of connections: sponsors, equipment, public television, community, press, etc.

We went to air for 20 hours (5 days x 4 hours), one of the longest public TV broadcasts.

We achieved outstanding student participation at a technical and interviewer/interviewee level.

We produced interview programs which schools can use to promote their school initiatives, such as Home Reading, Family Maths or the operation of School Council.

The test broadcast also exposed areas for improvement:

There were technical difficulties early in the week which 'turned off' potential audiences. By the end of the week, the
broadcast was at its most effective, but it seems clear that we should try the 20 watt transmitter.

We can improve the publicity before the broadcast, alerting people to the fact that it's happening and how to tune in (which appeared to be complicated - people had to re-tune sets to Channel 31). This publicity should include a publicity campaign in all schools and local press, production of a program guide for every student in all schools, further workshops for tuning sets, arrangements for school visits during the transmission, and approaches to the major press.

We should transmit from the studios at Preston Secondary College and utilize a micro-wave relay to the transmitter, thus enabling more sophisticated live-to-air segments and for all schools to be rostered to visit the broadcast in progress.

We should survey all schools and through the local paper to determine the audience, the reception and the preference for community programs.

Technical Issues

It's important to remember the limitations of this type of transmission. It's narrowcast, not broadcast i.e. a 45 degree arc for a limited number of kilometres (in our case for 10 watt this was only about 7 km) in a singular direction. It is a requirement that you broadcast in a westerly direction, so that you are in line with the direction of home TV antennas. The transmitter needs as high a vantage point as possible. The UHF transmitters depend on line of sight, so the signal can be blocked or obscured by buildings, hills, valleys etc. Previous sites have included the tops of high-rise blocks of flats (Housing Commission in Fitzroy and Flemington), the Rialto Building, Westfield Shopping Centre, a 'cherry-picker' on a hill in Richmond and ours at Victory Transport, a taxi radio tower on Upper Heidelberg Road.

It's important to stress that the length of cable between the antenna (up on the radio mast) and the transmitter (the 'magic-box' at the base of the mast) is critical. The power of the transmission signal is reduced as the length of the cable increases. This was problematic for our broadcast because we began with 30 metres of cable - it was too long and we changed to the antenna and cable which were kindly donated by RMIT.

Where To Now?

Northern Access Television is in the process of formalising its organisation in preparation for another test transmission in May 1991 with a view to another in November 1991. It has been recognised that student participation is one of the strengths of the group. While that participation has been strongly evident in content, production and transmission of programs, the formal organisation has, to date, involved a small number of consultants and teachers.

There are important local precedences for strategies on this - the Preston Battle of the Bands project was begun by adults, but is now an annual event operated by students. Increased student participation in setting directions and in the overall control and organisation of NAT is a priority.

Maria Savarino has pointed to some curriculum and organisational advantages for links between schools and public television:

The VCE strongly emphasises the presentation of work requirements and projects to an audience. Public television is the perfect medium for
presentation of work requirements and the practice of classroom theory... It will become increasingly difficult for students to consistently find a suitable audience for presentation of their projects. Student-produced videos on issues of social and local relevance, social justice and individual or school interest, would be broadcast on a regular basis. By provision of access to a Public Television station, the local community, specific groups or a broader audience, can be reached through the television medium.

Student Representative Councils will be able to utilise the airtime available to telecast student information and up-coming events to a broader number of students on a consistent basis. School events like discos or plays could be telecast to the school audience and the local community.

For School Councils and administration, membership with Public Television stations would provide the opportunity to easily and economically reach their school and local community. Air-time could be utilised to broadcast information about course selection and counselling sessions, courses of study offered at the school and announcements, to facilitate community liaison, to share information, and to provide school publicity.

There is unlimited potential for work experience in Public Television. Students would have the opportunity for hands-on experience in all aspects of production and telecasting... This is an excellent opportunity to practise the theoretical classroom studies...

Already there are clear signs of the influence of the project in classroom work. Preston North-East Primary School has called consultants in to assist them in developing a classroom unit which involves video-recording a play about technology, in which students talk about issues and then present the play they have written. Having the possibility of a real, community focus for learning, sharpens the activity.

Previous examples have indicated that such a 'real world' outcome improves students' writing, teaches them communication skills, increases their knowledge of the local community and gives them a critical understanding of the medium - from inside.

"Community TV ... allows interaction and awareness of what is going on locally ... (it) doesn't just show what the large networks want everyone to see and accept, and it gives the people in the area a chance to see themselves on TV...," said one student. "It got me more motivated to try and do something about my grades. It showed me that there can be a reason behind school," said another.
JUNIOR SCHOOL COUNCILS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NETWORKED!

(with apologies to Oscar Wilde)

By: Mary Petherick - Yarraville West JSC; David Petherick - Yarraville JSC

Recently, we attended a Student Participation Training Day organised by our local School Community Development Officers from the Footscray-Yarraville, Braybrook and Deer Park-Albanvale Networks. This was a great opportunity to meet with other teachers involved in student participation, and in particular Junior School Councils. To our great relief, we found that they shared many of the same concerns and apprehensions that we were feeling: concerns about how JSCs fit into the school culture (or does anybody care?); how it is valued in our schools (real participation vs tokenism); access to decision making (organising school disco vs decisions about curriculum); the structure of JSCs (how much should teachers intervene in JSC meetings - ‘guiding without dominating’).

COMMON CONCERNS

In our discussions on JSCs becoming part of the school culture, our major concern was that if we did not succeed in this area, then JSCs may become rather *ad hoc* affairs, continuing only if there is a teacher on staff willing to give up extra time on top of all other responsibilities expected of teachers in the ’90s. We feel there needs to be a whole school commitment to JSCs and student participation in general. Some of the ways this commitment may manifest itself include time-release for teachers to run JSC meetings during school time. This makes the JSC more attractive to students and to teachers who may be interested in becoming involved. It is also important to have the role of JSC organiser included on the school’s list of roles and responsibilities for teachers. This builds in an expectation that someone will take on the job each year.

There needs to be some form of accreditation for students who participate in JSCs. This could range from giving badges and certificates to those who participate, through to setting aside a section in the school’s pupil reports for comments regarding participation in JSCs. To improve the profile of JSCs, it is also critical to keep as many people as possible informed of the work you are doing. This includes the student population, the community at large, and teachers and administrators. Valuable ways of doing this are by having minutes of JSC meetings typed and circulated to staff, School Council, parent groups and classrooms. Assemblies and the ever-faithful school newsletter provide other avenues for the dissemination of information.

We have also recently discovered the value of networking first hand. As a direct result of the training day, we formed a network of teachers involved in JSCs and have had our first meeting (thanks to Sue Holmes from West Education Centre for the meeting place and nibbles). Currently we are looking into ways to arrange a networking structure for the JSCs themselves. So far, we have agreed to have the minutes from each JSC meeting circulated to other JSCs in order to keep each other informed of projects each is involved in. Hopefully, this will lead to sharing of ideas through the mail and will show each JSC that others are interested in what they are doing. Hopefully, implementing these ideas (only in the embryo stage, and a long-term project) will give some legitimacy to our JSCs in the eyes of the school community, parents, teachers, administrators and the children attending our schools.

Many teachers also expressed concern over the structure of their JSCs. How do you guide meetings without dominating? What structure should the meeting take? How do you build in some success? How do you involve the whole student body as opposed to the ‘elite’ few who have been elected? These are crucial questions that seem to have no ‘quick fix’ answers, but by forming a network we can share successes and failures and find some ways of overcoming these problems.

THE ROLE OF THE JSC

It appears to be a common misconception that the role of the JSC is to organise the school disco and, perhaps, do a bit of fundraising for the grade 6 graduation. However, Roger Holdsworth
(guest speaker at the training day) pointed out that the role is more far-reaching than this. He advocates that the JSC’s responsibilities could be divided into three areas, and all of these areas should be looked at by the JSC body. The first area, which most JSCs seem to do naturally anyway, is to organise - social functions, fundraisers, fetes etc. The second area is to address and facilitate change - changes to school uniform, bicycle riding to school, playing areas etc. The final area, and perhaps the most difficult, is decision-sharing - making decisions to do with school rules, homework policies, curriculum content and the like. However, if we are going to pay more than lip-service to the notion of collaborative decision making, the involvement of students in decisions regarding curriculum is critical.

A COUPLE OF PERSONAL VIEWS

David - Yarraville PS

Last year, whilst organising our JSC, I went to great pains to ensure that I had as little say as possible at meetings (although my colleagues may find this hard to believe and some JSC members may have a little giggle). The result was that those on the JSC benefited greatly and worked through issues that were important to them, and this is a very valuable exercise in itself. However, I am more aware this year of the need to be seen as a legitimate part of the school community, and therefore we need to deal with issues that are seen as important by, and have a high profile in, the school community. This is part of the political process that elected bodies must go through, so I am trying not to feel guilty about this development. Consequently, our JSC is running a referendum around the issue of separate play areas for grades prep, 1 and 2 (JSC issue). We are in the process of drafting playground rules for our school (my issue). We have set up a subcommittee to look at recycling (JSC issue). We intend providing funding for a grade 6 graduation ceremony at the end of the year (JSC issue). And we are investigating access to better facilities for the JSC, including a permanent meeting room, use of a filing cabinet and notice-board, and access to the school secretary to type our minutes (my issue). I feel very comfortable with this, as it seems to balance my need to attain legitimacy for the JSC with my belief that JSCs should be run by the students.

Mary - Yarraville West PS

This is the first year I have attempted to run the JSC in our school, so I am speaking from a novice’s point of view. However, after attending the Student Participation Training Day, I have maintained my enthusiasm and optimism about the success the JSC can achieve. Because the JSC is valued at our school, the committee meets in school time. To make sure the JSC addresses the three areas it should (Roger Holdsworth), the committee is divided into three sub-committees - 'the organisers', 'the changemakers' and 'the decision-makers'. The JSC meets once a month and each sub-committee meets once a month. The issues raised by the members are allocated to the specific group concerned, to address at sub-committee level. Any major decisions are then brought to the whole-group meeting to be voted and acted upon. I believe that, by dividing the JSC into sub-committees, it ensures that the children are participating in all areas of school life and are seen to be playing a legitimate role in the school community. It also allows the less dominant children to have their say in a more workable group.

It is stressed that the members are representatives of all the children who attend the school are not an elite group who meet once in a while. Thus it is expected that each rep gives a verbal report to their grade after each meeting. Typed minutes are also placed on a JSC notice-board where a photo of each councillor can be seen. A report is also required to be placed in the school newsletter on the progress the JSC is making. The members will be holding a public meeting in each grade to find out the real concerns at grass roots. I look forward to working with the JSC in addressing these issues and thus improving our school.

THE POINT OF THE EXERCISE

We have experienced the benefits of networking firsthand, but we realise it is not always practical for others. Constraints of distance and time may make this impractical for many. What we propose is to form a register of schools in Victoria that have, or would like to form, Junior School Councils. This list of schools would then be published in Connect magazine and would be a valuable starting point for JSCs who would like to communicate with other JSCs. Hopefully, this would allow JSCs to network via the mail.

If your school is interested, please write to us care of Connect magazine.

We would like to thank our School Community Development Officers: David Jay, Liz Meddings and Anne Lancashire - without their help and encouragement, we would not be at the stage we are with our JSCs. Also many thanks to Roger Holdsworth who has given of his time, advice and assistance freely.
ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH ALLIANCE

The Environmental Youth Alliance is a national network of young people's environment groups acting in schools, colleges, universities and local communities. The EYA has branches in all states and territories:

ACT: C/o the ACF, PO Box 2699, Canberra ACT 2601. Phone: (06) 241 8241.

NSW: PO Box R1240, Sydney NSW 2001. Phone: (02) 247 9342.

NT: 36 Humbert Street, Woodleigh Gardens NT 0812. Phone: (089) 27 9735.

Q: C/o The Wilderness Society, 97 Albert Street, Brisbane Q 4000. Phone: (07) 221 3695.

SA: 120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone: (08) 47 1345.

TAS: C/o The Wilderness Society, 130 Davey Street, Hobart TAS 7000. Phone: (002) 349 366.

VIC: PO Box 1504, Collingwood VIC 3066. Ph: (03) 241 8241.

WA: PO Box 2699, Cloisters Square, Perth WA 6000. Phone: (09) 321 1762.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The Youth Research Centre (Institute of Education, University of Melbourne) has published a report of its research into 'Young People and the Environmental Movement'. This report examines current practices in school and community groups, and suggests strategies for the more effective participation of young people in conservation and environmental organisations. The report is also supported by an extensive database of Victorian groups and of clubs and projects directed to young people.

The research report is published in two volumes - Volume 1 is the main report, and Volume 2 contains information about and extracts from the database. Copies are available from the Youth Research Centre. Each volume costs $10 for non-members or $5 for Centre members. Contact the centre on (03) 344 8251.
SA: State Council of Students

The idea of a state-wide school students' organisation in South Australia emerged from a conference of young people held during the 1985 International Youth Year. A further conference of secondary school students was held in July 1985 at which representatives were elected to the first State Council of Students (SCoS). The organisation was established to work towards effective student participation at school, area and state level within the education system, and to assist and support students in undertaking community action on issues of concern to them. (Priebbenow, unpublished background paper, 1986)

The initial months of the Council (July-Dec 1985) set the basis for the organisation:

* the establishment of goals
* the undertaking of action on issues affecting students
* the establishment of the Management Committee
* the seeking of support and recognition within the education system, particularly at senior management level of the Education Department.

Since 1986, the Council's progress has emphasised its dual tasks of ongoing organisational development and the facilitation of student participation and governance:

Organisational Development

* the establishment of the constitution
* the lobbying for, and attainment of resources, including monetary grants and personal support
* the building of an infrastructure, through the forming of Area Councils and district clusters.

Student Participation and Governance

* the consideration of issues affecting students
* the organisation of meetings, training camps and annual conferences
* the production and distribution of the student participation training manual, Unravelling the Maze.

The State Council of Students seeks to provide a student run organisation for all secondary students, from both the government and non-government sectors. As a facilitatory organisation, the Council is structured on the basis that its goals can best be achieved through students being able to participate in groups or networks at various levels: school, district, Area and state-wide.

The basis of the Council is the various student governance organisations in schools. Representatives from these groups may meet in clusters or district arrangements, often determined by geographical proximity. Students from clusters, or directly from schools, are able to become members of Area Councils. Each Area Council elects four representatives to the State Council's Management Committee. From the Management Committee, a State Convener, co-deputy convenors (one male, one female), a secretary and a treasurer are elected. This structure is almost pyramidal in shape, but is not intended to operate as a hierarchy of participation.

The main continuous operational level has been at Management Committee level, whilst there have been, and are, various Area and cluster groups operating. Membership, particularly of Area Councils and the Management Committee, has been more on an ad hoc basis rather than formally constituted.

A significant background element is the relationship of the State Council of Students with the Education Department of South Australia. Whilst essentially established as an intersystemic (ie with non-government schools sector) and independent organisation under the patronage of the Minister of Education, the State Council of Students now has specific links with the Education Department:

* a funding allocation of $5000 pa from the Minister of Education
* part of the role of Parents and Students in Schools (PASS) Development Officer is to support the Council's Management Committee and its activities
* the support of advisors and teachers for Area Councils and networking
* clerical support in Areas and in the Curriculum Directorate.

Whilst there are these links, the State Council of Students maintain a reasonable degree of autonomy as a student owned and student run organisation. This independence is seen as an important factor enabling students to readily take action and accomplish tasks without being delayed or hindered by bureaucratic formalities.

THE GREEN STRATEGY

In December 1990, the South Australian State Council of Students (SCoFS) was presented with a proposal for action relating to their concerns about the environment. They were asked to consider the kind of advice that student government bodies in secondary schools could be provided with to support a change in school environments so that they would become more environmentally sound places in which to live and work.

With the support of an Environmental Project Officer and a grant from the Education Department, the Green Strategy has developed from these embryonic beginnings. Working towards a deadline of World Environment Day on 5th June, a group of students nominated to be part of a writing group with the task of preparing a book promoting an awareness of environmental concerns in schools. It is expected that this book will be presented to the Minister of Education on 5th June.

An invitation was extended to members of the Environmental Youth Alliance to join SCoFS in the project, and 11 students representing both organisations have continued to meet, research, discuss and write in ways that they believe will appeal to other students (students' concerns in students' language!).

The project received an initial boost with the opportunity to meet and talk with Dr David Suzuki, a man much respected by all members of the group for his commitment to action on behalf of us all. The students were very keen to hear of the types of programs that students in Canada had tried. A very clear message from this meeting was that any action, no matter how small, will have some impact on what happens globally. The air we breathe does not belong exclusively to us, but moves constantly around the globe.

The writing group met shortly after for a two-day conference. Here they heard from people who were working on campaigns such as LandCare and Keep South Australia Beautiful. They then determined that the contents of the book would include:

* What is happening in schools
* Greening classrooms and the curriculum
* The canteen
* Working with the school administration
* Energy management
* Waste reduction and recycling

A first draft of the book is almost ready for printing. It will be sent to some schools in the country and city for students to try the ideas before giving feedback about its usefulness. What do the students involved in the project think?

The writers of the Green Strategy hope that our tips will help guide all struggling environmental activists through the difficult discussion stage to the stage of action. We hope to point out that there are a lot of small things we can do in our schools - things that won't cause us to implement major changes to our way of life.

Karyle Rozek

The final product will be a genuinely collaborative effort between students and teachers. When following the advice in the book, students will be responding to student initiatives rather than 'good ideas' from the oldies.

Rachel Proud

For more information about the project, contact Cheryl Ross, Development Officer, Parents and Students in Schools, Gilles Street Curriculum Unit, 91 Gilles Street, Adelaide SA 5000. Phone (08) 232 4076.
1991 has seen the introduction of the new VCE in Victoria. Sherbrooke is going against the trend to bigger and bigger schools trying to offer all 44 study areas. We will be offering a lesser range of study areas but spread over the main learning areas of Arts, Humanities, Mathematics, Sciences and Technology and, hopefully and for the first time, Business Studies.

How can we compete with mega schools? We have to continue to do what we have done in the last six years - offer something they cannot do or find very difficult to do.

By this I do not mean we just stay as we are. We cannot afford to do that. We must look at our school and deliberately map out the way forward. We can always do better than we do now - better at catering for individuals, better at involving students and their families in school decision making, better at negotiating courses with our students, better at increasing individuals’ self-esteem and so on. But we also need to continue to break new ground.

Community schools have traditionally been innovative and exciting places. They have contributed to the advancement of the Victorian education system as a whole. Many of the innovations have become built into the programs of all schools.

One example is STC (Schools Year 12 and Tertiary Entrance Certificate). It arose primarily in community schools and became the most rapidly growing year 12 course in the system. Its popularity was one of the pressures on the old HSC system that resulted in the reforms that have been introduced this year.

Other programs that are taken for granted now had their beginnings in community schools - programs such as cross-age tutoring, work experience, working with the elderly and the disabled, and tertiary visits.

The earliest community schools were Sydney Road Community School, Swinburne Community School and Lynall Hall. Some High and Tech schools were community schools on a larger scale - Ferntree Gully High, Maryvale High, Moreland High and Huntingdale Tech - and were established with a similar philosophy to community schools.

Students were empowered, subjects were broadened, new subjects introduced, competitive assessment was abandoned, active learning was substituted for passive learning.

These schools opened the curriculum up to try new things. They worked with the students' ideas and interests. They accepted students as they were and worked with them to advance their knowledge and skills and they encouraged their students to have opinions and develop attitudes.

We are no longer in the experimental stage. The practices of these schools in the 70s and 80s have been tested, refined and finally subsumed into the education culture of our time.

A final reflection on these innovative schools: they were not large or rich schools; they were not endowed with a special student population or a special group of teachers.

If you need proof of the influence of these schools, come in and look at the landmark documents in education over the last ten years. Look at the Ministerial Papers, look at the Blackburn Report, look at the Framework documents, look at the new VCE Study Designs.

Surprisingly (or not so surprisingly) educationalists are finding that these ideas were not new ideas. Bill Hannan, as Chairperson of the State Board of Education, in Education Victoria has written an article relating the present theories of learning to those espoused by J A Comenius in 1669.

Eliot Wigginton worked for 20 years developing the Foxfire project in Rabun County, Georgia, only to discover that the truths about education that he thought he had discovered had been chronicled by John Dewey 50 years previously.

But what about our future?

I think we are ready to take the next leap
forward in our development.

An early notion of community schools was that they used community resources as much as possible and that they, in turn, became a resource for the community. I feel that they have certainly done the first part, but I have not seen a lot of evidence of the latter part.

I know at Sherbrooke we let groups use our facilities, but I am thinking of our human resources as well. There are many ways we can more actively provide resources for the community.

The swamp project is one example. When the ecosystem is established, we will be able to use it ourselves and derive a lot of value and pleasure from it. But why just us? Ken's vision of the swamp includes its use by school groups and other groups from outside the school. Our students' role would become that of instructors, guides and teachers for those groups. Imagine the added learning that will go on when our students plan another group's learning experience and then deliver it. Imagine the lift in students' self-esteem when they do this.

We have many other opportunities within the school to work in this way. Our media facilities are developing to a point where we could contract to make videos for people. We have desk-top publishing equipment that would allow us to produce pamphlets and newsletters for local groups.

Performances have always been a popular area within our school. We not only have students experienced in performing in music, drama and acrobatics, but we also have writers, directors, lighting designers etc. We must begin to entertain more than just our school community.

We plan to have the organisational skills and the entrepreneurial skills that our students display in homegroups given recognition as part of the new VCE. If students organise a country performance tour, they will get credit for it as part of their VCE. If other students organise the catering for such a tour, they could have that recognised as part of their Cooking and Catering course.

When you think about it, the possibilities are endless. In all of this, we do not lose sight of the basic skills (the 3Rs). We develop those skills by doing exciting and valuable things.

This approach is similar to that of the Foxfire project, about which Eliot Wigginton says:

It is also a particular approach to teaching and learning - one which emphasises that what happens in the classroom must be academically rigorous, purposeful and produced for a real audience.

(from Sometimes a Shining Moment, Doubleday, 1985)

In this way, our small school can provide a stimulating and enriching education for all our students.

Colin Hollow

THE SWAMP PROJECT

Why have a swamp?

Here are some of the reasons why, according to the students from the 1989 Swamp class at Sherbrooke Community School:

* The swamp would provide an ideal source of aquarium animals for little kids and big kids to study in class.

* We're learning a lot about ecology, plant/animal life-cycles and adaptations. The swamp is really like a scaled-down world environment - lots of links between animals, plants and the environment. Maybe we could learn more about ecological laws that apply to living on our planet by using the swamp to show these.

* By trying to recreate a natural community in the school-ground, maybe kids can learn that such communities are very complex and sensitive. Some respect for wilderness areas may arise from this. This would be particularly so for kids involved in re-vegetating the area using data from our field work.

* We may be able to attract other animals (eg birds) to our wetlands area. It would be of interest to watch the changes over a period of years.

* There is intrinsic value in kids participating in all stages of a project such as this - design, data collection, interpreting
THE SWAMP PROJECT

WHAT WE'VE DONE

We carried out work on wilderness using the Wilderness Societies' kit

Decided to recreate a bit of wilderness in the school

Visited Austraflora to look at landscape designs

Visited a real swamp in Sherbrooke forest

Visited the keeper at Healesville Sanctuary in charge of building their new wetlands enclosure. Collected ideas for our own swamp.

Collected animals in plankton nets at a swamp at Yelingbo for study back at school.

Drew up plans for swamp after considering possible sites in the school grounds.

Made a model of the swamp

Collected information on plants adapted to swampland/bog conditions.

Visited a swamp in Gembrook (overnight camp) and collected information on swamp plants and animals. We collected animals for research.

Visited the State Schools' Nursery and talked with the person in charge of their wetlands area. Purchased some plants for the swamp.

Visited Kuranga Nursery in Ringwood to check for the availability of plant types.

Prepared a plant zone map of the swamp.

Wrote a submission to school council for some initial funding and for approval of the site in the school grounds. Sought approval for fencing. Submission approved.

Organised for a parent to excavate the site using a bobcat.

Spent many weeks carrying out final excavation and landscaping of site. Dug trench for water supply. Marked fence position.

Organised quotes for sealing the swamp (Concrete, rubber sealant). This work is still
By the end of 1990, the swamp workshop will have:

* sealed the swamp using a PVC dam-liner product. We are currently carrying out final preparations for this work;
* continued our planting program (mulching existing plants, planting out more tubes);
* updated and extended our plant and animal data-base for the swamp;
* continued our liaison with the People in Their Environment group and the Sherbrooke Environmental Network, with the aim of involving other groups and schools in our project;
* continued with our boardwalk/bridge construction.

In 1991 and beyond, we plan to:

* maintain our propagation/planting work;
* erect the fencing (if funding is available);
* carry out a wide range of ecological and biological research in science and biology workshops eg population studies, animal diversity, bird records, plant and animal succession;
* promote cross-curricula activities using the swamp - English, Maths, Art, Photography;
* promote the use of this resource (and our experiences) by other community groups.

**Work by Swamp Students**

My name is Robert Walsh and my brother’s name is David. This is our third semester in the swamp class and during that time we have done a number of things.

First, we helped make plans and a model of the swamp which, together with a submission, we used to get a grant for $300 from the School Council. We helped dig out the swamp and dig a trench for the water supply. This was hard work and took a long time.

We got quotes from several fencing companies, because we needed to keep dogs and cats out and the swamp animals in. We also got a quote for a rubber-based liner used to keep the water in the swamp. We were surprised when we found out that the cost was way higher than we had allowed in our budget, so it looks like we might have to use packed clay to keep water in.

During Arbor Week, we helped plant 300 plants around the swamp. I worked with Sam (grade 3) and David worked with Joel (prep). We helped to write a submission to send to the Victorian Environmental Education Council for about $4000. They did not give us the money because too many people applied for grants, but they said to try next semester.

We both went on a swamp camp to Gembrook forest and collected animals and plants. We studied the animals and plants for our research projects. I have already done a research project on leeches and I have one in a jar ready to experiment on. My brother has been doing work on the behaviour of water bugs.

We are waiting for better weather before we continue work on the swamp (bridge building, plumbing etc).

Robert and David Walsh

My name is Gavvin. In the last year or so I have had lots to do with the Swamp Project. I was in the Swamp Class last year and found it quite interesting. The first term of this year there was a swamping fitness which has mainly been finishing off the digging of the swamp and the trench for the water pipe. Last year’s swamp camp was very exciting. The best part was collecting microscopic swamp animals and fish. I did a research project on cyclops which are some of the microscopic animals we caught on the camp. I also did lots of ringing up to get quotes for the swamp fencing with a friend last year which was good, but it took lots of time.

I think the swamp is a good idea because it will help the study of aquatic animals, mainly for science and biology classes. It will also be good helping kids improve their construction skills building the bridge and the board-walk. It will also be good for other animals who like those sorts of conditions to build their nests or homes in when the trees are grown.

Gavin Andrews

These reports are reprinted from Sherbrooke Community School's 1990 Year Book, which was put together as a Communication project by two year 11 students.

Sherbrooke Community School
311 Mt Dandenong Tourist Road
Sassafras 3787

An up-date on this article, outlining the developments in the swamp project at Sherbrooke Community School will be included in the next issue of Connect.
The Pioneer Settlement at Victoria's Swan Hill is Australia's first outdoor museum. Set on seven acres beside an anabranch of the Murray River, it seeks to recreate all aspects of life in the Mallee up until 1930. This doesn't just include white settlement, of course, but also Aboriginal history which goes back about 25,000 years in this area. There are about 50 original buildings, about one-third of which have people operating them in the traditional manner.

The Pioneer Settlement Education Service caters for school groups with two Ministry of Education teachers - one full-time and one half-time. We have developed a large range of programs, but the basic emphasis of the place is hands-on. We believe that people learn by doing and that they enjoy learning that way.

Different programs cater for different interests and year levels - from kindergarten to year 12. They are:

**PIONEER ACTIVITY PROGRAMS:**
Students perform a number of activities eg pioneer games, sock darning, school work, morse code, blacksmithing, building etc.

**BUSH PICNIC:**
Traditional picnic races and games.

**ABORIGINAL CULTURE SESSIONS:**
Conducted by members of the local Aboriginal co-op.

**WOMEN AND WORK:** (for Australian Studies) students perform tasks done by women 100 years ago - washing, ironing, cooking, butter-making etc - using old-time equipment.

**WORK AWARENESS PROGRAM:** (for Australian Studies) students work for half a day with a Settlement worker. Some jobs are traditional, some modern, some half and half. Between them, the class gets a comprehensive view of work in the workplace.

**STUDY TOURS:**
Conducted by our teachers. These are slanted towards the particular age group and interest. Our Education Service can also arrange a complete itinerary for a school group, with lots of stimulating activities in and around Swan Hill.

If you want to visit the Pioneer Settlement, or you just want more information, please give us a ring on (050) 32 1093. Ask for Joe Blake or Anthony Neill (teachers) or Lynne Lawry (bookings officer).
MORE THAN JUST A CHRISTMAS CARD

The Foxfire approach encourages methods of active learning, where students design projects that engage the curriculum in meaningful, interdisciplinary, elegant ways, and that often result in tangible products. In executing these projects, students, teachers and community residents often work together in collaborative, cooperative, democratic partnerships.

An important component in the Foxfire approach to learning is the 'memorable experiences' chart created anew each year by each new group of students during the first week of school. In small groups, students recall their most positive educational experiences, and then determine the specific ingredients that make those experiences so memorable. The resulting list, reprinted below, is then posted in the classroom and used to design their projects.

Memorable Experiences

1. Learning to communicate with an audience. For example: speaking/storytelling/play
2. Learning something useful
3. Learning to produce a tangible product
4. Connecting outside world to subjects in the classroom, real-world experiences - flying/field trips
5. Seeing a job from the other side
6. Peer teaching
7. Demonstrations/hands-on activities
8. Out of the routine/different
9. Meeting new people
10. Having fun

As part of the semester exam, Foxfire students reflected on their various projects in light of the 'memorable experiences' chart produced by their class. How many of the items on the chart had they engaged during the course of their projects? Which ones did they miss? A selection of responses by three members of the Christmas card group to each of the items follows. Responses are keyed to the chart numbers and tagged with the students' initials:

1.

In a lot of our cases the class was the audience. We would come up with ideas and then present them to the class so that if there were any corrections that needed to be made on anything, or if things needed to be rearranged or if we just needed to look at the idea more carefully and come up with better ideas, the class could help us. (AJ)

We would come up with ideas then go before the class and ask their opinions. This way we could see what other people thought. In the future we should try to get more of an outside audience to help us with our decisions. (DC)

2.

We learned more than one useful experience. We learned how to develop and print pictures. We learned how the darkroom works. We learned how much the outside life affects Foxfire. We learned something very helpful: we learned how to work as a group with everyone taking the same amount of credit instead of working by yourself or fighting over who gets the most credit. (DC)

In doing our project we learned many things that were useful to us and our project. We learned about the printing process, the process for designing postcards, and how to get a job done thoroughly. (AJ)
3.

We learned how to produce a tangible product from making and designing a Christmas card. We had some problems with producing the Christmas card, but we worked on it as a group and produced [it]. (DC)

4.

I had a real-world experience by going to the printers from school, and watching them print the cards we designed. We also got to leave school to go to Bob Edward's studio and interview him about postcards. (CG)

We brought the real world inside the classroom, but we didn't do it as much as we should have. When we went to J & M Printing we wrote down some information that they gave us. We also did this with Bob Edward's studio. We then put it all together so it can be used [by other students] in the future. (DC)

Our project did hit this. We had to think of ideas and determine if the idea connected with the outside world, and if not we had to make adjustments to our idea to make it [connect]. We learned to work with businesses and to get our ideas across to them of what we wanted to do. (AJ)

5.

I saw a job from the other side when we got to design a card. We usually just get cards, not thinking about how they were designed or who did it. Now we know how much time and effort was put into it. (CG)

6.

Our group learned a lot from each other and the rest of the class, such as: looking over someone else's project reports, products, or just listening when they tell where they are on the projects and how they got there. (CG)

With the use of our project report, other students will be able to learn more about printing, designing, developing etc. (AJ)

We did a lot of peer teaching; we all worked together and taught each other because we all knew something different. (DC)

7.

Our group demonstrated to the class and to Wig how we were going to do our project, our ideas for our project, and the possible outcome of [our] project. (AJ)

We showed the class every version of the card that we thought up, so they could help us. Everyone would discuss it; then we would come up with a final draft. (DC)

8.

This Foxfire English class brings the real world into the school more than others, because we had many different speakers, and visitors coming in the classroom and sharing some of their experiences with us, so maybe it could help our English class out.

This project was definitely different from any other project I had ever done in my life. We got to communicate with different people and deal with all kinds of different ideas and prospects. (AJ)

Besides planning and executing their individual projects, students also compiled a detailed project report on the steps, problems, plans and stages of their projects, complete with illustrations and photographs when appropriate. On the exam, they reflected about the writing involved in their projects and reports. The Christmas card group commented:

We would write out a version of something that would be maybe two sentences long, but when we were finished we would have about fifteen or twenty different versions of it, so we could see which one was best. We don't do that much writing until we're through with our projects; then we would write up to maybe fifteen pages on how far we had got. (DC)

This project helped us a lot with grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, content, etc. In doing our project reports we learned a lot about these things. The things that we learned will be very useful in the future in doing reports, papers and other projects. (AJ)

Whether recipients knew it or not, what they received last December was much more than a Christmas card...

from Foxfire News Vol 2 No 1, January-February 1991
Local and 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:
Sherbrooke Community School Year Book 1990.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:
Foxfire News (Rabun Gap, USA) Vol 2 No 1, Jan-Feb 1991
SCIP Newsletter (Red Cross, Vic) No 13, March 1991
Retention Matters! (Staying On, NSW) Vol 2, Summer 1990
Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) March 1991, Annual Report
Youth Forum Annual Report 1990 (Strawberry Hills, NSW)
Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) Jan/Feb, Mar 1991
Collective Notes (COSHG, Vic) No 59, March 1991
AERO-Gramme (AERO, New York, USA) No 5, Feb-Mar 1991
YAKKA (Aust Red Cross Youth in Action) Autumn 1991

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 list is available in Connect 46/47 - to October 1987.)

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