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Welcome back to the 2009 school year - the 30th year of Connect’s publication. (Should we start celebrating yet?)

As we start this year, we’re experiencing a renewed interest in active, participatory, real, valued roles for students, from schools throughout Australia. Sometimes they call it ‘Student Voice’, sometimes ‘Civic and Citizenship Education’, sometimes ‘Student Leadership’ or ‘Student Action Teams’, but each is underpinned by a similar interest in and commitment to curriculum approaches in which students are respected and challenged to make significant decisions about their own and others’ education.

For example, we’re about to present a series of workshops in South Australia through the lens of Values Education, and the interest is in students leading their school community in defining, enacting and assessing their values. In both New South Wales and Victoria, we’re about to be involved in some Student Action Teams in which primary and secondary school students will investigate and action on ‘transition’. Elsewhere, there is strong interest in the lead that students can take in investigating environmental, health and other issues, and making a real difference in their world.

Connect is proud to be supporting these initiatives; Connect is even more heartened that most are taking off independently – as schools and students recognise that such approaches are essential to meeting educational goals and to engaging students meaningfully ... beyond simple (and limited) ideas of ‘engagement’ as attendance or retention.

Therefore This Issue

This first issue for 2009 then continues the documentation of such encouraging approaches, with stories firstly that update information in previous issues of Connect. Student Action Teams are represented through another report on the work of the Student Initiatives in School Engagement (SISE) – or Switched On-Switched Off – project at Preston South and Penders Grove Primary Schools in Melbourne. The Learning Partnerships program continues, and students from St Margaret Mary’s Primary School are developing a book of drawings to advise beginning teachers on ‘what works’. The VicSRC also reports here on its plans for 2009 and urges all SRCs to similarly plan now for participation.

There are some new voices here too. Genevieve Hudson was a Year 12 student in 2008 who investigated the reality of global citizenship in schools; her essay raises challenging questions. Heather Robertson is a primary school Principal committed to student voice practices; she reports on a study tour she was involved in in 2008. And finally, Jan Hargreaves, Deputy-Principal of a secondary school in Brisbane, outlines the continuing process of dialogue between students and teachers about teaching, learning and student leadership. We’ll be excited to hear more from all these initiatives.

Happy reading ... and writing, as you share your stories!

Roger Holdsworth
Primary School Students Advise on Teacher Training

The Learning Partnerships Program

Maree Moore and Tania Rivett

Students at a Melbourne primary school are helping to train new teachers by providing information about what to do in classes and around the school. After all, they say, who knows better than students about what works and what doesn’t?

These students’ voices – and the ways in which they are shaping teaching – are part of the Learning Partnerships program at The University of Melbourne. Previous articles in Connect (#154-155, August-October 2005; and #162, December 2006) outlined this program, and provided some examples of how this was transforming curriculum within a secondary school. The work at St Margaret Mary’s Primary School builds on this and continues the approach through a partnership within a primary school.

St Margaret Mary’s is a co-educational Catholic primary school in Melbourne’s inner northern suburbs, with a large component of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The school was introduced to the project in 2007 and continued their collaboration in 2008, with 42 students from Grades 3 and 4 involved in 2008. (Similar approaches were used in each year, but the student drawings are from the 2008 group.)

The Learning Partnerships program uses strong drama components to role-play situations facing students and teachers and, together, to explore possible solutions. Using these scenarios as a basis, the school students provide advice to trainee teachers about what makes an effective teacher and discuss how best to react in certain situations. For example, they have said that getting angry or yelling at students is high on the list of what to avoid, whereas listening, being fair and remaining calm are seen as better ways to respond in challenging situations. It should be noted that these students’ involvement with such drama approaches prior to the project had been minimal.

How we (teachers) got involved

We are the teaching staff and facilitators of the program. Maree is a very experienced teacher with vast experience with all age groups and literacy backgrounds while Tania was, in 2008, a graduate classroom teacher with a major in Teaching Primary Drama. The other member of this team is Bern Murphy from the University.

Bern initially approached the Student Wellbeing Coordinator at the school and outlined a possible collaboration between us and the University. We were invited to a professional development day that gave more information about the project and, after attending this, the teaching staff committed to the project. As facilitators, we attended two further professional
that are frequently confronted by
students – and teachers – at school.
These workshops were presented
in a way that was very accessible
for teachers without prior drama
experience. The activities discussed
were practical and, as we discovered
when we started using them within
our classrooms, could be easily
adapted for a wide variety of ages
and learning experiences.

Teacher resources were
provided; these included support
literature and possible frameworks
for our workshops with trainee
teachers (in a subject initially called
*Education Policy, Schools and
Society – EPSS* – then *Social and
Professional Contexts – SPC*). These
resources prepared us for what
could have been daunting sessions
for both us and for our students.
They also laid the basis for on-going
support through phone and e-mail
contact throughout the term. As our
University contact person, Bern was
available to come into the school,
chat with our children, outline
the program at staff curriculum
meetings and support us in any
area of need.

**How the students
got involved**

When we initially outlined the
project to the children, we told
them that they were going to have
an opportunity to teach student
teachers. In our classrooms, we
started to discuss what teachers
do, and work on some of the
activities that would be used
during our visits to Melbourne
University. These fuelled their
interest and, even at this early
stage, their enthusiasm was high.

We implemented strategies
that were provided at the PD
that best suited our children; we
selected topics for investigation
that were age appropriate and
relevant to our children and
curriculum. The activities were
used as tools for learning in a similar
way to the ways in which we used
the *Six Thinking Hats* earlier in the
year. We found these techniques
created a safe, supportive and
challenging learning environment
to explore many areas of our
Religious Education (RE) and
Victorian Essential Learning
Standards (VELS) program. These
strategies for teaching and learning
were most beneficial in curriculum
areas such as maths, literacy and
RE, as they involved a high level of
inquiry learning.

The children also found these
learning experiences exciting as
they were novel and inclusive of
all levels of understanding. This
resulted in them producing high
quality work – often far beyond the
standard of work they had achieved
with more conventional methods
earlier in the year.

**At the University**

The core of the program was the
sessions with the beginning teachers
at the University, in which drama
was used to explore and discuss
situations facing both students and
teachers within schools. Groups
were led through techniques and
subsequent discussions, where
student, teacher and beginning
teacher perspectives were valued.

Throughout the program, the
children worked in group situations
only, as a strategy to support
confidence and learning. At no
stage was any child (or adult) forced
to perform or improvise individually
in front of an audience. The mixed
age and ability groups provided
effective scaffolding for all involved
in a variety of ways. A fundamental
part of our preparation with the
students involved developing a clear
understanding of the importance
of anonymity when discussion or
reporting on the characters within
their dramatisations. Specifically,
children were directed not to refer
to others by name on any occasion,
and this was re-inforced throughout
the year.
Here are examples of two days with the trainee teachers. In the first session, we organised activities that facilitated the two groups getting to know each other, so we used 'meet and greet' strategies such as developing unique greeting actions or words, and mingling within the group. The primary school students were armed with questions for the teachers that involved simple interviewing skills in search of basic information. They decided that asking the student teachers why it is that they wanted to be teachers in the first place would be the best starting point. The most effective way to do this was through paired sharing, and then moving around in a rotation, so that the primary students could briefly interview a number of student teachers and gather a range of responses. Digging deeper and asking why the teachers had chosen secondary and not primary teaching for their future, really made the university students think about their responses and made the task of the primary school students much easier. The activity leaders provided short but structured questions, and this allowed all students to feel competent with this activity.

This was a purposeful and effective use of our time, and one that established a safe environment, so that everyone could remain in their comfort zone. This was particularly important so that both our students and the trainee teachers could develop relationships that could be built on in future meetings.

In the second session, the foundations that were built during our first session led to more in-depth questioning and sharing. We found that having this second session was valuable in terms of the relationship between the two groups of students – as both our students and the trainee teachers were more relaxed in each other's presence. The primary students welcomed the fact that teachers remembered their names and they commented on feeling 'equal' to the student teachers. This allowed the students to feel comfortable in contributing to the group activities and involvement in role-play. In this session, students were invited to think about how teachers maintain harmony within a classroom, and what strategies are useful in preventing or dealing with misbehaviour. This was done through mixed groups developing a small role-play, followed by discussion of what was happening in the scenario and how things could be made easier. Another version of this was to ask students to put together a 'freeze frame' of both 'good' and 'bad' examples of what teachers do. The rest of the class were then invited to guess what was going on in the scenario. The benefit of this method is that students from all levels of abilities and confidence can readily participate.

**Learning Partnerships in the curriculum**

As classroom teachers, we initially questioned how we could include the Learning Partnerships program in our increasingly crowded curriculum. It soon became
apparent to us that using this program as part of our pedagogy enabled us to explore and assess many aspects of our curriculum simultaneously. It was therefore not an ‘extra’ that added to our load, but a valuable investment of both teachers’ and students’ time.

We found that, when using the Learning Partnerships techniques, a revealing moment of the project for us was when a student who rarely contributes to any form of class discussion participated at a much higher level. In this case, this child’s ability to demonstrate knowledge in the areas of literacy was not dictated by his ability to write. This allowed an assessment that was truly indicative of his understanding of text and other subject material.

For example, we used the technique of inviting students to become the conscience of another person when solving a dilemma. This technique, known as a ‘hot seat’, could be used in a range of situations and could involve the whole class by asking them to construct the possible thoughts of a person in a given dilemma or events that have happened in history. We found this strategy helped students to develop an understanding of a particular issue and move towards a deeper level of analysis.

Another student had displayed limited language and social skills throughout the year and this frequently resulted in him being frustrated and not contributing to class discussions. Although he was, at times, reluctant to involve himself speaking in role throughout the dramatic activities, he was observed actively listening and involving himself in mime. This level of participation and engagement was far beyond his previous input.

**Formalising the advice**

Following the involvement at the University, we suggested to the students that they might like to present their advice to new teachers in some way. They had seen the cartoons that some students at a secondary school had developed, and were excited about the possibilities for ‘speaking’ to new teachers in this way.

So we began by discussing with them what we had learnt – and what we had to say to new teachers. The students then worked in groups, dividing up the topics they wished to comment on. These cartoons are what they produced over a couple of sessions. Students at the primary level have well developed opinions and can offer sound advice on what
works for them at an individual level in relation to effective teachers. They are able to dig much deeper than simply requiring that a teacher be someone who they ‘liked’. The notion of the importance of a teacher knowing all of their students’ needs, responding fairly in any situation and making sure the classroom is a place where kids feel comfortable so they can learn – were things that the students wanted to communicate to student teachers.

**Outcomes**

There have been many outcomes for our students. Most noticeable is the change in many of our students in confidence and ability to read in front of an audience. This has been most obvious in one student who was able to read at a class Mass at the end of the year – something that would have previously been impossible.

We have also seen that some of our children get very little opportunity to interact with adults other than their parents and teachers, and so we have found this program most valuable in developing their skills to engage with a wider circle of adults.

We have received only very positive feedback from our school community – students, parents and other teachers – about our undertaking of this project. And
we believe that our students have produced some invaluable advice for teachers – that would otherwise not have been heard!

Maree Moore and Tania Rivett

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These cartoons were developed in 2008 by students from St Margaret Mary’s School, Brunswick North as a book for beginning teachers. This work supports the Learning Partnerships Project between The University of Melbourne and participating schools. In the Learning Partnerships project students assist teachers and doctors to develop their professional skills by participating in workshops with them and developing learning materials for them. This builds on the notion that to learn with and from young people is different from simply learning about them.

For more information about the Learning Partnerships Project, contact Helen Cahill (h.cahill@unimelb.edu.au) or Bern Murphy (bemurphy@unimelb.edu.au) at the Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.
Student Research and Action on Engagement Continues

As has been reported in previous issues of Connect (#168, December 2007; #172, August 2008), students at two Melbourne primary schools - Preston South PS and Penders Grove PS, and supported by the CASS Foundation – have been leading their school community in Student Action Teams around ‘engagement with school’. In 2007, the students began by developing ideas about engagement, inventing models and instruments to ‘measure’ engagement and carrying out research about how engagement was influenced by what went on at school.

In the second report, the two schools reported on how they had worked individually and together around student-led approaches to investigating and acting on issues affecting engagement with school. The SAT at Preston South Primary School had led Grade 4 to 6 students through discussions and decisions about possible initiatives that would increase engagement, and had decided on student-led excursions as their primary strategy. This was to be developed, conducted and evaluated in Term 3.

At Penders Grove Primary School, the students had developed a theory that ‘the more you know about engagement, the more you will be engaged’. To test this, they had conducted educational campaigns across the school community, and were set to evaluate their effectiveness before deciding on further action.

This report picks up from that mid-year report and outlines subsequent action at each school in these areas.

Penders Grove PS

During Term 2 2008, the Switched On/Switched Off Team at Pender’s Grove Primary developed and conducted an Education Campaign with three foci: signage in the form of A-frames at the front of the school over several weeks; a Year 4-6 Engagement Treasure Hunt; and engagement workshops with individual classes. The SAT collected pre- and post-campaign data through a survey of students.

From the data collected in Term 2, the team isolated eight possible activities that they might now focus on. The SAT surveyed students in 3-4J, 5-6C and 5-6J, and three key areas emerged as possibilities for the rest of the year: the introduction of a Switched On/Switched Off Peer Engagement Award; the opening and planning of activities in the indigenous garden; and the planning of student-run excursions.

Action This Semester

1. Data from the Education Campaign

During Term 3, students explored and interpreted the results gathered over the education campaign. This data was gathered from an online pre- and post-campaign survey written by students in the SAT and completed by all students in Years 4-6. The primary focus of the Education Campaign was to educate students on what engagement was with the belief that understanding and awareness of engagement empowered students to be more engaged.

Pre- and post-campaign survey responses to the question ‘Do you think engagement is important?’ show clear movement of students toward a greater understanding of engagement by the end of the engagement campaign.

In response to the major purpose of the Engagement Campaign, students in the post-campaign survey were asked if they agreed with the statement: ‘Knowing more about engagement has helped me switch on more in learning’. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the overwhelming percentage of students agreed with the statement. The SAT recognised the significance of these results and used this information to shape their action in Term 4.

Students were surprised at the extent to which their peers agreed with their thesis that an understanding of engagement empowers students to take control of their engagement levels.

As we’ll see later, the students are now exploring whether such engagement in activities carries over into classroom learning.

2. Primary Action Focus

Using the data that was collected from the Education Campaign, the SAT refined a list of eight possible actions that students had suggested as ways to promote engagement at school. The SAT members then surveyed their classmates and identified three major foci for Term 4.

Figure 1 Compares pre and post survey responses to the question ‘Do You Think Engagement is Important?’

Figure 2 Students were asked if they agreed to the post survey statement ‘Knowing more about engagement has helped me switch on more in learning’.

Figure 2 Students were asked if they agreed to the post survey statement ‘Knowing more about engagement has helped me switch on more in learning’.
A Student Planned and Organised Excursion

Many of the students were excited about hearing of the actions of the Preston South SAT to plan and conduct their own excursion. This proved very popular among students at Pender’s Grove, but, after defining some of the characteristics of an effective excursion, the SAT decided to postpone any action until next year. It was thought that a more considered and timely approach would ensure a more effective excursion.

Fortnightly Whole School Student Engagement Awards

Students continued with their new understandings arising from the Education Campaign: that knowing more about engagement enables students to make decisions that make them more engaged. A Whole School reward system was not only a favoured option by students in Year 4-6 but was a logical step to raise engagement across the whole school.

Students from Prep to Year 6 gathered three times over Term 4 during lunchtimes to bend wire, join connectors and create a simple light circuit controlled by a switch – to build engagement awards: a small ‘engagement box’ that symbolises being ‘switched on’.

Members of the SAT then developed a process for peer nomination of students for engagement awards. They visited classes and explained the voting process for the awards. Students in the P/1 classes were invited to draw a picture of what engagement looked like, while the older students were invited to describe the characteristics and attitudes of the engaged student they were nominating. The SAT members collected the ballot papers and tallied the votes, read the comments and decided on a worthy person. It was interesting to note that the student who had received the most votes was not always the student who received the award. In some cases the tally of votes was close and what determined the winner was the quality of the descriptive comments.

These Engagement Awards were presented to students by the SAT during whole school assemblies. During the presentation, it was clear that the whole assembly was strongly engaged. Members of the SAT had rehearsed their roles and speeches prior to the assembly. The behaviours and attitudes students had recorded on the nomination form were read to the assembly, and the certificates also record these comments. The award recipients, along with their behaviours described by their peers, were published in the School Newsletter.

Staff have since decided not to continue with the regular weekly ‘Student of the Week’ Awards in favour of these student-led Engagement Awards.

Opening of the Indigenous Garden and Activities

Students in Years 4-6 suggested that opening the Indigenous Garden would improve engagement. Over four weeks, three times each week, the SAT team opened the garden during lunchtime and organised activities including pot painting, weaving and mask making. Students from the SAT rostered themselves on to help conduct the activities and to collect a pre and post engagement rating (using the Switchometer).

With the frequency of activity in the Indigenous Garden, many students have entered the garden during planned activities and been using the garden as a retreat or simple quiet place.

The data derived from pre and post interviews has again shown students claim that these activities increase their engagement at school at lunchtime. The SAT recognised that this data may reflect the immediate enjoyment of the event rather than record any improvement in engagement in learning back in the classroom, and therefore students followed up the initial visit to the garden with specific interviews with two students from each class. Their focus question was: ‘Has your participation in the Indigenous Garden activities improved your engagement in the classroom?’ This data is still being collected as this report is being collated.

Roger is a member of the Switched On/ Switched Off Team. He had been disruptive in class and uninterested in the discussions of the Action Team over the past few weeks. I took him to the local electronics shop to purchase the necessary equipment to build the Engagement Awards. That lunchtime fifteen students, including Roger, gathered in a spare room and began constructing these simple circuits.

Two days later, before school, he bounced up to me and said “Wanna see what I made Jeff?” He pulled out of his pocket his own switch. “I went down to the shops last night with mum and she bought me the battery and wires and stuff,” he proudly announced. We, and later the class, agreed that this was the action of a student ‘chasing learning’, a student at Level 4 on the Switchometer.

A week later his classmates recognised the difference in his behaviour and attitude. They awarded him with their vote for a Whole School Engagement Award.

Jeff Jackson
Switched On Switched Off School Coordinator
Penders Grove Primary School
Preston South PS

In the first half of 2008 the SAT at Preston South PS decided that the most effective method of engaging students would be through excursions that are planned and led by students. This was decided through brainstorming and then listing ten possibilities. The SAT then surveyed the upper grades (3-6) in the school. The ‘action’ chosen was to have an excursion where students had input into where they would go and what they would do on their excursion as well as having an active role in the day.

In planning the excursion, the SAT was driven by the idea: Kids know kids best!

**Action**

Students made a list of the requirements for a successful excursion. This list included things such as it being educational and having choices throughout the day. For example, if they saw a park they wanted to play in, they wanted to be able to stop and play there.

A key aspect of the excursion was the lunch break. The SAT decided that they should have a variety of activities available. We managed to have Angela Foley, a member of the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC), available to teach grass weaving, while others chose to play in the adventure playground and some walked and took water samples. This was very effective in engaging all students in this part of the day.

Also on the day, students viewed an Iranian (subtitled) film at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in the Federation Square precinct as well as going on a walking tour around the MCG.

The excursion has now been followed up by an excursion to Merri Creek (Dights Falls) and Trinwarren Tambour in Parkville. This excursion was funded by the MCMD and students had input into the sites they would visit and the activities they would participate in.

This excursion fitted in with a number of the elements that the SAT had identified as being important to improve student engagement in school: science, learning outside, working in the community, having new experiences – as well as student input into excursion organisation.

**Data Collection**

The data collected throughout the day of the SAT excursion to the city used the process of a pulse reading (engagement level) at specific points in the day. In addition, students designed an activity sheet, which all students filled in at two points throughout the day, and the SAT provided comments about their experiences of the day and their analysis of data collected from the pulse readings.

**Collecting data on the day**

Each student on the excursion had a pulse reading sheet and they had been trained by the SAT – prior to the excursion – how to use this tool. They also had a very simple activity sheet.

**Post excursion**

In the first SAT meeting after the excursion, students from the team were asked to do a ‘Walk and Talk’. This is a short 3-5 minute activity where students choose a partner and walk and talk about a specific topic or question. During this time I provided post it notes for students to record their ideas about what they talked about. They were asked to do a PMI, where they come up with one plus or positive (P) thing about the excursion, one minus (M) thing and one interesting (I) thing.

The following list shows their ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plus/Positive</th>
<th>Minus/Negative</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students' ideas were really good. Eg different activities at lunch time.</td>
<td>We couldn't do every idea on the excursion. Eg we couldn't do a tour of the MCG.</td>
<td>Everyone on the excursion had at least 1 new experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to different places.</td>
<td>Too much walking.</td>
<td>Went to the MCG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping out with the group. Organising stuff. It was fun.</td>
<td>It was frustrating organising the activity sheets and putting them in order.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water testing.</td>
<td>Tram + MCG.</td>
<td>Movie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to the city.</td>
<td>We didn't go in the MCG.</td>
<td>The movie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was cool making it (the excursion).</td>
<td>I didn't go.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned by us!</td>
<td>Grass weaving.</td>
<td>Walking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We saw a movie.</td>
<td>Squishy transport.</td>
<td>Movie in a foreign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to different places.</td>
<td>Too much walking.</td>
<td>Went to the MCG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was fun.</td>
<td>Walking.</td>
<td>We walked around the MCG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was fun. It was planned by us. Fun and interesting activities.</td>
<td>Too much walking. We only got 1 trick photograph.</td>
<td>Grass weaving. Movie in a different language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We saw the movie and played in the park.</td>
<td>I wanted it to be longer.</td>
<td>The movie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When all the kids were playing on the park in Birrarungmarr. When we went inside the MCG.</td>
<td>Not many people went to do the water sampling with Mr Ross. We didn't do everything and being tired at the end of the day.</td>
<td>We did weaving with Angela and it was fun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data is still being analysed by the SAT.

**Passing it on**

The success of the SAT approach is in students’ realisation that what they are doing and learning can be passed on and used by other teachers and students to make school more engaging.

When our SAT discussed engagement strategies in terms of their excursion to the city, there was at least one voice in the team that expressed disappointment about sharing the process:

“But we had to work this out all by ourselves! If we tell them how to do it then we’ve done all the work!”

To some extent, this student was identifying that the process of discussion, research and decision-making about
student-led excursions was the important aspect in relation to engagement – not the excursion itself.

The team discussed how they could pass on what we had done and learnt in such a way as to not give the answers, but rather give others the ability to find their own answers. It was decided that a Do and Don’t list for planning an excursion could be created. By creating this list, anyone using it would still have to plan things in their own way but they would have a guide to work from that would enable them to create an excursion that is an expression of their own class and their studies. This list is transferable to any class in any setting. A copy of this list has been tabled.

Where to next?

Having had a successful ‘action phase’ of the project at Preston South, the question is: where to next? There must be consideration given to what we have learnt this year; we must continue to act on these learnings to increase student engagement in school and learning.

From a project point of view we will be looking at ways in which we can communicate what we have learnt to others. Action will include the distribution of our Do and Don’t list for planning an excursion as well as explaining our learning to other students and adults through texts and verbal presentations.

In 2009, the SAT will be constructing a guide, complete with illustrations, images and cartoons accompanied by written text explaining their ideas about student engagement. The learnings of students within the SAT provide a knowledge bank from which students can reflect on what they know about the factors affecting engagement and the solutions, actions and measures that can be taken to counteract negative factors.

Students will be creating an artefact which is accessible to people of all ages, while engaging in a medium (art) that they have already identified as ‘engaging’.

In terms of ‘passing on’ the process we have followed, the students will also be working to organise and reflect on the process they have used so that this too can be passed on to other interested parties.

**Reflections**

For me, the discoveries of this year – from the ‘action phase’ – have been numerous and varied:

√ “Kids know kids best!”

√ Students become engaged when they are consulted and involved in decision-making processes.

√ Students have creative ideas about how to get themselves and their peers ‘switched on’.

√ Students can articulate their thoughts in various ways that they find engaging.

√ When given the opportunity, students engage in solutions to issues that affect them.

√ Student planned excursions are engaging.

√ Positive play at recess and lunchtimes helps engage students socially.

√ Certain subject areas are more engaging than others.

√ Tasks and activities can be challenging yet engaging.

√ Fun doesn’t mean engaging.

√ Positive adult role-models support student engagement.

**Teacher Learnings**

There are two key learnings that I have taken from working with the SAT on the issue of student engagement. These relate to teacher practice and the use of a SAT approach in tackling issues.

In terms of practice there are many aspects of what the SAT outlined for planning an excursion that translate directly to classroom practice. These include things such as:

√ Giving students choices.

√ Providing new experiences.

√ Considering what students know.

√ Letting kids talk.

√ Providing variety.

The list goes on! If you look at the students’ Do and Don’t list for planning an excursion, almost all of it transfers to classroom practice.

Listening to students’ ideas about this has effectively taken the mystery out of how to make school more engaging from a planning perspective. There are certainly other factors that affect student engagement such as coming to school with or without having eaten breakfast, peer pressure, social issues and personal relationships with teachers, but students from the SAT have been very clear about what they believe teachers should be thinking about when planning.

This learning is not necessarily new but it certainly is powerful in confirming many of these ideas that are incorporated in teacher training, literature and conversation within the profession.

The other key area of learning for teachers is the effectiveness, usefulness and power of using a SAT to solve issues within a school setting. This is summed up beautifully by the quote at the beginning of this report, which has become a slogan for our SAT: “Kids know kids best!”

Students have come to see that their opinions, ideas and work are valued and have produced their best work when it has been purposeful and relevant. The composition of the team in terms of ability, age, knowledge and skills has been important. Regular meetings, making it real (not tokenistic), listening and taking action have made it effective.

**Sam Ross**

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Inter-school Student Forum

At the end of 2008, a second inter-school Student Forum was held at Penders Grove Primary School. The Forum enabled each of the Student Action Teams to report to the other about their year’s work – with particular emphasis on actions in the second half of the year.

In planning their presentations, students decided that they didn’t simply want to talk about what they had done, but wanted to allow others to experience the activities: they noted that this would be more engaging. Therefore, the Forum also included time for students to lead other students (and teachers and visitors) through some of practical hands-on activities they have been conducting at their schools.

Below are some of the images from these activities (courtesy Jeff Jackson):

And in 2009...

This project will continue in 2009 with the support of the CASS Foundation, with a focus on student dissemination of learnings.

The CASS Foundation is a small private foundation that provides grants for medical and scientific research and education projects. In 2004, the Foundation commissioned researchers at Monash University to conduct a review about student engagement. Their report: Student disengagement from primary schooling: a review of research and practice, led the Foundation to provide funding in 2007 for seven projects in Victorian primary schools designed to improve student engagement.

For further information about the CASS Foundation, or to read or download a copy of the Monash report, please visit the CASS website: www.cassfoundation.org

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 proforms.

Order NOW from Connect: $33 or $27.50 for Connect subscribers.
In 1977, I was appointed to an Education Department school situated in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Like all first year teachers, I couldn’t wait to have my own grade and put my training experiences into practice in the real world of teaching.

My grade was made up of children from many nationalities, predominantly from middle European countries. Some of them were ‘latch key’ kids with little English.

We had to use a Language Experience approach to build their literacy and numeracy skills. Cooking, real life maths activities, science experiments, film trips, excursions and camps created opportunities for terrific engagement and great learning outcomes. However, like all children, my students were sometimes reluctant to do the inevitable writing and reading tasks which would follow the fun.

At this point, I decided that something different might get them over their disenchantment and move them forward. I used class forums (in today’s terms, Student Voice) to talk about what they felt their needs were, and married this with what I was required to achieve as the class teacher. The result was the use of learning centres, contracts, compulsory and optional activities. In today’s terms I was using the rudiments of negotiated curriculum and personalised learning.

Another Student Voice activity which I used then was a courtroom model complete with judge, jury, prosecutor, defence lawyer and witnesses to solve playground or classroom disputes. Sentences were governed by the ‘fairness principle’ i.e. use of logical consequences and provision of sentences which all parties would be prepared to receive.

I developed strong relationships with my classes as we all learned together. At the end of five years, I transferred to another school. However, the connections which I made with these students have endured. I have attended 18th, 21st and 30th birthdays over the years.

Fast forward to 2007: ‘Professors, Principals and Practice’

In 2007, I was awarded a place in the Victorian Department (DEECD)’s High Performing Principals’ Program. My focus for research was Student Voice and its capacity as a lever of improvement for schools. In 2008, I travelled to the UK to meet with professors, school principals and students. Thanks to Roger Holdsworth, our editor, I was able to meet key leaders in the field of Student Voice research and with principals whose work is guiding the UK Government’s plans for education. Professor Michael Fielding (University of London), Julia Flutter (Cambridge University), Professor Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham and an Aussie expat), Alison Peacock (Wroxham Park Primary School Principal), and Jo Shuter (Principal of Quentin Kynaston Specialist Secondaries Technical School and also Principal of the Year 2007 awardee), were extremely generous with their time and in sharing their learning with a complete stranger from the other side of the world.

Coincidentally, the research surrounding Student Voice has a history of approximately thirty years. Whilst I was launching my teaching career and dabbling in Student Voice on a small scale, without actually calling it Student Voice, Student Voice research and practices were commencing in South Australia and the UK.

As a result of my experiences whilst travelling, I have deepened my understanding of the complexities of Student Voice, and now know that there is a wide range of levels in the beliefs and understandings which underpin it. I concur with the definition provided by the DEECD Paper No. 10 (2006) that: “Student Voice is more than just communicating ideas and opinions; it is about having the power to influence change.”

One of the most remarkable real life examples that meets this definition is London’s Quentin Kynaston Specialist Technical School and the work of its principal Jo Shuter whom I visited last year. Q.K, as it is commonly known, was a school in deep trouble as recently as seven years ago. It was classified by OFSTED to be in ‘Special Measures’. (In DEECD, this would equate to very severe underperformance.) QK is surrounded by housing estates and the students represent many, many nationalities. There was a gang culture...
because of alliances to the different housing estates. The students were angry, disillusioned, frequently absent and not achieving.

In 2008, the students were very settled and happy, attendance is very high and QK’s results rate very highly. In 2006, QK was in the top 3% nationally for value-added performance. QK’s achievement in exam results continues to improve every year. Attendance is at 94%.

Tony Blair, ex-Prime Minister, visited the school and stated: “I’ve never seen a school with such a high Student Voice profile.” (Sept, 2006)

The amazing success in transforming Quentin Kynaston can be attributed to the dynamic leadership of its principal, Jo Shuter, and her astute use of Student Voice.

QK has a dedicated Student Voice Faculty that consists of:

• a prefect team;
• a student leadership team;
• peer mentors; and
• Sixth Form Community/Pastoral Leaders.

The CK prospectus says: “We make sure that our students have a say too. Students are involved in all aspects of school life from Lesson Observations to having their own Student Development Plan... They also had their say in the design of the school uniform, were involved in the tendering of the school meal contract and have an involvement in the appointment of key members of staff - as well as planning activities and arranging social events.”

I also had the pleasure of meeting Vitto Farci, an ex-student of Quentin Kynaston, who was very influential in driving Student Voice there. In 2007, during his gap year, the then 18 year old Vitto became the UK’s youngest ever educational consultant, employed by local government to advise schools about student involvement and participation.

In 2008, he returned to QK and continued to lead and drive the Student Voice Faculty. In 2009, Vitto is off to university.

Professor Michael Fielding (University of London) kindly gave me the following quote from Improving Learning Through Consulting Pupils Jean Rudduck & Donald McIntyre (2007). From my perspective, it demonstrates the purpose, the potential and the prize for engaging in Student Voice activities. “It is perhaps in relation to just these aspects of teacher-pupil relationships (humane, personal relationships and the mutuality of respect and trust) that pupil consultation has its most striking impact.”

As teachers see pupils differently, so they are more likely to respect and trust them and to offer more opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Where to from here?

I am in my sixth year as principal of Newtown Primary School. Over that time, I have worked with a Junior School Council, a Student Leadership Team and Year 6 leaders. We use Student-Led Three-Way Conferences, Pupil Feedback for teachers, and have a Teacher–Student Mentoring program involving Year 5-6. In 2009, we are trialling Student-Led Teacher conferences for Year 5-6 that will focus on how the teacher can best assist each child with his or her learning. This is real consultation and relationship building. The questions and comments in those conferences will be based on those suggested by the students.

I’ll keep you up to date with developments on this continuing 30-year journey.

Heather Robertson
Principal, Newtown Primary School
robertson.heathers@edumail.vic.gov.au
Plan to be Part of the Victorian SRC Action in 2009

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) – the student-run umbrella body of SRCs in Victorian secondary schools – invites you to be part of an exciting program of events in 2009. Local SRC clusters, as well as local and statewide conferences will enable representatives from SRCs across the state to share information, to plan joint initiatives and to make sure student voices are heard at all levels of education.

But if you are to be part of that process, you will need to start planning now. Make sure that these events are on your SRC calendar for the year, and that your school and SRC is represented.

Sub-Regional Conferences

The VicSRC will again be organising a series of SRC conferences and training days throughout Victoria in Term 2. One of these conferences will be in your area. Information about all these events will be sent to schools later in Term 1.

Plan now to be there!

If your school would like to host and/or organise one of these conferences, contact the VicSRC to discuss what is required. Phone the VicSRC on: 03 9267 3744 or e-mail: vicsrc@yacvic.org.au

VicSRC State Congress

The VicSRC will again host a statewide Congress of representatives from SRCs at the end of July – on Friday July 31st and Saturday August 1st. The Oasis Campsite at Mt Evelyn has again been booked for this.

Two representatives from all Victorian secondary school Student Councils are invited to attend. This is the main decision-making body of the VicSRC; it sets out the work of the VicSRC for the next 12 months and elects a state Executive of students to organise this work.

Plan for your involvement. Put these dates in your SRC diary and make sure you are represented.

Local SRC Clusters

The VicSRC is supporting the development and operation of effective clusters of Student Councils right across Victoria. These are local networks of student representatives, who meet regularly to share activities, to develop ideas and to support each other.

If there is a Cluster in your area, the VicSRC can put you in touch with it. Contact the VicSRC for information and plan to be an active member. If there’s not a cluster in your area, are you interested to help form one? Plan to call a first meeting of representatives - the VicSRC can help you do this.

Effective and Representative SRCs

The work that your SRC does in the school is the most important basis for all these discussions, links and actions. Your job as a representative is to find out what students are concerned about and develop proposals about these.

Plan to find out students’ ideas and concerns, so you can bring these to the SRC, to cluster meetings, to Regional Conferences and to Congress – so that the VicSRC can help you raise these issues with the Government, Department of Education and other groups.

The VicSRC Represents You

The VicSRC was invited to several important consultations in 2008 to represent the views of secondary school students. As well as the Victorian Government’s summit on the Blueprint for Education, the VicSRC was invited to the discussions on the National Goals for Education.

The VicSRC made a submission to this consultation, arguing that students must be active partners within education across Australia, and that the National Goals should recognise the important active roles that students play in decisions about their own education and that of other students.

Plan to make sure your voice is heard in 2009 – by making your ideas and views known to your representatives – the VicSRC.

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

www.yacvic.org.au/vicsrc
Get Up - Stand Up!

Mobilising the ‘Me Generation’
An investigation: Are secondary schools developing global citizenship in students?

Genevieve Hudson

I’d like to think of myself as a young activist with a passion for social justice, politics, dissidence and the unconventional. Looking back at my high school years, I found few people to share these interests with – the exceptions being my teachers, who are more like friends. I was disturbed by the apathy of my peers, questioning why everyone was wrapped up in themselves, myspace, abominable television shows, celebrity gossip and all those other superficial things as the world around us decayed physically and morally. I guess this is what triggered me to investigate whether the public secondary schools of my state were developing global citizenship in students.

Get Up - Stand Up!

Mobilising the ‘Me Generation’
An investigation: Are secondary schools developing global citizenship in students?

Genevieve Hudson

At the same time that I brainstormed ideas for my topic, something pivotal occurred. I tried to get an activist to speak to my Modern History class, who were studying the Arab-Israeli Conflict. My request ended up at the Department and was denied (“no politics in schools”) despite letters highlighting its direct alignment with the aims and objectives of the syllabus, curriculum content and even the school’s mission. The failure to get this speaker was the ‘cherry’ on top of many past experiences proving lip service to all the talk of students as ‘future political leaders’, being fostered to adhere “to the principles of democracy, freedom of expression... and social justice.” For example, whilst I was allowed to run 40 Hour Famine campaigns for World Vision, an Amnesty International group was ‘too political’ and constant calls for a social justice group were ignored. But enough whingeing; the point is that this led me to dwell on the question of just how you “prepare them (students) for informed and active citizenship,” if you won’t expose them to really hard-hitting issues, debate and discourse?

So this evolved into exploring the questions of whether the assumed ignorance of today’s youth is connected to the ways in which school systems are shaping student’s perceptions of their global environment: are they wending their power and influence to develop altruistic attitudes and social awareness in students enough? If so, are their methods effective?

Oxfam’s concept of a global citizen is to understand the need to tackle injustice and inequality, have the desire and ability to work actively to do so, value our precious earth and safeguard its future. They define it as a way of thinking and behaving, an outlook on life, a belief that we can make a difference. So I compared this to curriculum, certain syllabi and the values schools attempt to instill, to see whether they measure up. To discover whether their practical implementation was effective, I interviewed and conducted focus groups and questionnaires with students and teachers. Finally I employed a generational cross-cultural dimension to measure any changes and continuities that had occurred over time.

So, in a nutshell, what did I uncover?

Secondary research suggests that any global citizenship orientated education isn’t seeing results because it uncovers widespread attitudes that young people hold surrounding international issues. One newspaper article* described young people today as ‘materialistic’, ‘incurious about the world’, ‘troubled by ideas’, with ‘modest dreams’, who “show little interest in matters outside their own material welfare” and “have absorbed the Prime Minister’s [Howard’s] conservative values.” It referred to a qualitative study, Fearless and Flexible: Views of Gen Y, the co-author of which found “narrow ambition” was “so consistent across groups that the picture was likely to be typical of the wide population of young people.” Unfortunately this confirms my personal experience, including its claim that “the future they see for themselves is not one inspired by... the wild hopes of youth.

They don’t want to remake the world.” It is a view also echoed by the co-author of the study when summarising his research: “There’s a sense if you’re going to change the world you think about changing it when you’re young. There was not much of that here.”

One Principal confirmed the paramount role of schools in turning this around: “Sadly, other social institutions – the family, church, etc – have become less reliable as the promoters of values frameworks. Parents are overworked, churches are a minority taste... That leaves schools.” Schools ultimately need to play a defining role in the identities of students in enabling them to realise their place in the world. But in analysing the content of school programs, it’s clearly evident that they are striving to do this... so why are the results not visible in our generation? Why do the majority of us appear far departed from the notion of a global citizen?

Other research provided some insight into that next question. Some suggested that it was different leadership bodies who affect the extent to which global citizenship is emphasised, including executive, staff and students. Another pointed out that “issues of international affairs, human rights, or social justice are really only specialty studies in some subjects like Legal Studies or Society and Culture. There is not much reference to them beyond these classrooms.”

The cross cultural component also supported the idea that external factors could be interfering with schools’ attempts to instill global citizenship. I wanted to know whether the ‘idealistic avant-garde’ of the Baby Boomer Generation was connected at all to their schooling and whether it had made a difference; historically they’re portrayed as radicals and whether it had made a difference. So why is this proving effective in transforming high school students?

This concern for what was going on in the rest of the world – we were taught charity begins in the home. There wasn’t the same attitude as there is today. I remember when we were hearing about the Ethiopian Famine on the news; my mother told me that it was natural selection!’ Many Baby Boomers said that teenagers these days are more informed, because issues are stressed more in schools and there is the immediacy of the media as well as technology like the internet. So why isn’t this proving effective in transforming high school students?

A strong argument is that all Baby Boomers attributed their social awareness and revolutionary ideas to music: “It was the music that brought us the protest issues... Peter Paul and Mary, Dylan, Baez, Neil Young, the Beatles... music was the avenue for raising social awareness... but today people don’t listen to the same stuff and have the same feelings about music. It’s so different and most of it’s not about global issues.” Therefore, if the popular culture dictates the ideology that young people absorb, this is a perfect thesis as the reason why most of my generation are not responding to any attempts by schools to transform them into the global citizens we need to meet the ultimate challenge of our time, which someone described as forging “a global community which is both economically and environmentally sustainable and socially just.” No matter how hard schools try, the overwhelming power of today’s world of materialistic and self-absorbed television, internet, music and the like, is winning the war of influence over our young people.

But I don’t want to end this being nihilistic. I think to fight back we need maximise the potential of schools to empower students with the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes to be able to come together and work to solve the epic problems our planet is overflowing with. Teenagers are compassionate and all we need is inspiration and affirmation and the opportunity to make a difference. Global citizenship needs to be a holistic approach incorporated into every school’s ultimate ethos which is paramount in one’s education.

Hans Weingartner, writer/director of a great film, The Edukators, said: “Young people are meant to be rebels. Most revolutions were carried out by young people – because that’s where all the energy is. Pure energy. Society needs that energy to develop and renew itself. Someone has to question everything there is to question, so that what’s good survives and what is less good gets changed. So where is all the energy now?” Let’s tap into it.

**Genevieve Hudson**

In 2008 Genevieve completed her HSC at a high school in Newcastle, NSW. One of her courses, Society and Culture, involved a major work, or ‘Personal Interest Project’. 
From Voice to Dialogue to ...

The Australia 2020 Schools Summit process at Indooroopilly SHS has opened up opportunities for us to hear student voices about education and wider issues. But we have now begun the process of moving from supporting student voices, to hearing what students have to say, to entering into dialogue between students and teachers about future directions for our school.

Where will this lead? We're still in the middle of the process, working with optimism, and excited about the uncertainty of outcomes. And we're aware of the challenges before us.

Indooroopilly State High School is set in the leafy, relatively affluent and educationally competitive inner-western suburbs of Brisbane. During its 53 years, Indooroopilly SHS has had fluctuating enrolments reflective of the changing demographics of the local community and the educational trends and reputations of the times. We are currently enjoying a resurgence in enrolments, partially attributable to our success in recent years with improved students' tertiary entrance results. Our School Opinion Survey data consistently indicates that students and parents think that ours is a 'good school' and that teachers enjoy working in a school where 'students and teachers respect each other'.

'Indro' embraces a certain ethos that differentiates it from other state high schools. Since the 1970s, the school has been unique as the only non-uniform school in Queensland state education. This initially superficial distinction is celebrated and vigorously defended by staff, students and an active P&C. It is considered emblematic of the ethos of a progressive and highly multi-cultural school. Our focus is on academic achievement, internationalism, celebration of our diversity and mature interpersonal relations.

Supporting Student Voices

For many years, we have had student leaders elected by senior students and staff, who represent the school and who provide some informal feedback about the school. In parallel with this, a student-elected SRC has traditionally had a function of raising money (for charity and for the school) and organising some social activities.

The Australia 2020 process led the school, as it did many others throughout Australia, to organise a School Summit in April 2008. At our school, this Summit brought together about 36 self-selected students from Years 8 to 12. They met over a full day within the school where they were asked to work in groups on one of six key themes (e.g. sustainability, a creative Australia, our role in the region). They were asked to contrast what they saw as the situation now with what they thought the future would or could be like. The students’ passion, fresh perspectives and insight alerted us, as teachers, to the importance of ensuring we were hearing more from our students about the school itself.

The school’s IDEAS team (a teacher-led strategic management group in the school, using processes refined in the IDEAS research project at the University of Southern Queensland) has now assumed responsibility for ensuring that Student Summits occur each semester in the school. Our first Student Summit modelled the format of the Australia 2020 Schools Summit around the key question: ‘What does learning look like at Indro: now and in the year 2020?’ We ensured the elected student leaders were invited and then asked again for keen students to self-select. Year level coordinators and heads of department were asked to encourage students to attend. After providing some stimulus readings, we asked the students to think in terms of:

• What are students doing in the classroom?
• What are teachers doing in the classroom?
• What is the environment of the classroom?
• What is the context of the learning?
• What other ways of learning, outside the classroom, does Indro offer?
• What skills and values do students show from their learning at Indro?

The group broke up into six teams, each with one of these questions. They brainstormed around this question, noting ideas, and then led the whole group in gathering broader responses to their question.

The students’ view of learning at Indro was generally positive. They saw that they often engaged in ‘self directed learning, with structure’ and that ‘Indro students have confidence to talk back/ask questions, not disrespectfully, with mutual respect’ but they were cognisant of the differences in teaching styles, expertise and commitment from different teachers.
While sympathetic to teachers' workloads, they were critical of teachers who 'muddle through', obviously without planning and preparation, and of the use of video and DVDs without context or relevance. They were aware that teaching was an 'ageing' occupation and that younger staff would be the norm in 2020.

They were optimistic about the future of learning at Indro. In 2020, students would be 'self managed,... engaged and not problematic', there would be an increase in technology, but not complete reliance on technology. They did not see a future where the relationship between students and teachers would not matter ('Teachers will not become holograms!'). In fact, they thought the mutual learning around technology and the capacity for self direction would see students and teachers 'have greater respect for each other and so will students with each other' People would be 'more enthusiastic about learning; understand it is the great resource for the future' and see school as 'a safe haven where people want to come'.

Hearing What Students Have to Say

What could we do with all these inspiring ideas? The whole point, of course, was that we should be starting to create the Indro of the future now. It would be so easy (but ultimately make the exercise futile) to congratulate ourselves on getting students' voices about these issues, and then to do no more.

Rather, we took the student responses back to the natural teacher groupings within the school – the Faculty meetings – and asked teachers:

- From your Faculty's viewpoint, what are the three most interesting issues/points/insights raised by the students in these comments?
- Are there any clear links between your Faculty's priorities for 2008 and any issues/points/insights raised by the students in these comments? What are these links?
- What follow up issues/queries/concerns would your Faculty like to see a similar group of students address at our Student Summit in Semester 2?

Staff, in Faculty groups, responded to the students' insights with interest. Many Faculties pointed out that our ICT focus is developing well and that the improvement in ICT resources planned for 2009 will create a paradigm shift regarding essential learnings and teaching methodologies when ICTs are more readily available. Staff seemed both impressed and grateful that our students recognise teachers' hard work and interested that unorganised lesson plans and general lack of preparation are apparent to the students.

The English Faculty, in particular, opened the doors to ongoing dialogue by addressing questions back to the students:

- Teachers are concerned about students moving to the next year level without demonstrating the required skills and understandings. What do students think of the current system?
- How can students be motivated to complete assignments on time?
- Students are more distracted in the afternoon. How can this be addressed?

We were now starting to open up a slow and formal dialogue between students and teachers – about learning and teaching. How could we take this forward?

Developing Dialogue

To a great extent, this question is one about the form of student leadership that exists – and is desirable – within the school. Do students want to take the dialogue forward? If so, how? What are the most productive areas, and the most appropriate means for this to happen? In particular, how does the current separation of student leaders and SRC affect this?

So a second Student Summit was held late in 2008 to address these very questions.

A similar process was followed, in which student groups were asked to reflect and dream on the following issues:

- What should the relationship look like between the SRC and the School Captains? How will we know when our SRC is successful and busy? How should leadership skills be developed at Indro?

Student responses indicated that they were frustrated with the limited roles that both the School Captains and the SRC have traditionally assumed at Indooroopilly SHS. They will consider they have a successful SRC when they 'can see change occurring as a result of their suggestions' and when they
feel ‘involved’ and ‘valid’ in their roles within the school. The students have begun to develop a sophisticated notion of leadership development in the school, centred around increasing levels of ‘participation’, gaining ‘organisational and communication skills’ and change management (what they called ‘action changes’).

And that’s where we are at the moment.

**Challenges for 2009**

As we start 2009, the immediate task is to keep the dialogue going. That means taking these responses from 2008 back to what is essentially a new student group (in a new year) and to staff – again opening up a dialogue about possible and desirable futures.

We can see a few challenges along the way:

- So far a small and select group of students has been involved. How do we broaden this and challenge these students to take these issues back to others. In particular, how do we ensure that a wide range of voices are heard and taken seriously?
- How do we manage this process within crowded school days and curriculum – in particular, in a school that is regarded (and regards itself) as ‘successful’, how do we ensure that student voice and dialogue are regarded as something worthwhile?
- How willing will staff be to deepen the dialogue with students when their established work practices and classroom routines may be challenged?
- How far is the school willing to look seriously at student ideas for change, especially if these have time, financial or other resource implications?

Regardless of these challenges, we are enlivened by these ideas and, like the students, optimistic about Indro’s capacity to think into the future.

Jan Hargreaves  
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**Student Councils and Beyond:**  
Students as Effective Participants in Decision-Making

The first Connect publication (from 2005) supports effective and relevant participation of students in decision-making in primary and secondary schools.

It brings together a collection of practical ideas and articles about how Student Councils can go beyond tokenism ... and make a difference. Case studies, ideas, worksheets!

Order NOW from Connect: $33 or $27.50 for Connect subscribers.  
ISBN: 978-0-9803133-1-4
Form One Lane

Form One Lane is a professional development seminar for teachers who are working with Student Representative Councils in primary and secondary schools. It has been running for eight years, with over 90 seminars offered in that time by Second Strike. For teachers who may be feeling alone and unsure about their role, Form One Lane provides the tools, ideas and support you need to grow a truly successful student council.

Students are also welcome to attend Form One Lane. As well as having a great deal to teach all of us, you will find that having your students involved in professional development means a faster road to success and much less work for you to do.

In 2009, Form One Lane sessions are planned as follows:

**Melbourne (High Street, Kew):**
- Primary: 13 March; 18 March; 14 July; 10 December
- Secondary: 20 March; 25 March; 8 December

**Sydney (various locations):**
- Primary: 1 April; 1 July; 24 September; 1 December
- Secondary: 31 March; 23 September; 30 November

For all the details and registrations, check the Second Strike website: www.second-strike.com or contact: info@second-strike.com or phone: 03 9853 0600

David Mould
Teigan Leonard

The Wedge Workshop

The Wedge Workshop (TWW) is a four-session event for a Student Representative Council (SRC) or similar group, wishing to rigorously plan its future activities and dealing with the situation it is working within. It can also be used to review past activities - in a separate workshop or within the same event.

TWW is designed for secondary students, in particular Student Representative Councils, and similar groups of student leaders, and regional and state organisations and conferences. It complements and supports other training in, for example, group dynamics and formal meeting procedure.

TWW is easily adapted for other groups of students - student action teams, a class planning a year’s program. It can also be adapted for youth groups, primary classes, community organisations, small businesses, sectors of a corporation or government department etc.

TWW can be presented as four separate sessions, over four consecutive or non-consecutive days, or as four continuous sessions, as within a student conference or camp. Along the way there are also roundtable conversations, warm-up and wake-up activities etc.

TWW comes as a package, not just the four sessions.

The event

The participants leave with a document containing the products of the four sessions, as do the supervising or support teachers. The products provide a record of the transition from rough ideas to polished analysis and action. A disk of the document is left with the school.

The event is presented by a team of at least two experienced facilitators, with the help of one or two assistants or facilitators-in-training.

The professional development follow-up

Two professional development sessions are provided for teacher professional development days - focusing on the two key methods which are used, and their many variations. The two methods are called the Workshop Method - more than just brainstorming - and the Directed Conversation - more than just a discussion.

Further professional development follow-up

The facilitators are available for email or phone mentoring for 12 months. Two books, developing further the two key methods, remain with the school.

The fee covers all the above - an indication of the seriousness of this activity.

For more details:

Contact Frank Bremner, 34/7 Grainger Road, Somerton Park SA 5044; phone: 08 8376 6296; or e-mail: fjbremner@hotmail.com
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:
Education Connect (Hunter Institute of Mental Health, Newcastle, NSW) Issue 13; December 2008
Dream Catchrz (City of Greater Dandenong, Vic) Issue 3; 2008
Parent Voice (Parents Victoria, Pheasant Creek, Vic) Vol 35, Issue 7; November/December 2008
Learning Matters: Beyond Badges on Blazers (Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 13 No 2; 2008
YAPRap (Youth Action and Policy Association, Surry Hills, NSW) Vol 19 No 1; January 2009
Yikes (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 6 Edition 5; December 2008
Youth-led learning: Local connections and global citizenship (Wierenga, Wyn, Guevara, Gough, Schultz, Beadle, Ratnam and King; Research Report 31, Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, Vic) December 2008
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tас) Vol 27 No 4; December 2008

International:
Education Revolution (AERA, Roslyn Heights, NY, USA) Vol 20 No 4 (Issue #55); Winter 2008-9

Documents

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

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

Code Description/Pages/Cost
612 Beyond Student Voice to Democratic Community (Michael Fielding; conference presentation: New Developments in Student Voice: Shaping schools for the future; 12 June 2008; London, UK) (27 pp; $2.70)

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Supporting Subscribers (for a year):
Peter Cole Port Melbourne (Vic)

Connect has a website:
http://www.geocities.com/rogermhold/Connect

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!
Connect 175:

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