It’s your human right to participate!

Every single person alive has human rights.

While a lot has been said about human rights, understanding them can be difficult - to say the least. In this article, I’m going to outline what we mean by the rights of young people and students to participate. I want to emphasise, through practical examples, how a shift to a ‘rights-based approach’ within schools would empower students and young people. I want to provide an understanding of where the idea of ‘rights’ comes from, explain the rights language, and give a realistic appraisal of, for example, the pros and cons of a rights-based SRC.

What are rights, and what is a rights-based approach?

Human rights can be broadly seen as a diverse set of claims that every person on earth can make: the right to live, to have food and water and a clean environment for example. They can have many different religious, philosophical, moral or ethical justifications. However more practically, and more powerfully, they are also a set of ‘legal’ guidelines, developed by the United Nations (UN) that member countries sign up to. Our rights are written down (or codified) in various legal documents, often called Conventions or Covenants, which countries willingly commit to. Signing these documents (or ratifying them) reflects a commitment from a country to implement the list of rights in the convention or covenant, and to work towards giving their citizens these rights. This way, human rights become legal claims you have from your governments.

Australia has so far ratified two separate UN conventions that guarantee young people’s right to participate in schools: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and more importantly the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A rights-based approach to student participation is a framework that places student and young people’s rights, defined through international human rights standards (which say what should happen), squarely at the base of all action – within schools, and within society. So, for example, it recognises young people’s right to be included in decision-making processes as integral to the functioning of schools. A rights-based approach is then different from other approaches that claim, for example, that inclusion in decision-making should occur because it is ‘more effective’ or because ‘it helps students learn democratic processes’. These might be important reasons, but they are different from a rights-based approach.

Essentially, a rights-based approach looks to incorporate the principles of human rights into the plans, policies and processes of the school. This would created a new and important role for SRCs within schools.

A right-based approach is very powerful. It removes charitable, welfare, or ‘feel good’ justifications for seeking youth participation and replaces these with strategies for real empowerment. It focuses on students as independent rights-holding citizens within schools, and emphasises the power, capacities, capabilities and access that students have to change their immediate school environment, as they desire.

For example, in applying a rights-based approach to development for young people, the UN suggested that youth participation must be “active, free and meaningful”. The same principle could be applied to student participation and the work of SRCs within schools. As a result, limiting SRC activities to fund-raising or ‘ceremonial’ occasions alone would be seen as inadequate.

The demand for recognition of the rights of young people to be heard, to have their views given serious consideration, and to play an active role in promoting their own best interests is far from universally respected ... This demand represents a profound challenge to traditional attitudes towards young people in most societies throughout the world. It implies a radical change in the youth-adult relationship in all spheres of life including the family, schools, local communities, programmes, social services and local, regional and national governments ... (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2003: 272)
A Rights-Based Approach to Participation versus a ‘Health and Well Being’ Response

Youth participation has often been encouraged and supported through a health and well-being rationale. The common arguments within the health sector for supporting youth participation can often be divided into two main schools of thought:

1. **Youth participation builds resilient young people:**
   Through active and meaningful participation, young people learn transferable skills and gain knowledge that enables them to succeed in all arenas of their life. Active, participating young people are therefore generally ‘healthier’, especially in regard to mental health. Participation becomes a tool for promoting resilient young people.

2. **Youth participation in health programs generates more effective programs:**
   Meaningful youth participation within any program designed for young people creates a more real and effective program. Involving young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a mentoring program for example, will generate better outcomes from the program. Youth participation has an ‘instrumental’ role in improving program objectives.

Both of these objectives are laudable, but viewed through this framework, youth participation is valued only for its instrumental capacity. It is a ‘means’ to some other desirable end. While this is by no means a bad thing, it does not value young people’s participation in and of itself. It encourages participatory strategies that fall short of the full capacities of young people.

For example, Hart, while working with Unicef, devised a scale of eight types of participation (see figure one). Obviously, as you escalate from ‘passive involvement’ to ‘influence’ and so on, the level of participation from young people increases, and does the level of power ceded by an organisation to young people. It is here that a conflict arises. The desired outcomes from participation from a Health and Wellbeing perspective can be achieved through participation at a ‘passive involvement’ or ‘influence’ level. There is no need to have an entirely ‘youth run’ or ‘self-mobilised’ project.

On the other hand, a rights-based approach would value the participation of young people as being paramount within the project. Participation becomes the ‘end’ in itself. As autonomous, rights-bearing citizens, young people should be the people devising all programs targeting them. This slight conceptual shift obviously encourages organisations to cede as much power and autonomy to young people as possible. In a school, this would equate to valuing student input not as much as, but potentially more so than other key stakeholders’ opinions.

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**The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has become the world’s most ratified treaty, with 192 countries signing on (it is missing only Sudan and the USA). While the rights codified under the convention overlap significantly with the human rights protected for everyone (including children) in other ‘universal’ rights instruments, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the CRC is still a milestone in the field of children’s law. In a radical break from previous welfare-based and even paternalistic approaches to children, the CRC “elevated the child to the status of independent rights-holder and placed children’s issues at the centre of the mainstreaming human rights agenda” (Fottrell 2000: 1). This articulated a new concept of children in the rights language - as active, independent citizens.

Australia signed this progressive convention in 1989, making a commitment to giving all young people a voice in decisions affecting their lives.

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**Roger Hart’s Ladder of Young People’s Participation**

- **Rung 8:** Young people & adults share decision-making
- **Rung 7:** Young people lead & initiate action
- **Rung 6:** Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
- **Rung 5:** Young people consulted and informed
- **Rung 4:** Young people assigned and informed
- **Rung 3:** Young people tokenized*
- **Rung 2:** Young people are decoration*
- **Rung 1:** Young people are manipulated*

*Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
young people under 18 years the rights that were codified in
the Convention. Ratification represents a commitment from
the Australian government to progressively work towards
affording the rights in the CRC to children and young people;
it was never intended to be a statement of immediate complete
compliance of behalf of all Australian practices, and plenty of
work still needs to be done to ensure that rights such as youth
participation are taken seriously! The next step in ensuring that
Australia fulfils its legal obligations under the CRC is to work
towards enforcing these rights “in small places, close to home”
(Robinson in Fottrell 2000: vii), like your school.

The Convention is short, and has 44 main ‘articles’ (or
dot points) of rights for young people. Of these, article 12 is
most frequently labelled as the right to participate. It says that
any person under 18 years is capable of having an opinion or a
view on decisions that affects them, and has both the right to be
heard and for these views to be listened to. That means that if
you’re under 18 years, and you have an idea or opinion about the
way any ‘government’ decision affects you, you have the right
to be listened to. State schools, for example, are a direct part of
the government for these purposes but government policies also
guide private and religious schools so the Convention applies here
too. It is a young person’s right to be heard within their school.

While article 12 is the most powerful part of your right
to participate, you also have:

- **The right to freedom of expression**: that is to express your
  self and your opinions – within reason however. For example,
  this right does not include the freedom to ‘express’ the word
  ‘FIRE’ in a crowded cinema! This is codified in article 13 of the
  Convention of the Rights of the Child;

- **The rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion**: that
  is to think and believe what you choose. This is codified in
  article 14 of the Convention; and

- **The right to freedom of association**: to ‘associate’ or connect
  with whomever you please, as codified in article 15.

These four articles form a powerful ‘participatory’
principle that the Australian government has committed to.
The right to participate has even been identified by the UN’s
Committee on the Rights of the Child as especially important.
Actions within schools are no exception to these rights. As
recently as 2001, this Committee reminded governments that
they needed to pay more attention to ensuring that schools
established permanent ways of consulting with students on
issues that affect them (CRC/C/90 para 291).

So these ideas about youth participation are pretty
important stuff globally. At a UN meeting in 2000, where
countries of the world got together to agree on some of the key
priorities to improve the lives of young people worldwide, they
agreed that participation is one the top ten issues that the world
needs to work on. We need to start making sure this happens.
What better place than at your school?

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1: The World Program for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (UN General Assembly 1996).
A Rights Based Approach Within Your SRC?

Participation is always an elusive ideal to implement. It can never be fully done or achieved; it is an ‘evolving’ principle. This means you can always improve on what you’ve got! Developing this ‘shifting’ principle requires looking at the direct changes in the real world it can implement!

As this highlights, there are many advantages to taking a rights-based approach to your SRC and many arguments for it. However, the language of rights may not always be the best immediate approach to every problem – particularly within a school. There are many arguments against using the language of rights, especially when it comes to children’s and young people’s rights.

Is it Always the Best Approach?

A Pros and Cons list:

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<th>PRO (For)</th>
<th>CON (Against)</th>
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<td>A rights-based approach is morally compelling. Given the current awareness of human rights discussions, authorities can feel morally compelled to afford young people their rights. Saying “it’s my right to...” is more persuasive than saying “it would be nice if...”</td>
<td>A rights-based approach can often decrease the impetus to act. Someone once argued that no altruistic behaviour was ever possible - people only gave of themselves for others because they gained a selfish sense of moral wellbeing from their actions. Consider buying a copy of the Big Issue for the karma! If we take away that sense of self-sacrifice and ‘good-feeling’ for example by seeing that after all, you’re not giving the homeless person anything, you’re just enabling them to enjoy their natural born rights, we might detract from the willingness of others to help.</td>
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<td>A rights-based approach places the focus of all school functions squarely on the ‘best-interest’ of the students. Is having an under-resourced, not fully appreciated SRC really in the students’ best interest? This approach is a powerful ‘change generator’. It would ensure that your SRC is strengthened and supported.</td>
<td>When it comes to young people, rights are not enough! Many thinkers have argued that since ‘rights’ define the bare universal minimum necessities for human dignity, when it comes to children and especially in the developed world, a rights-based approach is radically under-ambitious. Do we only owe our children a set of legal entitlements, or is the situation more complex? Do we not owe our young people the most we can morally think of? Will a rights-based approach reduce all interactions with young people to a mere legalistic respect for their rights? Should teachers and school administrators not strive to interact with young people through the most moral structures that they can think of?</td>
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<td>It is a legal language. Unlike other approaches, a rights approach has a social, cultural and legal language. It becomes difficult to argue against participation when it has been so clearly codified in international law. Legal support mechanisms at a domestic level exist, and especially with the new Bills and Charters of Rights being passed in some states, these are very powerful agencies for change.</td>
<td>Rights promote rampant individualism. Emphasising each person’s rights promotes a culture of raging egotism and alienating individualism. Do we really want to only explain to young people that we’re doing this or that because they have the right to this or that? Should we not try and contextualise our actions and impress upon students the dense chains of interconnections between themselves, others and the future?</td>
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<td>Rights-based approaches can unite disparate thinkers and diverse approaches. Because rights are explicitly non-religious and non-cultural-specific, they reflect an approach that can seek to unite a consensus within schools. Rights do not (and were devised specifically not to) contradict with any religion or culture, so this is an approach everyone can agree on. Often, a rights-based approach will work hand in hand with other approaches already adopted within your school. Keep in mind that the current rights approach was designed to occupy the middle ground between communism and democracy: it is a language of infinite compromise!</td>
<td>The balance of rights has it all wrong! Rights come with responsibilities. The rights of students need to be finely balanced with the rights of teachers, of administrators and society at large. Emphasising only an individual student’s rights obscures their corresponding responsibilities to other students, teachers, the school as an institution and the community at large.</td>
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<td>A rights-based approach will strongly align your school with contemporary government rhetoric. Most state governments are moving towards a rights-based approach to participation, and most states are also implementing or investigating citizens’ rights at some level. Using this approach harmonises your structures with emerging government emphasis.</td>
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A Rights Based Approach to Some Common SRC Problems

At the last Victorian SRC Congress, some issues common to all attending SRCs were noted. The ‘top 5’ (or most commonly discussed issues) related to: the state of school toilets, bullying and students not being taken seriously. How would a rights based approach tackle such issues? What other frameworks could we adopt, especially since we’ve now seen some of the shortcomings of this approach?

Here’s how we could look at these and other examples that were identified at this Congress:

1. The poor state of school toilets. All human beings have the right to a clean and healthy environment. This has been ‘read into’ the basic right to life, that international courts have recognised within the fundamental right to life - a right to liberty, livelihood, a healthy and clean environment and protection against degrading treatment. Taking a rights-based approach to student welfare would place the onus on schools to remedy the state of toilets immediately. Adequate toilets would be a right – the basic benchmark. Students would not need to argue that they should have adequate toilets. Rather than looking at repairing or maintaining toilet facilities as simply a ‘good thing’ that could be done when the resources arise, a rights-based approach demands progressive implementation of students’ rights to the maximum capacity of available resources. Schools would need to justify their inertia in repairing/maintaining toilets rather than students needing to justify their case for adequate facilities.

2. Bullying. The Universal Declaration on the Rights of Man states that no human should be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment. In addition, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has often made reference to bullying in schools as a failing of the state to provide safe education to all young people. That is, bullying represents not only a violation of a student’s rights, but also a mechanism that discriminates against some young people through limiting or making difficult their access to education. Addressing bullying, as a rights issue rather than an individual problem, demands immediate action from schools. It places the onus on schools and teachers to work with both the victims and perpetrators of bullying (who are more often, one and the same) to find solutions to this behaviour. A rights-based approach makes a loud and clear argument that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated because a safe education is a right for all. A rights framework would suggest a participatory approach to finding a workable solution; perhaps each year level in a school would work together to create its own code of conduct around bullying based on a right to be free from bullying, and suggest their own workable solutions to bullying. Not only would students feel some ownership over this solution, but it is more likely to be taken up around the school – in corridors, the playground, before and after school, as well as classrooms - if students have had some meaningful engagement around the policy’s formation and are understanding of their power to assert their rights.

3. Students and SRC not being taken seriously in decision-making. As this article has highlighted, young people have the right to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them. School policies very much affect young peoples lives, yet students are often not represented in decision-making bodies that form such policies. A rights-based approach would make legitimate claims to, for instance, having young people form a substantial part of the School Council, or for new school policy proposals to undergo real and meaningful consultations with all students. If schools accepted that students had the right to participate, the normal assumption might become ‘taking students seriously’.

4. Canteen food and prices. Students identified that the food provided in their canteens was often not healthy or affordable. In fact, often the healthy food was the least affordable option. Human rights include the right to food and the right to health. If we read them together, it becomes apparent that students should have access to healthy food! Adopting a rights approach would clearly require schools to provide access to healthy food at canteens; but it might go further and justify schools subsidising healthy food, or even the free provision of fruit or juice in class!

5. Student Rights. Many issues around student’s rights were floated at the Congress, from schools providing a booklet to students about their rights inside and out of school, that students’ rights be written and reviewed by students annually, and that school rules should respect students’ rights, such as the right to religion. If schools were to successfully adopt a rights-based approach, an integral part of this would be education: educating teachers and students about what rights both parties had, what responsibilities they had, and clear mechanisms of conflict resolution when rights (inevitably) clash. This process would also be participatory, seeking input from teachers, students and administrative staff. So, in successfully adopting a rights-based approach, schools would have already met the VicSRC student’s calls for knowledge of their rights, input into and negotiation of student rights.

How to find out more...

If you would like to read the articles on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, you can find them at www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm or www.lawstuff.org.au has a bunch of information too. If you feel your right to participate isn’t being heard at school, and you’ve exhausted your ability to change this by talking to teachers and principals already, you can try to email the National Children and Youth Law Centre, at www.lawstuff.org.au/lawmail.asp who should be able to provide more information.

Rys Farthing

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Some history of participation and the CRC

Despite the CRC only being 20 years old itself, the concept of child rights can be traced back a full century! In 1919 for example, the Save the Child Alliance was formed when their founder was arrested for distributing ‘obscene’ pictures of German children starving from the sanctions imposed after WW1. The enthusiasm of this early movement led to the first document that outlined Children’s Rights, the Declaration of Geneva. This was adopted by the predecessor to the UN, the Assembly of the League of Nations in 1924. This Declaration confirmed “that mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give”, but it was still welfare-oriented and painted young people as vulnerable and in need of protection.

With the formation of the United Nations (UN) and a renewed commitment to securing human rights after the atrocities of WWII, children’s rights returned to the international agenda. In 1959 the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Remarkably the declaration was only not signed by Cambodia and South Africa; given the global economic, ideological and cultural diversity of the era this was truly astonishing. Regardless of the global scope of this commitment and its good intentions, the emphasis was still on children as dependent pre-citizens. The French delegate to the Commission on Human Rights at the time for example, proclaimed that

the child was not in a position to exercise his own rights. Adults exercised them for the child ... (Juvigny in Veerman 1992: 164)

As the civil liberties movement expanded in the 1960s, the concept of child rights and particularly the right to self-determination attracted greater attention in the broader community. This campaign was the first to recognise the need to respect children and young people as independent rights-bearers. The recognition of children as rights-bearers in and of themselves was a radical departure from previous ways of looking at Child Rights.

In 1978, during the International Year of the Child, the Polish government formally proposed a convention for children’s right, partially to redress this. It took 11 painstaking years to draft the Convention! The weight of participation became clear in the very last meeting during the drafting of the Convention. It was suggested that the convention be renamed ‘the Convention on the Protection of the Child’, but a storm of protest followed rooted in the belief that such a renaming would be a step backwards. Children’s rights were finally being seen as protecting full and independent citizens. The concept of children and young people as independent rights-bearing citizens, and the need for active participation, radically shaped the making of the CRC. Notably however, no children actually participated in the 11-year long drafting process! The CRC was finally adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the General Assembly on 20th November 1989 and entered into force on 2nd September 1990.

The Human Rights Youth Forum, held on 26th February 2007, was a forum for young people by young people, supported by Youthlaw and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC). An advisory group of 8 young people planned the program and ran workshops on the day. Over 60 delegates from 44 local government areas right across Victoria were involved in the day. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years.

We came together at the forum to discuss the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities in detail and work to address human rights issues faced by young Victorians.

During the forum we had the opportunity to hear from a range of speakers who, through their experiences and interests in human rights, inspired and challenged us. The speakers impressed upon us as young people, the importance of taking responsibility for promoting and protecting the rights in the Victorian Charter.

After a whirlwind tour of the charter, delegates worked together to discuss in detail the human rights issues affecting young people today. This was done within a realm of topics what are of importance to young Victorians such as ethnicity, the criminal justice system and use of public space, family, work and disability.

An issue raised through the forum workshops was young people’s experiences with discrimination and the key ways it manifests, such as a prevalent lack of youth voice in Victoria. This issue has pushed for more opportunities to be made available for young people to participate in decision making at all levels.

Due to such a strong sentiment that young people are at the receiving end of discrimination, there was a call for increased public interest in youth participation. There was also a call for increased education to promote existing services for young people to utilise and the provision of access to resources in which can aid young people in achieving these outcomes.

Another prevalent issue amongst delegates was the need for recognition of rights such as the right to education, health etc that are not covered by the Charter.

The forum was wrapped up by the Minister for Youth Affairs Mr James Merlino and Kate Ceberano, the Ambassador for Youth for Human Rights International. Both reinforced the message of our responsibility as young Victorians to take action on the human rights issues that affect our daily lives and promote these rights locally.

The forum was a fantastic day in which enthusiastic and passionate Victorian young people came together to understand the human rights listed in the Charter and work towards taking action to address issues raised.

The delegates who attended the forum are committed to broadening their local communities' understanding of human rights in Victoria and involving themselves in action to address human rights implications affecting all young Victorians.

(Modified and abridged version of presentation by Crystal Clancy and Michele Fountain, Youth Forum Advisory Group members at the VEOHRC Human Rights Conference on 27th February 2007)

NB: A DVD and final report of the forum is currently being produced, and Youthlaw hopes to set up an interactive human rights forum for young people at www.youthlaw.asn.au so keep an eye out if you’re interested for more information.

For further information, contact Tiffany Overall: <tiffany@youthlaw.asn.au> at Youthlaw.

Some of the Human Rights Youth Forum delegates and organisers outside the VEOHRC Human Rights Conference
Thanks to a partnership developed between The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the Australian Red Cross, Victoria, 21 young people from diverse cultural backgrounds have recently undergone training in Geelong, Victoria, to develop a stronger voice in their local community.

The Young Leaders of Today program provided leadership skills to Year 10 and 11 students from North Geelong Secondary College. The program was strongly supported by Diversitat, a multi-faceted service provider in Geelong, specialising in multicultural communities. The program equipped participants with leadership skills that are transferable to their school lives and within their own communities.

Students in the program originated from countries such as Sudan, Iran, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Liberia, the Philippines, Germany, Cambodia and Vietnam.

CMYI promotes social harmony through inclusiveness and provides real choices and opportunities for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The partnership with the Australian Red Cross, Victoria has been formed to encourage young people to become more active in their local communities. The Australian Red Cross, Victoria, through programs like this aims to enhance the capacity of the young people to make a substantial contribution to society.

“This program has developed out of a recognition that migrant and refugee young people endure a range of experiences that place them at a distinct disadvantage compared to other Victorian young people,” says CMYI Director Carmel Guerra.

According to Tammy Byrne, Project Officer – Education and Leadership Programs, Australian Red Cross, Victoria, the program is immensely valuable because it encourages young people to take on leadership roles in the community, as well as achieve personal goals and address issues of concern.

Commencing as a pilot program in 2001, Young Leaders of Today has been a great success with programs delivered on 10 occasions to 270 young people from 38 schools situated in 14 local government areas across metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria.

Successes include Farah Faig (18 years) a previous participant in Young Leaders of Today who is now a leader in the Hume region organising community projects including a women’s festival in Hume and workshops on domestic violence in her school. Farah arrived as a refugee from Iraq only two years ago.

“Our program shows that when you encourage leadership and develop skills within an environment that specifically caters for their needs and draws on their life experience, migrant and refugee young people flourish,” says Ms Guerra.

The program has a huge impact on participants. A student from a previous program stated that: “This course could change the way you look at the world ... it was an amazing experience I’ll never forget ... I now want to follow my dreams no matter what.”

For more information, contact:

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
Level 1, 308 Drummond St
CARLTON VIC 3053
Tel: (03) 9340 3700; Fax: (03) 9349 3766
Imagine a group of Year 9 and 10 students planning and conducting an international conference that boasted some high profile academics, politicians and diplomats from around South East Asia and drawing student participants from 10 countries. Most people would say ‘yeah right’ but this was the case with a recent conference in Singapore. Students from Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College in Melbourne attended this event as part of the consolidation of the College Student Leadership Team for 2007.

As an elite college for girls, Raffles Girls College in Singapore was well placed to host such an ambitious conference. Here students vie for places, which has selective entry based on the national curriculum at Grade 6. The College utilises its highly developed student leadership structure to engage students in a number of projects and this conference – entitled “Empowering Leading Ladies for the World Stage” – was one such example. It took 12 months for Raffles to organise the conference, with places open to schools who were part of the Alliance of Girls Schools.

The conference was held in Singapore in late November 2006. It was designed as a global platform for female youth leaders with diverse cultural and leadership backgrounds to exchange their ideas and experiences and thus gain a better understanding of how they can contribute to society as a female leader. The conference incorporated three main ideas to support students in this pursuit:

- the notion of female leadership;
- the need for a global perspective; and
- empowerment.

Each of these ideas were reinforced through a notion of ‘Sight, Light and Flight’, representing the journey which all leaders take from initial empowerment to effecting global change.

Deputy Pascoe Vale Girls College Captain, Monique Burns, commented: “These concepts are so simply put. Every leader must be able to inspire others (sight); a leader must be able to problem solve (flight); and every leader must be able to be enlightened (light) as she undergoes the process and leaves some sort of legacy.”

Emma McIntosh, who is also a Deputy College Captain, added: “In the course of this year, all members of the College Leadership team have worked hard to implement these key concepts in terms of the Leadership Training day that they organised for February, leading into induction, a special night where formal recognition is given to all student leaders.”

Sarah Brunton, the College Captain, said: “The conference was extremely demanding and challenged all participants.” Each day there were formal and informal discussion groups, keynote speakers and highly sophisticated debates on issues facing the world and its resources. At the end of each major session, motions were formalised, debated and were then put to the mass gathering of students for resolution. Sarah said: “It was a great experience to be exposed to different cultures outside Australia. To feel that you are part of the bigger picture was quite humbling. We take so many things for granted; we were moved by some of the issues facing our fellow students in developing countries.”

The Conference was strongly supported by local and international leaders with direct links to Raffles Girls College and this in itself contributed to the notion that with “great power comes great responsibility” and a genuine desire on the part of leading speakers and dignitaries to give something back to the students by way of their interest and commitment to building strong leadership in youth.

Monique Burns said: “You couldn’t help but be inspired by Dr Shirley Lim - founder of PEAKS profiling and author of several books on leadership.” Both Sarah and Emma were especially moved by what the South African High Commissioner to Singapore, Her Excellency Zanela Makina had to say about the struggle of women in gaining political rights. According to Sarah: “The conference gave us a format to discuss and debate a range of issues that are quite universal by nature and made it possible for youth to be inspired and really make a difference in the world in which they live”.

For more information, contact Michael Walton, Head of Student Development, Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College:

wal@pvgsc.vic.edu.au
In Connect 162 (December 2006), Linh Do, then a Year 10 student at Braybrook College in Melbourne’s west, reported on the web-based campaign to Change a Million Light Bulbs (CAMLB). Linh updates this campaign with news about the proposed ban on incandescent lights.

It all started in California, when Senator Lloyd Levine proposed that California should ban the selling and reproducing of incandescent lights. After being mocked in the US as a ‘joke of a legislation’ and being put down by other countries, including some Australian premiers, it came as a shock that Australia has decided to adopt this policy. Malcolm Turnbull, who is the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, has proposed the gradual removal of the energy wasting lights by the year 2009-2010.

What does this mean for CAMLB?

After the initial hype of the proposal, which created some free publicity, much of the fuss has died down. And from now to 2010 - three years - not much is being implemented by the government, which leaves room for CAMLB to do everything that we initially set out to do. The only real downsides are: it might appear that we are a project developed after the government plans (rather than the other way around), and people may now not take it as seriously, as they believe that in three years time, they will already be forced to change.

However, one of CAMLB’s aims was to also change people’s mentalities and approaches to the environment and to global warming. We never wanted to force people into doing the ‘right thing’; we wanted to educate them and change their mindsets.

In the Media:

CAMLB is randomly appearing throughout the pages of the Herald Sun, The Age, Think Magazine ... and of course Connect. CAMLB is also currently waiting for articles in local papers, and prominent culture magazines.

Appearances:

CAMLB will be presenting at the ‘Children and Young People are Key Stakeholders’ conference in Perth as a guest presenter. CAMLB may also hold a workshop at the upcoming VicSRC State Congress.

Information:

Continue to check our CAMLB website at:

www.myspace.com/change_a_bulb

or contact me at change_a_bulb@hotmail.com or on 0413 706 032.

Linh Do
Kids Teaching Kids at
The 2007 VICTORIAN YOUTH ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE

August 27th & 28th; Portland & Port Fairy, Victoria

The 2007 Victorian Youth Environment Conference is the culmination of a process. This process involves students working with expert mentors many months prior to the event, and results in curriculum materials that will be in Victorian Schools for many years after the event. Most importantly, the process is about promoting students teaching students as the highest form of learning and aiming for a cultural change in the way we view, use and perceive the environment and the resources and industries that it supports.

The Conference is less about a conference and more about a lasting commitment to our youth and Victoria’s environment. This is no ‘flash in the pan’ concept; it is the future of learning and the future of the Victoria’s unique catchments and its associated creeks, river systems and coasts and sea!

Details:
When: August 27th and 28th 2007
Where: Portland (27th) and Port Fairy (28th)
Who: All Victorian Schools – grades 5 to 11, maximum 2 teachers and 10 students
Cost: $66 (includes GST, entry to the 2-day program, all meals, a spectacular conference dinner, bus travel during the event, exciting student workshops, access to award winning educators and mentors to prepare student presentations and participation in the environmental project day)

Important Information for Schools:
To extend the opportunity to as many schools and students across Victoria we are accepting groups of between 3-15 students with 1-3 teachers from each school as per regional quotas below:

Regional Quota System: Limits on school numbers from across Victoria: Western Victoria: 150 places will be accepted (approx 10-20 schools); Mid Victoria: 50 places will be accepted (approx 6-10 schools) ; East Victoria: 50 places will be accepted (approx 6-10 schools).

There will also be a cap of 16 student-led Workshop Presentations at the event – so we encourage schools to work together on presentations, to maximise involvement! Please register for both attendance and presentations early as this event will sell out very quickly.


“Research has found that Kids Teaching Kids pedagogy works well in terms of engaging students in environmental/resource management issues. At the River Health Conferences, for example, for a significant number of students, the experience of participating in Kids Teaching Kids activities appears to generate a sense of connection with local place and involvement with real local issues. Many students also seemed to express a sense of environmental responsibility and a developing sense of environmental and democratic agency. In other words, some students gained a sense of possibility for change, or a growing confidence in their capacity to actively participate in social and democratic processes involving environmental issues. In addition, through the actual experience of being Conference participants, students learn to be active, effective citizens and advocates for a sustainable future”

Richard Wood
Ford One Planet Award Winning ex-Principal

Other Areas:
Firestarter is involved in several Kids Teaching Kids environmental events already scheduled for 2007 and these are:

- Melbourne Water Yarra River Youth Conference: MCG Melbourne - June 4 and 5 for World Environment Day;
- Victorian Youth Environment Conference: Port Fairy/Portland - August 27 and 28
- Enviroschools Youth Jam: New Zealand - September 17 and 18 - visit http://www.enviroschools.org.nz
- MDBC International River Health Conference: Canberra Australia - October 14-17 to launch National Water Week;
- School Sustainability Awards: Melbourne - November 13
- NSW Youth River Health Conference: Inverell, Northern NSW - November 19 and 20

For 2008 there will be four statewide Kids Teaching Kids events in Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. Towns within these states are welcome to bid to host these events by contacting Firestarter.

Check: www.onelifeoneworldourfuture.com
Seminars and Conferences:

South Australian Twilight Seminar on Values Education and Student Participation:

Building authentic relationships with students and the community

**Keynote speakers:** Roger Holdsworth plus Mia Handshin and South Australian students from across the education sectors working on student-led values initiatives, and Pt Vincent, Edithburgh and Stansbury Primary Schools currently working on student voice, values and sustainability.

- Hear how student led action teams undertake research and action around priorities they have identified including areas of personal and family life, schools and the wider community.
- Listen to case study examples describing how schools have implemented active student participatory approaches - approaches recognised as having strong values-based foundations.

**Wednesday 9 May 2007 from 4 pm – 6.30 pm**

Adelaide Sailing Club
Barcoo Road, West Beach

Places are limited. Bookings are essential.

Register by fax to (08) 8379 4072 by Friday 4 May 2007. Your registration will be confirmed. Light refreshments served.

For all enquiries, please contact Mary Hudson:
Phone: (08) 8338 0422
E-mail: the.hudsons@ozemail.com.au

This is a collaborative cross sector initiative with the Department of Education and Children’s Services, Catholic Education SA and the Association of Independent Schools SA.

Valuing Young People?

Valuing Young People? is a platform for individual young people to let those in government know how they feel about issues that are important to them. The postcard is an easy way for young people to say what they think about an issue and have it sent to a government decision-maker.

The NSW Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) will provide bulk sets of postcards to Youth Week event organisers (and anyone else interested in joining the campaign), who will give out the postcards to young people, for example at a local youth forum or in a youth support group.

Is it just a postcard?

The postcard is the most tangible part of the campaign. However YAPA encourages youth services to use the Valuing Young People? slogan or logo with other projects which aim to help young people be heard by governments, such as youth forums, surveys etc.

The key graphics on the postcard are available for download so that you can use them in your flyers, posters, websites and reports.

Is it just a Youth Week campaign?

YAPA is launching the campaign in National Youth Week 2007 and sees it as a way for local Youth Week organisers to inject a greater level of youth participation into Youth Week.

However YAPA will continue the campaign after Youth Week. If, for example, you are holding a youth forum later in the year, you may wish to include the postcards in your event.

How to get involved:

Have a read of How to use the postcards: www.yapa.org.au/youth/value/how.php or email: info@yapa.org.au

To order postcards, use the order form at: www.yapa.org.au/youth/value/order.php

Are We There Yet?
National Youth Affairs Conference

Melbourne
May 1-3, 2007

Registrations close: April 27th, 2007
Info: www.yacvic.org.au or 03 9267 3713 or toll-free 1300 727 176

Curriculum Centre Stage

Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) 2007 Biennial Conference

Melbourne
July 8-10, 2007

Earlybird registrations close: May 1st, 2007
Info: www.acsae.edu.au or 03 9417 3555
**Washington Youth Voice Handbook**

Adam Fletcher has been working for more than 10 years in the USA around action to engage young people in meaningful ways and to promote ‘youth voice’ as “a catalyst, informer, agitator, and positive driver of action”. In the introduction to this Manual, he goes on to explain: “I have seen that instead of simply being cheap labor for civic improvement, young people can be the designers, researchers, teachers, evaluators, decision-makers, and advocates of democracy. I have learned that Voice can be so much more that what I originally thought, and in this Handbook I want to share that with you.”

The 155-page Handbook has five core chapters explaining the concepts of Youth Voice: what, why, who, when, where and how. It then presents a Youth Voice Planner and 23 Youth Voice Workshops that can be conducted with adults and with young people.

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**Professor Jean Rudduck**

We were saddened to hear, as we went to press, of the death of Professor Jean Rudduck of Cambridge University, UK. Jean recently led a pioneering team of researchers and writers around concepts of student voice. The legacy of her work in the area can be seen at the website on ‘Consulting Pupils About Teaching and Learning’:

[www.consultingpupils.co.uk](http://www.consultingpupils.co.uk)

Her energy, insights, scholarship and humanity will be sorely missed.

*Roger Holdsworth*

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**Connect has a website:**

[http://www.geocities.com/rogermhold/Connect](http://www.geocities.com/rogermhold/Connect)

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**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 Views (Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Qld) Vol 15 Nos 21-22; Vol 16, Nos 1-5; November 2006 - March 2007
- TLN Professional Development Course Directory (TLN, Abbotsford, Vic) 2007
- VicSRC Student Advocate (VicSRC, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 1 No 2; March 2007
- YAPRap (Youth Action and Policy Association, Surry Hills, NSW) Vol 17 Nos 2, 3; February, March 2007
- Yikes (YAC Vic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 5 Edition 1; February 2007
- Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas) Vol 26 No 1, March 2007

**International:**

- Washington Youth Voice Handbook (Adam Fletcher, Common Action, Olympia, Washington, USA)

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**Friends of Connect**

By subscribing at a higher rate, the following have helped keep *Connect* going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following contributions since the last issue of *Connect*:

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- Shepparton High School
- Shepparton (Vic)

**Sustaining Subscribers** ($100 for two years):

- Peter Cole
- Port Melbourne (Vic)

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** all payments in AUD; add $10 pa outside Australia

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Back issues of Connect ($4 single; $6 double issue). Circle issue/s required: $ ........


- Cross-referenced index to contents of Connect back issues ($3) $ ........

***SPECIAL OFFER: Any calendar year of Connect back issues (6 issues) ($12) *** $ ........

Miscellaneous Resources:

- 2005! Student Councils & Beyond ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) $ ........
- 2006! Student Action Teams ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) $ ........
- NEW! Reaching High ($33; $27.50 for Connect subscribers) $ ........

- Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work (1996) $ ........

Foxfire Resources:

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

Documents

- Photocopies of the following documents: $ ........
- Cross-referenced Index to photocopies of documents ($3) $ ........

(all prices include GST + postage and packaging within Australia)

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TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ ........