Learning Partnerships: 
School Students as Tertiary Teachers

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& Incorporating the PASTA Newsletter #44
Thank you for bearing with us through a foreseen period of hospitalisation - a ‘life-gap’ that delayed the August issue (#154) and rolled it into this double issue.

We hope the delay has been worth it: it now allows us to present some fascinating stories about the participation of students in developing better teachers (and doctors) and teaching approaches.

It should be obvious that students can bring particular expertise to issues of pedagogy and curriculum. Their daily experience of the good and the not-so-good means they often have sharp ideas about how teaching occurs and what makes a good teacher. Articles in this issue present examples of this expertise being utilised in partnerships to improve schools: a large-scale student-led consultation culminated in students writing to their teachers and schools about pedagogy; a University-led project involves primary and secondary school students in training beginning teachers and medical students.

This work also reminds us of initiatives, principally in the UK (but also continuing in Australia), engaging Students as Researchers within schools and about issues of curriculum and pedagogy. Check some recent issues of Connect for further information on this.

In this issue, you’ll also find resources around similar community-directed approaches, including some possible tools for use with Student Action Teams. This is particularly pertinent as we note the formal extension of such approaches into South Australia.

All this indicates the importance of the continuing role of Connect in sharing program documentation as a strategic approach that aims at changing classroom and whole-school practices. As we’ve previously noted, articles over the last 15 years have dealt with challenges to traditional Student Councils, and these were compiled in the book Student Councils and Beyond. (Initial sales of this book have been strong, and relatively few copies remain of the first print run - so get your orders in fast!)

We now want to collate recent documentation about the local implementation of Student Action Teams. So we are planning a further Connect book that draws and builds on the previously published accounts of student investigations and action around traffic safety, and also includes stories from current Student Action Teams working on issues of the environment and values. What are we learning about how to implement such approaches? How does this happen in individual primary and secondary school classrooms, within overall school structures, and within clusters of schools. Watch out for further information about this in 2006! As always - copies will be cheaper for Connect subscribers!

So keep reading and subscribing ... and keep writing and sharing your stories about your practice.

Roger Holdsworth

This Issue:

Why does Connect exist?
Connect has been published since 1979.

It aims to:
• document student participation approaches and initiatives;
• support reflective practices;
• develop and share resources.

Cover:
Learning in Partnership:
Drawing by Louis: Grade 4/5, Errol Street PS.
See pages 3 to 8.

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Deadline for material: mid November
DRAMA AT THE HEART OF LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

Learning in Partnership

School students as tertiary teachers

Three key elements inform the structure of the Learning Partnership:

• **Partnership**: The assumption underpinning the partnership is that each of the parties has something to contribute and something to gain, so the relationship is one of reciprocity.

• **Purpose**: Workshops are designed to serve specific ‘curriculum’ or learning requirements for each of the participants, to impart key concepts and skills, and to inform committed action. To ensure status and sustainability, the workshops are situated in the curriculum and on the timetable for both tertiary and secondary students.

• **Pedagogy**: Drama-based techniques provide the pedagogical design that facilitates the enquiry, interaction, relatedness and skill development.

In the **DRAMA AT THE HEART OF LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS** project, primary and secondary school students help to educate classes of pre-service teachers and medical students from the Faculties of Medicine and Education at The University of Melbourne. The school students and the tertiary students participate in shared drama workshops designed to assist teachers and doctors to understand the sorts of social and emotional issues that can affect the learning and wellbeing of young people. The classes of school students (primary and secondary) do this work as part of their school curriculum. The tertiary students also engage in this project as part of their core compulsory curriculum studies in Medicine or Education.

In the Medical workshops, the focus is on helping the doctor to communicate effectively with young people. The fifth year medical students study a unit on *Adolescent Health*. A key learning in adolescent health is the need to take a holistic approach, as one health, medical or social issue may impact on a young person’s life in many ways. Also important is the knowledge that young people are relatively free of illness and are most likely to need medical help in relation to issues such as sexuality, substance use and mental and social health.

To be effective, the doctor must be able to offer confidentiality and a listening that is free of judgement, condescension or moralising advice. The doctor needs to assist young people to talk about sensitive issues and to learn how to question in such a way as to support the telling of their stories.

The medical students act the part of a GP and practise a questioning technique designed to help them ask about risky behaviours in the arenas of drug use, sexuality and self-harm. The school students work as actors, playing a character with a particular history (not their own). The actors play this character when the doctors are ‘practising on them’. The school students also work as coaches – giving
the doctors feedback on how they are going and advice on how to communicate more effectively. The students are also key informants, answering general (not personal) questions about youth experiences of school, growing up and their social worlds. A doctor (medical tutor) from the university co-facilitates the workshops with the university and school facilitators. The facilitators manage the process and give additional coaching.

The Education students, in the main completing a Diploma of Education, study a core subject entitled Education Policy, Schools and Society (EPSS). The drama workshops are used in this subject to conduct a co-exploration with the school students of how social issues such as racism, bullying, alienation and substance use can have an impact on school climate and student learning.

The pre-service teachers mix with the school students in games and improvisations designed to have them communicate with each other about these issues. The school students improvise with the pre-service teachers, acting out common school situations and then problem-solving by re-enacting the scenes in such a way as to produce a better ending to a problematic situation. This involves the use of forum theatre techniques, small buzz groups for teachers and school students to talk with each other, and larger discussions. The school students are called upon to give advice to the teachers about how to manage some of the common situations that occur in schools.

At the school, the university teachers and the class teachers work together to prepare the students for their roles as actors, coaches, and key informants. In their preparatory workshops, the school students can learn the techniques they will use, prepare

Who is involved at this stage?

The current partnership draws on the contributions of a number of leaders from both schools and the university:

University of Melbourne

The Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education

- Helen Cahill has been developing these techniques since the late 80s and has devised the process to build on prior work using similar processes in research workshops, in the training of experienced GPs, teachers, parents and health workers. Helen dreamt up the project and leads many of the workshops for teachers, doctors and school students, including working with Princes Hill Secondary College and University High School.
- Bernadette Murphy has a background in youth participation and has joined the project in 2005, leading EPSS classes and working with Erroll Street Primary School and Princes Hill Secondary College.

Centre for Adolescent Health, Faculty of Medicine

- Dr Lena Sanci used this process in her PhD study which focused on educating experienced GPs in how to work effectively with adolescents. She assisted in bringing this program to the medical students, and co-facilitates workshops.
- Dr Andrew Kennedy, Professor Susan Sawyer, Dr Zoe McCallum and Dr Michelle Yeo, along with other Research Fellows on the team, bring the medical perspective and co-facilitate the medical workshops.

In Schools

Princes Hill Secondary College

- Prue Wales (drama teacher) teaches a specially devised Year 9/10 Community Drama elective which supports this project. Prue and her classes have participated with Helen Cahill in the project since its inception in 2003, and were later joined by Tracey Carroll (drama teacher) also at Princes Hill SC.

University High School

- Ken Harper and Anna Newbold (drama teachers) incorporate the project within their Year 10 drama curriculum and work with both medical students and EPSS students.

Eltham High School

- Glen Pearsall (Head of English) involves students from his year 9/10 Literature elective in the project and himself leads the EPSS class for the pre-service teachers. His school will incorporate this work into the school's student leadership program.

Errol Street Primary School

- Renee McConaghy (Grade 4/5 teacher) and Sally Karlovic (Acting Principal) have housed this work in the curriculum of Renee’s Grade 4/5 class.

We hope to grow the partnership to involve more schools, more teachers, and more Education students. To show an interest or to find out more, contact Helen Cahill on: h.cahill@unimelb.edu.au
their characters (for the medical workshops) and do some thinking about the issues they will cover.

In the Drama classes, the students focus on the different types of theatre they are using and develop their skills in using drama and theatre to promote social health. In the English classes, there is a natural focus on researching and communicating about social issues and on oral communication. In the Primary classes, there is a strong focus on developing social skills and citizenship opportunities as well as a focus on oral language and critical thinking.

**What do the participants have to say about the process?**

I have been collecting the students’ views of this process as part of my PhD study. Some of them are summarised below. Also included in this article are some of the views that school and tertiary students involved in the project have contributed to this account.

What I have noticed from interviewing 28 school students across the first two years of the project is how much the students value being given a useful and important role in helping adults to learn: a reversal of their usual position in schools. I have heard how much the students appreciate a sense of purpose and contribution, the chance to develop their skills and confidence and the opportunity to develop their thinking or awareness of the issues.

**What do the school students value?**

The school students described a sense of purpose and contribution in terms of being useful, being listened to, feeling important, and being serious about something.

They valued the skills and experience they were gaining and identified them as:
- improved communication skills; more confidence coming from working with strangers and adults;
- developing acting skills and focus when replaying a character many times;
- going to the university for classes; and
- developing more life skills like how to do the conversation in real life.

They perceived that their awareness and understanding was enhanced, particularly in relation to:
- thinking on the spot in improvisations;
- understanding the perspective of the adults; and
- getting more thoughtful and aware of how some issues affect young people.

**What do the Education students value?**

In interviews with 19 of the pre-service teachers, I found that they valued the opportunity the workshops provided to engage in ‘honest dialogue’ as ‘equals’, playing on a shared and common ground and their access to the school students’ perspectives.

A sample of the pre-service teachers’ comments includes:
- extremely useful getting students’ insights into how various issues impact on them;
- hearing the honesty of the students is ‘gold’ for us;
- role-play is a fantastic way to get to the heart of the issue;
- having school students in the classroom is an excellent innovation;
- there was profound learning in this subject mostly thanks to the innovative approach to teaching and the inclusion of the students;
- this is the only class which examines the interactions between teacher and student by actually getting teachers and students to work together towards common goals;
- Drama role-play was excellent and took theory into the realm of the practical reality of classroom teaching.

The experience of having school students positioned as teachers, co-investigators and co-players was described as quite distinct from other learning opportunities. The process made possible a relationship and a dialogue of a different character to that possible on teaching rounds where the real life roles of ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ limited the conversations that were possible.

**What do the Medical students value?**

The Medical students, like the Education students, valued the chance to actually communicate with the students, to role-play the conversations about sensitive issues and the chance to get feedback or coaching from the students.

The comments below represent the views of a range of the stakeholders currently involved in the project. They give a sense of what a project that works across traditional boundaries has to offer. They remind us of the important contribution we make when we re-position young people as ‘co-providers’ rather than ‘consumers’, and as part of a ‘solution’ rather than as the ‘problem’. They also illustrate the need for well-structured interactive processes to provide opportunities for the participation that is at the heart of a learning community.

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From the Pre-Service Teachers

One of the highlights of my Dip Ed

When the Alice Hoy Building was suddenly alive with teenage voices, I felt a ripple of apprehension from our class. Of course, we knew they were coming. Our teacher, Helen Cahill, had arranged drama workshops for us, with ‘real’ students. Over three weeks, student/teachers at the University of Melbourne would improvise student/teacher scenarios, with the University High School students. And what fun we had. The Uni High students were first class. The student/teachers... well, we tried hard.

The Uni High kids taught me so much about teaching. Primarily, to never underestimate the potential in students. For these high school students were impressive: intelligent and articulate. Their message to us was clear: teachers owe it to their students to create exciting curriculum and assessment tasks. “Students don’t want textbook boredom,” according to Sophie. Now, that I am on my third teaching round, her words ring constantly.

Helen’s drama workshops were one of the highlights of my Dip.Ed. The ‘multiple intelligences’ that are so often talked about, were put to practice. I loved playing the ‘ham’ with the University High School students, and through dramatizing or ‘exaggerating’ school teacher/student scenarios, I was able to further question my own teacher pedagogies at university. The drama workshops were fun and informative. It was an experience I will not easily forget.

(Julee Calvert: pre-service teacher, 2005)

Listening to their voices

The students allowed me to actually witness, without any boundaries or limitations, what they really thought about teachers, issues, themselves. This opportunity gave us the insight to watch the students, listen to their voices and give us the better understanding, that we were not given access to in a usual classroom. I think it’s important to have access to students to ask them questions and get their answers, instead of theorising about what they might want, feel or need.

(H.P.: pre-service teacher, 2004)

From the Teachers

Equals in the partnership

Conducting a class with school students and university students is above all a fun thing to do. It’s fun because both groups like it, both learn from it and both contribute to it. Using young people as the teaching resource is possibly the best way to demonstrate what student participation is all about. My background is in secondary education and at first I thought students of Years 4/5 level would have difficulty with the role of advising beginning teachers on what makes for a good teacher. I was wrong. There was little difference in what either Year 9 or Year 4 students contributed in this situation. Both offered useful advice to student teachers and contributed as equals in the partnership.

(Bern Murphy: EPSS workshop leader)

Working with

I find it exciting and challenging to work with others and to position my class within the community. I enjoy watching my students’ confidence flourish and seeing their enthusiasm to participate in others’ learning.

(Prue Wales: Community Drama workshop leader)
From the Community Drama Classes at Princes Hill SC

**Being taken seriously**

I am not really very used to teachers or adults taking your opinion too seriously, and for someone like that to have their complete attention or focus on you, and actually be learning from you, that is a really good experience. It makes you feel kind of important. *(Immogen: Year 9)*

**They were like us**

When our school, Princes Hill Secondary College, went to The University of Melbourne to work with students currently studying teaching, we discovered they were not too different to us. The teaching gene had not settled in and they were shy like us. This made the workshops enjoyable. We were able to share ideas and talk freely. And by the end, we were able to talk without that feeling of awkwardness that we feel usually in a room full of teachers. They were nervous. We were nervous. It worked out very well. *(ZP: Year 9)*

**Getting talking**

At the University of Melbourne, our Community Drama class was scheduled to work with student teachers. The purpose of this was to give the student teachers a little experience of some of the issues teens face and how it is to teach teens. Our class went there two times. It was a good experience for us and for the teachers-in-the-making. In the first session we sat down and got to know each other and then we went around the room doing plays. It was fun. I learnt that adults are a little shy about talking and communicating with teens but, as we went along, they seemed to get used to talking to us. *(GG: Year 9)*

From the Students of Errol Street PS:

I think that the teaching of teachers is cool because it’s like being a teacher. I think I got to teach teachers how to teach from a kid’s view. The process of the actual teaching was sort of the opposite from a normal class. I think we told teachers how they ought to be. We told them how to act. Like I would not like a grumpy or embarrassing teacher. *(Luke: Grade 4/5)*

When you told us we were going to teach teachers first I felt shy and special. But when we got there I had fun. I had fun being the teacher and seeing teachers learn. *(Ben: Grade 4/5)*

I thought it was weird for us to contribute to the teaching of teachers because we felt more like the teachers ... seeing them sitting on the ground with us that made us feel like they were at the same level as us. *(Jessica: Grade 4/5)*

I felt like I was needed but sometimes I’m a bit shy. From the process I got fun and happiness because it is nice to see other people happy. I also got a hint that you should think about teachers too ... how to keep students and your job happy. Sometimes I think you should be more like my teacher Renee. *(Jo: Grade 4/5)*

It was kind of weird and funny because it was like you were the teacher and they were the students. I think I contributed to the teachers by giving my point of view as a student so then they know sort of how a student feels. *(Anon: Grade 4/5)*

I felt shy at first because it is not very easy to sit down and say hi unless you are a person who is talkative. I felt weird because I am a student teaching teachers and a teacher is meant to teach me not me teach them. To be a good teacher is to not be a favouring one; if you favour one everyone gets angry. *(Azzam: Grade 4/5)*

I got value out of this because I saw teachers being students and I learn that teachers learn things too. I think we taught the teachers a lot about teaching. *(Kiralea: Grade 4/5)*

When I first heard that we had to teach future teachers I thought it was funny because it is usually the other way around, but while we were teaching the future teachers, I felt very important. *(Catisia: Grade 4/5)*

It made me feel special and important teaching teachers. The value I got out of the experience was the fact that the student teachers were shy confronting us and because they now know what it feels like to be a student. I think I contributed on how to be a good teacher or a better teacher. *(Rebecca: Grade 4/5)*

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We did some more not-seat activities...
I am a year 10 drama student at University High School. I was involved in a workshop during term three of this year. The first three sessions were with a woman named Helen, a mentor figure to our class. We did some improvisations, which involved us being the doctor as well as the character we were given to play - called Jo. I felt comfortable expressing myself in the activities both in front of Helen and the rest of my class.

We had many discussions as well, not only about Jo, but also about how we would handle certain situations with Jo if we were the doctors. We also talked about different approaches and reactions Jo could have. This gave us a good insight into how the doctors feel and what they would do, and also made us consider how we would play Jo and what sort of person we would be.

I enjoyed finding out about Jo when the character was first introduced to us: she seemed like a great character to play. At first I wasn’t very happy with how my character had turned out, so I decided to work on Jo for the next session.

In one of the sessions we did an exercise, which was performed in front of the class. I was playing the doctor again, only this time I was in the ‘medical centre’ with Jo and her mum. I found this extremely difficult. I didn’t know what to say and I consistently got stumped on where to go with the conversation! I found it really interesting that this was the case, though the mother being played was slightly over the top and extreme. I felt awkward and uncomfortable talking to both Jo and her mum and felt like her mother was judging me. I also didn’t know how to direct the questions to Jo so that she could answer it without her mother interrupting and butting in constantly.

The first session with the medical students was very enjoyable and I was surprised by how good they were. They were friendly, natural relaxed and non-judgmental when they were being the doctors. I was also surprised at how open, friendly, relaxed and confident I was with them too.

In the three sessions that we had with the medical students, each one was different. The Med students were different and because of that I was different too when I was playing Jo.

I had one main person for the three sessions. All three of the main doctors got the entire story out of me. I do think that I was a bit easy and open with the three doctors for it to be completely realistic. Because I am sure that if I was being myself and not playing Jo, I wouldn’t have told them everything, but it didn’t matter, because I gave them lots of good feedback and constructive criticism.

I am really glad that our class was exposed to this workshop. I want to do more! All together, I think that I gained just as much from these sessions as the med students did. It was so much fun and I hope that the rest of the class and the med students enjoyed it as much as I did.

I thought Helen was fantastic, really nice helpful, friendly and intelligent. The sessions we had with her before the interactions with the med students were great and I definitely learnt a lot from them and on reflection needed them as well. Overall, it was a fantastic experience, so a big thanks to everyone who was involved.
Over the past 10 months, a group of 21 students from 11 schools in the City of Banyule in Melbourne, have been investigating the issue of pedagogy. They have written to teachers and principals with recommendations for improving the learning environment in their secondary colleges.

The Oxford dictionary defines pedagogy as ‘the science of teaching’. The students researched pedagogy - teaching methods, resources and classroom interactions - specifically in the subject areas of Health and Human Relationships.

They described their research methods as a ‘multi-layered’ approach in which they:
• researched and analysed documentation on pedagogy;
• held in-depth discussions with students, teachers and the wider community;
• constructed a survey, which was given to 25 students in each of Years 7 to 10 in eight secondary schools across Banyule;
• organised a Banyule ‘Youth Inquiry’, which was attended by 140 young people, where pedagogy was one of the three major areas of discussion.

These approaches helped the students to construct a list of findings and recommendations that they have put to teachers and principals for consideration.

Findings
The students firstly presented the findings of their research:
• Overall, they say, students were very positive about the various ways in which they were given information about issues which directly affect them such as sex education, drug and alcohol, bullying, mental and physical health etc. However, students generally still feel that there are substantial opportunities for improvement.
• Many students reported a large variation in the level and quality of Health and Human Relationship knowledge they had been taught. Information in Health and Human Relationship subjects is constantly changing and the students surveyed reported that they sometimes are being taught out-of-date information.
• Young people feared that the differences in the quality of information taught to them would put many at a disadvantage in their knowledge about these issues and that this would affect self esteem, self confidence and sense of self worth.
• The students surveyed indicated that they responded best to presentation of information by videos and guest speakers, particularly those that have a modern approach and clear content.

DART is a project of Banyule City Council’s Youth Initiative in Melbourne’s north-eastern suburbs. DART stands for Discussion-Action-Representation-Thought.

The DART Board is a representative group of 21 young people from 11 of the 14 secondary schools in Banyule. The patron of DART Board is the Mayor of the City of Banyule and Councillor Jenny Mulholland has been an active participant and supporter of the work of the group.

The objective of the DART Board is to develop leadership networks between secondary schools. In doing so, the students highlight a single issue for investigation each year. They hold discussions, carry out research and organise meetings to plan their work.
Most importantly, the young people felt that most teachers neither seek nor use feedback from their students on issues affecting their learning environment. They pointed to this as the most under-utilised but accessible resource within schools and also identified it as the key ingredient for teachers in improving their professional practice.

**Recommendations**

The students then presented a set of recommendations to schools, based on their findings:

1. Secondary schools should network and share information to develop a greater consistency in the levels at which Health and Human Relationship subjects are taught.
2. Secondary schools should update class materials regularly to ensure that information is current.
3. It was noted that videos and guest speakers were favourably regarded by students as more interesting and engaging ways of delivering information. However, it was recommended that students should be actively engaged in evaluating these videos and guest speakers in an organised way. This would allow schools to share the evaluation of resources and also highlight those that are particularly recommended or not appropriate.
4. The creation of a *Yellow pages of guest speakers and videos* was recommended. Students suggested that this would detail the effectiveness, cost and appropriateness of resources for different age levels, and would save a lot of time for teachers planning classes and would make these resources of a greater value to students.
5. It was also recommended that the Department of Education should create an outside resource to attend all secondary colleges and provide open, interactive, effective and up-to-date lessons on all Health and Human relationships topics. This would, in the students’ opinion, better connect young people to this vital area of education and would have a substantial impact on areas that are sometimes linked to issues such as eating disorders and self harm. This recommendation also acknowledged and addressed the awkwardness that students said often develops when a teacher presents a very personal Human Relationships issue and then had to teach the same students in another subject.
6. More broadly, the students recommended that they should be more actively and consistently involved in providing feedback on teaching strategies. They suggested that a **Students Engaged in Assessing Teaching (SEAT)** strategy would be a practical approach that could be undertaken almost immediately, and acknowledged that some teachers individually already tried this. They wrote to teachers: “We acknowledge that such a strategy could be viewed as very sensitive, and could risk hurting people’s feelings, and that is not what we want this strategy to achieve.” However, they suggested, if applied correctly, such a SEAT strategy would give students a position that would make learning more a shared responsibility and this would much improve their learning environment. “We believe there are also obvious relationship benefits between teachers and students; if done well, a SEAT strategy is likely to have flow-on effects in improving school attendance and retention rates.”

The students concluded their open letter by inviting responses “We hope that our work over the past 10 months is of benefit to the active discussions that take place in teachers’ staff rooms and during teacher professional development days. Please consider our recommendations seriously.”

They are now following up the letter in all the schools, by asking how and where it was considered and what the responses were.

For further information on this issue or on the DART process, contact Banyule Council Youth Service on 9490 4222.

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**Members of the BCC DART Board 2004:**

- Debra White, Mahad Atosh, David Di Florio, Samantha Williams: *Banksia Secondary College*
- Tanya Mandaliti, Hayley Blair, Sarah Harrison: *Bundoora College*
- Wade Zimbolaui, Sharon Hollamead: *Concord Special School*
- David Chen, Sara McWhirter: *Ivanhoe Grammar School*
- Jessie McMaster, Amy Bamford, Simone French: *Ivanhoe Girls Grammar*
- Sara Alnes, Thomas Johnston: *Latrobe Secondary College*
- Amanda Miller, Richard Pratten: *Macleod College*
- Jessica Foley, Nicole Andrew: *Our Lady of Mercy College*
- Mathew Lillyst, Colin Dunlop: *Parade College*
- Jacki Massa, Brendan Kenneally: *Montmorency College*
- Mark Kearney: *St Helena College*
- Nathan Braddy, Bianca Peacock: *Viewbank College*
Student Action Teams

What have we learnt about implementation?

Student Action Teams have been implemented at state and local levels for several years now. It’s important to note that there’s not a simple recipe or set way of implementing such approaches. The implementation is shaped by school circumstances and is responsive to opportunities. We are still learning how to do that each time we set up a Student Action Team. In Victoria, the information about SATs on Softweb says: “The selection of activities to be pursued by each Student Action Team will be decided by the team and will depend on the issues that arise in any school and local area.”

However, with several such teams ‘under the belt’, we can start to see some patterns in what happens. I initially summarised these for a workshop at Christie’s Beach HS in South Australia, and have developed this further in working with teams in Victoria around environmental issues (in the Darebin network) and values (with a Catholic primary schools cluster in the City of Manningham).

My initial discussion identified:

• Teacher Preparation: an understanding of what we want to do - the theory behind the Student Action Teams approach, and a commitment to student decision-making on real issues; plans for how this might fit into the curriculum; identification of possible partners and resources. This also involves setting up the challenges.

• Engagement with the Issue: The identification of a real problem, challenge or issue in which we don’t know what the outcome might be, and where students bring some ‘expertise’ to a solution. The role of the outsider is often very useful: someone to ‘commission’ the students, to challenge them to research and act, to provide an audience for them to report to. Many of the Student Action Teams have operated within a cluster of schools, and this challenge has occurred at an inter-school Student Forum.

• Research: Defining the research questions, what we already know, what we need to find out, how we might carry out the research. It is sometimes useful to think about two research steps on:
  a) what the issue is within our community (eg defining or prioritising the issue); and
  b) what the issue is about (deeper research into the nature, causes etc of the issue).

• Reporting the Research: Telling someone ‘external’ what we have found out. That might mean a report on the research phase to the ‘outsider’ or to other students or to the community as a whole. This has often been a second Student Forum.

• Designing the Action: What do we want to change? What is the big possibility for what could be achieved? Initially this is what we want to achieve; then what we will do to achieve that. We also need to think at this stage about how we will know whether we have changed anything - what information will we need to collect about the way things are before we started out action?

• Implementing the Action: Carrying out the planned steps. The table below also includes some thinking about the nature of action that might be taken - so we don’t think just about posters or building something expensive.

• Reporting the Action: Telling someone - the ‘outsider’ or other students or the community - what was achieved. How do we know what was achieved? What have been the consequences of what we have done?

• Reflecting on the Journey: The Student Action Team should look at what was achieved, how it was achieved, what was learnt etc. How would we do it differently if we did it again? What still needs to happen? This is also a time for celebration - and for a new commitment.

After developing that framework, and then continuing to work with groups of Student Action Teams, more detailed steps began to emerge, with ‘critical questions’ being suggested that could be used (with both teachers and students) to focus the enquiry at each step. In particular, we began to recognise the importance of student passion - anger, commitment, disappointment, hope - about what is being found out and about what could be - if they are to take action.

As I write this, we are still refining these steps (see the next page for some details) and thinking about how we ask these questions. We are thinking about ‘guided visualisations’ through which students might ‘dream’ about the changes that are needed. We are thinking about what we need to do to tighten up the investigations.

Keep in touch - and let us know what you are finding out about the implementation of Student Action Teams.

Roger Holdsworth, October 2005

FORMS OF ACTION

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<tr>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>ENCOURAGEMENT</th>
<th>ENFORCEMENT</th>
<th>ENGINEERING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provide information&lt;br&gt;Tell people&lt;br&gt;Train people&lt;br&gt;Get them to investigate it</td>
<td>Reward positive behaviour&lt;br&gt;eg provide funding&lt;br&gt;eg public praise&lt;br&gt;Provide good examples</td>
<td>Punish negative behaviour&lt;br&gt;eg public rebuke&lt;br&gt;eg physically restrain&lt;br&gt;eg sanctions&lt;br&gt;Check up and tell off</td>
<td>Build things&lt;br&gt;Change structures&lt;br&gt;eg timetables</td>
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August-October 2005
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<th>NOTES</th>
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As we begin our tenth year as an organisation, it is perhaps timely that we look back and see what progress we have made. In this issue we begin this process by reflecting on what has happened with SRCs at the school level and how much the support of those willing to fill the position of SRC adviser contributes to the way in which students develop as school leaders. We will also be looking at the ways in which various members contribute to the ongoing promotion of student leadership on a daily basis.

In early August we were able to take up an invitation from the Professional Teachers Council of New South Wales to attend an information night for educators from East Timor. Presentations were made by a number of professional organisations including Mathematics, Learning Support, Early Childhood, Human Society and Its Environment, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. While leadership was not on the formal program, I was invited to address them on what SRCs did in schools here. During the discussions that followed, it was quite sobering to hear them say that not only do the schools they work in not have any resources, a lot of them don’t have electricity, water, sewerage, etc, and a lot of the teachers don’t have any formal qualifications. If you can suggest ways in which SRCs could assist them to develop resources within the above limitations, please contact the PASTA secretary. Keep in mind that, whilst English is being taught in many of their schools, their ability at this stage is limited.

Places for the Advisers’ Development Day that we are holding in October are filling fast. While it is probably only possible for you to attend if you are close to Sydney, we are prepared to send summaries of individual sessions to members who might be interested, for the cost of materials and postage. A copy of the program can be obtained by emailing the PASTA secretary at esheerin@ozemail.com.au

For some time now, PASTA has been promoting a set of working conditions for SRC advisers. Chief among these is training for the position and relief from face to face teaching. It is pleasing to see that the students from the 2004 NSW State SRC Conference felt the same way. One of the resolutions passed at this recent State conference was in essence to give more support to the advisers in the schools. It is also good to see that the NSW DET is now providing paid relief for some advisers at least to gain training for the job, something for which PASTA has been advocating almost since our inception.

Ken Page
PASTA President
Partnerships

Partnerships in the Learning Environment was the theme for one of the plenary sessions at the Second International Confederation of Principals Conference, held at Darling Harbour Convention Centre in Sydney in August 1995.

That was over 10 years ago.

In February that year, PASTA had had its inaugural Conference. In July, Roger Holdsworth and Connect furthered the cause of student participation at the Third National Student Participation Conference (now known as NASPAC) in Melbourne. Students also presented papers and took active part in the Australian Studies Curriculum Association (ACSA) Conference following that.

The combined lobbying and organisational efforts of Bathurst High Principal Jan Gerard and our nascent national SRC Advisers’ Association resulted in several stirring and relevant presentations by SRC students and members. In addition to Partnerships in the Learning Environment, the ICP Conference had a panel of six students discussing the topic ‘Student Leadership’ and a highly visible and active display stall. The students came from various NSW regions and schools. They came, significantly, from a range of ages from Year 5 through Year 12.

Whatever their contribution, they were as one in leading Robin Amm, Convention Director and then Principal of Newtown High School of the Performing Arts to formally recognise their valued contribution in follow-up letters: “There were glowing comments about the students’ performance and their participation.”

On the same stage with then NSW Director-General of Education Ken Boston, three student leaders – Sarah Vardon (Bateman’s Bay HS), Brooke Frary (Granville West PS) and David Jones (Narrabeen HS) – each gave 10 minute addresses to an audience of over 1200 principals and other school executives from around the world. Sarah and David were then in Year 12, both active on the NSW SRC and their respective regional SRC bodies. Brooke, in Year 6, was then ‘Prime Minister’ of her school’s Student Parliament.

In her opening remarks, Sarah set the task, then enunciated the vision and the hope:

“To be a partner is to share responsibility and decision making equally. It is to let others have the same control as you and to let them take some charge of the business or relationship. It is to be equal in all senses: finance, possessions, responsibility and rights. It is to be able to allow other people’s ideas to be worked upon. It is to listen to others and to act on that advice. To be a partner means to share and to work together for a common goal ...

Partnerships are of great benefit to all of the school. They develop pride and understanding, they promote good listening skills, they provide a sense of ownership and they teach new skills to students. Partnerships are a part of the learning process and we, as leaders in education, should embrace and develop them...”

[The full text of all of the nine student speeches, together with photos and supplementary media coverage of the SRC input to the 1995 ICP Conference was published in a booklet entitled OZ YOUTH SPEAKS TO THE WORLD. It is available on request from PASTA. Contact Secretary Ellen Sheerin.]
AS WE SAID, “THAT WAS 10 YEARS AGO”.  

So where have such principles led us? Where have the Principals who heard them taken us?

Alas, the sad case of Brooke may serve as a mirror introduction to the rest of this article. Less than a half-year later (following the deserved accolades she received from so articulately addressing partnerships with thousands of Principals based on her superb primary school leadership program), and having been ignored, even ‘put down’ as a mere Year 7 student by older high school students and executive staff, Brooke, in polite terms, said something akin to ‘stuff the SRC’.

More than just ‘ironic’, isn’t it? Especially as, in the final paragraph of her full four page closely argued speech to the Principals of the World, only a year before, she had said:

“Many primary students are empowered through Student Representative Councils, Peer Support, other schemes and hard work by Principals and teachers. In primary schools, they use these skills to improve themselves, the profile of their schools and the whole educational environment. When they arrive in the senior setting in year 7 they are treated as juniors and their skills are not fully utilised. The perspectives

• Things worth doing are worth doing well.
• Student needs are paramount, but without attention to teacher/adviser needs, the former are never going to be addressed satisfactorily; nor the latter’s interest or ability to ‘go that extra mile’ to meet them be sustained actively over time.
• SRCs have been around in Australian schools since the late 50s/60s. With some exceptions (only a few of which have been adequately documented and recognised), SRCs are still widely perceived, when they are thought of at all, as largely fund-raising/charity/social organisation groups.
• Student Leadership, Representation and Participation Activities have increased in diversity and acceptability, but are, in the main, still labelled and seen as ‘extra’ (as in ‘extra-curricular’ or ‘extra duty’ - ie of less importance or expendable).
• In recent years the development of so-called ‘Leadership Teams’ within many schools has too often had unfortunate side-effects: SRCs have been relegated to the above stereotype. Worse, communication gaps and a top-down dismissive attitude from school executives and seniors toward juniors have re-emerged, devaluing the SRC experience as a vital training ground for roles as active citizens and representatives.
• These limited perceptions (what we should view as misperceptions and narrow views of what is possible) are shared by most students, many staff and some administrators.
• Whether negative or limited, these activities are rarely considered by most of these groups as worthy of being credited on normal school reports or in any ways other than once a year formal presentations or one-off certificates of consequent little impact.
• Parents and community generally have neither a negative nor a positive view of such activities. Contrary to strong views on other matters (eg uniforms or the cultural imperative of sport or music, dance and drama) they are hardly thought about.
• The media – especially the rural media – cares. But schools don’t use it to promote student leadership, representation and participation.
• **Whoops!** That is, *except for sport* (and the Rock Eisteddfod..!)

• “Involvement in student activities is the single most important factor in achieving success at university or on the job.” (This clear result of a comprehensive USA survey of ex-high school students, done two decades ago and repeated regularly, has implications for Australian schools in the 21st Century that should not be dismissed.)

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**Practicalities**

- **TIME** (for teacher/advisers as well as student participants) and a *widely recognised and accepted profile* (for such organisations) are the two greatest needs to make a start at improving the current ‘misperception’.

- **Training** and **Resources** flow from the above.

- Schools that have initiated and are vigilant in sustaining practical links between student leadership structures/activities and their school philosophy/aims/in-class curriculum do exhibit a greater sense of student ownership and community responsibility for outcomes. They are happier places for it.

- Properly done, an SRC Adviser’s role is at least equal in potential and workload to that of a current Year Adviser in high schools. At present, none of the allocations of time or in-house communication, expectations or essential replacement imperatives are applied consistently if at all across the system to SRC Advisers. *(If they are where you work, PASTA would love to hear of it!)*

- As an interim measure towards achieving that medium term goal, Principal support for SRCs can best be productive by giving SRC Teacher/Advisers discretionary time allocation, office space (for SRC students too – it was a vital component of student government as practised over 25 years ago at West Wyalong High School in NSW!)

- A positive school profile must include reporting of such active citizenship roles as represented by the SRC and other activity oriented participation structures and projects on *individual student reports*.

- The positive outcomes suggested or implied by the argument that follows will occur if at school, district, state and association levels, these people are included in the communications, networking and decision-making re matters of curriculum, welfare, reporting, school promotion, finance, professional development and scheduling.

- At the *very least*, identify the **SRC Adviser** as such on their pigeonhole!

Advisers to SRCs and activities are also teachers of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They deserve and can have the support required if schools are serious about students.

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In the next issue, PASTA will explore further the potential School Principals have at both the primary and secondary levels to use the SRC to improve their schools. Through practical support for the teachers as well as the students (who give so much time to, and gain so much value from, student activities) they should be able to make maximum impact in the positive use and sustainability from year to year of this invaluable resource.
Six weeks ago, we were eight individuals, and two advisors, boarding one very large United Airlines aeroplane, beginning a journey that would help to shape the rest of our lives.

We were a group, but our group bond, our connection was not yet established. We felt nervous and excited about the unknown that lay ahead. We were questioning ourselves, our abilities as leaders, and our very part in this trip. Am I ready for this? Am I capable of wonderful things? Am I deserving of this experience? Who am I?

Six weeks on, we have found our second family and the answers to these questions and many more.

When first writing this report I didn’t really know where to begin. There is just so much to say, so many wonderful and important things that happened to us while on tour. I decided that I wanted to focus on the things that came out of the trip, us growing as leaders, growing as individuals, and really coming together as a group. I have highlighted the special events on the trip that contributed to these wonderful things.

Pre-Conference

Our first week was spent touring the beautiful state of Maryland. We visited Washington DC and went on a night-time tour there; it was so beautiful. All of us felt amazed at the extent of America’s patriotism. We toured the Annapolis Naval Academy and were inspired to work through the tough time to achieve something great. We sailed along the beautiful Chesapeake Bay and saw our dream homes!

We dined in many different places, eating crab (Maryland’s famous icon) and other delicacies. Our tour was lead by our friend Lance and his wife Hope. These two people were so friendly and kind to us. We were also joined by one of Lance’s students, Sarah Peno. Boy, did we love Sarah! Elle and myself had the pleasure of being hosted by Sarah and her family; that was such an experience! The other girls (along with Ken and Sue) stayed with Sarah and her family while the boys stayed with Lance’s neighbours. We all really enjoyed our time in Maryland, from the sights to the host families. The whole week was a bonding week for us as a group, a time for us to get comfortable with each other. This week set the scene for the weeks to come.

Day 7 of our trip led us into the lives of our special friends from Maryland. M-A-R-Y-L-A-N-D. When we met them at the Baltimore Airport, they were so excited to see us! And we were equally excited to finally see them. The buzz that surrounded us was so exciting! This group of people were the first of hundreds of leaders we would meet, all anticipating the National Association of Student Councils (NASC) Conference. Straight away we all just clicked. I remember sitting on the plane with them in amazement, feeling so excited about the week ahead of us.

Spending our Pre-Trip with the Maryland delegation really helped us to become more confident in ourselves. We had just spent a wonderful week together touring Maryland State, so I feel as though the Pre-Trip was significant in us growing as individuals. We all grew close to different people in their delegation, which helped us realise things about ourselves and each other. These friends hold a special place in all of our hearts.

Our Pre-Trip - the couple of days before the conference - were spent in the company of our Maryland friends: that’s how we all got so close. There was our first dinner at the Hard Rock Café in St Louis, standing on tables and chairs chanting and singing our voices out – literally right Troy - with our new friends from all over. There were bus rides...
chanting our chants and singing our songs together. There were numerous hugs of all kinds! There was swimming together in an overheated hotel pool; I will never forget Arly-Lian’s fully clothed lunge into the aqua. There was our first major league baseball game: the St Louis Cardinals vs the Pittsburg Pirates! Walking out of that stadium singing *I Will Survive* at the top of our lungs was so much fun, and so special. All of these moments meant so much to us, and so much to them. On this Pre-Trip in St Louis, we began to get really excited about the Conference. Our journey as leaders was about to begin. We didn’t know what to expect; we didn’t really know how to feel: excited, nervous, anxious, scared, pumped to the max - all come to mind! This was why we were here.

**The NASC Conference**

Our first day of the Conference was one of the most memorable days of the whole trip. Words cannot describe the atmosphere at Collinsville High School. It was incredible. There were hundreds, thousands of leaders all crammed together, trying to fill out forms and find our workshops. People were screaming “*Australia!*”, trying to find the ‘real’ Aussies. We got absolutely mobbed by so many people. Poor Ken was trying to keep us together as a group because we were just so excited and amazed, and so many people were coming up to us wanting to trade items and wanting us to talk to them about Australia that we kept getting separated. Poor Matty didn’t even get to experience this as he was in hospital! But all was OK.

I will never forget our first general session. Walking to the school auditorium screaming “Aussie Aussie Aussie”, all of us so happy, so together. I remember walking into that auditorium hearing all the delegates so proudly chanting their state chants. Feeling the atmosphere, the excitement. Wow, I’m getting goosebumps thinking about it. And that first guest speaker, he was awesome.

The conference was such a special part of our journey. For the first time, we were all challenged out of our comfort zones, and this made us stronger leaders. We came together as a group because we were experiencing the same, yet different experiences. We were drawing so much from each experience. Wow. When people ask me now what was the Conference like, I really don’t know how to respond. How can you put it into words?

**State President**

I would also like to talk a bit about my experience at the Conference as the State President. It was really an honour to be given such a role. I felt really excited and nervous; I didn’t really know what to expect. Our first Presidents’ meeting was lots of fun. No-one really knew anyone else, no-one knew what to expect, but we were so excited to be given the honour of representing our delegations.

We played some fun games, talked about our states and got to know each other. The Presidents’ Summit was the second time we met together and was held on the second day of conference. This was a four-hour long meeting where we all identified, classified and acted upon the problems facing Student Councils in America, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Australia. It was really interesting to see that the problems the Councils in America face are much the same as ours.

I loved that we were attending a *national* conference. Australia doesn’t have much communication between district councils, let alone nationally; perhaps that’s something that needs to change for the future. The ideas thrown about in the Presidents’ Summit were all valid and vital for the future success of student bodies.

**Post-Conference**

All good things must come to an end, and boy did we realise this. Leaving the conference was such a hard thing for all of us to do. It was the first time on the trip when we all really felt emotional. Gosh – it was so hard. Saying goodbye to the Maryland delegates, wow that was difficult. Looking back though, I think that experience really brought us together as a group. We were all so upset, but together in this state. Suddenly we only had each other. I remember sitting on that plane to New Mexico reflecting on the Conference and how it had impacted on me personally, and I realised how much it had affected you guys and in turn our group.

New Mexico! Now, that was cool. It was here that we were joined by Mike Nolan, an adviser from New Jersey. It was here also that we were again challenged by being separated and put out of our comfort zones. This was especially daunting as we were all still a little bit emotional after the conference. We had just experienced so much there and had so much to take in, and now we had this whole new experience to take in as well.

Albuquerque, New Mexico was where we stayed with our second (for two of us our third) host family. The kindness and hospitality that these wonderful people showed us was truly appreciated. They welcomed us into their homes with the kindness you would expect of life long friends. Whatever we
needed or wanted, they provided. They invited us to their homes for six days.

Those six days were spent seeing the beautiful and varied sights of New Mexico from a locals’ perspective. Acoma Sky City, the Sandia Mountains, Old Town and the July 4 celebrations all provided a vastly different experience to that of the Conference. Our Alberquerque organisers and friends, Sandra and Camille, along with Phil our bus driver, showed us how wonderful people can be. We thoroughly enjoyed our stay in New Mexico, shopping and visiting museums, because it gave us the chance to really bond with our families and experience a different taste of the USA. I know all of us really loved our stay in Albequerque.

On leaving Alberquerque we travelled further into New Mexico, finally arriving in a small town called Lordsburg. It was here we met the special family, the Jarvis’s. Traveling the 10 hour journey and staying with Jo and Jim at their ranch in New Mexico was the turning point for us as a group. It was half way through the trip and we were in an isolated area with only the company of the Jarvis family, Mike and ourselves. I think we really needed this to connect with each other. The tranquillities Mike ran under the stars in New Mexico still give me shivers when I think about them. Before New Mexico, although we had all become closer and bonded, there were still barriers within the group, still things about each other that we chose not to acknowledge and I guess to an extent neglected. Mike, as well as Ken and Sue, recognised these things and began to mend them. I will never forget our last night, going around the circle saying special things about each other. We truly began to love and appreciate each other, and respect all of our differences, and appreciate us as a group. We evolved from being just a group of leaders touring together, to becoming a bond of friends.

Our last night with Mike in Albequerque was a special night for all of us. As he played those songs I think we all realised the significance this trip has had on us, how much we have grown and all the things we’ve learnt. This was even before camp! Looking around that room seeing the tears in everyone’s eyes, feeling the love … it was really special.

National Leadership Camp

The Lake Tahoe National Leadership Camp … where do I even begin? That experience was so much more than any of us thought it would be. We learnt so much about leadership, and so much about ourselves. I learnt how amazing you guys are. The memory of us standing up there on our last night, arms around each other singing I Am, You Are, We Are Australian with all of the American delegates joining in made me so proud of all of us. We grew so much over that week, as leaders, individuals and especially as a group. Being separated for so long made us realise how much we had grown attached to each other, how important we all are in each other’s lives. We met such amazing people there, people who will be special to us forever. It really was incredible.

Coming Home

San Francisco was the final leg of the trip. This was an interesting experience filled with lots of emotion. We didn’t want to leave, but we wanted to go home. We felt changed, and all shared the anticipation about what life back home would be like being these new people. It was here that our final transition occurred. We evolved from being a bond of friends, to realising that we are in a sense, family.

If I had to summarise our tour into one paragraph I would say that it was a life-changing and goal-changing experience. It shook all of us to our core, and challenged us to find who we really are. It was a journey of self-discovery. This tour has had an impact on all of our lives immensely, and because of the skills and knowledge we now possess, we have become infinitely more qualified, capable, and stronger leaders.

I thoroughly encourage the youth of today to explore their potential. Take challenges, do things that scare you. Challenge yourself to reach your leadership potential, and do things like this tour to help you get there.

You will never be the same again.

Lanai Stanger
State President, 2006 USA Tour

Check out ‘How To Join’ page on our Website:
http://hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/
or contact the PASTA Secretary: esheerin@ozemail.com.au
USING GROUP ACTIVITIES: 4

This article concludes our series, for now, on the use of games and developmental activities with your SRC, leadership team, student activity, staff or other participatory group. There are many printed resources from the fields of drama and group development, and peer support which provide detailed instructions for different games.

In his introduction to Great Games to Play With Groups - A Leaders Guide, Frank W Harris points out that, from a group leader’s point of view, a repertoire of games is not only handy but essential, as they can help to resolve tension, release energy, enhance self-esteem, promote better group relations, challenge players and heighten problem-solving skills.

However, as the group leader there are some guidelines that you need to be aware of before you get to the point where you begin your games session.

• Ensure a physically safe environment for the activities: check the area for hazards and either remove them or make sure that these areas are pointed out to the group. If necessary, use part of the group to act as safety monitors.

• Ensure a mentally safe environment: don’t allow put-downs or other inappropriate behaviour.

• Establish a ‘stop’ signal: give the group a signal that will indicate they are to immediately stop and listen to your instructions.

• Make directions short and to the point: the aim is to get the activity started as quickly as possible. If groups are needed, give instructions after they are formed.

• Keep rules for the activity to a minimum: an important part of the game could be to see how the participants use their own problem solving skills to develop rules/strategies for the activity.

• Demonstrate where necessary what you want done: for some activities (or parts of an activity), visual cues can be easier to follow than verbal instructions.

• Be prepared for a less than perfect first time through: it takes time for the group to gain the confidence to give it their all, especially if this is the first time they have been together.

• Be personally enthusiastic: the more enthusiastic you are, the more likely the group is to be involved.

• Maintain control/Be vigilant: this helps to maintain the safe environments above. It can also help with points for discussion at the end of the activity.

• Be the timekeeper: this allows for you to control what happens within the activity, how long it goes for, when it finishes, etc.

• Have a plan for the student who doesn’t want to participate: this may involve anything from standing aside for a while, to complete exclusion from the group, but make sure that you give it to the group before they start.

You have covered all of the above and are now sure that you are ready to let the games begin. Or are you?

What sort of activities are you going to use? Is it a whole group activity or do you need smaller groups? Do you appoint teams or let the students do it? Are students going to be eliminated as part of the game and if so, what do you do with them to keep them involved? Are points awarded for ‘winning’? Is winning more important than developing strategies/teamwork/group bonding? Can you adapt a known game to give someone who is less able an equal chance of being as involved as everyone else? If the activity isn’t working, do you have an alternate ready to go? What props/materials do you need and do you have them ready? The list appears almost endless.

The key thing we wish to hear is from you. Have you made time to do some of these: in SRC meetings, in workshops, camps and conferences and, especially with SRC leaders trained and trying some of them out in normal classroom situations? If so, let us know so that we can tell others.

Charles Kingston

The PASTA Newsletter is edited by Ken Page and distributed bi-monthly as a supplement to Connect magazine.

http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/
At Youngtown Primary School in northern Tasmania, Grade 3/4 teachers and over 100 students embarked on a voyage of discovery this term. We were aiming to make a difference in our local community but didn’t know what or how we would do it.

Our unit of inquiry is entirely student led and driven! Yes, it is scary to set sail on a unit like this. It takes effort and a supportive team of students and teachers to make this possible. Luckily we have all of these things at our school.

Our team has had to continually reflect and re-plan our direction based on the way our students’ understanding of the issue has changed. We are still unsure what the end product will look like! But we know what we would like to see in our local community and the world in twenty years time based on our changes. We are aiming to fix the causes of vandalism in our local community.

The search for answers to the following questions are the fundamental understandings of our unit of inquiry:

- By working together can we solve problems?
- In what ways can I contribute to the group to solve our problem?
- Does charity provide lasting change?
- Is this problem worth fixing?
- How can our actions make things better?
- How can our actions bring about lasting change?
- Are you making a difference?
- Is this really helping?
- Are we fixing the problem?

Teachers and students have been working together to discover the possible problems in our local community. We needed to develop questions to survey a variety of community members. We bundled and used the data to graphically represent the responses. The top four responses were selected and the students voted to decide which problem was most important to them.
We bundled and used the data to graphically represent the responses. We discovered there are many causes including the related issues of supervision, friendships, family support, and community ownership mixed with drugs, peer-pressure and alcohol causing younger adults to react to problems through vandalism and other responses.

The result was a decision to fix the causes of vandalism in our community. To do this we have been visited by many special guests such as the Mayor. We have developed and role played possible causes of vandalism. We have also asked many other community groups such as local government, police and others to give us their understandings and data. You never really understand how deep some students understanding of an issue is until they have time to explore it in depth. We discovered there are many causes including the related issues of supervision, friendships, family support, and community ownership mixed with drugs, peer-pressure and alcohol causing younger adults to react to problems through vandalism and other responses.

We now have meaningful data about our community and are working towards changing the underpass near our school to be more positive, inviting and supportive to the community. We aim to create a mural with better lighting and drainage using younger adults within our community. We will work together to get community support and understanding. Our second action plan is to develop an advertising campaign to educate the community about the causes and problems that vandalism creates.

It is powerful because it is learning based on real life issues and problems. The answers we create are a stepping stone helping to bring change and understanding in Youngtown and beyond. Thank you to Rose, Jo, Brock, Shireen, Alida, and Maria our intern for being so flexible and supportive as we have progressed.

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... and other Student Participation Support Materials

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Documenting, Defining, Informing ... & Challenging

Many secondary schools are allocating staff responsibility positions to the support and development of various forms of student participation, representation, leadership and voice. While the responsibility of these positions includes traditional or emerging forms of Student Councils (SRCs etc), some broader understandings of these areas are also emerging. In particular, it is recognised that these are curriculum responsibilities - part of the school’s planned teaching and learning program.

In this article, examples are presented of the ways in which two schools are documenting the development of such initiatives - and seeing this documentation as part of a strategic approach to develop and extend opportunities for students. Both of these examples are still being evaluated by the schools; responses are invited.

A Student Leadership Booklet

At Reservoir District Secondary College, in Melbourne’s north-east, Judy Simm has responsibility for the exploration and development of student participation and leadership. She has been creating a training program for students (as part of a team with teachers from two local primary schools), but has also been working within a ‘whole school’ context to recognise, integrate and support the diverse examples of participation and leadership within the College.

A ‘Student Leadership’ Booklet has been produced (a sample page is illustrated here) that summarises these diverse opportunities. This booklet starts with a broad statement of the College’s commitment to participation/leadership and an index list of the 12 or so areas included eg ‘Activities Committee’, ‘Advance Program’, ‘Junior Class Committee’, ‘Lunch Activities Committee’, ‘Peer Support’, ‘Sporting Coach’, ‘Student Representative Council’, ‘Team Captains’, ‘Youth Summit’ and so on. In each area, as can be noted, the initiative is described, required skills noted and information provided on how to apply.

Copies of this booklet are made available to any student on request and brief information about the positions (and the existence of the booklet) is included in the School Diary.

It is already prestigious to have a school program included within this booklet. This prestige is used strategically to support and extend opportunities for real participation that goes beyond tokenism. Some programs are reported to have applied for inclusion, but have been rejected until they can show that students have significant opportunities for decision-making, responsibility and skill development. The staff responsibility position therefore also provides support to teachers about ways to change how they work with students to enhance ‘deep participation’.

For further details, contact Judy Simm, Reservoir District Secondary College, Plenty Road, Reservoir 3073; phone: (03) 9470 3555.
A Participation File

At Roxburgh College, in Melbourne’s north-west, a similar approach is being used to document the range of student participation/leadership/voice initiatives within the school. A staff team of four teachers has been set up, with responsibility for these areas in the junior, middle and senior ‘sub-school’ areas; Katrina Cikes has responsibility for overall coordination of approaches.

There were several examples of active student participation within the College, but not always recognised or integrated within a consistent framework. There was concern that little was known about who participated, and a desire to ensure that such participation went beyond tokenism.

Existing initiatives were documented by compiling a central folder of sheets describing each example (see top example on this page). The school might extend this to look at the skills involved and the assumptions underlying the student roles.

Analysis and Reflection

However, the particular value of the approach undertaken by the team lies in their analysis of and reflection on these initiatives. The second part of each sheet (shown below on this page) - it could be the bottom part of the page, or the reverse of the sheet - collects information on who actually gets to participate. Is it always the same students? In a diverse school community, with significant numbers of students from various cultural groups, how are these groups reflected in participation in the initiatives? How about the balance of male and female students? And, perhaps more importantly, are there any patterns observed about who doesn’t get to be involved?

It is then possible to extend the reflection: Why? What are the mechanisms involved here that include or exclude certain groups? What can the school do about it?

This part of the documentation also looks at the recognition or credit that the school provides to students for participation in this initiative. What actually happens? How does this affect participation?

Thirdly, when staff look at these initiatives, what outcomes are seen for the students and for the school?

Finally, the form asks for information about any evaluations of this initiative, including the degree of satisfaction of members of the school community - students, teachers and others - with the operation of the initiative. This, of course, raises the question of the source of these reflections: are there opportunities for students as well as teachers to reflect and comment on and analyse the practice of the initiatives?

For further information, contact Katrina Cikes, Roxburgh College, Corner Thomas Brunton Parade and Donald Cameron Drive, Roxburgh Park 3064 or phone: 03 9930 8100.

Roger Holdsworth
At School Councils UK, we firmly believe that having an effective Student Council can improve your school. But now we have the chance to prove it. School Councils UK are heading a project in ten London schools. The project’s aim is to research in schools and work with their students, staff and Student Councils to see how student participation can make a difference to the whole school.

The players

The schools are all very different from each other in terms of the stages of their Councils, the type of school and the background of the students.

Student Councils can be a bit of a lottery, but school-wide training for form councillors and staff is increasing the odds of having a really effective, working council.

Ask the audience

A research team from Birmingham University is administering surveys, conducting interviews and “asking the audience” about their Student Councils. Professor Lynn Davies passionately believes that student participation is key to improving schools and that there is a need to have research that shows the benefits to everyone.

Some schools are seeing the project as an exciting opportunity to ask students about their experiences in class and involve them more in their lessons; student councillors are also receiving training. Some of the students are taking part in finding answers to the big questions in schools: ‘What makes a winning lesson?’ ‘How can we stop bad behaviour getting in the way of learning?’ ‘How can teachers engage students in their lessons?’

A lifeline

Members of staff - as well as the school as a whole - are benefiting:

As a newly appointed Senior Teacher, following in the footsteps of a popular Student Council Link Teacher, I was unsure about how to approach my new job and whether I could enthuse the students in the same way my predecessor had done. I realised that a really successful Student Council would be more reliant and not collapse when a favourite teacher left. When details of the project came my way, I thought it would be a perfect way to establish a self-reliant group.

The training offered has been invaluable ... we’ve still got a long way to go, but I believe that Haverstock Student Council will play a significant part in the school's ongoing improvement.”

Link Teacher, Haverstock School

Asking the audience is also proving popular with students:

The kids are very enthusiastic ... there are loads and loads of ideas piling up as students are really enthusiastic. So as the days go by, the agenda lengthens.

Toyin, student at Sir John Cass

The schools have also had the chance to get together in City Hall in November 2004 and a Training Conference - hosted by Deutsche Bank, part-sponsor of the project - in the city:

Following the conference, training took place of all the Student Council representatives to ensure the form meetings are well run. The training included workshops on taking minutes, chairing meetings and ensuring that students’ views are realistic and accurately represented. Meetings now take place every week, and the views of the form are then taken to the Year Council meeting which takes place every month. The Executive Student Council then meets with Mr Phillips to work on making the changes the students would like to see.

Student, Lilian Baylis Technology School

After meeting with School Councils UK, we were very excited ... We met other schools and learnt about their successes and failures and how they have managed to accomplish beating bullying or getting others to respect their environment. At school, we have now completed a bullying survey and we are analysing the results to see what our peers need. We feel we have gained more confidence after or training ... we certainly have more ideas.

Student, Cheam High School

The research project is set to run for a minimum of two years.

To find out more, log onto: www.schoolcouncils.org for more information about involving Student Councils in teaching and learning, or contact Lois Canessa, London Schools’ Project manager on lois@schoolcouncils.org
The VicSRC

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a statewide network of Victorian secondary school students. It has developed from the Victorian Secondary Student Network, set up at a state conference of students in 2001. The VicSRC is formally auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACvic).

The VicSRC aims to:

- strengthen SRCs;
- be a representative body for Victorian secondary school students;
- facilitate and co-ordinate action by secondary students at all levels;
- be democratic and participatory.

FIRST ANNUAL VicSRC CONGRESS

Thursday 4 August 2005
Kingston City Hall, Moorabbin

The first Annual Congress of the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) was held in Moorabbin (Melbourne) on Thursday 4th August. Over 120 students from approximately 60 schools took part in a full day’s program that included discussions about issues defined by the students, and a formal session in which proposals were debated and decided upon.

Information about the Congress had been sent to SRCs and support staff in all Victorian secondary schools earlier this year. The SRCs were each invited to nominate two student representatives to attend the Congress, to discuss the nature of issues they wished to raise, and to return the registration forms.

The suggestions from SRCs (and other student groups) about topics of interest formed the agenda for the Congress. It was suggested that these topics for discussion would fall within three areas:

- individual skill development;
- operation of SRCs; and
- wider issues of concern to students.

Aims of the Congress

The Congress aimed to provide “a formal representative tool for secondary students across Victoria”.

In addition, it would offer:

- wide ranging discussions on how to improve student councils;
- networking opportunities; and
- workshops on personal skill development.

The VicSRC undertook to work towards achievement of Congress decisions and to report back to participants.

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On The Day

Discussion groups were held around the issues identified by students before the Congress, in areas such as: School Spirit, Litter, the State of Toilets in Schools, Canteens, Lunchtime Activities, Student Rights, the Role of SRCs, Issues Faced by the SRC, Effective SRCs, Fundraising, How the SRC can make an impact and get heard, Overcoming Obstacles, and Meetings.

Following these discussions, students then met in preparatory groups to consider any proposals for decisions and action around the issues. In the afternoon, a formal Congress was convened along Parliamentary lines, with students representing the ‘seats’ of their schools. Motions from the preparatory groups had been submitted and grouped and these formed the agenda for the Congress. Proposals that couldn’t be considered within the time limits have been referred to the VicSRC for consideration and action.
Outcomes

Several resolutions were considered, with some passed and others rejected. The following resolutions were agreed to by the Congress:

**A: SRC Networks**

1. That all SRCs from each school should come together to inform and collect ideas from one another, to form a working network.
2. That SRCs should have twice-yearly cluster forums involving local schools, to discuss issues relevant to students.
3. That the VicSRC organise an annual social/recreational event at other meetings/events of the VicSRC.
4. That the VicSRC establish a website, inclusive of a forum, to enable the exchange of SRC related issues and advice, and to provide for inter-school support when taking issues to decision-making bodies.

**B: School Councils**

5. That students be represented on School Councils.

**C: Constitution**

6. That SRCs operate on the basis of a constitution that states their rights, purpose, and responsibilities. The constitution should be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Follow-Up

At the end of the Congress, approximately 20 students indicated a strong interest in continued active involvement at a local or central level as part of the VicSRC. These students are being contacted separately and a follow-up meeting will be held to consider action around the above resolutions and the on-going work of the VicSRC.

A full report of the VicSRC Congress is available from the VicSRC on request.

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**Student Leaders Unite**

Karingal Park Secondary and Frankston High Student Leadership Council (SLC) members came up with an innovative plan to find out more about how other schools work. On the 18th July of this year, eight Frankston High School students came to Karingal Park Secondary College and joined in classes for the day. There was a return visit two weeks later, when Karingal Park students joined the Frankston school community.

The students decided to follow a class timetable for the day at their own year level. Two visiting students went to each class. They also participated in an SLC meeting at lunch time.

Michelle Zintschenko, Karingal Park SLC Coordinator assisted the students to settle in.

“It is a great opportunity for our students to mix and to pick up new ideas to bring back to their schools. The students organised the whole thing. Each pair of visitors was nurtured by two of our SLC representatives.

“The visitors from Frankston were brave,” Michelle said. “They turned up to our College in their own school uniform. As outsiders, their uniform attracted positive and negative attention and they were willing to face the challenge”.

Students participated in all classroom activities.

“For the most part, the day was very successful,” Michelle said. “The cross fertilisation of ideas will have an enduring benefit for our colleges.”

Debbie Knight
Karingal Park Secondary College
Belar Avenue, Frankston 3199

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VicSRC
Level 2, 172 Flinders St.,
Melbourne 3000 VIC
Phone: (03) 9612-8999; 0422 225 946
Publications Available from Connect!

*Connect* is able to make available a wide range of publications that illustrate or support various aspects of student participation. These publications are listed on and can be ordered using the form on the back page of each issue of *Connect*. However, new readers may not be aware of the content of these publications, and so the following guide provides a summary of the valuable documents that are available from us.

---

**Student Councils & Beyond**

**Students as Effective Participants in Education Decision Making**

Compiled by Roger Holdsworth
June 2005; 108pp

The LATEST *Connect* publication!

Student Councils in primary and secondary schools have been criticised as:

- exclusive and elitist;
- bogged down in token issues;
- unconnected to the broad body of students, school decision-making and other student groups;
- outside the curriculum; and
- ineffective.

However, current educational theory and practice indicates that it is important that students are active participants and partners in all aspects of school decision-making – in both curriculum and school governance areas.

*Connect* brings together a collection of ideas that challenge you to go beyond criticisms of ineffective Student Councils. *Student Councils and Beyond* enables you to find out what students, teachers and schools have implemented around Australia - exciting and practical ways that you can “take the next step” to go beyond tokenism and make a difference.

Articles that were originally published between 1990 and 2005 now appear in one volume – 108 pages of stories, strategies and worksheets.

**Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils At Work**

Written by: Students and Teachers from Primary Schools in the LaTrobe District JSC Network (LaTrobe District JSC Network, December 1996)
48 pp; $7 ($12 for 2 copies); ISBN 0 7325 1465 7

Junior School Councils (JSCs) are student organisations that operate in many primary schools. In this book, students and teachers from ten schools in Melbourne’s northern suburbs document how their JSCs work. There are stories from each of the ten schools, and also their answers to ‘frequently asked questions’ about how these groups operate.

**Students and Work: Studies Reprinted from Connect 1979-1985**

(Ed.) P Blunden (1986)
80 pages; $5; ISBN 0 7241 3995 8

Case studies of schools that developed school/work programs which were documented in Connect between 1979 and 1985; includes a theoretical overview of mixes of school and work, identifies issues and provides examples of programs.

**CRAM Guide:**

**Special Youth Radio Issue**

3CR Program Guide (October-November 1985)
12 pages; $1 (free with other literature order)

A special issue of the 3CR (Melbourne community radio station) magazine from late 1985 highlighted a variety of youth-produced radio projects. Copies of this document can be provided FREE on request, in association with other literature orders, until copies run out.
**Foxfire Publications**

Foxfire is a quarterly oral history magazine that has been produced by high school students in the Appalachian mountains in Georgia, USA since 1966. It is now recognised, more broadly, as the curriculum approach behind this magazine, an approach that is now used in many primary and secondary schools throughout the USA and internationally.

This approach is based on the development and exploration of a set of 'Core Principles' which stress:

* democratic decision making and student action, rather than passive receipt of processed information;
* clear connections between the classroom work and surrounding communities and the real world outside the classroom; and
* the academic integrity of the work.

*Connect* has limited stocks of the following *Foxfire* publications for sale:

**Sometimes a Shining Moment:**

*The Foxfire Experience - Twenty Years Teaching in a High School Classroom*

E Wigginton (1985)
438 pp; Doubleday; $25; ISBN 0 385 13359 6

Wigginton outlines the history of *Foxfire*, its philosophy, underlying approaches and details of his classes, lesson by lesson. This is an inspiring and informative book, crammed with ideas. *(5 copies only left)*

**A Foxfire Christmas - Appalachian Memories and Traditions**

(ed) E Wigginton (1990)
170 pp; Doubleday (hardcover); $25;
ISBN 0 385 41347

Put together, in the *Foxfire* style, by high school students, this is a handsome hard-cover volume which illustrates the *Foxfire* approach, as well as providing a valuable insight into Christmas traditions in the area. *(3 copies only left)*

**Foxfire: 25 Years: A Celebration of Our First Quarter Century**

(ed) E Wigginton and students (1991)
359 pp; Doubleday; $25; ISBN 0 385 41346 7

Includes interviews with Wigginton, early *Foxfire* students and community members. It provides a dynamic illustration of the classroom approaches underlying the *Foxfire* approach to teaching and learning. *(26 copies only left)*

**Connect Research Articles**

*Connect* receives various articles and documents that are relevant to issues of student participation but are not, for various reasons, appropriate for publication. These articles are listed in each issue of *Connect*. We can make copies of these available for research purposes for the cost of copying and postage.

Again, there is a database of these articles available - and this can be cross-referenced, searched and printed out by topic, location, issue of listing etc.

Simply quote the code number of the required article.

**Back copies of Connect**

*Connect* has copies of all back issues available for individual purchase. Copies are $4 for a single issue or $6 for a double issue.

To find out what is in any issue, we are able to provide you with a database print-out of the articles ($3 for postage and copying).

However ... **SPECIAL OFFER!!:**

... order the complete set of issues from any past calendar year for only $15 (including postage). Simply specify the year, and we'll send you ALL six issues from that year.

Or use the form on the back page and circle the back issue/s that you want.

**ADVANCE NOTICE:** Student Action Teams Book

*Connect* is currently starting work on a further publication documenting school and classroom practices with *Student Action Teams*. This will provide practical information about the operation of such teams, with examples in the areas of Traffic Safety and the Environment. Due early 2006!
Applications are now OPEN for the Learning Choices Expo 2006 to be held in Maroochydore, Queensland.

This event will bring together 500 teachers, principals, coordinators, youth workers, policy folk and researchers from across the country who are passionate about diverse ways to engage young people in meaningful learning - particularly those young people whose needs are not able to be met in a traditional classroom setting.

The Learning Choices Expo will feature an impressive range of experts in delivering workshops, facilitating ‘fierce’ conversations and offering professional development opportunities across three themes ‘Practice and Programs’, ‘Research and Policy’ and ‘Indigenous’ education.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Keynote presentation from Laudan Aron of the Urban Institute, Washington D.C.;
- Keynote presentation from Chris Sarra, former Principal at Cherbourg State School and 2004 Queenslander of the Year;
- A showcase of 20 student teams from some of the most innovative and exciting learning programs in Australia.

Visit:

www.dsf.org.au/learningchoices

or call Mikaeli at the Dusseldorp Skills Forum on 02 9571 8347.

Numbers are strictly limited – register before December 9th, 2005 to take advantage of the Early Bird registration rate.

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Student Action Teams: South Australia

The South Australian Office for Youth has adapted and re-published the Student Action Teams Manual, with South Australian examples, as part of the Social Inclusion Initiative.

The original manual: ‘Acting for Change’ was written by the Australian Youth Research Centre for the Victorian Department of Education and Training and has been available free on the web at:

www.sofweb.vic.edu.au
(search on ‘Student Action Team’)

Copies of the South Australian version have been sent to all primary and secondary schools in the state. For further information:

www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au

Student Voices: Beyond Tokenism

The current issue of the Journal of the Teacher Learning Network (TLN) in Victoria, has a focus on student voice - on student views, advocacy and action.

The issue contains articles on the DART program in the City of Banyule, on a leadership program for refugee and newly arrived young people in Year 10, on ‘authentic tasking’ at Killara PS, on ‘including students in the process and purpose of learning’ at Streeton PS, on student leadership in the Pakenham cluster, on ‘promoting student engagement’ at Mill Park SC, on ‘capturing student voices’ at St Patrick’s College in Ballarat, on VCAL and on the Brigidine Justice and Democracy Forums.

To enquire about copies of the Journal (Vol 12 No 3, Spring 2005), contact the Teacher Learning Network at PO Box 363, Abbotsford 3067 or phone: (03) 9418 4992 or e-mail Greg Duthie on gduthie@tln.org.au or Michael Murray on mmurray@tln.org.au

(The Teacher Learning Network is an education initiative of the Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch, and the Victorian Independent Education Union. Schools can become members of the TLN and receive copies of the Journal as part of that membership.)
Documents

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

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

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<td>Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring (Page Kalkowski, School Improvement Research Series, NW Regional Educational Laboratory, USA) (13 pp; $1.30)</td>
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<td>Social action and education for citizenship in Scotland (Ian Fyfe, in Groupwork Vol 14 No 2, 2004) (10 pp; $1.20)</td>
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<td>Promising Practices and Impacts of Youth Engagement in Program Decision-Making and Planning (Linda Camino and Cailin O’Connor, Community Youth Connection - Issue Brief, April 2005) (3 pp; $0.60)</td>
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<td>568</td>
<td>The Everyday Neglect of Student Voice in Our Schools (Susan Groundwater-Smith, paper at University of Melbourne, June 2005) (12 pp; $1.40)</td>
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* Cross-referenced index to contents of *Connect* back issues ($3) $ ...........

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

**Miscellaneous Resources:**

- **NEW!** Student Councils & Beyond ($30; $25 for *Connect* subscribers) $ ...........
- Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work (1996) $ ...........
- Case studies of Primary School SRCs ($7 or $12 for two copies) $ ...........
- Students and Work - 1985 *Connect* reprint booklet #5 ($5) $ ...........
- Youth Radio Cram Guide - 1985 ($1 - or FREE with any other order) $ ...........

**Foxfire Resources:**

- Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($25) $ ...........
- *Foxfire*: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($25) $ ...........
- A Foxfire Christmas (Doubleday hardcover) ($25) $ ...........

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