Student Participation in Curriculum and Governance: Hair-Raising Possibilities?

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  9th - 10th July; University of Melbourne
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This Issue

This issue of Connect is, as you will have noticed, produced jointly with Otherways, the journal of the Alternative Education Resource Group. This collaboration arose from a conference on Alternative Learning held earlier this year. We thought it valuable to bring what we do and what we share to a wider audience. If you wish to continue learning more about each publication, subscription information is included in the centre pages.

It is therefore valuable to pause and review what Connect is about:

What do we mean by Student Participation?

The word ‘participation’ has been used in various ways in education. For example, it can mean ‘being there’ as in participation (or retention) rates; it can mean ‘taking part’ (as in doing activities over which students may have little or no say); it can mean ‘having a say’ (students’ speaking out about issues). All these might be important, but we mean much more than these definitions when we talk of ‘student participation’.

We mean: an active sharing by students in decisions about and implementation of education policies and practices and of the key issues that determine the nature of the world in which they live.

This implies that participation must value the contribution that students make, meet genuine needs (i.e. be about real things), have an impact or consequence that extends beyond the participants (i.e. outside the classroom), be challenging to participants, and provide the opportunity for planning, acting and reflecting.

Another way of saying that is to see that student participation must involve activities that are valuable and make sense in three ways:

a) to the participants - students are working on issues that make sense to them, and in which they are valued;

b) to the community - the community sees the issues as valuable ones to be worked on, and in which students can add something of value to that community;

c) academically - the participation meets the academic or curriculum goals that schools are required to achieve.

Arenas of Student Participation

There are two major arenas in which we see student participation developing.

a) in school governance

This involves students directly, or through representatives, in participation in decision making about educational issues. This occurs through students on formal committees e.g. School Council, Curriculum Committee, Regional Board etc.; and through student-run organisations e.g. SRFs, Junior School Councils, student networks - where students can discuss, debate and decide their position on issues facing them.
b) in curriculum
This involves students in decision making and action through negotiation of their learning, and through specific ‘student participation’ projects or approaches.

Student participation projects can be community development projects in which students provide some service to their community eg cross-age tutoring, media productions and so on; or community research and action projects in which students investigate and act on issues facing their community. There are long lists of practical examples in both these areas.

Why is Student Participation Important?
Reasons for supporting increased student participation focus on:

a) students have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives: we live in a democratic community - student participation can be an ‘apprenticeship’ for citizenship in this democracy;

b) student participation leads to more effective decision making and learning; better decisions are made when participants share in making those decisions; learning is more effective when students are active participants.

Behind these reasons, people like James Coleman and Art Pearl have developed a ‘theory of valuing youth’. They argue that the role of young people has become increasingly passive, divorced from action and devalued by society. This has negative consequences for young people and for society. Schools play a central role in such approaches, and must therefore adopt different approaches that build a valued role for young people today (as distinct from ‘learning for tomorrow’), and that develop models for community participation.

The critique is neatly summed up by Coleman as:

> The student role of young persons has become enlarged to the point where that role constitutes the major portion of their youth. But the student role is not a role of taking action and experiencing consequences ... It is a relatively passive role, always in preparation for action, but never acting... The consequences of the expansion of the student role, and the action that implies for the young, has been an increased restiveness among the young. They are shielded from responsibility, and they become irresponsible; they are held in a dependent status, and they come to act as dependants; they are kept away from productive work, and they become unproductive.

Pearl argues: “If youth are to be valued, they must be of the society - participants, not recipients. That is the crux of any theory of valuing youth.”

Connect’s Role
That’s why Connect exists: to support educational approaches that value students for their contribution to their schools and their community. It does that through assisting people - students, teachers and others - to document their practices, and through publishing the stories and the resources that will encourage and enable increased student participation.

Roger Holdsworth

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**NATIONAL STUDENT PARTICIPATION WORKSHOP**

University of Melbourne
Sunday July 9th - Monday July 10th

Students, teachers and others sharing information about:

- How SRCs work
- Students and School Councils
- Peer Mediation
- Curriculum Negotiation
- Forming Networks
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Do young people really care about “Participating?”

The generally view is that young people are only concerned about their immediate world: what to wear, where to go on Saturday night, who is going out with whom, what is the latest miracle cure for acne, what is the latest musical release and so on. Who says that these are not important issues after all? Just take a look at the front page of our newspapers of late, to determine what news and which adults - important adults such as politicians - are making headlines nationally and worldwide. The issues are not too dissimilar. Just a different context with different players and slightly more complex rules.

We could say that young people are very interested to participate; it's just that they are not often invited to do so. And on the odd occasion that they are asked, they are not quite sure how to do it.

Participation is an active process - stepping out of one's comfort zone and into the spotlight. It is about seizing the right moment to make one's views known to the world. It is about shouting loud: “Hey! I am here; I am not invisible; I am alive; I am part of this world. Yes! I care about what is going on. And I have skills and abilities that should be valued today - not tomorrow!”

Often, however, young people feel quite discouraged. Even when they have made an effort to 'participate', nothing really changes. Well! Let me tell you a secret. If you are wondering how to change the world, let me assure you first of all, that you are not alone; and you are certainly not the first or last person to be consumed by such a powerful passion. Just do not lose it! Hold on to it - it is a healthy emotion to have. Only now you need to know how to convert such a strong feeling into practical skills. It’s not impossible; it’s just a time consuming but rewarding exercise. Before you take on the whole world, remember the saying: “Think globally, but act locally”.

You are confronted every day with the need to make choices, decisions, and dilemmas. You are participating; you are already making decisions. But is this participation being acknowledged and supported?

Your own school is a classic example of how decisions are made - at what level, for what reasons and by whom. Whose interests are being served; where do you fit in to this decision-making? Your neighbourhood is another context where local decisions directly affect your life and that of your family.

Just remember at all times that you are not alone. There are lots of others affected by these decisions, with views, ideas and energy. It is a matter of knowing who these people are, where they are, how to get together and what to do. It is a process that is referred to as ‘Networking’. Many people use this word casually, but a careful examination of it reveals that it is loaded with meaningful ideas. Networking is about establishing links and alliances with individuals and groups with whom you share particular concerns. It is about coming out of your isolation and joining hands with your peers. It is about contributing your energy and creativity to a common pool, and then watching how astounding the results can turn out to be. I am not saying that it is as simple as it sounds, nor is it all smooth going. On the contrary, it is difficult, frustrating and emotionally draining. But, every little success you achieve is absolutely exhilarating.

Now that I have said all this and hopefully motivated you to jump out of your seat, wanting to start networking towards a better world, let me invite you to a perfect 'get together', where you will get to meet people you would like to network with, talk to, listen to and exchange ideas with.

If you didn't notice the articles in Connect's previous issues on the National Student Participation Workshop, let me tell you a bit about it. It is going to be a most exciting opportunity! Students from all over Australia will be getting together to discover the rewards that could be gained from networking. You will be amazed how much fun you will have while you are achieving very serious and important results.

The workshop is on the 9th and 10th of July 1995 (that's a Sunday and Monday), at Melbourne University - starting at about 3 pm Sunday and going all day Monday. It is supported by the Youth Research Centre (at the University) and by Connect, and it is free. You will need to pay for your food on Sunday evening and for lunch on Monday (we're thinking of 'pooling' money and getting some food sent in), and for your accommodation and travel if you need that. (We have information about some very reasonably priced accommodation and meals. Just give us a call and we'll give you all the information you require.)

So far, students and some teachers and other support adults are coming from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

If you are already involved in something exciting in your school or community, we would like you to do more than just turn up on the day. We are hoping you could channel your energies into designing a short workshop to present with your friends. This could be on some burning issue about which you need input and feedback.

The workshop is during the school holidays, but it might turn out to be so 'cool', so 'radical' or so 'wicked' that it will leave all other activities, including that Take That concert, for dead!

Don't take my word for it. Just come and check it out for yourself. See you there!

Dalal Smiley

Dalal Smiley is a Community Development student working (on placement) as an organiser of the National Student Participation Workshop.
Accountability of Quality Through Student Participation

Sean Haynes, Smith's Hill High School, NSW
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Paper to be presented at the Australian Curriculum Studies Association Curriculum '95 Conference, July 1995

Abstract: This paper will review the process of Quality Assurance in New South Wales and student participation in this process. The purpose of Quality Assurance is to assist the development of schools and to provide a public account of the effectiveness of schools in meeting community needs for schooling. The paper will discuss the involvement of the South Coast Region Student Representative Council in Quality Assurance reviews. The paper will focus on the experience of two members of the Regional Student Representative Council who participated in a program review of school development days. The reasons why students should be involved is outlined. In conclusion, discussion will focus on how students can become involved in the review process.

Quality Assurance

In 1993 the NSW Department of School Education established a system to review schools and the programs and services provided to schools. (Cutance 1993) These Quality Assurance reviews will involve 2300 schools throughout New South Wales.

The purpose of Quality Assurance is to assist the development of schools and to provide a public account of the effectiveness of schools in meeting community needs for schooling. (QA Information for Community Members)

The mission statement of Quality Assurance is: “Reviewing and developing public education to enhance quality student learning”.

The objectives of these reviews are:

1. to ensure schools are meeting the educational needs of students and the community;
2. to assist schools to improve their performance in specified areas;
3. to look at ways the whole community can be involved in providing quality education;
4. to provide constructive recommendation to schools for their future development; and
5. to support the development of schools for the improvement of student outcomes.

The Quality Assurance team who conducts the review includes:

- a Quality Assurance review team leader;
- a school community member;
- teachers (from other schools);
- other departmental personnel.

The focus areas for the review are negotiated with the school. They are agreed upon as the initial understanding of key aspects for the performance of the school and the most important factors in its continuing development. (Cutance 1993) Staff, students, community members and parents are interviewed.

Quality Assurance reviews also serve an accountability function by providing the community and the Department of School Education with information about the success of programs and initiatives of the school. Further, they place on record the key issues to which individual schools will give priority for revising their plans to meet community needs within statewide educational priorities. Quality Assurance is therefore about both development and accountability. (Cutance 1993)

Reports are written on the basis of the findings of the review by the review team leader and their team in consultation with school personnel. The report is a public document that acknowledges the strengths and achievements of the school and provides the school community with information and recommendations for future development of the school. (Cutance 1993)

Students and Quality Assurance

When students are involved in the Quality Assurance review system, it gives them a clearer and better understanding of how the school education system operates.

Over the past year, the South Coast Region Student Representative Council (SRC) has been working in conjunction with the Southern NSW Quality Assurance Unit. This has enabled students to gain knowledge about Quality Assurance so as to participate and play a larger role in school reviews. During a Regional SRC meeting, a review team leader conducted a workshop on Quality Assurance and how students could become more actively involved in actual school reviews.

This workshop involved discussion about:

- Quality Assurance’s focuses, changes, evaluations and what’s
successful and what's not;
• the process and planning of a Quality Assurance review;
• how and why students should be more involved in Quality Assurance.

State Review

A major step to increase student input was taken last August when two students from the Region's SRC were invited to partake in the reference group and review teams for a state review of The Impact of School Development Days on Student Coast Learning in the South Coast Region.

This involved:

1. For the Reference Group:
   • attending regular meetings to plan the review;
   • drafting questions on School Development Days for review interviews;
   • organising review panels to go into randomly selected primary and secondary schools;
   • processing, analysing and evaluating data gathered.

2. For the Review Team:
   • visiting randomly selected schools and interviewing selected students on the topic of School Development Days;
   • recording information given in response to questions asked.

Why Students?

The authors believe that there is a major role to be played by students in the review process, especially if teams are to get reliable feedback from students. Students who were interviewed felt more relaxed and were able to express their opinions and views on the issue much easier than with adults. Therefore reasons for increased student involvement in Quality Assurance include:

• experience to provide a valuable learning tool which develops the skills of students eg communication and social skills;
• the increase of knowledge on issues related to education;
• the opportunity of involvement in school decision making as a result of the experience;
• the review process acquiring input from another perspective.

How Can Students Become Involved?

It is helpful if students become involved in Quality Assurance by:

• the SRC reporting to their principal after SRC meetings to demonstrate the quality of the work being done in relation to State Educational Priorities;
• students, preferably from the SRC, representing their peers on school councils to give a student perspective to key issues;
• having a member of Quality Assurance speak at a meeting to assist SRC members to become familiar with Quality Assurance;
• being represented on the Quality Assurance planning committee to help identify focus areas for consideration;
• having student representation on Quality Assurance Regional Reference groups;
• having student representation on school and program review teams;
• communicating with other schools that have had SRC involvement on Quality Assurance reviews;
• having the SRC use the Quality Assurance model to review some key issues within the school related to priority areas.

The South Coast Region of the Department of School Education has extended its involvement of students with Quality Assurance. During the Regional SRC Forum in May two students and one teacher from every high school were trained to enable them to participate as part of the review team for school reviews.

We look forward to the challenges ahead as students become more involved in school based planning, decision making and reviewing.

References

Quality Assurance. Information for Community Members. NSW Department of School Education.

This paper will be delivered by Sean and Cindy at the ACSA Curriculum '95 Conference in Melbourne - July 11-14. An introduction to it will also be presented at the National Student Participation Workshop, Melbourne, July 9-10.
The Background

In 1992, I enrolled in a Master of Education course at Ballarat University College (now the University of Ballarat) after 15 years of teaching. During that time I had been a Regional Subject Consultant, a member of a Participation and Equity Program (PEP) funded curriculum team at Wondouree Secondary College, examiner/course writer for the VCE History CDS, convenor of the VCE History Teachers Network in Ballarat, and a VCE local panel chairperson. It seemed that the time had come to link my practice with some current educational theory. During those 15 years (especially in PEP), I involved myself in areas of student participation and accreditation, so it seemed a fairly logical step to pursue this theme in my Masters. Then in late term 2 in 1993, like a bolt out of the blue, the thought struck me that, during my experiences with student participation, nothing had really been done along the lines of getting students to assess and evaluate the structure and delivery of the curriculum of a subject or learning area.

Additionally, there were a number of factors operating within the school environment which gave added impetus for some form of Social Education curriculum evaluation. The other factors included:

1. Need to do something - Program Budget

The program budget evaluation program had arrived at a point where Social Education was required to produce a major report. Hence, the student project would be an important part of the evaluation process, especially as it allowed the students to have a direct input to the evaluation process - it provided the opportunity for the students to have a say in the development and delivery of the program from their perspective. Rarely have students been given the opportunity to look at a whole program in the school, though in the past some students had been engaged in helping to develop individual units of work and a school policy on assessment and reporting.

2. Alienation and lack of interest of students and staff

Alienation and lack of interest by both students and staff were reflected in the declining numbers of students selecting VCE Humanity subjects, the declining numbers of students electing Social Education electives at Years 9-10, the growing number of students not completing their work requirements in Years 7-10, inappropriate pedagogy and staff boredom or comfort zone with the content and their teaching styles. It was very obvious to me, as the Learning Area Head, that something had to be done and that it had to be something dramatic.

Students were making fewer selections when they were given a choice from Year 9 to 10. Social Education was losing numbers to Physical Education, Outdoor Education, Commerce and Health - significantly, the very same areas that students had flogged at the VCE level. Perhaps there were external reasons, such as job demands and so on, but there still was a need for a change.

Some investigation was required regarding the relevancy of the content and learning activities of the Social Education program to ascertain why students were not completing their work requirements in the core (compulsory) social education classes. This growing phenomenon might be linked to issues of group exclusion from the materials and/or the failure of 'true' mixed-ability approaches. Of course, student lack of interest may have been attributable to the learning practices carried out in the classroom. This might have resulted in some students being 'turned-off' the subject because teachers did not use 'cooperative learning', 'mixed-ability' or 'active learning strategies' to engage their students. Whatever the reason, this issue needed to be investigated because some students were not achieving success (measured in this case by whether they received an S or N for their work requirements or tasks).

Staff who had taught units of work for a very long time may have been inadvertently contributing to student alienation and exclusion because they had dropped into a comfort zone in which their teaching was routine, to the extent that their teaching lacked enthusiasm, drive and all those positives that might motivate students. Furthermore, some teachers had fallen into the trap of encouraging their students to be passive learners rather than active ones, especially when active learning placed greater demands on the management skills of the teacher or questioned some teachers' perceptions about the learning relationship between teacher and student.
It was very apparent to me that something had to be done. The time was ripe to engage the staff and students in an evaluation of the Social Education program - or so I thought.

**The Evaluation Operation**

**Starting**

In order to start the student-based evaluation project, it was necessary to identify the groups and individuals who would be affected by such a thing. Basically, the groups naturally fell into: the students from Unit 1 (sub-school) 10b, the parents of the students, the social education teachers, the administration of the school and the Units, and the Curriculum Coordinator. I thought it was necessary to gain the support of these groups and individuals if the project was to have a significant impact on the nature of the Social Education program for two reasons: first, without student and parent willingness to forego the current program, there would be no possibility of the students' owning the project; secondly, if the recommendations were to be implemented, then it would have to have the support of the relevant groups and individuals. Without these preconditions being met, the project would be doomed to failure.

a) **engaging students**

One perpetual question that confronts all educators is how to motivate or engage the learner in an activity. In this case, the decision was made to present the project to the students by explaining why I wanted to carry it out. This meant placing before the students my reasons for interrupting their Social Education program. Furthermore, not only did I have to justify the change, but I had to show the class that all students, regardless of their skills, would benefit from the exercise. Consequently, I explained to the students that their research skills and so on would be further developed by engaging them in a 'real' project. To my surprise, the thing that swung them to the idea was the realisation that they could make a valuable contribution to their school, though I'm sure some of the students felt that they now had an opportunity to express their negative feelings about some of their teachers. Given that the students had their own reasons for supporting the project, not one of the twenty-five rejected the idea.

The project would have ended there if the students had not supported the concept. I'm sure that having two female student School Councillors in the class helped to swing some of the students behind the concept. Right from the start, these two students expressed enthusiastic support for the idea. Probably, having experienced the operation of the School Council and the Student Representative Council, they felt the project was an extension of the many tasks they had carried out on these bodies. This probably highlights the need to have student leaders support such concepts if you are going to get support from students.

b) **engaging parents**

Along with the students, the other major group to gain the support of was the parents. Like the students, I had to justify why I wanted to change the planned Social Education program. I'd admit that I approached the students first to gain their support when I contacted the parents. With the students on-board and enthusiastic about the project, they were able to provide additional information to their parents. Basically, I contacted the parents through a letter to which was attached a permission form. Again, I made it clear in the letter that if there was insufficient support for the change to the SE program, then the project would not go ahead. I also offered the parents the opportunity to have a special meeting to discuss the project if they wanted further information. To my surprise, only one parent expressed a concern and this was about whether the project could be conducted in the time allocated: something that, in the end, proved to be correct. Obviously, the students had done their job very well indeed.

c) **engaging the social education faculty**

Engaging the faculty in the process was going to be a simple matter because the faculty was due to evaluate the year 7-10 program; members' support should be forthcoming. I had always been under the impression that the students and parents would be the hardest group to convince about the merits of a student evaluation project. Gosh - was I wrong! It is funny how things always turn out differently to what you think should happen.

The faculty quickly divided into two camps: those who thought the project an excellent idea, and those who believed that year 10 students were not capable of carrying out such an important task. Those opposing the idea also have been worried about what the students might recommend, and this may have had something to do with their opposition to the project. Significantly, the teachers opposing the idea believed that they should carry out the evaluation because the program had been devised by them and should be evaluated by them. Basically, they were asserting issues about who owned the Social Education program and, in effect, they were right. I then had to negotiate with these teachers to run a teacher-based evaluation of the program as well, just to get the project off the ground. I remained convinced that these teachers would eventually be swayed by the way in which the students would conduct themselves when carrying out the research.

d) **engaging the school administration**

Putting the idea to administration was based on a five level plan: the need to evaluate under program budgeting processes, student outcomes, support from the faculty, curriculum improvement, and school image. This task proved easier than I'd originally imagined. With the aid of the two student Councillors, we arranged a meeting with the Vice-Principal to discuss the issue at the end of the first week of term 4. In this meeting, I hardly spoke, as the two students basically presented the arguments as to why the project should go ahead and explained what benefits they saw accruing for students, staff and the school. With the support of the Vice-Principal, the administration gave their support to the project.

e) **engaging the curriculum coordinator**

The Curriculum Coordinator was new to the school in 1993. Luckily, he was also a Social Education teacher who advocated greater student
participation in decision-making processes, hence support from this quarter was assured.

Everything was in place. All the relevant groups and individuals had been approached to secure their support. There only remained what I considered a small problem with some Social Education teachers, but this was something I felt would change over time. Early on, I felt that it was necessary to inform the class of what steps I had taken to ensure support, and they were made aware that there was some reluctance from some teachers. To my surprise, the students accepted this as the way things were and didn’t harbour any resentment towards those teachers. Indeed they were anxious to get on with the task - even two male students who had considered leaving school before the end of the term. It seemed that the idea of a project in which they played a pivotal role appealed to them. As one student said:

“It’s about bloody time I was trusted to do something. Why can’t teachers give us important things to do rather than copy notes from the board; this seems exciting - that appears bloody boring boring boring...”

The only thing that was left to do before starting the evaluation was to decide on an appropriate research methodology.

Selecting the Research Methodology

Selecting the appropriate research methodology raised all those questions about quantitative versus qualitative methods. It raised issues about who owned the research and whether I would be pulling the strings. Eventually I felt that if the students were going to own the research, then an Action Research methodology should be used. Consequently, I contacted Robin McTaggart at Deakin University (Geelong) to discuss the issues associated with year 10 students using AR. While he convinced me that what I planned to do should work, I was still worried about how students would cope and just how much I would control the decision-making processes, either consciously or unconsciously. This was to remain a contentious issue with me all the way through the project.

Essentially, AR revolved around a collaborative process in which the nature of the research was developed, reflected on, reviewed and altered in ‘on-going’ ways, to ensure an improvement. The key element in this method was that the ownership of the research plan rested with those people (the students in this case) who wanted to improve a situation. Here, in this project, the students wanted to increase the relevance of the content and move teachers to more active learning strategies, rather than relying on passive ones.

Hence discussions started with the class on what they wanted to achieve, how they were going to organise it and so on. Basically, the plan that emerged was that the students would break into Year Level research teams. However, they did insist that they would restrict the evaluation to years 7 to 10 because it would be unfair to interrupt the VCE students at that time of the year. The group also decided it would be necessary for each team to develop a research plan which would be submitted to the class for approval. This resulted in the four groups agreeing that a questionnaire or survey-based approach should be the method adopted, although there was a strong suggestion at the time that they would have to be trained in the techniques of questionnaire construction.

Training

Inside Expertise

Questions arose about my own competence to provide students with the appropriate skills to carry out the project; mainly these were self-doubts rather than direct accusations from staff or students. Yet, having been involved in research projects before, I was confident that the students could acquire skills from me. Interestingly enough, I felt that the student skills in conducting research might, themselves, provide some insight into the effectiveness of the SE program. Further assistance could be found within the faculty to help students, such as from the current Curriculum Coordinator and a past Assistant Curriculum Coordinator, whose skills the students could draw on when necessary. Hence it was vital from the start to engage faculty members in the project, so that the students had the support of key people.

External Expertise

To help students develop their questionnaires, I called upon the services of Roger Holdsworth. Roger arrived from Melbourne on a Friday to take the class through a session in which he explained about survey discriminators, and so on. The class as a whole were impressed by what was delivered, because the week following Roger’s visit, the students were utilizing all the jargon associated with the construction of a questionnaire. Roger’s visit also caused some of the students to question whether the questionnaire approach was the best method. This especially applied to a group working at the year 9 level. This group decided it would be a good idea to conduct some interviews with a small sample of students so as to provide further information to inform the survey
results. In essence, these students were starting to question whether quantitative methods were the appropriate way to go.

**Operation**

**The Collecting**

The research groups soon engaged in developing the year-level questionnaires. Significantly, the students kept coming back to a plenary session to ensure that all the groups were going the same way, or for new ideas to be discussed. Eventually, the students went into action with some pilot surveys. From these pilots, the students altered some sections of their questionnaires to incorporate more feedback about the ways teachers delivered the program. Of course this was an area of potential danger for the students; they were gaining information about teachers which, in some ways, could have been considered to be damaging. But to the credit of all the students involved, not one of them used the information outside the class. It was very obvious that the students respected the privacy, not only of the person giving the information, but of the teachers as well.

The collecting of information did cause problems for some groups, especially those dealing with year 7s. This group ran into difficulties with jargon and language as they had fallen into the trap of using words/concepts associated with the evaluation process. Hence they had to modify their questionnaires and interview questions. They also had problems with the year 7 students’ approaches to the situation. For example, one member of the year 7 team complained about how immature and irresponsible the year 7s were. It appeared as if these year 10 students were expressing something that was commonly heard in the staffroom.

**The Analysis**

The analysis that was done was limited. Time and the merger process (see below) meant that this side of the evaluation was incomplete. What did emerge from the analysis of the available data was that the students were dissatisfied with the information gathered. They thought they needed to change their research plans to incorporate greater individual feedback from the students. All the groups concluded that they needed more time to interview students. Of course, what was pleasing about this aspect was that the students had internalised the Action Research methods of reflection, evaluation and change.

**The Merger**

The biggest problem encountered in the project was 'the merger'. As an outcome of the 'School Provision' process, three schools in Ballarat - Ballarat East, Midlands and Wendouree - decided to merge to form a new multi-campus school for 1994. Consequently, three students from the project team ended up on committees such as school uniform etc. With my involvement on the Year 7-10 Curriculum Working Party, the project soon ground to a halt.

However, some of the students’ findings were placed into operation. For example, at the year 10 level, 'Work Education' has become an important component of the Social Education program. This was something that the Year 10 Research Group recommended from their findings, although it did take until 1995 for it to be implemented.

**What was learnt from this project?**

Would I do this sort of project again with students? The answer would be an emphatic YES! This project demonstrated clearly to me that teachers and the system has a tendency to undervalue what year 10 students are capable of. By this I mean that year 10s must be given an opportunity to have responsibility - something which is hard in a 7 to 12 school - and to engage in learning activities that require responsibility and independence.

The students also need to have projects that are far-reaching in their scope - that have an impact on the immediate environment of the student. Again it showed that if you do give students responsibility, they will act responsibly. Furthermore, it showed me that collaborative learning does work and that it is possible for teachers to act as facilitators or joint learners with their students.

The project also highlighted how necessary it is to gain the support of all groups involved in any evaluative project for it to get off the ground. For example, the project could have been finished off right at the start without the support of the Social Education faculty. It is very necessary to remove any hint of ‘teacher attack’ from evaluation projects which look at teaching techniques. This class of year 10s did this and by the middle of term 4 1993, they had the full support of all the SE faculty members.

There were many student outcomes. Many students improved their communication skills and were happy to work with different student age groups and with teachers as well. In essence, all the students, no matter their starting point, demonstrated all levels of the SOSE inquiry strategies within the Curriculum Standards Framework. In the project, a couple of students had reading level which placed them at about year 5, but they were able to clearly show Level 7 inquiry strategies, such as collecting information from a variety of sources, evaluating different viewpoints involved in the information collected, and justifying and implementing their responses to an issue. Of course, all of this was done through a collaborative approach in which their contributions were regarded as essential and valuable.

Indeed, these two students were able to approach some of the so-called ‘difficult’ students to gather their views about the Social Education program. It didn’t matter that they couldn’t put a sentence together on paper, because they used a tape-recorder to interview their colleagues. They were able to bring this information back to their research group and reflect on what the data contained as well as reflect on their own questioning technique and how to improve it. Indeed, reflecting on their technique of data gathering and then taking action to improve this, would seem to indicate that these students were actively engaged in metacognitive processes, something which many teachers believed these students incapable of performing.

The project also showed that students are capable of taking onboard research methodologies. Interestingly enough, this project also highlighted just how ingrained
quantitative methods of research are; the first evalutative tool that all students wanted to use was a survey. I think this says a lot, not just about the SE program at Wendouree Secondary College in 1993, but also something about the way in which so-called ‘commonsense’ knowledge in the community may work. We need to ask the question about why these students immediately picked on this tool as the ‘best’ method to collect information. It would seem that there is a Masters degree in just trying to answer that question.

I would encourage other teachers and students to engage in such projects with the understanding that it will not be easy. Yet what the students gain from such activities far outweighs any organisational problems associated with implementing the project. As a quote (from James Coleman) on the cover of a recent Connect said: if you don’t give students responsibility, they will not act responsibly. Nor will they learn.

Allen Jones
Ballarat Secondary College - Wendouree Campus

TOWARDS PARTICIPATION IN A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

When we think about ‘health’ in schools, we now think more broadly than nutrition or medical classes or what the canteen sells. A healthy school, as Margaret Sheehan explains in this introductory article, is also concerned about the active participation of students in all aspects of school life, including in decisions about traditional ‘health areas’.

The term “Health Promoting School” has begun to be used in the education arena; there is now a movement in Australia, as in Europe, to encourage “Health Promoting Schools”. This term is used to describe a wider view of a healthy learning environment and to apply to all areas of the school which can have a significant impact on student learning.

What is taught in the classroom can be reinforced by the school atmosphere or school ethos - including the quality of interpersonal relationships, the school’s organisational structures and the nature of community involvement in and by the school. The health promoting school can pull together an already existing range of activities and programs and consider these in terms of their broader health context. In this regard, the notion of “Health Promoting Schools” it is not new but one that provides the opportunity for schools to view health and their health practices and services in a new light.

There are a myriad of actions that school communities can take to promote and indeed improve the health of people working and learning in their environment. One action is to ensure that all members of the community are involved and have access to participate in the decisions and life of the school. A number of pilot schools in the health promoting schools project have reassessed the role that students play in terms of

student participation in SRCs, their role in negotiating and contributing to the classroom curriculum, and the role they play in developing welfare/discipline codes.

Some New South Wales schools have been working towards a charter for a healthy school community. Among many other things, this charter includes:

- ensuring that the physical surrounds are safe, pleasant and stimulating;
- relating and communicating well with all members of the school community;
- creating school policies and procedures which support health;
- participating - staff, students, families - in planning and carrying out health promoting activities;
- inviting local organisations to work with them to make the school more healthy;
- providing Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Programs which are integrated with student welfare;
- providing a canteen with a policy of selling healthy foods;
- recycling paper, aluminium and glass and using environmentally friendly products where possible.

How Healthy is YOUR School Community?

A number of schools in Australia and Europe are working toward being health promoting schools. The first national healthy school communities conference is planned for September this year. Around the themes: “Developing Health Promoting Schools: Understanding Diversity, Promoting Social Justice, and Creating Supportive Environments”, the Conference will be held at the RMIT City Campus in Melbourne from September 21st to 23rd 1995. For more details about the Conference, contact Carol Burton, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, Geelong Vic 3217.

Phone: (052) 27 1483 or (052) 27 2666; Fax: (052) 27 2014; e-mail: carolb@deakin.edu.au

Connect hopes to follow up the links between student participation and health in future issues. How can students be active participants in determining and developing the health of their schools (and communities)? Can you have a health promoting school that isn’t democratic? We’re interested in your experiences.

Margaret Sheehan, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne

June 1995
NSW SRC Networks

Two of the NSW Regional Student Representative Councils reported on
Regional developments in recent editions of the School Education News.

SRC network encourages students to speak up

Offering students a more effective say in decision-making is the prime aim
of the first ever Student Representative Council network covering Western Region
schools. Linking student representative councils through a secretariat made up of
representatives covering education resource centre catchments will result in a
bigger impact on isolated schools.

Western Region Coordinator for student representative councils, Lyn
Crofts, hopes the new network will boost the effectiveness of councils and offer
support to existing councils and schools that wish to give students greater
involvement in decision-making.

Already around 80% of high schools have some form of student
representative council. A growing number of primary schools are also looking to offer
their students a greater say in what happens at school.

The first secretariat meeting was held in Dubbo in April and comprised
students from Bathurst, Oberon, Dubbo, Ungarie, Cobar and Broken Hill. Mrs
Crofts said the students played a major role in laying the foundations for the secretariat
to develop an effective regional network of representative councils.

As could be expected, the students had plenty to say. Their contributions were
articulate, cogent and drew on a wealth of experience that they had already gained
in their own schools. For much of the proceedings Mrs Crofts and the
other teacher advisers took a back seat providing assistance, support or guidance
when requested by the meeting.

Mrs Crofts observed that the cooperative approach to shared decisions
could be a lesson to many decision-makers.

It’s this style that Mrs Crofts hopes will be adopted by more schools.

While some schools look to their student representative councils to organise
fun activities or raise funds, Mrs Crofts points to a growing number that are
including students on fundamental bodies, like the school council.

Brett Blacker, an alternative
delegate to the state student representative
body, has no doubt that students have
much to contribute. He sees the network
as providing very effective support
because it will be at a student to student
level.

I think it will improve things
greatly because of the wider
communication - you can get more ideas
when everyone comes together,” Brett
said.

State councillor, Elizabeth Phegan,
admits that some schools have been slower
than others to fully engage students in
decision-making...

“The up side of student
representative councils is that in a lot of
schools they really do count and they are
making decisions that matter,” she said.

“Now we deal with issues, not just fundraising. It’s our education and
everybody has a point of view and knows
what they want,” Elizabeth commented,
emphasising the role students could play
in shaping better education. She sees the
new network secretariat as providing a
basis for communication that she believes
will be most effective because it is at a
student to student level.

The switched on teenagers will not
just be relying on face-to-face
communication once or twice a year.
Already the students are taking advantage
of advanced computerised electronic mail
to spread ideas and seek advice.

School Education News 17 May 1995

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SRC - Standing on Shoulders of Giants

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants - taking great ideas to greater
heights - was the theme of the
(Metropolitan East Region) Student
Representative Council Conference
held at Vision Valley, Arcadia, over
three days in April.

In 10 years, this annual
conference for schools in the
Metropolitan East Region has evolved
from a teacher-directed program to
one that is largely developed and
organised by the SRC delegates. This
year’s conference was 11 months in the
planning.

While teacher coordinators
Stuart Harne, Dawn Northey, Jeff
Rigg, Bob Kijurina and Michael
Selway provided the guidance, SRC
delegates from the participating
schools attended workshops on such
topics as communications, time-
management, conducting a meeting,
self-esteem and SRC structure.

Delegates Mandy Parkes of
Port Hacking High and Zac White of
Menai High, wrote this report:

“What happens when you put 120
students in a conference room where
students actually RUN the conference?
RESULTS - that was the case at the
Metropolitan East Region’s Annual Student
Representative Council Conference. The
conference was a successful educational
experience for both student participants
and student leaders. The two members
from each high school’s SRC within Met
East who were selected to attend learnt
new ideas and strategies to take back and
implement within their school through the
SRC structure. The students were exposed
to a different social situation and as the
conference evolved, new friendships
developed.

The conference theme Standing on
the Shoulders of Giants was used to signify
the importance of the experience, advice,
support and assistance provided by
student leaders of the past. Through the
use of workshops, the conference aimed
to equip students with the practical skills
and solutions to help them deal with
various issues within their school, region
and state networks. It also provided
students with the opportunity to enrich
their interpersonal, leadership and
communication skills.

“Students learnt how to become
stronger leaders through public speaking
techniques and development of high level
communication skills. Working effectively
as a member of a team, students learnt how
to negotiate using action plans.

Workshops dealt with ways to tackle
counter issues, and taught students
stress and time management. Conference
participants were given an overview of the
SRC structure as a whole, from school level
right through to state level. The Regional
SRC team, which comprises 12 student
leaders, not only designed and presented
the 10 workshops, but had the
responsibility for facilitate, organising
events, recreation and introducing the
speakers...

“The many diverse workshops
encouraged students to share their
experiences within their own schools,
allowing for a flow of ideas to disseminate
throughout the region’s high schools.”

Dan McAlloon in
School Education News 31st May 1995

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Connect 93:
NEWS AND REVIEWS

Melbourne Community TV Consultations: How to Get Involved

In the last issue of Connect, there was information about the possibility for groups of students and young people to become involved with Community TV. At a recent SRC training day for one Secondary College in Victoria, there was strong interest in setting up SRC-run media within the school, and they were interested to become involved in discussions around Channel 31.

Channel 31 in Victoria is now offering a community outreach and training program aimed at those denied access to television, and who are not currently involved with Channel 31.

Free Training

Channel 31 is organising a series of free seminars and workshops. These consist of an Outreach Program, followed by a Training Program. The Outreach Program is to inform interested organisations and individuals of their options for involvement and to develop program ideas. The Training Program will provide more detailed information for those committed to involvement.

Outreach Program

The Outreach Program includes two related sessions:

Session 1: a seminar, covering what Channel 31 is and how it works. Member Groups, what is offered to the community and the options for getting programs and announcements on air. This session will include people and organisations from various communities.

Session 2: a workshop, to be held in small groups. Where possible, each workshop group will be made up solely from one community. These workshops will concentration developing realistic program ideas.

Planning, funds, equipment, station requirements for programs. The session will be led by a Channel 31 producer and, where possible, a facilitator from the community involved.

To participate in the program, you need to attend two sessions. (Each session will be offered twice.) You can attend session 1 only, but you must attend session 1 in order to attend session 2. A third series of two sessions is specifically for those involved in the area of abilities/disabilities. It is necessary to register by June 20th in order to attend. Contact Lee Cartledge at Channel 31 (Melbourne), 1/247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000. Phone: (03) 9650 5610; Fax: (03) 9650 6924.

In other areas, for information about Community Television and how to become involved, contact Christina Alvarez at the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBA-A) on (02) 310 2999.


MJCSCs at Norris Bank and Preston North-East Primary Schools

At Norris Bank, we have 18 students on our Junior School Council. Students from grades 3 to 6 are on the Council for the whole year, while the five students from grades P to 2 change each half year. The JSC meets on Friday, once a fortnight at 12.15 pm. Our major focus in 1995 is on fundraising for Social Service, improving our school environment and involvement in the school’s discipline policy review. The JSC network is valuable to us for sharing ideas, advice and contacts with other members.

Contact: Nicole Di Marco
Norris Bank PS, Settlement Road, Bundoora 3083

Preston North East Primary has nine students on our JSC. We meet each fortnight on Monday lunchtime. We are producing two magazines a year, and also raising funds through two discos a term for beautifying the school grounds with trees and shrubs. It is valuable to have a Network to find out how other schools run their JSCs - the JSC magazine also helps us do that. Meetings are a good idea to keep in touch. We need training in meeting skills, and we need new ideas.

Contact: Wendy Stewart
Preston NE PS, PO Box 8114, Northland 3072

June 1995
The Australian Centre for Equity through Education was established in October 1994 by a Consortium of organisations - the Australian Council of Social Service, the Australian Education Union, the Australian Council of State School Organisations and Eduquate. The Australian Youth Foundation provides the funding for the Centre and is represented on the Board.

The Centre’s aim is to promote cross sectoral cooperation to ensure
- equal access to education services
- equal opportunity within educational institutions and
- equal outcomes from the educational experience
so that the educational benefits for disadvantaged young people mirror the range for the population at large.

To achieve this aim, the Centre is identifying structural impediments to successful participation in education. Further, we are engaged in surveying the field for policies, programs and projects to determine the nature and extent of school and community sector interactions. We will provide information and analysis to foster development of successful cross sectoral cooperation at all levels and to remove structural impediments to successful participation in education.

The key functions of the Centre include:
- Establishing a Clearing House for the dissemination of information on equity issues;
- Developing a national database of services and data relating to educational disadvantage;
- Initiating and fostering action research including trialing improved educational and related services;
- Developing national networks, strengthening cross sectoral interests and engaging institutions and interest groups across sectors in collaborative planning;
- Intervening in and informing national education debates and policy developments through engagement of policy makers, practitioners, interest groups and young people;
- Establishing partnerships with young people in planning and evaluation; and
- Promoting a charter of education rights for inclusion in the Australian Constitution.

While the Centre recognises that disadvantage is a difficult concept and that many groups are disadvantaged in our society, our focus is on socio-economic disadvantage which remains the most common determinant of unequal educational outcomes.

Identifying the problem of disadvantage is the easy part, trying to find out how to change the outcomes is much more difficult. To assist us in this task we are looking for students to participate in the activities of the Centre. This might include some research for the Centre, attending our symposia and providing advice and feedback on our activities generally. If you are interested in any of this please contact us.

Australian Centre for Equity through Education

Staff: Chief Executive Joan Brown
Admin. Assistant Deborah Chaplin
Research Officer Dev Mukherjee

Address Level 3, 4 Yurong St.
Darlinghurst NSW 2010

Ph (02) 332 3548
Fax (02) 332 3541
Email devm@ozemail.com.au
Developing Democratic Education
edited by Clive Harber

There has always been a connection between education and political systems. Until relatively recently, however, schools have been essentially authoritarian in most countries and have not consciously educated for democracy. While there have been critics of the school’s abdication of its responsibility for creating democratic citizens, and individual schools that have operated democratically, there has been little political support for such education at the level of governments.

This book demonstrates that this is now beginning to change. The collapse of communism in eastern Europe has created a new international context in which there is a consensus on democracy as the key aim of political development. With this new found interest in democracy, many countries and international agencies have turned their attention to the question of sustainability - how can we create political cultures composed of the democratic values that will support and protect democratic institutions?

Any answer to this question must include education because democracy is not genetic - it is learned behaviour. The book argues that there are important signs that education for democracy is now much less of a minority interest and is significantly higher on the international agenda of debate. This increased interest coincides with evidence that more democratically organised schools are more effective schools, both in the conventional sense of better examination results, less vandalism and truancy, and also in the sense of creating individuals who possess democratic values and behaviours.

In this book, writers from a variety of backgrounds explore the nature of and practice of democratic education in a series of contexts, such as classrooms, minischooling, drama, community arts, and school and college management, and also at a number of levels: primary schools, secondary schools, further education, teacher education and higher education.

The team of writers includes Clive Harber, Derry Hannam, Frank Reeves, Roland Meighan, Janet Meighan, Patrick Ainley, Lesley Browne, Philip Toogood, Josh Gifford, Sharon Robinson, Mark Webster, Anna Frankel and Lynn Davies.

This book is vital reading for an understanding of the emerging debates regarding education in post-modernist times.

Dr. Clive Harber was Deputy Director of the International Unit of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, UK, but has now been appointed Professor of Education at the University of Natal, Republic of South Africa.

ISBN 1-871526-22-1 Price: £10
Available from: Education Now Books, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcole Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ UK

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(03) 489 9052 or (03) 344 8585

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:
Jobs for Young Australians (Adelaide, SA) Call for Papers, August 1995
Youth Options (Youth Bureau, ACT) February/March 1995
Annual Report 1994 (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria)

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June 1995

Equity Through Education: Directions for Action and ACEE Equity Network (Australian Centre for Equity through Education, Sydney, NSW) Vol 1, Issue 1, May 1995

Overseas:
Democracy and Education (Institute for Democracy in Education, Ohio University, USA) Vol 9 No 3 Spring 1995 and Invitation to 8th Annual Democracy in Education Conference
Developing Democratic Education, (ed) Clive Harber (Education Now Books, Nottingham, UK)

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