changing perspectives on youth participation
You may be interested to know that as this issue of Connect arrives, Roger Holdsworth will be somewhere in India, enjoying a well deserved rest from deadlines and daily chores. As Roger indicated in the last issue, Connect is to be published in 1988 by a group of people associated with Melbourne College of Advanced Education. We hope that as the year gets underway, staff, students and friends of Connect will get together to produce the magazine while Roger is away.

Issue No. 49 has something old, something new. The first two articles were originally printed in the American magazine, Hands On in 1980. They provide a rather sharp contrast to the articles in the last issue. Whereas those in No.48 focussed more on organisational issues, the articles by Mary Kolher and Eliot Wigginton remind us of some of the ideas which stimulated interest in youth participation, and of the early visions of its potential impact on individuals and communities.

The articles by Ann McCamish and Viv Stranieri deal with contemporary issues and technology. Ann McCamish's two pieces draw attention to the importance of linking work on student networking and governance with broadly based curriculum development. An innovative use of technology to assist students to work together will work only if they have already been part of the decision-making process and if the educational support is provided to assist them to take advantage of the new opportunities. Viv provides some details of the Northern Region Radio Network and insights into her own experiences.

The continuing appearance of Connect in 1988 will depend on you. In the first place we want you to write about your experiences with student participation. You may want to tell people about a particular activity or initiative with which you have been involved, or you may wish to raise broader issues or ideas to stimulate debate and action by people in other schools and communities.

Secondly, we need your financial support. Without the re-subscriptions, Connect simply cannot be printed or mailed. Perhaps your school library or friends would also like to become subscribers? If you would like to help with the practical side of producing Connect, you could contact Bruce Wilson at Melbourne CAE on (03) 341 8251.

Happy reading!

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Youth Participation and Empowerment

The two articles which follow are reprinted from an American journal called Hands On (Vol 3 No.2) which was published in the winter of 1980. That particular issue was the report of a National Workshop on Cultural Journalism, covering technical issues and projects. A major part of the workshop was devoted to considering “New Directions”. Kohler and Wigginton both spoke in that forum. Reading their comments provides us with a perspective for considering how much has been achieved during the last decade.

To see that youth participation becomes a way of life is my mission. This calls for a strong interest in something or someone beyond oneself and demands that opportunities be developed so that young people can make a difference. These opportunities may be through service to others or having a role in bettering life in their communities in many different ways.

Not every young person has an interest in which to become absorbed. In fact, during the seventeen years I was on the juvenile court bench, I encountered only one youngster who admitted to a strong interest in anything. He was a sixteen year old boy who invented his own model automobile from dozens of car parts he had stolen, piece by piece, over a two year period. I confess we were tempted to pin a medal on him, not only for his ingenuity, but also for his persistence and the all consuming interest he showed in his enterprise. We didn’t, but we saw to it that he worked and paid back, in service to the community, the cost of the parts he had stolen.

The cultivation of a strong interest and a commitment to express it through magazines is one important benefit that has come as a result of the spread of cultural journalism. You are particularly blessed in that your interest results in a product that can be shared with the rest of the world. You must feel gratified in knowing that but for you the heritage, the ways of life, the places and persons portrayed by you might have been lost forever.

Young people have certain needs during their formulative development that have to be met. I see cultural journalism as being able to meet many of them. I’m talking about the need for feeling important; the need for feeling you’re doing things that are worthwhile, and that you’re not just at the mercy of someone else. To me, that is most important during adolescence, but it is a nourishing experience for adult life as well.

This need for feeling important came home to me once when I was visiting a prison. A young man about twenty was running a hand printing press. His face was beaming with joy. I said to him, “you look so happy, I guess it’s because you’re being paroled.” He answered, “I don’t want to be paroled. I can’t get a job like this on the outside.” When I asked him to explain what was so important about that job, he turned to me with scorn. His face still haunts me. He said, “How can you ask? But for me, this wouldn’t work.” We all need that feeling of satisfaction to be able to carry on. To be able to make a difference, to have some chance of being recognized and to receive esteem from people who count is essential during the adolescent years to help young people gain confidence in their growth to adulthood. It is easier to endure pain, stress and anxiety if one can feel that one has a part in the world. The future can be fearful for all of us, but particularly so for young people today, much more fearful than in my youth. Much of what is going on in the world is good cause for disillusionment of the young.

In other times, there were reinforcing agents to help us through these difficult years. Many of you who live in a more simple environment than the one I know in New York still have this help from your family—in your family life. However, the Children’s Advisory Committee of the Year of the Child lists as one of the most serious hurdles in their growth to adulthood, “the breakdown of family life.” They state that young people miss the kind of help and guidance which comes from good communication within the family. They pleaded for better communication between youth and adults—not only in the family, but also in school and at the work place.

There is really not much to fill the void that young people feel in big city life. Sports fill it for some kids, but there is not much else for others. We do not have a lifestyle that needs our young people. I have even seen young people turn to delinquency as a way of getting recognition. They seemed to get a satisfaction in knowing that they were admired by someone, even if that someone was a person in their gang who had already built up a criminal record. They felt they made it in someone’s eyes. And yet, I can take you to many young persons of that type who have the potential to be doing all the kinds of things that young people are doing in cultural journalism projects.

Cultural journalism is obviously meeting many of the needs of the young people working in these programs and those young people can see the projects as their social mission. If only you could see fit to publicize the stories of quality youth participation programs that are going on around the country, the public image of teen-ages might change. If only those many capable hands that are clicking the cameras could illustrate those projects, the public
picture of youth might be different. Currently, for want of sufficient documentation and illustration, we are not able to divert public opinion from the negative image of youth to seeing their tremendous worth as contributors to bettering our society.

It has always been my dream that some of the feeling of this generation of youth could be preserved for posterity. I am talking about the kinds of feelings that I heard expressed when I sat on the juvenile court bench and the feelings of the kids that I see in the public schools, particularly in our big cities, who find themselves stamped as worthless and are living out that prophesy. You could tell the world about them—how they look at life. Their ways may be shocking to you, but I think you would be amazed, as I am, at the tremendous inner strength that helps them keep going despite the fact that they have been stamped as failures and seem to be an unnecessary burden to everyone around them.

Youth participation programs have helped many of these young people, but the public needs to understand how they feel and to have some insight into their dreams. The public needs to see how and why kids are reacting as they do to teachers—both to the good ones and the bad ones. The public needs to hear it in the words of these youth who are involved.

I wish I could have recorded the conversation I recently had with a young person who helped me discover why she and her contemporaries seemed to be deliberately having babies without marriage or security of any kind. Several confess ed that they deliberately tried to become pregnant. They said they wanted something that depended on them; they wanted, so desperately, someone to love and someone to love them. Remember the quote from the boy in prison. "But for me, this wouldn't work." It is astounding that we have not been able to reach young girls who feel this way—who feel that they would rather go through pregnancy alone, through raising a child alone, without any of the reinforcement from family, simply because they needed something to love. I can take you to many such persons. I can take you to young people who are wards of the juvenile court as a result of their being definitely pegged as delinquent and to youngsters who have joined a gang because it was the only place where they felt they had a role.

Youth participation is one way that we have to affect all young people. It is participating in some work which meets a genuine need and offers a challenge. It is participation that stretches young people by placing them in positions of real responsibility and real decision making, rather than always being told what to do.

Too often we hear a teacher say, "Today, Mary, you help Charles read; cover from page 1 to 10," when she should be saying, "Mary, Charles is now your charge. He seems to have a problem with reading. Maybe you can find what it is that bothers him and find a new way to reach him." The Marys and the Charles's who are approached this way across the country in the Youth Tutoring Youth program have come up with a host of creative ideas for teaching reading. Our National Commission has a storeroom packed with the games that were invented by teen-agers to teach younger children—games that teach reading, math, grammar and geography. They didn't completely discard the textbooks, but they were greatly subsidized by the games the tutors invented to meet the needs of their tutees. These young tutors, most of them poor students themselves from disadvantaged families, were able to make a difference when they were permitted to carry responsibility and make the decisions that affected others. They seldom failed, but if that happened understanding adults could help them profit by those failures.

Dr. Rene Debos, a member of the commission's board of directors, would on occasion challenge us at board meetings as to when responsibility took place for us. He said, "It took place for me when I was six. We lived in the outskirts of Paris and my father operated a small butcher shop. He died when I was six. I think I became an adult at that time. I would saw the meat, my mother would package it, I delivered it, and we were able to live from that small butcher shop. I cared for my younger brother while my mother served the public." This conversation made me realize that I too had become an adult at six when I was put in a convent boarding school. I was the oldest in the dormitory and became a substitute mother to the younger children. When they would cry at night, I would rock them to sleep. That was my first experience in learning to care for others.

Today those caring experiences are more difficult to come by, particularly because families are smaller. They seldom include grandparents or other elders, and they are frequently limited to a single child thus there are no younger children to care for. The big city has little use for the hands of children. This is less so in the rural areas.

Youth participation was created to fill this void, to provide not only the opportunity to carry responsibility, but also to have practice in decision making. A quality youth participation program requires action on the part of the young people—action that affects others with the young people being a part of the planning, carrying the responsibility and decision making. It also includes at least one seminar a week. This provides the opportunity for reflection on the experience which the young people have at the worksite and for the students to relate this to the subject matter of their school courses. Hopefully it should be conducted not as "I am teacher, you are student," but rather in a manner that occurs between people of mutual understanding and respect. If this collegial relationship exists, there can be frank discussions of what takes place at the worksite and of what might have been done better as a result of the experience. For instance, youngsters working in a day care center can learn the essentials of good parenting through discussion and reading during the seminar time. This requires an adult supervisor who can listen and draw out the questions which the young people have.

I'm reminded of a beautiful, young Mexican-American woman who had a lovely day care youth-helper program. The youngsters went every day. These great big Mexican boys and girls became substitute parents for those little kids. But the teacher talked all the time during seminars and never drew out any of the questions of the kids. And I said to her, "But look, they have questions." "Oh no, Mary, they just like to play with the kids," she said, "there's nothing to talk about. They're just happy working with the younger kids."

So I picked up a journal. (They all keep journals of all their activities, and one should always keep a journal in a youth participation program.) This little girl, Margie, was thirteen, and she was worried about Stevie who was three and a half. "Steve,"
she said, "He doesn't play with the children anymore, he just wants to sit on my lap and have me pet him. I wonder if it could be because his mother just died." Nothing to talk about! "Becky, nothing to talk about!" I say to the teacher.

"But, Mary, I've never faced death."

"You don't need to have faced death, some of those children have faced death. There's been grandmother who died, there's been someone. They can talk about death, and it would be very helpful for them to talk about death." This could have been a profound educational experience for everyone in the group, including the teacher. As adults, we don't have enough confidence in the innate knowledge that is in the hearts of young people. We fear an exposure of feelings.

What kind of service am I talking about when I say youth participation? It falls into different types of helping service to others. There is a helping service to others on a one-to-one basis, such as Youth Tutoring Youth, working in day care programs, or working on a one-to-one basis with the elderly. In an English class in a very dull town in Minnesota, the high school English teacher became so bored with the compositions the kids were turning in--"What I Did Last Summer" and "What I'm Going To Do Next Summer"--that she arranged for her students to serve in the County Aims House with the aged, the mental defectives and the infirm. That experience became the topic of their compositions. These young people were able to tap the feelings of the loneliness of their charges, and they were able to interpret them in their writing. That material could well provide training for the staff of that hospital. Through their caring, those young people were able to touch something within each of their charges that the average paid worker seldom has time to do.

Community service is another variety of youth participation. It can take many forms. In one community, teen-agers operate a complaint bureau. Each student will take the complaint of one client and follow it through--such as the person whose clothes were ruined by paint advertised as washable. In this case, the student ultimately recovered the cost of the ruined clothing. I visited some of those classes and felt that those young people were learning many facets of living. It amounted to more than just handling the complaint.
It was her effort that changed that system.

Another group of young volunteers in that same community saw how impractical it was to manage the after-school care of the special education students by mainstreaming them into regular school classes. These students were physically or mentally handicapped and had previously attended all day schools. With mainstreaming the students to the regular high schools, their day ended in early afternoon, and they were dropped off at home—often to a home where there was no parent to greet them. This meant that, in many cases, they were in dire distress because of being alone. The teen-agers who saw this said, “It can’t be. We’ve got to provide some kind of service.” So they opened an after school program for those children at a center which they created and managed completely. They made the rules and enforced them. When parents in the neighborhood learned of the service and wanted to use it to park their children while they went shopping, they were denied. It was explained, “This program is designed as a learning experience for the children who come every day; it would interrupt the program and cannot be permitted.”

Social action is a form of youth participation that comes about when young people become involved in a critical situation in their community. For instance, in Coos Bay, Oregon, there had been a study by professionals of alleged pollution of the bay. The study revealed no pollution. The teen-agers found pollution. Why? They found a red dye that was not soluble in water, poured it down the toilets in different locations around the bay and, sure enough, the dye turned up in the bay in those areas. They took their findings to the Coos Bay Board of Supervisors and got some action.

I could give you hundreds of examples of youth participation programs. In general, they fall into four categories: (1) a one-to-one service to others, (2) a service to the community, (3) social action and (4) internships. They are not all carried on in schools. Some are sponsored by voluntary agencies or by ad hoc groups of young people. They can be conducted on a short-term basis to meet an emergency need or on a long-term basis. The National Commission on Resources for Youth has over 15 hundred case studies of programs of these kinds. It offers summaries of these in our free Resources for Youth newsletter.

I have not time here to tell you the difference that all this makes in the lives of the young people I have watched over the years who are involved in youth participation programs. I have seen the toughest kind of kids become mellow and kind when a younger child is placed in their charge. I’ve seen miracles work! I remember “Grizzly,” a huge black girl in one of our first Youth Tutoring Youth programs. She had matted hair and an unkempt appearance. I doubt her hair had known a comb for months. She became a tutor of younger children under the Neighborhood Youth Corp program. With her first paycheck, she had her hair cut and styled. With her next paycheck, she bought the first new dress she had ever owned. Ever after, she was well groomed and lovely to look at. She became the leader of that group and was eventually in charge of it. What made the difference? I believe it was being given responsibility for a younger child and being recognized, probably for the first time, as a person who could be trusted and given responsibility.

The greatest handicaps in starting these programs are the adults. It is a completely new role for most of them. What kind of adult do we need for these programs? To operate youth participation programs, the adult must like kids, and not all adults like kids. You should have adults who respect young people and have confidence in their ability. You should have adults with a passion for opening up experiential opportunities for youth. It is not possible to have a successful program if the teacher who takes over one of these programs does not have that passion. I feel the same way about all who work with young people.

Judge Mary Kohler is the founder and former director of the National Commission on Resources for Youth, Inc. in New York City. She presently serves as chairman of the board for the Commission and continues to lecture and serve as a consultant on Youth Participation.
EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH EDUCATION

By: Eliot Wigginton

This is going to follow directly on the heels of what Mary Kohler was talking about this morning. I think you’ll recognize some of the same themes. There are a lot of things that over the last few years I’ve been wrestling with. The bulk of the wrestling began, I guess, when I and the students came to the realization that there had to be something more than a magazine. And I and the students came to the realization that it was awfully easy to devote all of our energy to the production of the magazine and lose sight of the fact that there was another agenda. And that’s when we began experimenting with other vehicles and other forms of action—other ways of getting young people involved, either in the community or in school, in other kinds of projects that would broaden them as individuals and make them more sensitive to the needs of others.

This is hard to get aholt of because there are about eight threads running parallel here, and we’ll just have to grab aholt of each one and see what happens to us; but in the Southern Appalachian Region, for example, there are a number of problems. The problem which is most severe is that, by and large, the majority of young people that I educate in our public high school are not going to be able to stay in Rabun County. They’re going to have to go somehowise somewhere else to work. The Appalachian Region is owned, bag and baggage, by other folks. In Rabun County, 66 percent of the land is owned by the United States Forest Service, and 18 percent of the land is owned by the Georgia Power Company. Five to six percent of the land in Rabun County is owned by various industries and non-profit corporations. Less than 10 percent of the land in Rabun County is available for private use, bought and sold on the open market for a house, a farm, a dairy. The bulk of that land is being grabbed as fast as it can be grabbed by people from Tallahassee and West Palm Beach and Miami and Fort Lauderdale and Savannah and all those places who want a place to build a summer home. They’re going to go up there and stay perhaps three months out of the year, three weeks out of the year, three days out of the year, and go back home. And, what’s left for the local kids is very little; and what little is left is so inflated in price that they cannot afford to buy it. Why? Because the only jobs that are available in Rabun County (except for a few professional developers) are industrial jobs. All the industries of Rabun County are non-union industries. People get paid minimum wage. That means that they earn about $56 hundred a year before taxes. Land is now $4 thousand an acre. You can’t buy a lot of land if you take home less than $5 thousand a year.

So on the one hand, you’ve got a project inside a school system that is devoted to building a commitment on the pan of those kids to a culture and a heritage and the place they come from and a sensitivity to people from their own backgrounds and other people around the country. And you’ve got that project operating inside the school and doing well and building that commitment. But on the other hand, you’ve got an impossible situation where the kids come out of that school and want to exercise that commitment, and they’ve got no place to go. Problem number one.

Problem number two is that you see an amazing amount of ignorance on the part of young people about the way things get done in the world. They don’t have any realization of the way the political process works. None of them knows, even though their families have lived in places like Mountain City, Georgia, forever, that the mayor of Mountain City has been mayor for 30 years; that they never had a town meeting in the history of that town, although it was incorporated in 1907; though they’ve only got 450 people in the whole town, they never got together to talk about what they wanted the town to look like ten years from now, or what they were going to do for their kids. And, if some of the students—and I hope this is going to happen—I pray that it’s going to happen—want to run for political office or want to begin to make a difference, they got no notion of how that happens and how to go about it, or what kinds of things they ought to propose or suggest. They don’t even know how to hold meetings. They don’t know how to make decisions. They don’t know how things get discussed and how answers get arrived at. This is one of the reasons, by the way, why it’s so important that every decision that gets made in connection with one of these projects gets made with students participating fully. Because until they have that opportunity, they don’t even know how to call a meeting and get an agenda out on the table for discussion. We forget that you know, but we have to remember that a lot of kids that we work with don’t even know how to make long distance phone calls, much less call a meeting of strangers or citizens to plan and take some kind of action. They don’t know what options are open to them for community action on a broad scale, community action that’s really going to make a difference.

In the Southern Appalachian Region yet another problem we have is the influx of outside influence. There are almost no parts of the country that have been so heavily visited and impacted by well-meaning people from the outside who were going to save the Appalachian people from themselves. You’ve got the early movement back in the late 1800’s with the Episcopal missionaries setting up mission schools and bringing in train loads of used clothes from the north to clothe the poor ignorant savages and educate the poor ignorant children. You’ve got all the government intervention during the Depression days, which is when much of the land in Rabun County got taken from the Appalachian people by the government. You’ve got the tremendous influx of people during the days of Peace Corps and Vista coming in and working for two or three years and starting programs that collapsed behind them leaving this residue of bitterness. And more recently, of course, you’ve got the Appalachian Regional Commission where all of the federal money that goes into the Appalachian Region, by and large, for social services (schools, hospitals, roads, sewer, and water systems) is channelled through the ARC. I was in Washington several years ago and was asked to go over to the office of the ARC to show some slides of the region. I went over to do that, and asked Amy Hardy, who had invited me, why I had been asked to do that. And she said, “What you’ve got to realize is that most of the people in the Appalachian Regional Commission have never been to the moun-
The thing that I'm getting at is that in the face of problems like these, it's almost criminal in projects like the ones we guide to focus exclusively on the production of a magazine. Because although, as an activity, that has value in and of itself, it is a ready-made vehicle (as are the other applications like video tape or record production or environmental education) for teaching kids, not only how to print pictures and how to make a record album and how to market a magazine, but also for teaching kids how businesses work and survive, how communities work, where the power lies, who's got the power in the community, and how they either use it or abuse it, how decisions get made, how polity gets implemented. All our projects are ready-made vehicles for teaching students how, as adults, they can have some control over their own futures and not constantly be the victims of other people and other agencies.

Most of the kids in our county know that something's wrong; none of the kids, by and large, in our county except the ones that have been really actively involved in our program, know why. I don't know what kind of a difference our work is going to make. It may be too late for our county. Our county may, in fact, just have to be written off at this point because there's almost no way to get it back. It's gone just about too far. But at least, perhaps, in other places where students settle or in other communities where they decide to live, they can, first of all, know how to get into a community and discover what resources lie there and what kinds of people live there and what their needs are, not what the government perceives their needs to be; and secondly, have enough savvy and enough knowledge to know where to find answers to questions they've got; and third, have enough savvy and knowledge to know how to get into positions of leadership and how to exercise some leadership, and how to exercise some decision making power and take control of their own futures instead of having to sit by, helplessly, moaning and groaning and complaining while the rest of the world takes everything from them.

We've been experimenting with a lot of different kinds of vehicles for getting at this problem. One of the things we tried was to experiment with a course about Mountain City, Georgia. Sherrod Reynolds and I got four students, and we tried it totally on an experimental basis. The students started with all the various kinds of skills that they had gotten already from the magazine and took them eight steps further. They knew the people from the community because they had worked with them in a magazine-type situation. So what happened was that each of the four students adopted a small town, and by themselves, each went to that town, and each by himself or herself set up the interviews inside that town with the mayor, members of the City Council or Chamber of Commerce—any leaders they could get hold of. They chose the towns because they were roughly the same size as Mountain City, and they chose them because over the last ten years they had experienced rapid growth. They asked, "How did you deal with this growth? Did you do anything about zoning? If you put in zoning restrictions, exactly how did you do it? How was that implemented? How come all the business in Toccoa moved out to Big A Road instead of staying in the downtown area (Big A Road being your every-city-strip with five lanes and 18 hundred Pizza Huts and Burger Chefs)? And how come that happened," right?

And they got all these guys on tape explaining the problems of running a small town, explaining how decisions that govern that town are made. They're using all the skills that they've already learned, right? They're tape-recording interviews, they're taking color photographs for a slide show, they're asking all the right questions, they're setting up their own interviews, they're going by themselves, and they're bringing the information back, they're transcribing it, they're working it up just like they might do for the magazine. And they're taking that material and pulling out powerful sections and revealing stories like, "If I had been smarter, I never would have done this happen in our town," those kinds of stories, and they're keying those with a series of color slides that they themselves have taken and they're creating a slide show.

Then they go to Mountain City and they split up in groups, each kid takes one quadrant, and you have four kids, OK? So in each quadrant, each has a city map, in cooperation with the mayor who provides the map. And they mark every single building in their quadrant, almost like doing a
census. Right? There’re only 312 homes in Mountain City, so that’s not a real big deal, but it’s an interesting exercise.

Then they draw a similar kind of map, but all it has on it is the old streets. They go to the residents of the town and say, “I want you to show us what this town used to look like thirty years ago. What buildings were here thirty years ago that are no longer here?” They found that there was a railroad that came through there, there was a railroad depot, there was a factory that produced shuttles, there was an apple packing warehouse, there were huge orchards all over the place, there were four hotels, there was a barber shop, there was a tavern, there was a cafe—a whole series of things that no longer exist there now. There was even a little newspaper in Mountain City. There are only five businesses in the town now. There are two gas stations, two grocery stores, and the post office, which I guess you count as a business. And Mountain City, although it is ready-made for a period of rapid growth, has been experiencing a gradual decline that few people noticed.

They got all those patterns established. Then the kids went door to door. Using their journalism skills, they had worked up and had printed announcements of a public meeting. They said, “We’re all going to get together, and we’re going to talk about Mountain City.” They had coordinated it with the mayor and the City Council so that those guys would be there. They said, “What we’re going to talk about is where this town is going. We’re also going to talk about the fact that the mayor is in the middle of implementing a sewer and water system for this town, and he’s ready to give a report to you about the progress that’s been made.” They went door to door, to every one of those houses, with the fliers they had designed, and put them in the hands of the people that were there and explained the situation. And if people weren’t home, they put them in the doors.

On the appointed night 86 people turned out. The meeting was held in the auditorium of what had once been the town’s elementary school. The four students that were in the class and Sherrod and myself and the mayor were in the front of the room. The students gave a presentation to the community of the maps to show how the city had changed over the last few years, and then the students ran their slide show. One of the most revealing sections came from the mayor of Helen, Georgia. Helen was a dying town ten years ago. They only had three businesses in town. The same number of people live in Helen, Georgia, as in Mountain City—same size—and they made a conscious choice to go for tourism to save their town. They took the three businesses in town and the existing public buildings—the fire station, the post office, the police station—and converted them to an Alpine decor, you know, like Swiss chalets, right? And they began to advertise the town. Got the Atlanta Journal and Constitution to write a couple of articles about it. There are now over 100 businesses in Helen, Georgia, all Alpine decor. The town has been saved completely; it’s a major success story. But the same three businesses that were locally owned then years ago are the only three businesses today that are still locally owned. All the other businesses in Helen, Georgia, are owned by outside people who have candle shops and stained glass window shops, and tacky-tacky bologna shops that are opened in the summer time to serve the tourists. There are no other local businesses that exist there.

Well, that’s got some very interesting things to say for Mountain City. Mountain City is in a period of decline. Tourism is an answer. Maybe it’s not the answer we want, I don’t know, but the students presented the option.

And then they presented three other towns through their slides and
quotation from leaders. Afterwards they opened up the floor for discussion. Mountain City has absolutely no zoning. Anybody who wants to go into Mountain City and buy a piece of land and do anything he or she wants with it, no questions asked. And that creates some problems. So that was discussed.

After the meeting was over everybody stood around and talked for about another hour. We got a great slide of the mayor and City Council huddled anxiously way back in the back corner by themselves having a little council meeting trying to figure out what it was that had just happened to them. But one of the end results of that thing was the creation of a planning committee made up of 24 local residents. There were three other meetings that followed that one. Local residents pulled themselves together then, and the first major activity they sponsored in association with the kids was a major town-wide clean-up where 125 people turned out, scooped the town, hauled numerous truck loads of garbage to the dump. Everybody turned out and mowed their lawns, trimmed their trees, and if they had old stuff they had been meaning to throw away for years but had never done it, they could haul it out to the side of the road, and when the crews came through, they’d grab it and throw it in the trucks. We took away bed springs and a row boat, dish washers; you know, all manner of garbage. And then at the end we had a big festival, a community celebration. We had a square dance and a greased pole climb; we had kids spitting watermelon seeds, and a tobacco spitting contest. Tom McFalls, who’s here with us, won first place in the tobacco spitting contest. Spat a wad 24 feet. If you want to find out what that little festival was like, just talk to Tom McFalls about it. A great experience.

Now what the people in the town are trying to do is figure out a way to do some major redesigning. My father’s a landscape architect, and he’s going to give them a hand to do some major redesigning with planting flowers and shrubs and that sort of thing. A gazebo over the town fountain is one idea they’re playing with. That’s their decision, not mine, and that’s good. It’s the first decision they’ve ever made for them-
Using Modern Technology in Goulburn Valley

After some consideration and debate, the PEP Regional Reference Group made a decision late in 1985 to allocate resources designated "student support" to the installation of a computer modem network which would link all thirteen P.E.P. schools in the Goulburn: North-Eastern region. Although three district student networks had already been established in response to state requirements that students be involved in the decision-making process, there was identified a need for an organised and articulate regional body which would represent the views of students from all schools. It was anticipated that the modem facility would "enable students to communicate with one another across the region without experiencing the delays of the post or the access problems of the telephone. The electronic network would reduce the need for face-to-face meetings and facilitate the development of an effective network." (Gawler, S. Discussion Paper: A Regional Student Network, Benalla 1986).

The modem units were subsequently purchased, and an introductory in-service conducted in March 1986. Many teething problems were experienced. Schools reported problems with software. To enable the most effective use of the facility, a discrete telephone line is necessary and these were often not installed in schools for some months, by which time any skills acquired at the March in-service were long forgotten. As a result, only one or two schools were able to take immediate advantage of this P.E.P. initiative. In an attempt to discover the reasons behind the failure of students to use the modem, the P.E.P. consultant conducted a survey of all regional post-primary schools in March 1987. The survey confirmed the suspicion that students generally were not using the facility. In most cases this was because they did not have access to the necessary skills: in the case of two schools frustration arising from the lack of responses to their messages, resulted in a lack of student interest. The modem turned out to be far more difficult to use than anticipated by the instigators of the project, and teacher support and encouragement were not forthcoming because very few adults in schools know how to use it either. The vast majority of school personnel do not know what a modem is. Because the facility was given to schools, and its installation did not follow from SRC expression of interest, there appears to be little sense of responsibility or ownership towards the project among students in our schools. Only where the modem is incorporated into the curriculum of a school, is it being used to any degree at all.

A range of interesting and powerful issues emerged from the survey. While lack of expertise is central to the failure of students to use the modem, it appears that apart from curricular requirements, students do not believe that there are good reasons to acquire the necessary skills. This casts some doubt on the validity of the original aims of the project. While there are student representatives on the Regional Board of Education, these girls belong to district networks, and it is to these groups that they report regularly. They also contribute articles to the
Students generally cannot think of anything which cannot be said by post or phone, to say to each other, although SRCs have more recently expressed an interest in sharing meeting notes, agendas, constitutions etc., acknowledging that this could effectively be achieved by means of the modem facility. Regional student networking is an area so geographically vast as the Goulburn: North-East is difficult to set up: it can effectively be done by modem, but it will not occur until there is a need understood and valued by students.

It should be clear that students need to be taught the skills necessary to make effective and efficient use of the modem – I use the word "efficient" because there are costs associated with this means of communication which can be minimised by the correct use of discs, but again, students have to know how to do this. It is equally necessary for teachers to acquire the same skills, since they are the resource people most accessible to students in schools. Commitment to the purpose and value of the unit applies equally to teachers and students. This issue has not been addressed specifically by the P.E.P. consultant, but it merits the serious consideration of planners who may envisage state or nation-wide electronic communication in the future. Expertise in using the modem requires an initial learning period, followed by regular practice sessions. The need to practise skills cannot be over-stated. If schools are serious about student participation in decision-making, and they also understand that this may be facilitated by belonging to the modem network, then they have an obligation to ensure that not only do teachers and students have access to skills, but the user must also be assured of access to the modem unit itself. If there is no discrete telephone line: if the discrete line serves the telephone in the DP's office: if the modem is attached to the school computer which is used by administration staff during school hours - if these conditions exist, then students do not effectively have access.

Given the funding and placement of these units by the P.E.P. Regional Reference Group, schools may not have made policy decisions with regard to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the innovation. Since there are costs associated with use of the modem, specifically telephone rental and call charges, there is a need for schools to consider questions such as - which students will have access to the password which will get them into the system? Which body will bear the costs of using the facility? How many students at any one time will be permitted access to the modem unit and/or the password? What records of use should be maintained, and by whom? What are the responsibilities of student users to other students, who may not enjoy access? Whose responsibility is it to monitor and evaluate the project, and to which audience will collected data be made available? A school-based policy incorporating answers to these questions, is essential.

Adults have often remarked on the quality of material posted by student modem-users. Items such as "Hi! My name is Leanne. I am 5'5", sexy and available" do little to convince school administrators of the value of student to student communication. Teacher supervision is just as essential in this area of learning as it is in any other part of the curriculum. Students should be made aware of the need to post only "finished" work - i.e. messages which are edited for punctuation and presentation errors. They are offering an image of themselves to the network, just as surely as if they were personally addressing a meeting. This is something they must learn to do, and teachers are the people in a position to facilitate this learning. These observations raise the issue of the role of
the modem in the curriculum. It has been noted that effective use of the unit is occurring only in those schools where it is incorporated into the curriculum: like it or not, the reality of schooling means that unless an assessment is made of student performance in an activity, it is unlikely that that activity will be accorded the status of real and worthwhile knowledge - by parents, teachers or students. This issue is closely related to the notion of accreditation for students involved in decision-making: in fact the modem offers the means to all students to share a common learning experience which may help them to come to terms with their role in effective and meaningful decision-making. Most schools offer experiences in word-processing. It is a simple matter to "post" the products of this work to students in other schools. It would appear therefore that it is essential that language teachers become familiar with the operation of the modem, and that case studies of good practice and curriculum materials illustrating practical classroom activities, be made available to them as soon as possible. Only by providing this sort of support to teachers will the modem be recognised, understood and used as a communication tool with a valid and legitimate claim to timetable space. As well, it is likely that many of the issues that should be considered in the framing of a modem users policy in schools, would be more easily addressed if the facility could be identified as belonging to a particular learning/faculty area. Unless the expertise needed to make use of the modem is incorporated into the common learning experience of all children in the school, there are very grave risks that student use of the facility will not satisfy increasingly urgent demands for equity in education. P.E.P. resources were used to fund this project in the belief that the school experiences of all children would be enhanced by their representation on regional decision-making bodies. Currently, only a few students have acquired the necessary skills and are therefore in a position to share common concerns. While use of the modem remains extra-curricular, and is regarded as a program not readily accessible to all students, it is difficult to justify the allocation of P.E.P. resources to the project. Unless the issues raised by this paper are confronted by educators and planners in the very near future, it appears unlikely given cost and budget restraints, that support for isolated and uncoordinated student use of school-based modem units can be regarded as a responsible exercise for P.E.P. to foster and subsidize in 1987, or beyond.

Anne McCamish 15.5.87

a progress report:

In the earlier paper I raised a number of issues arising from the 1985 P.E.P. initiative which placed Modem facilities in each of thirteen regional post primary schools for the specific use of SRCs and students participating in District Regional and State-level decision-making processes. Generally students were not making use of the facility. Many explanations and hypotheses were offered to take account of the apparent failure of the original aims of the project. These included the perceived lack of expertise among both students and staff in schools; the reluctance of school communities to incorporate technologically advanced means of communication into their work programmes; the failure of school administrators to ensure regular and appropriate student access to the Modem; the lack of any real need for students to communicate with their peers in schools across districts, regions or the state.
Subsequently a number of actions were taken at the regional level in an effort to confront the factors operating against student participation in using the Modem system.

1. Representatives of the Students of Shepparton and District (S.O.S.) network, negotiated with their computer consultant to conduct two half-day in-services to familiarise staff and student teams from local schools with the operation of the Modem. A letter to schools, written by the President of S.O.S., informed SRGs of the proposed in-service; at the same time it was strongly recommended that attendance at the activity be conditional on participants agreeing to make regular use of the Modem in their schools. Nathalia H.S. responded to this initiative by planning their own in-school familiarisation programme, to be conducted by one of their own students. Three Shepparton schools took advantage of the first half-day in-service held at the District Computer Centre. Students were taken through the operation of the Modem, and then required to compose and post messages to students in other schools. Messages were duly posted and received, although comment was later made on the very poor standards of language expression and presentation exhibited by the student users. The second in-service attracted less interest from the remaining Shepparton schools, but when only one teacher and no students made the effort to attend or apologise for failing to attend the consultant understandably cancelled the programme, indicating that he would be unwilling to conduct a further in service until students were prepared to demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to their learning. To my knowledge, no other in-service activities have been organised for student users of Modems in the region.

2. As the Regional P.E.P. consultant responsible for the Modem network, I attended a regional meeting of computer consultants in Wodonga on May 22. Generally the consultants appeared to be reluctant to run further Modem-users programmes for students partly because some of them have never believed in the rationale for the Modem network, and partly because they have remained unconvinced of the relevance of inter-school communication to the school experience of the vast majority of students. It must be acknowledged that both these concerns were expressed by the consultants at the very outset of the project, and disregarded by the relevant decision makers at the time. Nevertheless, issues relating to student communication via Modem were addressed, and the group agreed to cooperate with language and computer teachers at Cobram H.S. who had made an offer to produce a Telememo broadsheet including items written by students from different schools, and posted to the editors via Modem. Consultants also reported on programmes currently underway to introduce school staff to the Bulletin Boards now operating from District Education Support Centres.

Requiring access to the Modem, the Boards represent another reason for staff to become familiar with the electronic data transfer facility. This should train a small group of teachers in all schools willing and able to act as support and resource personnel to SRGs and students who wish to make use of their Modem.

3. I have written to the secretaries of all regional student network groups and SRGs, asking them to allocate agenda space to a discussion of questions such as "What is Modem?" and "How can we use Modem to improve our learning at school, and at SRC meetings?" I have made myself available to address student meetings on these topics, and to respond to queries and
problems they may have in relation to the Modem. I also advised them of the plan to produce a Telememo broadsheet, and invited them to prepare items to publicise the aims and activities of their groups. I have since been approached by a local independent school to discuss the Modem project at their next scheduled SRC meeting.

4. Similar letters have been addressed to Principals and language coordinators in schools, informing them about the Telememo broadsheet proposal and requesting support from them, for students intending to make contributions to the publication. Because of the need to ensure that items are received by Cobram High School in a "finished" state and ready for publication, it will be necessary to involve language teachers and language classes in the composition and preparation of work for transmission via Modem. Cognisant of the role of language teachers, the P.E.P. Task Force at Cobram H.S., taking advantage of P.E.P-funded emergency teachers, is currently planning an in-service for their English faculty. This in-service will introduce teachers to the word-processor and the Modem, and also to curriculum materials and processes which incorporate electronic data transfer i.e. the Modem.

5. The Telememo broadsheet proposal has been extensively promoted in schools, not only by means of personal correspondence to administrators, faculty personnel and students, but also by means of the Regional Focus and the Modem itself.

6. At a recent meeting of the P.E.P. Regional Reference group in Wangaratta, students discussed ways in which they might make use of the Modem. They compiled a list of users, but devoted most of their attention to a number of issues associated with Modem use based on their own experience in schools. They expressed concern that most school people do not know what the Modem is, or what it is used for; they identified a need for a directory similar to a telephone book, listing contacts which may be made via Modem; they urged schools to draw up a Modem-users policy which incorporates a reliable method of record-keeping and cost-monitoring; they re-stated a need for Modem-users to make regular reference to their electronic mail-boxes. They cited examples of, and expressed concern for schools where adults in possession of Modem skills and expertise (and the password!!) appear reluctant to share their experience with students and other staff.

While the Modem is still not used as it was envisaged early in 1985, there are a number of positive and encouraging things happening which suggest that progress is underway. Students are more aware of the existence of Modem. In small groups they are discussing it and requesting more information and skills. When school communities such as Cobram take on projects such as the broadsheet, students within those schools have been the long-term beneficiaries of such initiatives. There is awareness of the issues at regional consultant level, and coordination of activities aimed at greater use of the facility is understood to be the responsibility of the P.E.P. consultant. As student participation in decision-making makes demands on student participation in communication, the need for Modem fluency will become more apparent, and may eventually make its way into school programmes. When this happens, the instigators of the Modem network in the G.N.E. region will be seen to be achieving some of their original and forward-looking aims and objectives.
Northern Region Radio Network

Students on the Air

In 1986 the Northern Region Radio Network (N.R.R.N.) was born. The program was initiated to encourage and develop radio studies across the curriculum. Funding was derived from the Disadvantaged Schools Program, being granted a part-time co-ordinator and portable audio equipment in 1986. The network began in February of 1986 with five secondary schools and by the end of the year four other schools had joined in. In 1987, another school joined and the network now boasts ten schools: Reservoir High, Thomastown High, Merrilands High, Hatfield High, Preston Girls High, Northcote High, Thornbury High, Northcote Tech, Preston East Technical and Preston Technical.

Most of these schools have operational studios within their schools and broadcast at lunchtimes. Radio classes are taught either via Media Studies or has and elective. Students are taught to fully research, plan, script and record their own material. Curriculum material has been devised on the following projects: vox pop, profile, documentary and voice piece. In addition a network resource directory, which is available for purchase from Reservoir High School has been prepared.

The main emphasis of the network is to obtain air-time on public radio for student work. Until recently, the network produced fortnightly shows on 3CR and will now be presenting shows on 3 PBS FM in 1988. Students from the network have been involved in a number of radio related projects such as: 3LO Sunday Night Live, 3CR Pal Sunday Peace March broadcasts, Spoletto Fringe Youth Radio Broadcast, 3AW Radio Plays, Greensborough Festival, Education Report 3CR Peace Exhibition Northland 1986.

In order to encourage radio across the curriculum, a two day state wide conference was organised by the network in 1987. The conference dealt with radio in schools issues and also consisted of practical workshops. A video of the network was produced by the Northern Region Ministry of Education. The network is also mentioned in the Youth Radio Directory produced by 3RRR and Bruce Berryman. Recently the network was involved in organizing the Media forum day for girls at the Girls, Science and Technology week which the Lalor Education Centre ran.

Decision making, developing and sharing of ideas within the network is formulated via regular monthly management committee meetings. The meetings are open to all staff, students and parents who are interested.

Radio for students is a rewarding and demanding subject. Radio develops student confidence, organisational skills, voice production and most importantly - communication skills. When successful, it is very fulfilling.

The network is always open to assisting any interested students or staff who wish to pursue radio within their schools. Tapes of student material and curriculum material are available on request from Reservoir High School. The directory is also available for $4.20. Simply contact the new radio co-ordinator or Jeff Cooper at Reservoir on 470 3555 or at the school; Plenty Road,
Reservoir. As of February 1988, a new co-ordinator will be taking my place as I leave to attack my own tertiary studies far more seriously. To the network and all interested in setting up radio in your own schools - my best wishes, it is definitely worth while!

Regards, Vivian Stranieri (ex Co-ordinator)

reflections...

After writing a blur on the Northern Region Radio Network, it seems strange that I should be leaving and writing this my personal thoughts on co-ordinating such a program for the last two years. I began the job in February 1986, slightly hesitant, as it was my first serious part-time job at nineteen years of age. Could I handle such a job adequately and be of benefit to all involved in the program? Coming from a radio oriented background was helpful, now, all I had to do was place all that into an education situation. All I had wanted was a part-time job to subsidise my tertiary studies and now I found myself in one of those "part-time jobs which become full-time". However, in the two years of being co-ordinator, I feel that I have reaped enormous personal rewards. I only hope I gave as much as I feel I received.

Being a student myself posed some interesting dilemmas. It was challenging to be left to supervise students and yet get some positive radio production from them. And what happens when you have your own definite views on the role of radio and how the medium should be utilized most effectively, what you should and shouldn't produce, etc. all those radio production considerations you think of before producing material when you are working with students? These all somehow take on a slightly different role when placed into a classroom context. You can't force your views onto students. You want to produce a half hour show on why we shouldn't celebrate 1988, but the student wants to produce a five minute tape on Kylie Minogue. What do you do then? Especially if this is the students first encounter with radio. And we all know that it is quicker and more effective to learn when one is interested in the first instance. You let them do their Kylie Minogue tape and not only hope, but introduce them to the idea of why one would produce that social/political tape. And what of the student audience? What happens if that audience wants to hear about Bon Jovi rather than Aboriginal deaths in police custody? I know what I would produce, but I am not the student. Overall, most students take to radio very well. Those students who are shy tend to take to the air-waves with an air of confidence, whilst those more self-assured tend to freeze speechless. Why, I can't really say.

Sharing your skills with others is what every society should work towards, but to pass them onto youth is more beneficial, and to then see youth pass onto youth their skills is an added bonus. And this is precisely what the network is doing. Students teaching students. Youth relate to youth, you need only get through to one and watch it snowball.

I leave the network with positive feelings. It has some original and innovative ideas. I only wish I could have stayed on to see those ideas progress and further develop. As for me, I think two years has certainly given me opportunities to progress and re-think about radio and what the medium can and should be achieving.

VIVIAN STRANIERI
(Ex-Co-Ordinator Northern Region Radio Network)
MOVING IN

An interesting publication has recently appeared on recent activities at Queenscliff High School, Victoria.

Queenscliff High School (QHS) was targeted by the 1984-85 Commonwealth Participation and Equity Program (PEP) and chose to work on Parent, Student and Teacher Interaction as one of the Areas of Action. In 1985, QHS successfully submitted to be included in the PEP Parent and Student Participation in Curriculum Development and Decision-making Schools Resource Program and set about developing, documenting and disseminating their practice in student and parent participation. Tony Wright recorded their progress up to, and including 1985, in the publication entitled, "Student Participation in Decision-making at Queenscliff High School, 1984-85".

"Moving In - A Guide to Student Participation at Queenscliff High School" is the culmination of the efforts of students and teachers to increase student participation in decision-making at Queenscliff High School.

This guide is based on the following beliefs:

That all schools can be "good" schools.

That a "good" school is one where:

* everyone feels worthwhile
* everyone feels successful
* everyone participates
* the teaching and learning program is worthwhile, rigorous, interesting and relevant.

That the best way to learn something is to do it, to talk about it, and to reflect on it.

That student participation gives students a share in decision-making which should result in the improvement of the curriculum, learning outcomes and ultimately, students' welfare.

That if students are to participate effectively in decision-making, they must acquire the necessary confidence, skills and knowledge.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOCUS

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has produced a 1988 Calendar entitled "Young People in Focus 1988". It is well-illustrated, has plenty of space for noting activities on any particular day, as well as more space for general notes for each month. It is available from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 179 Barkley Street, St. Kilda (phone 03/537 1833). The cost is $11 (including postage).

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Articles:

325 Youthworkers in Schools
(Stth Australian Youth Workers Network, May 1985)
8pp; 80c

Publications Received:

Contact Connect on (03) 341 8251

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Reflections: An E.S.L. Anthology
(Dandenong H.S., Vic. 1986 - PEP supported)

Final Focus (Albert H.S. Vic)

Voice Over (Holmsglen College of TAFE, Vic) Vol. No.1. 1987

Voice Over: Boycott the Bicentennial Farce (Holmsglen College of TAFE, Vic) 1987

PEP Xpression (Collingwood TAFE PEP, Vic) No.2. 1987.

PEP Xpression (Collingwood TAFE PEP, Vic) No.3. 1987.

OVERSEAS STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

Foxtfire (Rabun Gap, Georgia, USA) Vol 21 No.3 Summer 1987, (No,80).

NB:

Several of the publications listed under 'Other Sources' are documents produced by the Participation and Equity Program whose funding ceased at the end of 1987. If you are quick you can collect copies of the PEP publications from their office at 416 King Street, West Melbourne. Otherwise, you can find copies at your local Schools Support Centre; some will be available for purchase through the Victorian Government Bookshop at 318 Little Bourke St., Melbourne (Phone 663 3760). More details about availability will be given in the next issue of Connect.

Other Sources

Network (Surrey Hills NSW) Dec 1987

Student Council Development Camps
Reports from Broken Hill N.S.W (May 1982) and Murray Bridge,

Student Forum Development Program

Create (VCOSS, Collingwood, Vic), Nov/Dec 1987.


Options (Youth Bureau Newsletter, DEET, Canberra) Dec 1987.

Collective Notes (COSH G. Melbourne, Vic) No.28 (Dec 1987)

A review of Negotiation and Assessment (Huntingdale T.S., Vic PEP) 1986.

The Dynamic Classroom (PEP, Vic) 1986.


A New Beginning: Technology Studies (Brunswick T.S. Vic PEP) 1987

Art and About (PEP, Vic) 1987


NIE Update (Newspaper In Education, USA) Vol 13 No. 8 Nov/Dec 1987.


Towards Inclusive Curriculum in Maths and Science (PEP, Vic 1987.)
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