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  ‘lift the lid’ on sanitation

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  *Do It Yourself Democracy* website;
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Why does Connect exist?

Connect has been published bi-monthly since 1979.

It aims to:

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

This Issue:

I recently attended an interesting seminar on Outward Facing Schools (sponsored by the Australian Catholic University and the Catholic Education Office Melbourne). This raised questions about what an ‘outward facing school’ might look like, why it was important, and how we might move towards it.

The idea of an ‘Outward Facing School’ is not new; I remember that years ago we talked about ways to break down the ‘fortress school’ mentality, and also worked to build closer links between schools and their communities – links that would go beyond excursions or incursions, beyond the occasional visit of students to a nursing home, or an address from a local Councillor, or use of the local library. While the idea of an Outward Facing School is flexible and responsive to both school and community needs, to me, the core idea is ongoing and authentic interaction between the school and its many communities, in ways that are inherent to the curriculum.

I remembered the production of Ascolta, a five-language community newspaper produced by a cluster of schools in Brunswick in the 70s and 80s. Connect has previously also carried stories about a History class that worked with its community to reconstruct lost records of the local cemetery, about primary school students commissioned to evaluate young people’s use of a mall, about primary and secondary students collecting and publishing oral histories to keep community memories alive.

What is vital is that students are at the centre of the Outward Facing School; indeed, as George Otero from the Centre for Relational Learning in New Mexico (relationallearning.com) reminded us on the day, that students lead the outward facing school.

... In This Issue

In this issue of Connect, this documentation of students leading interaction between schools and communities continues. Michelle Wright tells of an exciting project in which student action teams from three primary schools took up a commission to make their communities aware of sanitation issues in 2008. The ruMAD? approach has always stressed active participation of students in community action and change, and Kate Pile documents the story of a Tasmanian primary school that is making a difference to their local environment. Similar issues were raised by many primary schools at the Frenzy day in Melbourne last year, and the ‘Hansard’ of the formal debates records their concerns and decisions.

In Geelong, students from three Catholic secondary colleges came together to ‘face outwards’ with a global focus: around making poverty history. These were student leaders looking outwards more broadly than just at the school context, and this focus is also reflected in the SRC at Dunoon Public School in NSW, and through the statewide work of the VicSRC.

Taking action as an ‘outwards facing school’ is not easy; such an orientation often struggles with national testing agendas. However, many schools are realising that there are enormous benefits for students (and teachers), not only in access to teaching and learning resources, but also in students’ authentic learning and in their growth as valued and active community members.

Roger Holdsworth
In 2008, Whitehorse School Focused Youth Service invited three primary schools within the City of Whitehorse to participate in a pilot student-driven community action project. SEED (Students Engaging Exploring Doing) was based on and adapted from the Student Action Team approach. It involved teams of Year 5 and 6 students from the three local primary schools: Burwood Heights PS, Livingstone PS and Weeden Heights PS. The starting point for the 2008 SEED project was a commission presented to students by an outside agency, WaterAid Australia.

Students were invited to engage with, explore and take action on the issue of the International Year of Sanitation. They were supported with training, regular meetings with a City of Whitehorse Youth Worker and were given a small project grant.

Each school networked with the other SEED schools at regular Gatherings and via email. They shared their experience and learnings with the broader local and global community through a project Wiki. Through the project, they actively and meaningfully engaged as members of their school, local and global community.

Aims of the SEED project

- To increase student engagement in learning through a practical and purposeful student-driven project.
- To increase student engagement with peers through collaboration in teams, group training, and through organisation of activities.
- To increase student engagement with teachers and Council Youth Workers, through collaboration, negotiation and joint planning of project activities.
- To encourage engagement of and with parents through direct involvement in project and activities.
- To encourage active student engagement with the wider local and global community.

Training

Students participated in two separate full days of training at different stages of the project. The training was provided by Second Strike and covered aspects such as Teamwork, Motivation, Communication, Creativity, Engaging others, Guided planning, Organising events, Working with teachers, Goal setting and Publicity.

Wiki

The SEED model acknowledges that today’s students engage with one another and create new global ‘communities’ through the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites.

To provide a medium through which SEED teams could network and share their experience and learnings, a project Wiki was created.

The SEED project wiki was hosted by Wikispaces, which offers free wikis for educators. These sites are ad-free and can be set up as public sites or private spaces. As the SEED wiki contained photos of students, we opted for a private wiki, which could only be viewed and edited by the students, teachers and support workers involved in our SEED project. It was accessible with a username and password.

Model

There are three key stages in the SEED model:

Engaging Exploring Doing

Stage 1: Engaging

The “Engaging Gathering”

- All SEED teams gathered to meet one another and the commissioning agency, which presented the ‘commission’ to the students, presented information about the topic, and sought students’ engagement with the issue.
• Teams met with their support youth worker to discuss ongoing support, communication and future meetings.

**Stage 2: Exploring**

**School and Community Based Exploring**

• Students explored the issue, enlisting support from partners they identified, both within the school and in the community. Once they had explored the issue, they started to think about what they wanted to do with their knowledge and interest.

• Students used ICT to network and communicate with other SEED schools, their support worker and the broader community.

**The “Exploring Gathering”**

• All SEED teams gathered to share the results of their exploring.

**Stage 3: Doing**

Students defined their goals and the actions needed to bring them about. They started making concrete, structured plans for doing.

Students carried out the actions that they had planned: assembly presentations, interactive events, media presentations, fundraising etc.

**The “Doing Gathering”**

All SEED teams gathered to share what they had done, what had been achieved, and what they had learnt from the experience.

They discussed how they were going to communicate their achievements at the final celebration evening.

**The “World Toilet Day” Celebration**

Students planned and ran a celebration evening to communicate their achievements and receive recognition from The City of Whitehorse, the commissioning agency, other community partners, their schools and families.

**Feedback**

Feedback from students and staff involved in the 2008 SEED project was overwhelmingly positive. Below are students’ responses to prompts regarding the stated aims of the project. The percentages given combine the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ responses.

**So far, participating in the SEED project has given me the opportunity to:**

- feel like I’m making a contribution to the local or global community. 90%
- increase my knowledge of important issues. 90%
- plan, organise and carry out real-life, meaningful activities. 90%
- connect with other members of my SEED team. 80%
- connect with members of the other SEED teams. 80%
- connect with other students in my school. 85%
- connect positively with teachers and other school staff. 90%
- involve parents in project activities. 85%
- connect with community agencies and the local and global community. 90%
- connect with City of Whitehorse Youth Services. 90%

**Student comments**

Student feedback was also sought regarding the project model, resources, activities and outcomes. Below is a selection of their comments:

**The topic - Sanitation**

“When I heard that the topic was sanitation, I went uh!! But now looking back, I think that it was a good topic because it is crucial and something needs to be done about it and we are doing just that.”
“It really was a huge surprise in the beginning and I think everyone reacted the same as in: ‘What kind of a topic is that?’ But as people came in to tell us the problem and opened our eyes, it really got us thinking. The topic was great. New. Weird. But an eye opener.”

The teams

“The SEED teams are perfect. To work with students from our own schools are great because we get along better with them and also we get to make friends with the ones we don’t really know much about. It’s also easier to communicate with them and organise meetings.”

The training days

“The training days have been really helpful and it has taught me stuff on leadership, planning, putting things into action. They are helpful because they teach you valuable skills. I enjoyed working with the other teams. It gave us a chance to explain our ideas to the other SEEDlings.”

Personal qualities you’ve developed

“Working with others – I am trying to improve that within my team. Listening to other people, taking what they say in.”

“It has helped me think questions through and to look at questions from different points of view.”

“Listening is a quality probably everyone has developed. Cooperating is something we would need if we wanted to get things finished. Respecting different points of view is probably the most important one of all.”

“I have also learned to resolve conflicts and be more organised. Working out plans for special days without a teacher is something we have done a lot. So far everyone has accepted their responsibility and have been doing a good job at their role.”

Skills you’ve developed

“I was terrified of public speaking but now it is not so bad. Communicating with other members of our SEED team. I didn’t know that you could have a private website just for you, me, whoever.”

“It has helped me think about problems in other countries and how we can help.”

“Presenting – HUGE. Just the way to hold a presentation to a group of people. It was a great experience. Preparation: when Dave did ‘How to plan a disco’, it taught me a lot on what needs to be done first to last.”

“I’ve developed a load of skills from doing the SEED project. Public speaking and presenting are something I definitely have improved on.”

Impact you think the project is having

“It is having a great impact on the school community. It is certainly raising awareness on how bad it really is. Everyone at school is really behind us and one day it may drive them to make a similar project on a similar topic.”

“I think doing this project is helping me to get to know the world a lot better, and also making me aware of these things so that I can get other people aware of ‘sanitation’.”

The SEED Wiki

“The SEED wiki! What a great idea! The good thing is that not anyone can access it. We can also make changes and add things that we’ve done to share with others. Awesome way of communicating. So it’s like we have a little club of our own.”

“I thought the wiki was a great idea. It tells us information about what other schools have been doing and it is full of great information. The wiki also makes me feel great as we have a lot of independence when using it.”
Best experiences so far

“The best experiences so far would have to be presenting the sanitation slide show in front of the 5/6s at school and also doing the puppet show.”

“Being on a radio show because I have never been on air before. I have also wanted to be known by some people so then they go ‘hi radio show girl’, etc.”

“The thought of being able to make a small difference in the world, raising awareness to our school and meeting other people.”

Teacher comments

“Absolutely fabulous experience. Achieved all aims beyond our wildest expectations. Totally amazed at what these students could achieve. Must have a driven and enthusiastic staff member to support.”

“This is an excellent model for student learning. ‘Engagement’ is the key to learning, and the opportunity to work as a team.”

“They found qualities neither they nor we knew they had. More importantly they recognised the fact themselves and felt very positive and enthusiastic about their capabilities in the future. They blew us away!”

SEED in 2009

Planning is underway for two 2009 SEED projects. The model will be modified to target all Level 4 (Year 5 and 6) students in two local primary schools, who will be supported by Year 9 and 10 SEED Leaders from partner secondary schools.

Whitehorse School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) will continue to provide funding for the project, including training days, gatherings, materials, and small project grants to SEED teams to assist them in carrying out their plans.

The commission for the 2009 SEED project will focus on environmental education and leisure facilities in the local area. Partners currently being approached include City of Whitehorse, Blackburn Lake and Creeklands, and a local municipal library.

Michelle Wright
Michelle.Wright@whitehorse.vic.gov.au

Footnotes:


2 http://www.wateraid.org/australia/

3 http://www.wikispaces.com/

Student Action Teams:
Implementing Productive Practices in Primary and Secondary School Classrooms

Student Action Teams - teams of students who, as part of their school curriculum, adopt a community issue that they care passionately about, research it, decide what needs to be changed or improved and take action to achieve that.

In this book (April 2006) primary and secondary schools in Melbourne’s northern suburbs tell how to establish and implement Student Action Teams. They describe their students’ work researching and acting around traffic safety and the environment and reflect on what they have learnt: the basic principles of Student Action Teams, their practical operation, and the stories of successful approaches and outcomes in two projects. The principles and approaches outlined here can be used to guide developments in any school - acting alone or in a cluster. Includes sample worksheets and proformas.

Order NOW from Connect: $33 or $27.50 for Connect subscribers.
ruMAD? and keen to try something different? Maybe this program is just the thing for you!

“A rich, real and relevant learning experience. Our kids need to see a purpose to their learning and this program achieves this.” Teacher, Gagebrook Primary

ruMAD? (Are You Making a Difference?) is an exciting pedagogical framework focused on social justice, environmental sustainability and cultural diversity. It is a highly flexible educational framework that allows students to explore possibilities for action using inquiry-based learning through various levels of involvement in social change projects, and lead the planning and implementation of their chosen projects. The projects empower students to take action, create positive change in their communities and become active citizens.

ruMAD? is designed to increase student engagement and motivation because it is driven by students and allows them to work on real-life, authentic and innovative projects developed from their own concerns. The program was written by David Zyngier, a lecturer and researcher in the area of student engagement, particularly for at-risk students, and Claire Brunner, a youth facilitator who has worked with young people from juvenile justice to the National Youth Round Table and Youth Summit 2020.

In 2006, Gagebrook Primary in Southern Tasmania became involved with ruMAD?

To set the scene, Principal John O’Rourke, who has led changes at the school, stated: “Gagebrook suburb is a broad acre housing estate that was developed by the housing commission in Tasmania during the 1970s. Gagebrook is relatively isolated. It is approximately 30 km in distance from Greater Hobart. In the census taken four to five years ago, Gagebrook was revealed to have an average age of 18 years and that the annual incomes of the people in the community were among the poorest in Tasmania. Unemployment rates are very high and there are no major employers in the area.”

The school began using the ruMAD? framework in 2006 with a particular focus on community, in an attempt to improve student engagement.

Some of the primary objectives of ruMAD? at Gagebrook Primary School project were:

• To assist the Gagebrook community in building the capacity of its youth and forging networks between the school, parents, community organisations and business.
• To trial the value of intensive assistance to a high needs school in the implementation phase of the ruMAD? Program.
• To develop a ‘culture of MADness’ at Gagebrook Primary that would help sustain the Program in future years.

Initially, just one Grade 3 class, led by teacher Steve Robinson, took on a small change-making activity: beautifying the local sports ground by painting sheds and planting trees donated by the local Council.

In 2007, the whole Grade 3/4 team (four classes) undertook to make a difference. This time the students looked further afield to understand and help children in Cambodia affected by landmines. An inquiry approach was used and work integrated across the curriculum: interviewing people, creating artworks, writing letters, circulating a petition, recording a song, organising an art auction, attending a conference and speaking publicly.

In 2008, the whole school became involved with the ruMAD? Program. As a result of a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund, Steve was given one day’s relief per week to focus on the program and assist other teachers in its implementation across all grades. The main focus was on increasing student engagement through positive social action. Students were encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning and thus come to deeper understandings of the community issues they tackled. The process enabled students to develop leadership, life and critical thinking skills. They became active change agents.

Kate Pile
ruMAD? School Coordinator, Tasmania
in their own community. As a result of his work on ruMAD?, Steve Robinson received a NEiTA ASG Inspirational Teacher State Award in 2008.

**Logistics of running the program at Gagebrook**

The students were initially divided into three groups according to grade level. Monday was designated as ruMAD? day and each group had approximately one third of the day to focus on their projects. The process to select an area of concern to investigate began with students openly expressing and discussing their interests and desires related to the environment. These were then recorded, similar items were grouped together and then, through democratic voting, issues were removed from the board until there was unanimous support for one idea. This idea became the focus topic and each group embarked on a journey to discover all they could. This included guest speakers, excursions, personal research, teacher-led discussion and more.

In the week before the end of term 1, all groups officially launched their topics to the rest of the school and local community. The use of media outlets made the launch an important occasion as well as providing the local community with an insight into the issues being developed. Second term was used to consolidate research and begin implementing practical ideas in order to make a difference to the selected issues the students had chosen.

**In brief**

**Issues raised**

Prep - Grade 2 students felt that rubbish was a problem in the school and that Gagebrook Primary should recycle.

Grade 3 and 4 students were concerned that too much rubbish from the local drains gets carried into the Derwent River.

Grade 5 and 6 students were concerned about the impact that a community can have on endangered animals, especially the eastern barred bandicoot.

**Outcomes Generated**

Students collected recycled containers, then designed and made musical instruments, Mother’s Day gifts and toys. They wrote a letter to the Council asking them to assist with recycling. Brighton Council supported them by giving three recycling crates and a wheelie bin. Students also picked up a second-hand worm farm so they are able to recycle all food wastes to either the worm farm or the compost. Students created group gardens using recycled polystyrene boxes with soil and planted seed vegetables.

Students researched the issues by visiting numerous sites from Risdon Brook Dam to the Hobart City Council sewerage plant. Students did some cleaning up around the drains and sought permission from the council to paint an environmental message alongside some of them. They raised funds for the purchase of a drain stencil and paint. The message they chose to use was ‘only rain goes down the drain’. As part of a public awareness campaign, students also designed water-wise pamphlets and distributed them to households, and placed water-wise posters in the public domain.

Students created a bandicoot habitat at Mangalore by planting out specific plant species for the eastern barred bandicoot. They raised money to buy materials by holding a milkshake and icy pole day. $200 was raised which was spent on materials such as stakes, plastic tree guards and chicken wire. They also raised awareness about endangered species in their community by distributing ‘Save the Bandicoot’ and ‘How to minimise cat predation’ pamphlets to households. Students became aware of the Savannah Cat, which may be introduced into Australia. They were concerned about the effect that it may have on the eastern barred bandicoot so they wrote to the Hon. Peter Garrett MP to express their views.

“I think ru MAD? is important because we do things to help our community.”

_Gagebrook Primary student_
The highly successful projects not only generated excellent outcomes for students and their communities, but also provided solid learning outcomes for assessment purposes across literacy, numeracy and other key areas of the curriculum.

Teachers at the school unanimously decided to continue the program in 2009 and we look forward to more exciting student-led MAD activities.

“Initially I was unsure about the capacity of very young students to understand the concepts involved in ruMAD? but I underestimated their pride in, and sense of ownership of, their community. The students genuinely care about their environment and clearly want to make a difference. Families are reporting that students are applying their learning at home.”

Teacher, Gagebrook Primary

Concluding

The program is owned nationally by the Foundation for Young Australians and delivered in Tasmania by the Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning (TCGL). Staff from TCGL played an integral role in the establishment of ruMAD? at Gagebrook Primary, obtaining a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund which enabled Steve Robinson to dedicate one day a week to the program. The Centre also provided all the support that is usually provided to a school implementing the ruMAD? Program, consisting of:

- Teacher training: a whole school training session;
- Curriculum and resource materials;
- Ongoing mentoring and advice.

If you would like to be involved with ruMAD? in Tasmania or learn more about Gagebrook Primary’s involvement, contact us at the Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning.

Contact:

Kate Pile:
  kate@afairerworld.org  or

Helen Hortle:
  admin@afairerworld.org

Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning

Phone:  03 62 231025
Web:  www.afairerworld.org

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The role of the classroom teacher never stays the same, making teaching a job for the ‘life long learner’. Now, more than ever, teachers are challenged with issues related to change for 21st century learning. Most teachers now realise the urgency of the need to change; the dilemma is how to change. Our current education system is based on teachers being the keepers of the knowledge: we teach learners, we test learners and if they tell us what we taught them, then they pass! The problem in preparing our current generation of learners for their future is: we don’t know the answers, so how do we teach them? The issue is we don’t know what this generation of learners’ workforce environment will look like, so the challenge is to ensure we develop adaptive learners.

What we know!
We know that today’s learning generation will develop into savvy users of advanced technology that we can only imagine. We know that they have to develop an environmental conscience and be able to solve issues our biological imprint has left as a legacy. We know that they will be global citizens, linking with or working for multinational companies, dealing with people from all over the world and this will possibly occur without leaving the office. One thing we are sure of is our current generation of learners will live and work in many ways that are vastly different to ours.

Some things stay the same!
Developing citizenship has always been a part of good teaching, something we should continue to grow as we become more global. Literacy and numeracy will always remain a high priority and good teaching is vital in ensuring this happens. We should not ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ so to speak. Good teachers for the future are as important as ever. What we need to do is open our minds to how we take the great things we do in education and adapt them to ensure we are addressing the needs of our students. At Bellaire Primary School in Geelong, Victoria, we are doing just that: growing the things we do well and engaging in action research on a daily basis to change for the better.

What we do!
Across the whole school we have developed an approach to personalising learning. We aim to develop responsible learners who can identify and set learning goals for themselves. If we can teach our students to take control of their own learning, then they can hopefully seek the answers to those questions we don’t yet know and can’t answer. In 2007 we explored what ‘personalising learning’ meant to us. We formed action plans that recognised that personalising learning looks different across the learning stages. The school is organised around learning communities from Prep, Juniors (Years 1 and 2), Middles (Years 3 and 4) and Seniors (Years 5 and 6). Students start goal setting in Prep, where goals are simple and are directly related to good teaching and
learning. The progression points in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards are literally broken down and put into child speak. It is not a huge leap from the traditional as the teacher forms their focus for their like-needs groups and takes it to the next step. In simple terms, students should be able to able to verbalise what they are doing and why they are doing it, involving them in the learning process. Learning communities foster this approach through enabling greater opportunity for like-needs grouping and social opportunities for students to relate to other teachers and students beyond their class. Teachers are encouraged to try different approaches to personalising and tracking learning, which is then shared with others, thereby making the action research ongoing.

By the time students reach the Senior Learning Community, they have learnt to develop and manage their own blog and are well versed in goal setting. Once in the community, they have to set and monitor their own learning goals, negotiate their timetable and manage their organisation to ensure all learning requirements are met. Teachers have three major roles:

1. They act as a learning advisor to their home group students with whom they meet weekly. During this conference, students discuss what goals they have met, issues they have and negotiate the setting of new goals.

2. They form workshops across the curriculum from which the students select to set their individual learning timetables. Specialist teachers also devise workshops in Physical Education, Art and French from which students are able to choose. This maximises student engagement while developing organisational skills that foster independent learning.

3. Teachers rove, supporting and assisting students in their independent learning time.

Information technology is integral across the curriculum with diverse use of desk top computers, wireless laptops, iFlips, iPods, digital cameras and interactive whiteboards. The use of blogs is extensive across the school, from Unit blogs in Preps and Juniors, to individualised blogs in Middles and Seniors. Senior students are required to maintain their blog on a weekly basis, including updated goals and timetables. Parents also attend student conferences and then are encouraged to log into their child’s blog to make posts about their learning.

Students become the focal point of the personalised learning process, where they actively engage in conversations with their home group teacher about their learning. Relationships are strong due to the one to one interaction with teachers and the fluid movement between social groups across the community. Students find the conversations about their individual learning, the ability to have choices in forming their timetables and the opportunity to have some independent working sessions, provides them with a sense of control over their learning. Students proudly show parents and other visitors around their learning community, explaining how they work. Comments often reflect their pride and sense of independence in their learning.

The teachers at Bellaire PS have taken major steps in trying to adapt great teaching so it is delivered in a way that further promotes the use of ICT, develops greater social skills and fosters independent learners. We ‘aim high’ with the intent that our Year 6 students will head off to secondary school with a high proficiency in literacy, numeracy, ICT skills, a broad range of social skills and a knowledge of how to learn. These skills will enable them to pursue their own learning goals and they will have developed the organisational skills necessary to achieve them!

In education we are facing challenging times. But if we take this challenge and try to approach learning differently, then both students and teachers benefit from increased engagement and learning. Now, more than ever, is the time for innovation in curriculum. The challenge is to take the great knowledge that we have and think creatively about developing learning communities that enable different modes of delivery to better prepare our students. Teachers are a bountiful resource and, with vision and encouragement, most teachers will take the challenge to do what they do the best but do it differently – to adapt to meet needs of 21st century learning.

Jane Warren
Principal – Bellaire PS
Warren.jane.m@edumail.vic.gov.au
Minister to Attend State SRC Congress

Friday 31 July - Saturday 1 August; Oasis Camp, Mt Evelyn

The VicSRC Congress is back again in 2009, and this year it’s due to be bigger and better than ever! As well as students from all over Victoria, the Victorian Minister for Education (Bronwyn Pike) will be attending to hear what students have to say and to recognise the importance of student participation in education decision-making.

This VicSRC Congress will bring together over 100 secondary school students from all over Victoria at the Oasis Camp in Mt Evelyn. They will represent their schools, network with other SRCs, discuss important issues and make their voices heard.

You’ll arrive on the first day with a warm greeting of “Welcome, Congress Members!” and then, after a brief introductory session, will take part in games, skills activities and discussion workshops.

The Congress is the VicSRC’s key event for the year.

Each day, Congress members will also participate in a formal parliamentary-style Congress, where motions are put forward, discussed, amended and voted upon. Decisions from Congress form the basis of the work of the VicSRC Student Executive for the next year.

The VicSRC Executive is also elected at Congress. Any students wishing to take part in this excellent leadership opportunity should definitely attend and be prepared to nominate for election to the Executive for the next 12 months.

Initial offers for Congress are for two students per school. A registration form has been sent to schools. Places are limited, so get in quick! Register by Friday, 5 June.

Michael Kurtanjek
Congress Coordinator

Make sure your SRC is represented!

www.vicsrc.org.au

The VicSRC receives funding support from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and is auspiced by and based at the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It can be reached there on 03 9267 3744 or, for the cost of a local call from outside Melbourne on 1300 727 176; or by email: vicsrc@yacvic.org.au
The 2009 VicSRC Congress
Victoria’s Peak Representational Forum
for Secondary School Students

2 students from your school have
the opportunity to...

Learn from over 100 other SRC reps
Discuss important issues
Represent your school
Have fun!

When: Friday, 31 July –
Saturday, 1 August 2009

Where: Oasis Camp Mt Evelyn

Who: Year 7-12 Students

Cost: $60 for VicSRC members,
$80 for non-members
(Price includes accommodation,
all meals, registration, materials)

Register by Friday, 5 June 2009
Full supervision provided

For more information, contact
James Tonson, VicSRC Coordinator
03 9267 3744 or 0411 679 050
coordinator@vicsrc.org.au

Michael Kurtanjek, Congress Coordinator
0406 486 301
congress@vicsrc.org.au

The VicSRC is funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early
Childhood Development and auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.
Connect 176:

Regional SRC Conferences

Dates have now been set for the following Regional SRC Conferences organised by the VicSRC:

- **Bendigo:** Thursday May 21st
- **Leongatha:** Wednesday May 27th
- **Western Melbourne:** Friday May 30th
- **Wodonga:** Tuesday June 16th
- **Kew:** Thursday June 18th

This year’s conferences will enable participants to develop Case Studies of each other’s SRCs, learn how to develop action proposals and debate issues that will inform the agenda for the 2009 State Congress. Registration and further information about these events will be sent to relevant regional schools early in Term 2. These conferences provide a great opportunity to meet and work with other SRCs in your area.

Other Areas

Further conferences are in the pipeline for Whittlesea, Bayside and Seymour but dates for these events have not yet been confirmed.

Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston SRC Cluster Grows

The Bayside, Glen Eira and Kingston SRC Cluster continues to grow in leaps and bounds! After launching in late 2008, we held our first 2009 meeting on the 12th of March. We think we may have even set a state record for the largest number at an SRC Cluster meeting, with 61 attendees. A fantastic result for a group that is less than six months old.

The large number of participants at our meeting illustrates the importance that young people place on student voice in our community, and we are very pleased to now have an SRC Cluster which can mobilise student participation and action in our area.

Our first meeting of the year was a chance for SRC representatives to hear from a wide range of guest speakers who enthused, motivated and informed the group.

Sarah Thomas, who recently won the Bayside Youth Citizen of the Year Award and is a Year 10 member of the Sandringham College SRC, spoke about the importance of being part of your community and the difference that one person can make in local, national and international issues.

Sarah Chadzynski, a former VicSRC Executive and local SRC Cluster (Banyule DART Board) member, spoke about her experiences as an SRC representative at a school, regional and statewide level. Sarah emphasised the important role that SRCs can play in harnessing student opinions and voices, and the way in which collective student action can influence government policy.

Students also heard from a number of community organisations (Victoria Police, Youth Connect and Bayside City Council) that are supporting our SRC Cluster and offer a variety of youth programs and services in our region. Already some of our SRCs are looking to those organisations to support projects in their schools or speak to groups of students about the services they can offer.

Our next meeting will be held in Term 2, with students requesting that the meeting have a focus on youth leadership and involve a parliamentary guest speaker. We will also be using that meeting to choose a catchy name for our Cluster, and in time we also hope to get our own logo designed as well!

We’re very excited about what the future may hold for our Cluster and look forward to sharing our news with Connect for many more years to come.

Fiona Waugh, BGK LLEN

Western Metropolitan Student Alliance

The Western Metropolitan Student Alliance held their first meeting on the 27th March, at Copperfield College. Three schools were present: Caroline Chisholm Catholic College, Copperfield College and Taylor’s Lakes Secondary College. We aim to help our community and schools by educating teenagers on drugs and alcohol. As a cluster, we felt that we were not educated enough about our wellbeing and it is something we need to reinforce in our community. The cluster plans to have different sessions on the effects of binge drinking, smoking and taking drugs, and we also plan to help students identify peer, media and family pressure.

We also discussed about having a second student alliance in the Western Metropolitan area – with the same aim, and involving regular meetings, and with both alliances reporting back to students. It is a large area to cover, so this is something we are looking forward to in the near future.

Jennesse Cruz, VicSRC Executive member
last year (in Connect 169, February 2008) we presented some suggested steps that could be used by Student Councils and other groups for planning and taking action. We tried these during the Regional SRC Conferences across Victoria in Term 2; the ideas were well received.

Another way of remembering and defining these steps could be to focus on DIVA - and use these letters as a checklist for your process:

Define the topic or issue: What are we concerned about? Why? Do we all agree on the topic and its definition?

Investigate the issue: What do we already know? What is already happening in the area? What research is needed?

Develop a vision of what it could be like: What is our aim? What are our goals? What would it look/feel/sound like?

Then define the action that is needed to achieve this vision: What do we need to do? Who will do it? By when?

How will we know when we have achieved our vision?

What sort of Action? That’s E-asy!

Having gone through that planning process, you might still be unsure about what sort of action you can take. Students in one project about traffic safety in their area thought about what sort of action was needed to deal with the problems they were finding from the Investigation. Several groups decided that what they needed was to build a roundabout in the street, or to build a pick-up and drop-off area in the school grounds. But when they investigated how much that would cost, they were horrified.

Did this mean that they couldn’t take any action at all?

They sat down with some other students and with some teachers and thought about all the sorts of action they could take - they brainstormed possibilities.

And then a neat little scheme (below) emerged from the discussion. The roundabout was an example of an engineering action; however, there were other types of actions. They could educate people about the problem; they could encourage people’s good behaviour (rewarding them for example); or they could enforce rules (sort of punishing people’s bad behaviour).

Thinking about it this way also helped the group brainstorm some more possible actions - and they wrote their ideas in a table like the one below. They could then look at all the different ideas for action and decide what they could do - and maybe they could do several things. They decided to make an information pamphlet for parents about good pick-up and drop-off behaviour; they highlighted good behaviour in assemblies; they took note of bad behaviour and asked people to change what they were doing - and they still had time to write to the Council about getting a roundabout and a pick-up and drop-off area.

Then we all realised that this way of thinking about action doesn’t just apply to traffic safety. The group had invented a way of thinking about how to take action on any issue: ‘engineering’ is just about different ways of putting structures in place.

Try it and see if it helps you.

Roger Holdsworth
Tri-UMPH
A Geelong Catholic Schools Success Story

The Process

In October 2007, I and the Senior Leaders of three Catholic Colleges in Geelong met over a biscuit and orange juice, smiling at each other – as they had all just received their badges appointing them as the 2008 College Captains. As we chatted, I remarked that I had long dreamt of a day or event that would bring all three Colleges together as a real community. The enthusiasm and energy from that first meeting was electric – I could tell these were no ordinary leaders.

We followed up this initial conversation and held a seminar of all the schools’ leaders where we hatched the idea of a music festival. It was not very long before Tri-UMPH was coined: Tri schools United to Make Poverty History. The senior leaders then created a document that was impressive enough and so convincing that all three Principals gave them, a group of student leaders, permission to begin to put into action the biggest event in both numbers and organisation that the three schools had ever seen.

Indeed it is the biggest student-based concert or event ever seen in Geelong.

For the next 12 months, the students met every week: throughout the holidays, through their exams and SACs, through driving lessons, 18th birthday parties, cases of the flu, glandular fever and everything else life could throw at them ... but they battled on.

The day required the students to think and organise everything ... from importing and costing 4000 wrist bands from the slums of Kibera, Nairobi; organising over 20 aid stalls to arrive and display their wares; food vans from the local community to feed 4000 people; contacting and arranging eight sensational bands and convincing these bands to all play for free at a student festival. The students had to think about security, paramedics, police, insurance, stages, wet weather, toilet facilities, staffing, selling tickets, press releases, back stage passes, advertising, banners, inviting guests, opening ceremonies, two stages with canopies and professional sound systems to accommodate an audience of 4000 people and a huge 15 metre wide side screen ... plus so many more unknown factors. All this was done by a group of students who had no prior skills or knowledge of event managing and had only the help of a handful of staff who believed in them. (I would especially like to thank Monika Ercoli from SJC for her drive and enthusiasm for, without her, the task would have been so much harder.)

And so it was that Tri-Umph indeed was a triumph. It raised over $43,000, was a well-run peaceful and exciting social discourse with students learning by osmosis that they can make a difference to world poverty and that they can achieve wonderful things.

It was a triumph also because it taught the school community that today’s young people can be trusted to organise and act responsibly. These students are not the rabble the media would lead and like us to believe; rather, they have a wonderful social conscience and, when given the opportunity, respond in an equally responsible manner – as was seen on the day. There was not a single poor response from over 400 attending staff regarding their behaviour.

Simon Cahir
Student Leadership Coordinator
St Joseph’s College
Phone: (03) 5226 8186
The Tri-UMPH Festival

The Product:
Tri-schools United Making Poverty History

September 1st 2008:
A Festival inspired by youth to reach out to the local community and to people suffering poverty

Three schools, 4000 people, 8 bands, 6 hours of music and $43,000! There was nothing small about the TriUMPH Festival for the three Catholic secondary schools from the city of Geelong: Sacred Heart College, St. Joseph’s College and Clonard College.

Tri-schools United to Make Poverty History, or TriUMPH for short, was a one day music festival held on September 1st, 2008 to raise much needed funds for the Viqueque region of East Timor. The idea was initiated by a group of Year 12 leaders from the three colleges as a way of bringing the three communities closer together. What it grew into was something that none of us would have believed possible back in October of 2007.

Regular meetings during the summer holidays resulted in the plan for the three schools to get together for a day of music and socialising, with a good cause being supported by the profits and some much needed awareness being raised. In nearly 12 months it took the efforts of over 30 committed students and a dozen staff to put the day together, with the committee meeting every Wednesday for two to three hours. What we created has become history.

Monday September 1st saw over 3500 students and 400 staff congregate on the ovals of St Joseph’s College, where two stages had been decked out with sound systems, 5-metre TV screens, portaloos, aid organisation stalls and dozens of food vendors from the Geelong region. "The food was great and the Galvatrons rocked" was the conclusion of a group of beaming Year 7 students. The happiness was also evident in the senior year levels, as heard from a very content Year 12 class: “let’s do this every day.”

Students were asked to purchase a hand-made wristband from the slums of Kenya as an entrance pass, costing $10 for junior students and $15 for seniors. Together with t-shirt sales and significant personal donations, this has resulted in an expected amount of $50,000 for the East Timorese cause. The funds, which will be distributed through Caritas, are in support of several health, training and education projects.

The Galvatrons, Borne, Carus, Sleep Decade, the Basics, Sol Nation and Perfect Fit all generously donated their time to perform for the crowds, entertaining a captivated audience.

TriUMPH was a massive success for all involved and the resounding feeling of the organising committee was one of pride. More than once we had heard that such a big idea would never come to fruition and that we were crazy for believing that a student-run event could be held without incident. We proved that the sky is the limit when trust is placed in the student leadership team.

The great passion of students in leadership roles can produce the most memorable and significant events in a school community when combined with the support and backing of the school administration team.

Damian Flanders
St Joseph’s College
School Captain

Renee Pirrottina
and Aleisha Smith
Clonard College
Joint School Captains

Jess Kearney
Sacred Heart College
Vice Captain
Dunoon Student Representative Council

Each year the students of Dunoon Public School (north of Lismore, NSW) elect a group of their peers to participate in the decision-making process at the school. Senior students are given the responsibility of encouraging fellow students to undertake community service, participate in anti-bullying programs, commit to environmental projects and contribute ideas to school rights and responsibilities.

The purpose of the SRC is to develop a spirit of school and community service and to provide a variety of opportunities where students can demonstrate a responsible and 'other-centred' focus. Students are strongly encouraged to be active participants in their education and to know that they are important members of the school community.

The SRC consists of an executive group to oversee student well-being: a President and Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Publicity Officer. There are four committees to focus on different areas of school involvement:

- The Environment;
- Community Projects;
- Creative Arts; and
- Sport.

Each committee has one Council member responsible for gathering and sharing ideas for discussion and action.

School staff members nominate areas that they are willing to oversee. The staff members support the committees in preparing reports for meetings, organising events, making announcements for assemblies and writing articles for school bulletins.

In 2008, a parent survey revealed some very positive attitudes in favour of the SRC. Parents found that their children were more aware and responsible and were pleased with the achievements and with the opportunities that the children were given for leadership.

So far this year, members of the SRC have:

- organised a fund-raising day to aid the victims of the Victorian bushfires. They invited all school children to wear casual clothes for the day and bring in a gold coin donation. They also performed on marimbas at The Channon markets and donated 50% of their proceeds to this cause;
- written a successful submission for funding to erect a shade shelter over the school playground area;
- attended a Young Leaders Day in Brisbane;
- been involved in organising activities for Harmony Day and Clean Up Our School Day;
- helped in the organisation of the Creative Arts room, including poster preparation;
- undertaken a stock-take of school sports resources and compiled a list of items to purchase;
- carried out a survey of school grounds to determine areas in need of an upgrade.

Student Council members value their experience and involvement. The report opposite was contributed by the President and Vice Presidents of last year's SRC.
“We’ve had a great year as leaders of Dunoon and are very proud of our school. The SRC has had a number of committees and they have all helped to make our school better. We have run whole school meetings and we’ve spoken to the School Education Director about our achievements.

Our committees have included The Environment, School Landscape, Creative Arts, Sports Council, Friends of the Library, Community Projects and Student Welfare.

We’ve raised money for charities and for school projects. We’ve organised school activities and helped to run them. We’ve visited people and places and welcomed them to our school. We’ve also helped to make sure that all the children at school are safe and happy. We hope that the SRC continues to go well at Dunoon in the future.”

Contact:
Genevieve Slocombe, Principal
Genevieve.Slocombe@det.nsw.edu.au
In September 2008, a ‘festival of ideas’ was held at Box Hill Town Hall (in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs) for students from primary school Student Councils (see Connect 172, August 2008). It was called **Frenzy**. As part of that festival, there was a formal ‘Congress’ or parliamentary-style debate on motions proposed by students from the participating schools.

The following motions were discussed during this Congress:

**Motion 1:**
That students should have a student state representative group.

*Question:* Would the group be made up from children or adults?

*Answer:* Children.

**Key Discussion Points:**
- High schools are doing it, so primary schools should be able to as well.
- There need to be adults helping, but using the students’ ideas.
- Should be made up of older students – maybe only grade 6s.

**Proposed amendment:**
"made up of grade 5/6s only."

**Key Discussion Points:**
- Should be grades 4/5 because grade 6 go to high school next year.
- Grade 5/6 because the grade 5s will have experience after grade 6 leave.
- Should include everyone because the preps have ideas too.

Amendment carried.

Motion now reads: "That students should have a student state representative group made up of Grade 5/6s only."

**Motion 2:**
That there should be a three step program for bullying.

*Question:* Some schools have this already.

*Answer:* It might not be working.

**Key Discussion Points:**
- Ignoring the bullying doesn’t work.
- Parents should step back and let the students work it out.
- If people don’t tell anybody they’re more likely to be bullied.
- Some people might feel uncomfortable talking to adults; they should speak directly to the bully.
- Some people don’t know what to do; there needs to be more information.
- You should tell parents and teachers.

**Key Discussion Points:**
- Parents can help.
- It should be the students’ choice.
- It’s a bigger fight.
- Students would become more mature this way.

Motion now reads: "That all schools should allow students to deal with bullying without interfering.

**Key Discussion Points:**
- This would probably just make things worse.
- Parents can help.
- It should be the students’ choice.
- It’s a bigger fight.
- Students would become more mature this way.

Motion Carried.

**Motion 3:**
That all schools should have a bullying council that involves the people who bully and the people being bullied and the people who have witnessed the bullying to talk and increase the awareness of the effects of bullying.

*Question:* How will you get bullies to come, and how do you know who they are?

*Answer:* Organise it with the teachers and use the witnesses.

*Question:* How do you tell the different sides of the story?

*Answer:* You could use witnesses.

**Key Discussion Points:**
- Bullies could get upset if they feel they are being attacked.
- Resolution equals a good result for peoples’ friendships.
- Bullying may increase after the meeting.
- It gives the victim a chance to talk to the bully and voice their opinion.
- Talking to the bully wouldn’t do much; they’ll just keep doing it.

Motion Defeated.

**Motion 4:**
That all schools should get at least two water tanks that connect to the toilets so when you flush you use rain water. You can also use it on the gardens.

*Question:* How will you connect the tanks to the toilets?

*Answer:* Pipes, plumbing, etc.
Solar panels.

Motion 8:
That schools should arrange to get solar panels so they don't use things that create greenhouse gases. As well as the computers being powered by solar panels.

Motion Carried.

Key Discussion Points:
- Might not be able to raise enough money.
- It's a good way of saving electricity and making students more ambitious.
- It would be a great way to save electricity.
- Its a good way of saving electricity but no one thinks about how.

Motion Carried.

Motion 7:
That schools should have some worm farms because the compost from the classes could get turned into good soil that the school might use for any plants around the school.

Key Discussion Points:
- Worm farms are educational and fun, and help the environment.
- Some schools have compost heaps so can't put scraps into the worm farm.
- Preps eat bugs and this could be a risk.
- There are a lot of food scraps from fruit and stuff.
- The worms could escape and they could crawl into anything.
- Will reduce rubbish and landfill by using the food scraps.
- The worms deserve a normal life.

Motion Carried.

Motion 9:
That our school should have meetings on learning how to be assertive to help put a halt to name calling.

Motion Carried.

Key Discussion Points:
- It would cost a lot to do.
- Could get government funding to make it happen.
- It would need a lot of sun so it would run out.
- It would be a great way to save electricity.

Other Motions Proposed
A further 163 motions were submitted to Congress but were not read or debated as the Congress ran out of time. They are divided into three categories: Bullying (79 motions), the Environment (72 motions) (both based on student surveys) and a general category for all other motions (12 motions).

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April 2009
News & Reviews

Do it Yourself Democracy

Youthcentral (www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au) is the Victorian Government’s website for 12-25 year olds. It provides practical and up-to-date information on a range of topics including Jobs and careers, Studying and training, Health and relationships, and Knowing your rights. Launched over four years ago, it now receives visits from over 40,000 people every month.

Youthcentral has just launched a new section on the site called Do It Yourself Democracy which aims to provide you with tools and resources on how you can be informed and engage in decision making within government and your community.

There is more to influencing local, state and federal governments than just turning up to vote on election day and so it doesn’t matter whether you’re 18 or not; you can still play an active role in and have a say on the decisions that are made that impact on your life.

The Do It Yourself Democracy section has over 50 pages of information and resources to assist you in becoming active in your community including: finding your focus, finding the people, getting the message out there, using technology, getting through to government and how to vote. With the exception of the Voting and Elections section of the site (which has been provided by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), the majority of the content has been produced by young people themselves and often based on their own experiences.

There is loads of content on the site, so if you’re unsure of where to start, take the “What kind of activist are you?” quiz which asks you to answer a series of fun situational and personality based questions which, at the end, provides you with a range of different ‘activist’ profiles, in some of which you will rank higher than in others. Each profile, such as the “Connector” and the “Observer”, then links to a range of tools in the Do It Yourself Democracy section which will suggest ways you can take action.

For Teachers

The project has been produced in conjunction with the Victorian Electoral Commission and will be used to complement their education program “Passport to Democracy” which has been mapped against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and provides a series of classroom modules to illustrate democratic processes and participation.

The new section could also provide useful reference information for English, Politics, Law and Commerce related studies that involve discussing issues, civics and citizenship, social justice, political processes or the school’s governance processes and student representative mechanisms.

Contact:

For further information on youthcentral and the Do It Yourself Democracy section contact:

Vivienne Browne
Office for Youth,
Department of Planning and Community Development
Phone: 03 9208 3564
Email: vivienne.browne@dpcd.vic.gov.au
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) 9489 9052 or (03) 8344 9637

Australian:

FYA Newsletter (Foundation for Young Australians, Melbourne, Vic) 02, 03; Summer, Autumn 2009
Research Developments (ACER, Camberwell, Vic) No 20; Summer 2008-2009
YAPRap (Youth Action and Policy Association, Surry Hills, NSW) Vol 19 Nos 2, 3; February, March 2009
Yikes (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 7 Edition 1; March 2009
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas) Vol 28 No 1; March 2009

Documents

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

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

<table>
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<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>613</td>
<td>Moral and Democratic Education in Public Primary Schools (W Veugelers and E De Kat, Graduate School of Teaching and Learning; paper presented at AERA 2002) (26 pp; $2.60)</td>
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<tr>
<td>614</td>
<td>Dilemmas of Democracy Education: The Strengths and Shortfalls of Controversial Public Issues Discussions (Diana Hess, University of Wisconsin-Madison; paper presented at AERA 2002) (53 pp; $5.30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>615</td>
<td>Inspiring Schools: Impact and Outcomes: Taking Up the Challenge of Pupil Participation (Centre for International Education and Research, University of Birmingham; for Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Carnegie Young People Initiative, UK; 2006) (25 pp; $2.50)</td>
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Slowly growing with information about subscribing, some back issue contents and summaries of Student Councils and Beyond, Student Action Teams and Reaching High.

Check in occasionally!

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• Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($22) $ ........

• Foxfire: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($22) $ ........

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