Connect
supporting student participation

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Student Action Teams (Australia) & Public Achievement (Turkey) Student Community Initiatives Across the World!

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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.

Cover:

Public Achievement profiled in the Turkish media; similarities to Australian Student Action Teams (see pages 3 to 8)

This Issue:

It was one of those strange coincidences and ‘convergences’. I played some Turkish music on my ‘worldwide music’ radio program on PBS-FM (see www.geocities.com/rogermhh) and was contacted by a listener. “By the way,” said Serdar Degirmencioglu (from Istanbul, and a Visiting Fellow at Victoria University), “it appears we have similar interests in education.”

We met and compared notes. We were indeed talking the same language (in different tongues) and supporting the same approaches. Serdar’s article, reprinted in this issue of Connect, about initiatives by young people in Turkish schools who use an approach called Public Achievement was one result.

Look at these program descriptions – developed quite independently in different parts of the world:

Student Action Teams: “A group of students identifies and works (preferably as part of their curriculum) on a real issue of community interest. The students carry out research on the issue and develop solutions – either proposals for action by others or action that they themselves then take.”

Public Achievement: “Young people in a school or community site identify real-life issues significant to them... They form a team around each issue. Working in teams ... and with the help of a coach ... young people design action projects that have a real impact.”

The rationale for such approaches is also similar. We have a lot to learn from each other and hopefully will continue to share stories and examples across the globe.

On the road

I’m also in the middle of presenting a series of 18 Regional Student Conferences for SRC representatives across Victoria, on behalf of the VicSRC – the umbrella body of SRCs in that state.

These Conferences have provided a fascinating insight into the state of the work being done by student groups. These insights have been both encouraging and, at times, depressing. Getting rid of the depression first: so many SRCs are still ‘trapped’ into limited roles, mainly around fund-raising. While opportunities exist here for SRCs and their students to be altruistic, to care for others, to develop skills in organisation and to use this funding to bring about desirable changes in the world (see the ruMaD? work on Student Foundations here), much of this work by SRCs is at the expense of students’ participation in any other areas of school decision-making. A focus on fund-raising can stop an SRC from being fully effective!

On the positive side, however, there were many stories of SRCs that are seriously involved in important decisions in their schools and communities. In one regional centre, for example, educational provision for Year 7-10 is being radically re-shaped, and the SRCs in the town are asking for a stronger role in consulting with students, providing input to the regional plans, and sharing in the final decision-making. Elsewhere, students have been involved in important environmental action (considering setting up a town-wide recycling industry, for example), have run co-curricular activities in schools, are addressing relationship and behavioural issues such as bullying – and are seen as valued and effective partners in their schools.

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #172: August 2008

Deadline for material: end of July 2008
Public Achievement in Turkey and Beyond

Civic Engagement as a Tool for Learning, Empowerment and Social Change

The relatively recent literature on sustainability and social exclusion converges in many ways with recent arguments in various disciplines focused on social capital and civic engagement. Researchers in developmental psychology, child care, education and community development have recently produced converging evidence that casts the role of young people as competent citizens and as assets to their communities and institutions, such as schools and municipalities.

Researchers who use a rights-based framework (ie based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Children) have also highlighted the contributions of young people in various domains of life. Relatively independent literatures on school reform, problem-based learning, experimental learning and learning-by-doing are completely compatible with the aforementioned work that emphasises action, civic engagement and community.

Therefore, there is sufficient evidence in the literature that supports two arguments related to sustainability of public practices:

1. that participation and engagement are good for the young people and the society, and
2. that when students’ roles in schools are altered, schools become easier to govern and various learning outcomes, including inclusion, democracy and sustainability-related learning, are improved.

What, then, is needed is a sustainable model that can help re-establish the ties between schools and daily life, real-life politics and action by young people, and recast the role of young people as competent citizens. Public Achievement (PA) is such a model of sustainable civic engagement. This is an ongoing initiative that has been very successful in all of the schools it has been implemented in Turkey. It has also been very effective in USA, Northern Ireland, Palestine and more recently in Eastern and Central Europe, and the Balkans.

Civic engagement as a tool for learning and empowerment

A sustainable model of civic engagement is particularly important in Turkey where the majority of the population is under 25. There are virtually no opportunities for young people for civic engagement and participation. Even university students are not very active. Many do not know how to get started, and some avoid participation, fearing political repercussions and negative responses from their families. However, democracy is based on the principle of people engaging in public actions to rule themselves. Recent European Union policies are based on active citizenship and that has to start early. As Turkey becomes more democratic and prepares to enter the European Union, young people’s civic engagement becomes more crucial and even critical.

Many parallels can be drawn between Turkey and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The basic commonality, however, is that the young population is very large and has difficulty making a difference for themselves, for their communities, and for the society in general. PA offers a very useful tool for changing the role of young people in MENA countries.

The PA process

PA is a civic engagement initiative for young people. It gives young people a framework to learn citizenship skills by doing work of real importance in their own communities. PA is simple to understand and implement. The main idea behind PA is that young people have the potential to address society’s problems and build a stronger community for everyone. PA takes place where young people congregate and, in modern societies, that public space is often the school. PA provides students with a flexible tool to build community and democracy in their own schools.
With PA, students discover principles of democracy and recognize why pluralism is central to democracy. They discover that rules are for the public and are made by the public. Schools, they discover, benefit from students’ work and that is why school governance, rather than what the teacher says, is very important. They learn that democracy is not just voting but real public work by ordinary people. PA builds community, pluralism, belief in rule of law, and trust in common people as producers of democracy. PA is particularly needed now as schools in Turkey seek ways to increase democracy in schools.

Unlike other initiatives, PA is simple to initiate. Young people (6 to 25 years) in a school or community site identify real-life issues significant to them. Next, they form a team around each issue. Working in teams each week and with the help of a coach (a college student or a teacher), young people design action projects that have a real impact. The coach facilitates group work and helps the young people discover the public skills they need to implement their project. Teams comply with three principles:

1. The issue the team picks has to serve common good;
2. Teams’ actions to resolve their issue are non-violent, and
3. Teams’ actions are legal or lawful.

At its core, PA is engaging in real public issues. With the help of a coach, young people identify the public actors they should influence and engage in action projects to influence these actors to effect change. From the start to finish, all work is done by team members and every step they take in public life is considered a success; hence the name Public Achievement. Each team periodically presents its work to other students and asks for opinions. This is to discover accountability to the public when real public actions are undertaken. During this process, young people discover that democracy is real work and they can create democratic processes on their own. Coaches make sure that they are not didactic and treat the team as fellow citizens. Coaches make sure that they are not didactic and treat the team as fellow citizens. Coaches make sure that they are not didactic and treat the team as fellow citizens.

It is often the case that PA starts with an educator inviting PA to a school. Recently, for instance, a teacher heard about PA on the radio and called for more information. She believed that the model was what her school needed and introduced the idea at her school. There were coaches, all university students looking for a school, and in about two weeks PA started at her school. In general, however, the process takes a little longer. Meetings are held with the administration, guidance counselors and teachers. If there is no opposition to PA, students in a classroom are told about PA and that they can make a difference in their own lives, in or outside of the school, using PA. They are told that participation is completely voluntary. If the students like the idea and want to do PA, a real public issue convention is held. Students identify issues and then they vote to choose the one they want to solve. Teams of 6-10 students form around each issue. The team is paired with a coach and they start working in about a week. Most teams finish their work by the end of the term.

**Who acts and who benefits?**

The main beneficiaries of PA are primary and high school students. The second beneficiary group is college students, who assume the role of coach. By facilitating group work and helping team members discover the public principles and skills, they learn how to work with young people and find creative ways to motivate civic engagement. There is often no single answer to the local problem the team has picked and the coach often does not know how the problem should be solved. Coaches meet every week and discuss each team’s work. This Coach Meeting allows them to collectively reflect on the PA activities in the school and provide genuine learning of daily politics and democracy.

The third actor and beneficiary group is teachers. In PA, teachers may also assume the role of coach. Working with students in a non-didactic fashion helps teachers discover that a) students can learn without a curriculum, b) students’ motivation is key to learning and fostering intrinsic motivation is key to teaching, c) ‘bad students’ can be good students when they are working on their self-chosen topics, d) working with students in a challenging fashion invigorates teachers. Teachers often admit that they themselves learned from their team and discovered new public skills. They also attend Coach Meetings. They benefit from interacting with college students and find genuine learning opportunities.

All three actor groups form a civic engagement community and begin to discover that democracy lies in their joint non-violent, legal actions to serve common good. The collective action and the inherent collaboration open doors to informal learning opportunities that schools or other public institutions are unable to provide.

**PA versus civic education**

It is important to distinguish PA from other models. PA is not a civic education model where one person teaches a large number of pupils. As can be seen from Table 1, common civic education models frame democracy mainly as a representation issue and an intermittent activity on the part of the regular citizen. That is, other people (ie representatives) do democracy for the citizens. In contrast, PA emphasizes active participation, public work, and collective action. In this sense, PA is an action learning framework that can be used by multiple actors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Civic Education Models</th>
<th>PA Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy is representative government, the rule of law</td>
<td>Democracy is work of the people; it is creating public process and results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship involves voting and choosing</td>
<td>Citizenship involves public work, creating and producing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic learning happens in programs that teach government and advocacy</td>
<td>Civic learning takes place in initiatives that teach the craft of public work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy, consistent use of a ‘rights’ discourse; at best volunteering and service work</td>
<td>Public work for the benefit of the self and others; creating a ‘commonwealth’ for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership is positional and involves mobilising others</td>
<td>Leadership by all; it is never permanent; involves contact, coaching and co-creating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability is achieved through government agencies and non-governmental bodies</td>
<td>Accountability can only be achieved by the involvement of people through public process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people need to first learn theory and structure before they act</td>
<td>Young people can generate theory and structure through public action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are not real citizens if they are legally underage</td>
<td>Young people are citizens at all ages and can be involved in public life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people do not have the skills, the patience, and the passion for politics</td>
<td>Young people have their own issues and motivation – adults coach them as they take action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Differences between Public Achievement and common civic education models.
It is also important to note that PA is a versatile model and does not have to be carried out in schools. Schools are regular sites of PA work because in most places around the world, young people do not have any other public space to work from. If, however, there are other public spaces for them to congregate and use freely (eg a community centre or a youth centre), PA work can be carried out in these settings as well. In principle, any person can serve as a coach and anyone can be a team member.

In Table 2, a coaching matrix is provided to outline a number of possibilities. The shaded boxes indicate most common forms of PA work. Various people can serve as a coach (eg professor, a college student, a community member) depending on the site. If the site is a university, PA work will involve a professor as a coach, an older student as a coach, and students as a team. In a community setting, a community-based organisation can provide coaches and local young people can be team members. This is particularly useful in disadvantaged communities where the young adults who have ‘made it’ despite the difficult circumstances would like to reach young people in the community and work with them to reduce social exclusion and improve their collective life.

Table 2. Coaching matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>School (primary or secondary)</th>
<th>Community Centre</th>
<th>Another Community Site (eg firehouse, museum)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Professor coaches students</td>
<td>Professor coaches students</td>
<td>Professor coaches young people</td>
<td>Professor coaches professionals or young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University student</td>
<td>Senior student coaches junior students</td>
<td>University student coaches students</td>
<td>University student coaches young people</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Teacher coaches students</td>
<td>Teacher coaches young people</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Parent coaches students</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school student</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>High school student coaches primary school students</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumnus</td>
<td>Alumnus coaches students in his/her alma mater</td>
<td>Alumnus coaches students in his/her school</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community association member</td>
<td>Community association member coaches students</td>
<td>Community association member coaches students</td>
<td>Community association member coaches young people</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult community member (eg a retired individual)</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches students</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches students</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches young people</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional community member (eg a firefighter, museum worker)</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches students</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches students</td>
<td>Adult community member coaches young people</td>
<td>A professional coaches young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These 5th Grade girls are from a PA team. They are busy creating posters. Also shown here is a magazine they prepared about their concern and circulated within the school. The photo on page 3 shows them presenting their work to classmates mid-way through the term.
Coordination and support for PA work

PA in Turkey is coordinated by Serdar M. Degirmenciglu, a professor of psychology. Each city or area with multiple PA sites has a PA coordinator. More importantly, each school has a PA coordinator. The school coordinator makes sure that coaches and teams are aware of other teams in the school and that PA work in the school has a firm communal grounding and adheres to principles such as public accountability. Coaches often come from a given university and often a professor coordinates PA work at the university.

All PA schools and all coaches are linked with each other in an e-mail group and meet each other in general meetings. Student clubs, which needed a tool to make a difference, have provided coaches to different schools. Currently, a country-wide youth organisation is considering the same option. Some members of the Ankara Chamber of Architects have been trained as coaches. Efforts are underway to collaborate with local governments to initiate PA at community centres.

Examples of PA from Moldova and Romania

There are many parallels between countries in the Balkans or Eastern Europe and countries in the MENA region. The basic commonality, however, is that the young population is very large and yet has tremendous difficulty making a difference for themselves, for their communities, and for the society in general. PA is very new in this region but has already proved to be a very useful tool for changing the role of young people.

An example from a town in Moldova illustrates a child-driven process where students acquired a whole range of invaluable skills that one seldom gets in schools. The team knew that they were doing something important and was determined to succeed. Two coaches, both energetic teachers, were helping them develop skills and asking them probing questions, but the rest was up to the students. ¹

Fourteen 4th and 5th graders came together to solve a health problem: “A friend got sick one evening and needed some medicine, but all the pharmacies were closed…” This created the ‘Sanatatea’ (meaning health) PA Team. After going through the steps of creating a working group, with name, logo, rules, consequences etc, they created a strategy. The town has 50,000 inhabitants and several pharmacies, but not one is open past 5 pm. Students interviewed people in the community. They had carefully filled out forms with questions that they had chosen as a group. “Have you ever needed to buy medicine in the evening? What did you do? What do you think about this problem?” Most replied that either they had been in such a situation or knew someone who had. In most cases they asked neighbors for medicine. Everyone agreed that pharmacies should be open later. They decided that the next step was to go to the pharmacies and find out why they closed early, how many pharmacies there were and whether they were private or state-owned. They later planned to go to the mayor, but only after they had collected enough data and were prepared for such an important meeting.

Another example from a town in Romania illustrates how marginalised young people can take up their own problems and empower themselves. Their issue is finding a place for themselves: a warm, safe and friendly learning environment. They are taking an active role in this endeavor and there is still a long way to go, but they are not waiting for someone else to help – they are helping themselves.

¹ The second group, ‘RoCalc’, consists of 16 members ranging in age from 7-15 years old. They are all Roma and are not part of the wider school system but attend classes in a back room of another school. That school wants them gone and had recently built a wall that cut them off from access to the bathrooms. Their biggest problem was finding a place to continue their schooling. They chose the name ‘RoCalc’ – meaning ‘Roma Calculators or Roma Computers’ – since they have 10 computers and need to set up the computer lab in a new place. This is part of their larger goal to create a new learning environment.
Examples of PA from Turkey

PA works very well in various settings but often makes a bigger difference where resources are very limited or not well-used, and the numbers are staggering. Two examples from a very crowded school in Istanbul might illustrate the point. The school has about 1500 students, about 40 teachers and a guidance counselor. Every year more students enrol and the school does not have sufficient classrooms to keep up with the enrolment. This school is located in the inner city, in the midst of a rough neighborhood. Most students are from families who migrated to Istanbul recently or are from Roma families, and long-time residents of the area.

The school was chosen as a pilot school by the Ministry of Education for a World Bank Grant Program. The school received computers for student use but students never had much access to computers. The year PA started in the school, money was collected from students for a computer lab but the computer lab was never open to students. A team of 5th graders identified this as their main issue and surveyed the opinions of other students. They had difficulty keeping together and focused during the process, but managed to obtain access to the lab for students.

Another team of eight 5th graders focused on the issue of lack of green spaces in the schoolyard – a common issue across schools in Turkey. Their teacher did not have any confidence in these shy and silent girls, but their coach, a sociology student from the university across the street, did. The team clarified their goal, produced a power map – a tool which shows who they needed to influence to reach their goal – and identified a plan of action. The plan involved influencing the municipality for help. The students did research to find out that the Parks and Gardens Department is the right address and paid a visit to the department with a teacher. The department had never received such a visit and was quickly convinced. In two weeks’ time, the schoolyard had some green spaces. The ‘shy and silent’ girls were very proud with their public achievement.

Examples of PA from Palestine

PA was received very well in Palestine, particularly in places where young people had very little control over their lives. The coaches were mostly university students. The PA experience helped young people to reflect about social and political conditions. They were invited to identify imbalances in the power structures, injustices as they see it in their own eyes. These were not taken up as theoretical discussions; rather the discussions were focused on action and each team took practical steps to challenge those conditions. The outcomes in the examples below are all directly related to the daily needs of the young people and to the community. In most cases, the young people not only changed their role in the community but also obtained support from various actors in the community.

In Gaza, a group of 12 young people in a housing development area focused on the issue of lack of green space for a large number of residents. One piece of land was allocated by the development project landlord who later changed his mind and was in a dispute with the residents. Years passed by and the dispute was not resolved. The PA team took up this challenge and developed a plan to discuss with all those involved in the process, including the city council. They negotiated with the landlord and managed to win his side. They mobilised resources from the local community to get the needed materials, plants, tools, and mobilised the residents of the project to participate in planting new trees. It was a big success for them and the community. They also received big support from the landlord who donated t-shirts and caps for the whole team.

A team from a poor, neglected neighborhood in Bethlehem focused on a local issue. One of the community members turned a spare space in a building into a community centre but the centre remained poorly resourced. Young people from that neighbourhood identified their need: They wanted a small community library as a study environment. They did not have resources and neither did the local community. They visited officials and local NGOs who promised to give them books for the library but would not fund furnishing and book shelves. The group then decided to collect recycled wood from their neighborhood and nearby communities. One of the participants’ uncle was a carpenter, who offered his time and skills for free to help young people build their library. At the end of the PA cycle, they had bookshelves, with books and a library from re-cycled materials.

In a village in the West Bank, the young people realised that their village has grown both in terms of population and area. The village also has frequent visitors from outside the village. But the streets of the village were not named. They took the initiative, organising a plan to name the street villages in consultation with residents and the local council. Their initiative was widely supported and they managed to put signs up for street names.

In Gaza a team of young people managed to coordinate among a number of schools to draft a statement against violence in the schools and obtained the support of the teachers, principals and students. The statement was focused on preventing use of any weapons (knives etc) in the schools and turning schools into violence-free settings.
Summary

In this article, it is argued that sustainable development and a sustainable future are only possible if existing educational policies are re-considered and the role of students at all levels of education – particularly in higher education – is recast. This requires abandoning models of education that require removal of real-life and community issues from the school context. Schools should move away from an exclusive emphasis on technical and passive learning. The fact is that technical mastery does not suffice for development and has very little to do with sustainability, participatory practices, public skills and action, and specifically with empowerment and democracy.

This shift involves recasting the role of students as active learners and problem-solvers in their schools and communities. Otherwise, public institutions and practices become unsustainable even in developed countries where resources are less of an issue.

The emphasis on the service market in service-focused economies and the accompanying model based on service delivery by professionals may work in developed countries but often fails in developing countries simply on the basis of the number of trained professionals. The public sector can employ few professionals and these professionals cannot meet the overwhelming demand.

This point is obvious when the number of trained adult professionals in developing countries is considered: Simply put, there are not sufficient numbers of trained professionals (teachers, psychologists, social workers, physicians, and so on) and sufficient numbers will probably never exist. That means that services that can only be delivered by these professionals cannot reach the public. Professional service delivery models are not models that developing countries can afford.

On the other hand, service models often produce a distance between providers and the citizens, and often quickly reduce unpaid citizen contributions. Public practices that used to be sustained by the citizens often become services that can only be sustained by the efforts of the state and the government. This is particularly obvious in the school context, where learning has become ‘education’ and a service to be provided or purchased. Adults have abandoned their roles in young people’s lives as educators, supporters and advisors, and young people have become passive subjects of a school, rather than young citizens with whom adults spend time. Only adults paid to work with the young devote time to the young. This model of schooling has stalled all around the world and it is now time to accept the fact that schools cannot be sustainable without student participation and that action on the part of young people is integral to learning. Recent European Union policies acknowledge this fact and encourage governments and civil society to consider the concept of active citizenship as one that involves the youngest.

Young people need:

- multiple opportunities to engage in performatory activities with adults and other youth encouragement to be active rather than passive, to work together and make decisions, and to relate to each other and adults in new ways.
- support to take on a variety of roles and responsibilities. Young people today have the skills or the potential to become leaders, directors, board members, funders, researchers, evaluators, planners, etc if adults to treat them as competent individuals.

Footnotes

1 The examples in this section are taken from a report prepared by the Education Society for Malopolska.

2 The examples in this section are narrated by the PA Coordinator in Palestine (personal correspondence).

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The ruMAD? (Are You Making A Difference?) Framework enables young people to lead change in their community by becoming active citizens. It is about making a difference to student learning, to schools, and to communities. Here are some stories from schools that have used this framework.

**Children’s Community Garden at Myuna Farm**

Doveton North Primary School is a primary school in the city of Casey, 30 kilometres south east of Melbourne’s central business district in Victoria. Doveton-Eumemmerring is a neighbourhood renewal site, with 13% of residents in public housing. It is a common destination for new migrants including many recent refugees from the Horn of Africa. Some of these families experience significant challenges including little experience with schools, suspicion towards public institutions and little opportunity for parents to engage in community activities. Some students have incidences of psychological trauma stemming from violent experiences in war zones.

The Centre for Adolescent Health suggested that Doveton North Primary School look at the ruMAD? curriculum as a vehicle for students to engage the community and take ownership of the challenges facing their local area. A Doveton North PS teacher notes that whilst the school had a strong history of community engagement, they struggled to maintain long-term relationships.

In 2007 the school was focusing on sustainability and healthy eating, and so the Grade 3 and 4 class decided to build on this pre-existing relationship at the farm. With assistance from their teacher, they contacted the farm manager and asked if they could put forward an idea. After observing the farm, they asked for a garden plot which they could have as their own. The Grade 3 and 4 students spent time each week over the next months down at the farm, watching people work in the Asian community garden and learning the details of recycling, composting and preparing the soil for their own plot. They planted seeds and seedlings and returned each week to watch the plants grow.

In 2008, students from Grade 5 and 6 had spent time at the farm, learning the details of recycling. The farm manager was excited at the prospect of students informing the community of ideas about recycling, energy saving and sustainability. He supported the ruMAD? philosophy of students themselves generating the ideas and sharing them with the community. Eventually they came up with an idea to design their own large recycling bin, an idea that was supported by the City of Casey.

“A few blocks down the road from the school lies Myuna Farm, a public community farm in the south-east area of Melbourne. It is an excellent example of farming life which includes a small block of land with several community garden plots. The farm had a relationship with the school in the past, and in previous years students from Grade 5 and 6 had spent time at the farm, learning the details of recycling. The farm manager was excited at the prospect of students informing the community of ideas about recycling, energy saving and sustainability. He supported the ruMAD? philosophy of students themselves generating the ideas and sharing them with the community. Eventually they came up with an idea to design their own large recycling bin, an idea that was supported by the City of Casey.”

Amy Wahid, Teacher, Doveton North PS

“You have a really great idea, you get as many people involved, you have a really great memory and that’s it. For the cluster, what we recognised fairly early on is that we need to be better connected with our community as a group of schools. The origin of that is the Principles of Learning and Teaching Principle six is about connecting with the community.”

Michael Polack, Cluster Educator, Doveton/Eumemmerring

Many teachers also noted a philosophy of learning consistent with the ruMAD? Framework.

“Our approach, when talking about literacy, numeracy whatever, is to give a purpose for learning. So we’re always trying to create and develop programs that will engage kids in doing more than just the surface learning, to really engage in the activity. [Gary] has taught me to do more than just look through the book or surf the net, but to really get out there. Once you’ve got this knowledge: how can we use it, how can we really empower these kids to learn?”

Amy Wahid, Teacher, Doveton North PS

In 2007 the school was focusing on sustainability and healthy eating, and so the Grade 3 and 4 class decided to build on this existing relationship at the farm. With assistance from their teacher, they contacted the farm manager and asked if they could put forward an idea. After observing the farm, they asked for a garden plot which they could have as their own. The Grade 3 and 4 students spent time each week over the next months down at the farm, watching people work in the Asian community garden and learning the details of recycling, composting and preparing the soil for their own plot. They planted seeds and seedlings and returned each week to watch the plants grow.
In October 2007, and the change in their community, but within a context of supportive relationships and organisations.

“There's no question that, in respect to the other schools, ruMAD? was crucial in getting them to think differently about some aspects of pedagogy. Here it was not to get them to think differently, but it resonated so strongly with them that it was an incentive to take the initiative.”
Michael Polack, Cluster Educator, Doveton/ Eumemmerring

Crtl, Alt, Delete:
It’s time for youth to push the switch

Colac Otway Shire Youth Council, Victoria

Colac-Otway Shire is located in the southwest of Victoria, about 160 kilometres from Melbourne. Colac is ranked among the 18 most disadvantaged Victorian postcodes by the recent study “Dropping off the Edge” (2007). The report captures a broad range of indicators of disadvantage. Forty percent of Colac's residents live in Neighbourhood Renewal (NR) areas. Formal education is low, with seventy-four percent of females having no qualifications beyond Year 10, and the region having low levels of formal TAFE delivery. A very high proportion of NR residents are in receipt of some form of income support or other government benefit. The number of single parent households in Colac NR areas is above the state average. Colac-Otway Shire has the second highest rate of Child Protection Orders made per 1000 head of population in the South West Region. Data collated by Crime Prevention Victoria indicates there was a significant rise in thefts and drug offences from 2001/02 to 2002/03. The Colac-Otway population is increasing at 1% per annum but growth is projected to be mainly in the 55 years and older age categories.

Colac-Otway Shire also has a Youth Council, a group of 14 young people aged 13-17 and drawn from representatives from each of the five local schools (three public and one Catholic). Their youth mentor explains that the Council has wanted young people to be more actively involved in the community for some time:

“Last year, the Youth Council wanted to do something similar to this, and without having any project methodology the event and the time got away from us and ultimately the group didn’t do a major project. So I looked around for a project methodology for young people that would actually give them the tools to deliver on their dream.”
Irene Pagram, Colac Otway Shire Councillor

The Children’s Community Garden at Myuna Farm is a learning environment that is safe and secure. It opens the minds of children to nature by combining hands-on and fun activities that help to make them more aware of their environment.”
Amy Wahid, Teacher, Doveton North PS

The project has received widespread recognition as an example of students learning about horticulture and sustainability through practice. It has also acted as a community hub for many parents of students. This has had great impact on many of the new arrival families, providing a non-threatening point of contact with the school, a community organisation and other parents. The students themselves are very proud to show what they have achieved. Neighbourhood Renewal has recognised the benefit for the community of the project and provided funding for it to continue. Amy explains her motives for connecting with the farm:

“I wanted to use the resources that I knew were down there [at Myuna farm], get the expertise that I knew was down there, work with those people, get the kids working with those people and then transfer their knowledge and skill back to the school to create our own garden. Once that’s established it wouldn’t matter if I’m here next year or not, it would be something that would be sustainable. But that’s only one branch of the project.”
Amy Wahid, Teacher, Doveton North PS

The school wants to develop this into an ongoing relationship that involves students continuing to visit the farm but also includes starting a garden plot within the school grounds. As the current Grades 3 and 4 move into secondary school, Doveton North wants to maintain a connection for the secondary years to mentor new primary school students in maintaining the garden. In this sense the garden becomes symbolic of a commitment to nurturing a supportive environment within the cluster for young people. The students presented their experiences to other young people at the Education Foundation Youth Ambassadors Conference in October 2007, and the Myuna Garden project is frequently cited as an example of young students leading change in their community, but within a
She found the ruMAD? Program and asked National Facilitator Josh Levy to work with the students in March. The students explained that his initial support was crucial:

“Josh gave us a starting point, taught us how to formulate ideas. We made posters and wrote on them what was most important to us, things that needed to be changed in the community and then put them together... He shared with us some stories that were pretty inspirational and made us think: ‘if someone else can do it, why can’t we?’” Youth Councillor, Colac Otway Shire Youth Council

The Youth Councillors then embarked on their annual overnight trek following the Old Beechy Rail Trail. The trek, coinciding with national youth week, is 40 kilometres long and gave them an opportunity to workshop their project ideas.

“It breaks down the barriers that young people have when they start on the council. They are all from different schools, on day one you can see which kids have come from which schools, because they stand, walk and talk together. At the end of the second day it is remarkable that all of that is just gone. It doesn’t happen formally, it happens informally.” Kerri Bauer, LCP Facilitator, South West Local Learning and Employment Network

The students felt frustrated at negative portrayals of young people in the local media, citing articles associating local youth with binge drinking, drugs and vandalism. Although frustrated at stereotypes, the Youth Councillors did acknowledge that many young people in the community engage in destructive behaviour. In the words of their mentor: “It was decided that kids didn’t have any idea what there was to do here that was healthy and fun and a better choice for their leisure time and their leisure dollar.” Working through the ruMAD? framework they articulated their collective values as Trust, Loyalty and Honesty and developed their project goal to ‘change community’s perception of young people’. The students came up with the title “Ctrl-Alt-Delete: It’s Time for Youth to Push the Switch.”

The title is a play on words with reference to the Windows computer shortcut. It stands for controlling community issues, altering youth perceptions, and deleting negative images. “Pushing the switch is about supporting young people to make healthy, fun life choices; switching away from inappropriate activities.”

The Councillors split into four working groups to tackle the project: participants, venue, promotion and fundraising and marketing. The venue team secured Blue Water Fitness centre, the local sports stadium. The participants’ team spoke at the local Principals Network meeting ensuring the schools understood the objectives of the project. All principals promise to let their Grades 5 and 6 attend. Many schools rescheduled class timetables to allow students to attend the afternoon. This secured about 600 students to attend. The promotions and marketing team enlisted the support of local sponsors, including Southwest Local Learning Employment Network (LLEN), Colac Otway Jumping Castles and even McDonalds. The specifically targeted the media and gained support from 106.3 Mix FM, Otway FM and the Colac Herald. On the theme of negative youth behaviour, they worked closely with the Colac Otway Police Youth Liaison Team (COPYLT).

While the schools were supportive, the local business community had to be convinced. The students acknowledged that getting the exhibitors to invest time and energy into the event was the hardest part of the project:

“It took a while for them [the business community] to warm up to our idea. They were surprised and a bit sceptical that young people could do this. Initially they didn’t understand what was in it for them. The Youth Councillors wrote a letter of invitation detailing the benefits of participating: increased exposure and increased membership of their clubs”. Youth Councillor, Colac Otway Shire Youth Council

They took no convincing after the event.

“They [the business community] were ecstatic; they were really surprised at how well it turned out, and they couldn’t be happier with the amount of kids that turned out to have a look at everything and have a go. They were also very impressed at the kids’ behaviour.”

The youth expo was an outstanding success. Over 800 people attended with over 60 interactive displays including sports, leisure, recreation, drama, dancing, arts and crafts, hobbies and youth support agencies. The local radio station, Otway FM, broadcast live to air from the youth expo on the day. The Youth Council was inundated with letters of support and appreciation from schools, community members and participating organisations. The students were clear about what made the project and event work for them. Some kind of project template that “breaks it down into achievable chunks” and provides the requisite skills for project management was crucial. Equally important was having a mentor as a source of inspiration and guidance.

“It was good to have Josh [ruMAD? facilitator] as someone to motivate you. It’s so important to have people that believe in you. There’s nothing worse than sitting there and thinking everyone thinks you’re going to fail. Kerri from South West LLEN was such a motivator - she believed in us and she was always telling us what a great job we were doing. It really helped and something that you overlook a lot. It makes you feel a whole lot better about what you’re doing.”

They were also clear about the value of their experience for learning and personal development. This ranged from discovering new opportunities within the community itself to building self-confidence, organisational, interpersonal and communication skills. The Youth Councillors particularly noted the favourable response from elders in the community, and felt a sense of success at young people being seen in a positive light. However most important to them was the sense of empowerment through successful civic engagement:

“I’m more outspoken and I’m not scared to have my say. I think I’ve got that from being part of this group. Before I was in the Council I didn’t know about this stuff, but now I know we can make a difference... I learnt that it’s just as satisfying to change something in your own backyard as it is to change something in the world... As a young person doing this, I’ve realised I can have a lot of input into my community. I never thought I had that much power to be able to do these things.”
Rise Against Racism
Eumemmerring College
[Endeavour Hills Campus]

At Eumemmerring College, ruMAD? was introduced as a project framework for the student leadership team. The Education Foundation facilitator worked through the initial stages of ruMAD? in which students identified poverty, racism and human rights as areas of concern that they wanted to do something about.

“Our school is really multicultural and there’s a lot of different nationalities… a lot of fights are started within our school because of racism… we thought if we could get that controlled in the school we might be able to see if there’s a problem with it in the community and make a difference there too.” Student, Eumemmerring College

The students developed the idea of constructing a large amphitheatre in the school. The process itself would "incorporate as much of the community as we could in building it. So we asked if there were any parents who had skills to offer". The students also set up a competition to design a unity flag representing all the cultures present in the school. The flag will hang alongside the Australian and Indigenous flags in the amphitheatre.

The amphitheatre is due to be finished by the end of 2008. One parent with a background in construction has assisted with project management, helping the students draw up plans. A small group then concentrated on construction activities while most of the group focused on marketing, fundraising and promotion. Two students were interviewed about the project by local radio station Triple R.

Construction of the amphitheatre has been linked to the school’s Hands On Learning program, a tradesperson mentorship program aimed at students drawn to manual work.

“It has become a two year project and a lot bigger than we originally thought. This year was more of a planning year and getting things organised, but next year will be more getting out there.”

The team have had some setbacks, most recently when there was a mix up with construction quotes leaving them $14,000 short. Nevertheless the students are making plans to raise the funds necessary and already planning the official opening of the amphitheatre.

“We wanted to build it so we could have concerts and drama performances at our school. It has three steps and a really big area that we could perform on. When it’s finally finished we’re going to have a concert, and we’re going to incorporate a lot of the performances in with the theme of racism.”

The Eumemmerring students are clear about what they have learned. In addition to the amphitheatre project, the group also planned and implemented the Education Foundation 2007 Youth Ambassador Conference. The students all cite organisation skills as a huge practical outcome of the projects. After sourcing construction quotes, making hundreds of calls for the conference, presenting a business proposal to Casey Council and being interviewed on radio, communication skills followed closely.

“Definitely communication; doing the radio interview was huge for us. We’ve had to make several calls to businesses to get quotes… you have to sound professional and know what you’re talking about… At the start we were nervous but now we’re not. Same with public speaking; we were nervous when we spoke at the website launch but by the time of the Youth Ambassadors Conference we were confident.”

Although none of the project work formed part of their formal assessment, the students are adamant that they’ve been able to apply what they learnt to their school work. When asked to bring in work they were proud of, some students brought in work for their ruMAD? projects. The students often felt that what they were doing was seen as extra curricula activity and not considered core-learning experiences of school. Their teacher however tells a slightly different story:

“I do have a lot of teachers coming up to me and saying: ‘Wow! What the student leaders are doing is wonderful.’ The kids don’t see that side of it yet, but I know there are teachers who are in awe of what these guys have managed to achieve. They give me the credit and I say I didn’t do anything. I was just facilitating and the kids we’re doing it all… Their values are being reinforced through every activity and I think they’ll be better people because of it. After being involved with the Youth Ambassadors Conference, I don’t think any of those students are the same. Whether they realise it or not, they’ve been affected in a very positive way.” Marina Prassos, Student Leadership Facilitator – Eumemmerring College
Make Poverty History
Exeter High School

Last week [end of term 1, May 2007] finished in the biggest possible way for Exeter High with two very powerful events. We had a Make A Difference Day (MAD Day) Assembly and our Make A Difference Day on Friday. Throughout the past month students have been preparing for our MAD Day in grade time and SOSE classes. Each grade had a Make A Difference theme to explore: Grade 10 - Make Poverty History; Grade 9 – Democracy; Grade 8 – Justice and Grade 7 – Equality.

The grades produced two large banners about their themes and each student wrote a pledge on a hand-shaped cardboard cutout attached to a small stake. Students also wrote their thoughts about poverty on an individual petition and then collected signatures from family and friends in support of their thoughts. Over 6000 signatures were collected!

At our MAD Assembly we watched two DVDs, one featuring Bono from U2 outlining what he and other celebrities are doing to fight poverty and disease in Africa, the other produced by students in SOSE class. Our school was addressed by Michelle Ryan from City Mission who talked about the work of this organisation assisting people in our own community of Launceston. Ros Lewis spoke about the work of Oxfam in Africa and we also heard from Sudanese woman, Hellen Obwana. Hellen spoke about having to flee her home with her parents and fifteen brothers and sisters when war broke out in Sudan, about walking all through the night every night for over a month in order to get to safety in a refugee camp and about her journey to Australia. Highlights of our assembly also included a drama piece and a very entertaining panel discussion featuring our Chaplain Ben McKinnon and SLC members.

The weather was fairly ordinary for our MAD Day but didn’t dampen our enthusiasm one little bit. Just after 12 noon we assembled on our oval to hear from Senator Guy Barnett. Before commencing our walk, students in each grade placed the hand with their individual pledge written on it into the ground symbolising the collective voice of our school. When this process was completed, our ‘hands’ spelled out ‘Make Poverty History’ on the bank of our oval.

Afterwards students enjoyed a sausage sizzle, games and music on our oval. The afternoon concluded with the awarding of prizes for the best crazy hats and best banners, and a whole school address by Member of the House of Representatives, Dick Adams.

I was so proud of our students and staff in the lead up to our MAD Day and on the MAD Day itself. Collectively and as individuals we did make a difference! However, as our Chaplain Ben said: ‘Making a difference isn’t about one day; it’s a life-long journey where people wake up every day and care for those with the least in the world.”

Ben says of the MAD events: “They have made people much more open and relaxed with each other. They have opened up conversations about far more than ‘just’ justice issues.”

Christine Males, Principal, Exeter High School

Addendum

The ramifications from the Exeter MAD Day turned out to be bigger than anyone anticipated. Students from other schools in the area heard about the day and wanted to be involved in the Make Poverty History campaign.

In July, the Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning and Exeter High jointly ran a forum in Launceston, attended by 37 students from eight schools. From this the students formed a leadership group which decided to run a concert in Launceston to raise awareness of global poverty and call on local politicians to be involved.

Students in Burnie heard about the concert - to be called ENOUGH07 - and decided to do their own!

So, on Friday October 26 the Launceston version of ENOUGH07 was held followed on Saturday 27 by the Burnie concert. Both concerts featured local and interstate bands and “action hot spots”. The Launceston concert also featured a “Thank God You’re Here” skit with local politicians getting a taste of the unequal distribution of resources in the world.


Helen Hortle, ruMAD? Coordinator, Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning
Make sure you’re part of this important and exciting event:

- to have your say in planning the VicSRC’s future;
- to work with and learn from over 100 other SRC representatives from around Victoria.

In 2007, the VicSRC Congress decided on action on some of the important issues facing secondary students. It elected the first VicSRC Executive to carry out this action.

The Executive has spent 15 months forming a vision for the VicSRC, building links with the Department of Education and other groups, gathering and feeding back student opinions and ideas, and acting on the resolutions passed at Congress.

Now it’s time for the Executive to report back to students, and for students to decide on the action for the year ahead.

**Is the VicSRC doing what you think it should be doing?**

**What should be our focus for 2008-2009?**

**Will you be part of that action?**

This year’s Congress provides two days to learn what other SRCs are doing, and to explore issues in depth and with detail. It will be two days of action planning (and fun too!) that will set the path forward for the VicSRC. Secondary student representatives deciding on action for their own organisation; secondary students doing democracy!

Watch out for more details and registration forms in Victorian schools in the near future. Contact the VicSRC on 03 9267 3744 or (at cost of a local call) 1300 727 176 or by email at vicsrc@yacvic.org.au or check the VicSRC Website:

**www.yacvic.org.au/vicsrc**

Connecting issues from SRCs through Regional Conferences to State Congress:

- **School-based ideas and action by SRCs & students**
- **Discussion at Regional Conferences and SRC Clusters**
- **Further research by SRCs, schools and clusters**

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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).
All Secondary Colleges in Victoria are invited to send two student representatives to the:

3rd Annual

Friday & Saturday
15th-16th August, 2008
@ Oasis Camp, Mt Evelyn

Prices per student:
$60 VicSRC Members; $80 Non-Members
(covers accommodation, all meals, registration, materials)

Places limited - reserve yours now!

Full supervision provided

VicSRC Annual Congress:
students discuss, debate, decide!

Propose action!

Form action plans!

Lead workshops!

Action by individual SRCs

Action by SRC Clusters

Elect Executive!

Action by the VicSRC Executive
So, you’ve decided that the best way to make decisions is to have a formal meeting.

If everyone at the meeting is going to understand what is going on and how to have their say, you need clear meeting procedures. These are to make the meeting easier and more effective.

There is no one correct procedure. If the procedure you’re using is not working, change it and improve it. But here are some points that are often found to work well.

Preparing for a Meeting

You need to tell people the meeting is on. Send out notices or invitations to everyone who should be there, in plenty of time. Say where it is, when it is, why it’s on and how long it will go for. If it is an open meeting, notices should be put up publicly.

You need an agenda – a list of what is going to be talked about. This can be put together and sent out before the meeting (but you all need to know who is putting it together) or it can be worked out (say, on the board) at the start of the meeting. The meeting can change the order and content of the agenda.

Agendas usually have some or all of these headings:

- **attendance** (who’s there)
- **apologies** (who said they couldn’t be there)
- **minutes of the previous meetings** (changes to the last minutes, acceptance of them as accurate, extra work to be decided on issues in them)
- **reports** (from subcommittees – small groups of the SRC – and/or individuals)
- **general business** (anything else – name the items)
- **date/time/place for the next meeting**

Set a suggested time for each item so that you’ll fit them into the whole meeting time.

W e continue republication of the series of training pamphlets for Student Representative Councils, first published in 1988 by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). This one, about meeting procedures, was written by Roger Holdsworth, Sally Warhaft, Jo Wood and SRC members at Exhibition High School, with illustrations by Mark Ryan.

We’re reprinting these pamphlets to celebrate their production, but also to ask the question: If we were to revise and reissue them, what changes would be needed?
At the end of the agenda, leave time to go back over the decisions you’ve made, so everyone knows what was decided and who has to do what.

Make sure you have a room booked. Set it up with enough seating for everyone. If you’re going to need materials like pens, paper, textas, boards etc, make sure you have them ready.

Everyone also need to prepare for the meeting by reading minutes and agendas, talking with other students (eg the class) and preparing reports and motions (see the article on being A Good Representative - coming next).

If you want the meeting to decide something, it is valuable to prepare a motion and put it on the agenda before the meeting. Also, you need to talk with others and ask for their support. This is called lobbying. If something is going to cause an argument and people know your view on it already, it can be useful to ask someone else to raise the topic. In other meetings, students might arrange, before the meeting, for parents or teachers to support their ideas.

At the Meeting

Introduce yourself at the start, especially if there are new people present. Name tags are cute – and you don’t have to remember all the names.

There are people in the meeting who have a particular role to help it run smoothly. They are:

The Chairperson who:
- welcomes everyone
- presents apologies for acceptance
- introduces each item on the agenda
- calls on the mover and seconder to speak
- decides who will speak next
- makes sure everyone has the chance to speak
- keeps everyone following the meeting rules
- calls for a vote on motions
- counts votes and decides on the result
- makes sure the meeting starts and finishes on time
- must not be biased, but must make sure the meeting runs fairly;

The Minute Secretary who:
- writes down the agenda
- records who attends and who apologises
- records the minutes of the meeting (a description of what happened, especially the decisions made)
- makes an action sheet showing who agreed to do what
- sends out copies of the minutes and the notice for the next meeting
- keeps a file of minutes
- makes sure the minutes are kept even if speaking;

Everyone also has a responsibility for making the meeting run smoothly by:
- being there on time
- only having one person speaking at a time
- asking the Chairperson for permission to speak (“speaking through the Chair”)
- sticking to the agenda and not bringing up other issues (except with the agreement of the meeting)
- moving a motion if you have an idea for a decision about the issue being discussed (see next page)
- listening to arguments
- speaking briefly about the topic
- sharing the work that comes out of the meeting.
After the Meeting

The Minute Secretary should have an action sheet at the end of the meeting which says:

• what it was decided to do
• who will do the work
• when it will be done by.

This makes it easier to check on decisions made at the meeting. It’s up to the next meeting to check that they have been done.

Minutes should be written up clearly and sent to all members, whether they were present or not.

And for everyone … letting the rest of the world (well, the school or class anyway) know about the decisions, is just as important as the meeting!

Moving a Motion

Moving a motion is a clear way of deciding what to do. Someone says (or, better, writes down) a statement: “I move that …” This should contain one idea and be clear to the meeting.

At least one other person has to support the motion before it can be discussed. This is done by someone else agreeing to second it. Both names are recorded in the minutes.

The motion is then discussed, often with speakers for and against it, in order.

Amendments (changes) can be suggested. They are moved in the same way. If the original mover and seconder agree with the amendment, it automatically becomes part of the motion without having to be discussed. The meeting can only debate and decide on one amendment at a time.

It is useful to have ideas discussed informally before they’re decided in a formal meeting. If there’s time, you can refer motions to a sub-committee (a small group within the whole committee) and ask that subcommittee to report to the next meeting. Or, if there isn’t time, a formal meeting can ‘go into committee’ for a short time (you say how long) to discuss a complicated idea more informally before coming back to the meeting. This is useful so that members can raise questions and fully understand a motion.

At the end of a discussion or debate, the Chairperson asks for a vote for and against, and decides if the motion (or amendment) is carried (agreed with) or lost (not agreed with).

The Chairperson doesn’t usually speak on the motion and only votes if the numbers for and against are equal.

There are lots of other meeting rules you could learn, such as:

• procedural motions – if you want to change the procedure of a meeting;
• points of order – if you think something is being done wrongly;
• reserving rights to speak – so you can speak later instead of now;
• right of reply – for the mover at the end of the debate;
• standing orders – the written down rules of the meeting.

You need to look these up and see how you can use them to make the meeting run more smoothly.
Prepare a folder for each SRC member.

Hold an SRC day away from the school to decide on meeting rules and how you’ll work together.

Get a copy of a full set of meeting procedures – there should be a book in the school library – and study up on some of the terms.

Attend meetings of other groups and watch their procedures. What works? What doesn’t? Why?

Keep a journal of SRC meetings to which all members can contribute. Make it a scrapbook where you collect:

- personal reactions and feelings
- documents
- photographs
- publicity

How can you make SRC meetings fun to be at? Discuss this with the SRC.

Monitoring

From time to time, the SRC should stop to consider whether it is working efficiently and effectively.

Who is making the decisions in the group? What roles are people playing? Who is doing all the talking?

When you’re right in the middle of a discussion, it is hard to see what's really happening. Maybe you’re so involved, you’re stopping others from having a say.

It’s useful to have someone to monitor or watch the group. You might ask someone to come along to watch out for:

- who speaks most
- who is being ignored
- who doesn’t even turn up
- who interrupts
- who left angry.

It is important that you trust this person. The person needs to be familiar with what the SRC is on about and familiar with the ways in which groups operate.

You’ll need to make some time for the group to hear a report back and to really look at what is happening.

That is also an important part of making good decisions!
Getting young people involved in the
democratic process before they turn 18

An exciting new civics education initiative is spreading to schools around the nation. The Parliamentary Club is not just a youth parliament, but the creation of a fully functional mini-democracy in your school complete with bi-cameral system of student leadership.

The Parliamentary Club is a co-curricula activity, which enhances the teaching and learning of civics and citizenship within our schools.

Citizenship, government, politics, the electoral process… what do all of these aspects of our democracy have in common? They do not attract the interest of our young people. So how is it that The Parliamentary Club is able to attract a membership of 90 students from across the school and then able to engage the entire student population in civics activities throughout the school year regardless of academic ability or subject choice?

**A brief overview of The Parliamentary Club**

In 2004, and in response to research stating that young Australians were becoming increasingly uninterested in civics, and that our education system was failing to produce informed and active citizens, The Parliamentary Club was created.

The membership, which is open to the whole student body and guided by a co-ordinating teacher, divides into political parties (not parties currently registered with the Australian Electoral Commission). They choose leaders and select candidates willing to enter the school’s election to form a House of Representatives and begin the task of governing.

**How to successfully initiate The Parliamentary Club at your school**

After announcing to the school population that an exciting new civics club is being formed, convene the first meeting of interested students. When the only interested student arrives you will understand the task ahead of you.

Promotion must be multi-pronged. Bombard the school with audio, use the public address system, with sound bites by Martin Luther King: “I have a dream… a dream of a civics initiative that will change nature of our next generation of citizens”, JFK: “ask not what your school can do for you… ask what you can do for your school”, and Gough Whitlam: “Well may we say…”

Use visuals: place evocative posters around the school promoting the formation of a unique club or society that will be both exciting and influential.

Recruit, recruit, and recruit…

It is now time for the tap on the shoulder. Approach the academics, chat to the sports stars, speak to the ‘musos’, entice the charismatics (not the religious organisation), include the natural leaders. They all have their purpose… to bring with them students from different areas of the student body. This is how you will build a healthy and diverse membership.

“Which of you shall take the mantle of the school’s first Prime Minister?

Who shall be the Minister for Sport, Arts and Culture, Education, the Environment, Foreign Affairs… the Canteen? Leader of the opposition? Sergeant-at-arms?”

**The Formation Of Political Parties**

Once you have a substantial core membership, the formation of political parties begins. It will be this group that will drive the initiative from this moment onwards.

Ensure their understanding of the concept of political parties, and guide the formation into a two party system, however do not be limited; form coalitions, minor parties and include independents. There may be leadership challenges; there may be some back room deals; watch the intriguing workings of student politics and their understanding begin to develop.
The Election: The first whole-of-school civics activity delivered by the Parliamentary Club

Leaders of the major parties deliver their speeches to the student body and announce the opening of the election campaigns. The length of the election campaign will vary from school to school. Do not limit polling to one particular day; announce a polling week, create a tally room on your Parliamentary Club website and update the current vote count each night so that the candidates can see what strategies are working and the rest of the school can monitor the progress of the election. Build to fever pitch.

Student House of Representatives is now formed

The newly elected Prime Minister will announce his/her cabinet in the school newsletter and prepare for Parliament's first sitting. Conduct talks with the PM and Leader of the Opposition about what issues are to be discussed, what legislation is to be introduced and what will be the order of business.

Losing candidates are essential in The Parliamentary Club; they will be your parliamentary officers, security and intelligence, journalists and committee members.

Partially script a sitting of parliament to familiarise the students with parliamentary process. The coordinating teacher may sit as the Speaker of the House for the first few sittings to illustrate the importance of this job (I certainly felt a hint of sadness when it was time to relinquish this position). Who will be the school's Governor-General? Perhaps the school principal, the coordinating teacher or some other school dignitary.

The Parliamentary Club activities

The installation of a student parliament, which sits regularly. Within a school's busy schedule you may find three times each term is appropriate and achievable. Lunch times work, and when your school principal sees the marvellous work and the empowerment offered to the students he/she will offer additional time.

Exhibitions of parliamentary sittings. At first you may partially script parliamentary sessions however you will find it won't be long before your young members of parliament are able to show their newfound knowledge and understanding of the parliamentary process to their peers, parents and the wider community. Local schools may send their students to view your student parliament; primary schools will be especially interested and an excellent audience.

The introduction of legislation. Students research the correct format for writing bills and introducing them into parliament. Assist them and suggest the installation of the school's existing SRC as the first Senate. This may be a good place to start in forming a bicameral system of student government. What other issues need addressing? Heavy text books and lockers, canteen lines, environmental issues, student activities – each school will have its own individual set of circumstances.

Instigation of student parliamentary inquiries. What other issues are of concern that need to be researched and prepared before considering forming legislation? Use the members of the Parliamentary Club who are not elected MPs and make them the first selected to be included in committees.

Student Ministerial announcements and initiatives. Newly appointed ministers will be given portfolios eg Arts and Culture, Sport, Education, Foreign Affairs or any other portfolio created by the Prime Minister. Give our young Australians the opportunity to show their capacity to be creative, innovative and energetic as they begin to improve the lives of their constituents and
develop an understanding of the role of the government’s front bench at the same time.

**Educate the wider school community in aspects of civics and citizenship.** The Parliamentary Club has the responsibility of attempting to engage as much of the student population as possible. Conduct an online quiz for interested students; offer prizes and trophies to eventual winners. Conduct a referendum or plebiscite on an issue which is relevant to your school. Use newsletters, public address systems or school assemblies to instruct students on how votes are counted for either of these two events.

**Specific Achievements at original pilot school:**
St Joseph’s High School, Albion Park, NSW

- Four general elections
- Feature story on ABC TV Stateline program 2006
- Chosen to be a part of the Australian Innovation Festival 2007
- Ministerial Initiatives:
  - **Electoral Matters.** Drive to enrol 100% of 17 and 18 year olds with the Australian Electoral Commission
  - **Arts and Culture.** School portrait prize. Students choose staff to paint.
  - **Environment.** School beautification process.
  - **The Beacon:** The production of the school’s first newspaper, complete with political journalists and cartoonists.

**The Parliamentary Club national promotion**

Since late 2006, **The Constitution Education Fund Australia (CEFA)**, the nation’s pre-eminent private provider of civics awards and programs, has supported the project towards national implementation, fully funding professional development, training and resource material. The initiative is now becoming recognised as one of the most dynamic and groundbreaking civics education projects in Australia. Pilot programs are now being instigated throughout the nation and schools in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria have joined the growing number who believe this to be the silver bullet in civics and citizenship education.

If you would like to find out more about this dynamic new civics initiative, and about CEFA’s Parliamentary Club professional development program, check out the website [www.cefa.org.au](http://www.cefa.org.au) or contact the Director, Don Perna at [dperna@cefa.org.au](mailto:dperna@cefa.org.au)

Don Perna

Constitution Education Fund Australia (CEFA)

[www.cefa.org.au](http://www.cefa.org.au)

Director, The Parliamentary Club National Initiative
THE PARLIAMENTARY CLUB: creating a new generation of informed and active citizens

What people say about The Parliamentary Club

“The Parliamentary Club has opened up new doors and given me an insight into the world of politics.”

Tiah Jones
Year 11 Spokesperson for the School Spirit Party 2007; Grace Lutheran College Qld

“The Parliamentary Club has made a lasting impression on the school community, promulgating its image for future incarnations. My position as its first Speaker has been a true honour. I wish the club and its dedicated members every success in the future.”

Ryan J. Kernaghan
School Captain and Speaker, House of Representatives 2005 St. Joseph's Catholic High School

“This experience in The Parliamentary Club has provided some great opportunities to make changes throughout the school.”

Iain McDonald
Spokesperson for The Rev(S)olution Party 2007 Grace Lutheran College Qld

“This is a great initiative and obviously it clearly works in the school. You were right in your opening statement; we should try and get this extended nationally.”

Mr Peter Lindsay MP
Chair - Joint Standing Committee Civics and Electoral Education 2006

“The presentation was nothing short of dynamic. It gave me great confidence in the ability of our young people and our education system to communicate and embrace the fundamental aspects of our democracy in a practical and realistic way”.

Mr. Tom Rogers
Australian Electoral Office State Manager NSW

“The Parliamentary Club has been a fantastic initiative in terms of the school and to see so many students involved and passionate about politics and also about events in the world. They are interested in having a voice and sharing their perspective on the world around them.”

Mr. Peter McGovern
Principal St Joseph's Catholic High School
Student Forums:
Rainbow Secondary College, Vic

Rainbow Secondary College is a small rural Secondary College (70 students, Years 7-12) in the Mallee region. We are very interested in establishing the concept of regular student forums where students have a greater say in the structure of the school day, delivery of curriculum and basically every aspect of the way the college works.

We want to encourage a team approach and make sure that the students recognise that we genuinely value their voice and input.

We have now set up a committee which we are calling Student Forums. The idea came from our Attitudes to School survey and what our Year 9 students (in 2007) were telling us in Personal Learning.

The students selected were ones that have been willing to speak up or take risks with their learning. We have two students from each year level plus all the Year 12 students who nominated for School Captain. Students also had the chance to co-opt themselves and we had two boys take up the option. We have had Student Forum badges made up that the students wear with pride.

The meetings are chaired by our school captains. I (Assistant Principal) and the Principal attend all meetings. We let the students decide on the timing of meetings (and to our surprise) they requested them every two weeks!

Most of first term was taken up with a discussion on our awards system. The students believe we have too many awards and they really don’t mean much to them. So we had a number of meetings discussing possible options. Here is a quick rundown of what the students will be tabling in a staff meeting and to School Council:

- changing our effort commendations to personal best commendations (with criteria);
- change how we hand out awards: keep only top third at speech night and the rest in the back of reports;
- mid-year discussion on end of year awards.

The students have now shifted their focus to safety and staff issues in our Tech wing. They are worried about the misuse of equipment and are wondering if there is any way of getting another set of eyes in that area. We are still working on this.

At this stage we have been impressed with the honesty and willingness of the students to voice their concerns. Any feedback or advice would be fantastic.

Colleen Petschel
Assistant Principal, Rainbow Secondary College
petschel.colleen.c@edumail.vic.gov.au

Our Student Representative Council:
Fitzroy High School, Vic

We are the first SRC to be running since our school re-opened in 2004. We started off small – at our first meeting only around 10 to 15 people were present. This was when we voted for our President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary. We began to think about our constitution and discuss our hopes and plans for our school’s future. One of the most difficult decisions to make was how many students from each year level we would elect. Once we made these decisions, the President wrote it up and we presented it to our student body. After the majority of the student body approved it, we were up and running as a Council.

What we have done

Even though we are a newly-established Student Council, we have achieved a great deal in the short period of time in which we have been running. Our President has been elected onto the School Council and is playing a major role in the running of our school. We have established a constitution which has been approved by the student body, and decided on an efficient way of running council meetings.

What we hope to do

Our SRC has great plans for our school’s future. One of our first plans is to organise council committees, including a fundraising committee and an environmental committee. A few of our members and the student body have expressed interest in creating new clubs and lunchtime activities for our students. With the construction going on, a lot of the school’s grounds are closed off for safety precautions. We are in the works of trying to create a better relationship between the School Council and the SRC. We hope to be able to have a louder student voice within the School Council and to give greater influence on the Council.

Lora Alakus, Oscar Alaks, Eleanor Doran, Sea Tirris and Sean Power
Student Representatives
Fitzroy High School, Falconer Street, North Fitzroy 3068
**News & Reviews**

**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

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**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.

ISBN: 978-0-9803133-2-1

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**Reaching High:**
A Program Promoting Positive Approaches to Learning Differences

Reaching High tells the story of 14 years’ work around literacy in north central Victoria. Student participatory approaches are central to a program that caters for students with learning differences, with an annual student-run three-day regional camp as the culmination of that program. This camp brings in adult role models who have, or have had, learning differences, to act as mentors for students. Past student participants now also act as leaders, adult role models and assistants.

This inspiring and exciting 120-page book documents the development and operation of the Reaching High Program. It outlines the theory and community links behind the program, and how it is built on the active and strength-based participation of students. Includes a DVD of practical ideas.


Order now: $33 each ($27.50 for Connect subscribers)
School Aid Helps Burmese Kids Back To School

Thank you to the many schools who have already supported School Aid’s Burma Emergency Appeal, following the devastation of Cyclone Nargis. We have been amazed by your brilliant fundraising and heartfelt messages of condolence and solidarity. To see schools’ progress from around the country with this Appeal, read messages of hope and some of the many media pieces written about this Appeal, please visit www.schoolaid.org.au

The Burmese Government has announced that schools will officially resume from July 1. While normal schooling is still a distant reality for many kids in Burma, establishing temporary schooling as quickly as possible will help these kids regain a sense of normalcy and cope with the tragedy they have experienced.

School Aid has now formed a partnership with internationally respected development agency, Save The Children, who have been in Burma for 13 years and on the ground with 500 staff since Cyclone Nargis struck. Funds raised by Australian schools will be directed toward purchasing specially designed school kits (including exercise books, pens, pencils) needed in order to restart education. Through this partnership with Save The Children, School Aid can 100% guarantee that the school kits, and the messages, will reach children in one of the hardest hit regions of Burma, the Eastern Irrawaddy Delta, where up to 100,000 children were severely affected by the cyclone.

School Aid will also be launching an exciting opportunity for Australian school students to support, and connect with, quake-affected students in China very soon! Registrations are already open through the website for this project.

To get involved, please go to www.schoolaid.org.au Thank you and congratulations once again to the many inspiring schools that have raised funds and created messages thus far for the Burma Emergency Appeal!

School Aid Team
via Daniel Bolotin, National Program Manager
PO Box 1526
North Sydney NSW 2059
daniel@schoolaid.org.au

Feedback and Evaluation Tools

Here are two simple forms we have been using in Student Forums etc to get evaluation feedback from participants (each originally A4 sheets):

This Correlation Chart simply asks participants to put a single dot or cross on the chart to show how much they learnt (how far across) and how much they enjoyed the activity/day (how much up). Responses can then be plotted onto a single chart to provide a ‘scattergram’ of feedback from the group. The Parking Lot (below) uses Post-it notes to allow participants to record responses in the four areas:
Clearinghouse

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 Times** (Department of Education, Vic) Vol 16 No 6; April 2008
- **Foundation for Young Australians: Annual Report** (FYA, Melbourne, Vic) for 2007
- **FYI** (FYA, Melbourne, Vic) Edition 1, 2008
- **Sustainable Consumption: Young Australians as Agents of Change** (Bentley, Fien and Neil; for NYARS, Canberra, ACT) November 2004
- **TLN Journal** (TLN, Abbotsford, Vic) Vol 15 No 1; Autumn 2008
- **YAPRap** (Youth Action and Policy Association, Surry Hills, NSW) Vol 18 No 6; June 2008
- **Yikes** (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 6 Edition 2; May 2008

**International:**

- **Dialogue on Participation** (PD Forum, Ottowa, Canada) Issues 3, 4; April, July 2006

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.

- Learning by Doing Democracy: Social education, SRCs and Statewide Representation (Roger Holdsworth and Georgia Kennelly, VicSRC) in *Ethos* (Social Education Victoria), Term 1, 2008 (4 pp; $1.00)
- Active Citizenship in Schools (Roger Holdsworth) in *Agora* (History Teachers Association of Victoria) Vol 43, No 1, 2008 (6 pp; $1.10)

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*Connect* has a website:

[http://www.geocities.com/rogermhold/Connect](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!
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• 1996  Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work  Case studies of Primary School SRCs ($6.60 or $11 for two copies)  $ ............

Foxfire Publications:

• Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($22)  $ ............
• Foxfire: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($22)  $ ............

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