Give children a say in how schools are run, says top-level report

THE AGE, Monday 3 November 1987

Activist says students want 'real power'

By PETER SCHWARTZ

In a bold step, the Victorian Government has announced a major new initiative to give students a say in how schools are run, and to make education more relevant and engaging for them. This is a significant step towards truly empowering young people and ensuring that their voices are heard in the decision-making process. The government has committed to listen to students and to make changes based on their feedback. As a result, there will be a greater focus on student input in the curriculum, teaching methods, and school policies. This will ensure that students are not just passive recipients of education, but active participants in their learning process. The government has also pledged to invest in technology and resources to support this initiative, and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to help them facilitate student participation. This is a welcome move towards a more student-centered approach to education, and it is essential for the future success of our young people.

Encourage students to have their say

NE of the weaknesses of the school system is the lack of student participation. The current system is flawed, and it is time for a rethinking of the way we educate our young people. The government has announced a new initiative to give students a say in how schools are run, and to make education more relevant and engaging for them. This is a significant step towards truly empowering young people and ensuring that their voices are heard in the decision-making process. The government has committed to listen to students and to make changes based on their feedback. As a result, there will be a greater focus on student input in the curriculum, teaching methods, and school policies. This will ensure that students are not just passive recipients of education, but active participants in their learning process. The government has also pledged to invest in technology and resources to support this initiative, and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to help them facilitate student participation. This is a welcome move towards a more student-centered approach to education, and it is essential for the future success of our young people.

...IN THE NEWS
After eight years of continuously producing Connect - since late 1979 - I'm taking a rest for a year. But that doesn't mean that Connect will be taking a rest!

In 1988, Connect will be produced by a collective of people based at Melbourne College of Advanced Education (CAE). One of the hopes is that Education students will be able to encourage, collect and/or write accounts for Connect as part of their courses.

Issues have been promised from Western Australia and from a group of primary schools in Yarraville. But Connect, as always, relies upon your writing and sharing to survive - as an active and exciting network.

People are still surprised to find that Connect receives no funding support - nor is it put out by any program or group. Not PEP ... not Youth Affairs Council. Publication costs are solely met by your subscriptions and donations. No salaries are paid - it's a 'labour of love' of people committed to student participation.

So please resubscribe promptly and encourage others to subscribe!

Over the past eight years, there have been significant developments. Connect is carrying many more stories about SRCs and student networks and less is being written about projects such as cross-age tutoring, media production, classroom research and so on. Are these aspects of participation occurring less, or are they less unusual - more the 'norm' of schools' programs?

In many ways, too, it is easier to write about formal committees and their problems and solutions. The Ministerial Working Party in Victoria certainly found many more responses about formal bodies than it did about negotiated curriculum and the like.

I don't think we can accept that. If students are to be active and acknowledged participants in decisions about their education, then we need to encourage the interaction of all aspects of participation - in the classroom, in student organisations, on formal bodies. In isolation, any aspect can so easily be a game - with complex rules that disempower and discriminate.

Best wishes for 1988!  
Roger Holdsworth
Coincidence or otherwise?

Two interesting examples of student participation in 'Youth Centres' have come over the Connect desk. In one case, a publication shows how a Student Representative Council was established within the Turana Youth Training Centre. In the other, a video documentary developed in association with boys at the Baltara School illuminates the history of and reactions to a Reception Centre.

TURANA

Where There's A Will, There's A Way To Be Heard

Setting up a Student Representative Council provides challenges under any circumstance. But the very particular difficulties, successes and excitement involved in establishing an SRC in a Youth Training Centre is captured in a recent 6-page publication from the Victorian Government Participation and Equity Program (October 1987).

"Turana Education Centre is a unique series of mini-schools situated within seven separate sections of Turana Youth Training Centre. Teachers go to the boys and teach them within the confines of those sections with a maximum or high security rating. Students in minimum security areas and those with open status may attend the Turana Open School or an outside school. Remand and Classification A (high security sections) accommodate boys awaiting court cases and decisions by the Classification Committee about where they are to go.

"Boys are placed in different sections depending on their age, whether they are wards, the nature and seriousness of the offense(s) they have committed, and whether they have a history of absconding. Not all detainees at the Youth Training Centre attend the Education Centre.

"The administrative structure of the Institution is quite complex and the relationship between the Education Centre and the Youth Training Centre, while generally positive, is sometimes problematic. The fact that two different ministries operate these centres and, at times, have conflicting approaches to the issue of pastoral care, has on occasions created confusion, most notably with respect to demarcation of responsibility.

"An understanding of these structures is essential to appreciate the kind of constraints under which the SRC was successfully established, and its continued operation.

"The setting up of an SRC provided an opportunity for many boys to improve their competency in all forms of communication and to recognize, with growing maturity, that the school operates within certain 'rules' as well. More importantly, aided by an SRC coordinator who moved from section to section, the students learnt that where there is a will, there is a way to be heard."

The pamphlet describes the background, reasons and beginnings of the SRC and outlines stumbling blocks and ways they were overcome. The issues students raised, the action that followed and the achievements of the SRC are listed.
"Involvement on the SRC has given students the opportunity to talk to adults as adults and as human beings who are not tainted by institutional labels. They have been allowed to voice an opinion on matters that are important to them. They have seen their suggestions acted upon in a number of important instances and this has given them confidence in their ability to deal with adults."

The publication was written by Cheryl Paul in collaboration with Gwen Stubberfield and Bernie Bryant. Copies may be obtained from:

Turana Education Centre
900 Park Street
Parkville 3052

BALTARA
I'd Rather Be At My Grandparents

What do young people in a 'youth reception centre' think about the centre and their place in it?

A 27 minute video, Baltara: I'd Rather Be At My Grandparents is an observational documentary designed to give institutionalised kids a voice. It contains the words and images of the boys at Baltara, chosen by the boys themselves. It is a frank and honest account of life in an institution - as seen by those who know it 'from the inside'.

Background

A letter dated 16th July 1906 from the Secretary of the Neglected Children's Department states that there were 30 children in the Royal Park Receiving Depot for neglected children "for whom there appears to be no method of regular schooling". A request for a teacher to attend five days a week was granted and the authorities provided one room 20' x 14' for instruction.

The school opened 23rd July 1907. Average attendance became 71 pupils in 1908. The head teacher wrote a letter of complaint to the department, protesting that the room was too small for effective teaching. Sixteen years after School No. 3552's inception, Frances Barkman's protests were heard and a building was erected to hold 110 pupils.

The School Inspector's Report Book date of entry 5.3.1914 states:

"The children are continually coming and going. The new one this morning is deaf and dumb. Others are affected either mentally or physically. More continuous employment might be found for the older ones, they are much less intelligent and may be subjected to stricter control."

The kids were given a battery of intelligence tests on enrolment. Binet, Porteus, Healy and Kohs scales were used to determine mental age and measure IQ scores. Test scores were logged with teacher comment on the pupil's temperamental traits. These scores and traits determined the labels used by teachers.

Children fell into one of the following categories:

1. Normal
2. Sub-normal
3. Borderline normal
4. Abnormal
5. Feeble-minded
6. Abnormal emotionality
7. Normal emotionality

Evaluation records dated 1932 reflect a clinical and discriminatory approach to pupil assessment as seen in the following examples of two 16 year old boys employed by day and attending school by night:

Comment: 'Tests suggest that this boy is at best a very dull normal. General emotionality is normal. Should make a good citizen.'

Comment: 'This boy is mentally a borderline case of feeblemindedness. He complained of unfair treatment at place of employment. Spiteful and revengeful. A thief.'

The conditions in which teachers and pupils functioned were environmentally restrictive in the extreme. Education was delivered in a management and supervisory mode and under the jurisdiction of the State; the kids were in effect socially immobilised. IQ testing as an educational requirement, validated social immobility and justified a curriculum based on the provision of skills enabling employment in menial work.

Prejudicial and negative terms such as 'feeble-minded', maintained the 'status quo' of accepted social/intellectual normality through definition of social/intellectual abnormality. Many of the kids at the depot were orphans or victims of poverty and circumstance.
The common scenario was the breakdown of paternal support systems via illness, unemployment or death. Women were expected to support children they couldn't feed.

Children in State care remained in a low status social order which, at best, only met their basic needs for food and shelter. At worst, it left them powerless.

The Receiving Depot and School No. 3552 have undergone evolutionary change since the dark days of 1906. Both institutions still exist, under the titles of Baltara Reception Centre and Baltara Special School. 'Special' at Baltara refers to social and/or emotional disadvantage. Boys 10-14 are admitted through the Children's Court, and length of stay is determined by the availability, or lack, of a suitable community placement. Most are wards, and whilst at Baltara attend the Baltara Special School. Today, there are six students to one teacher and Binet and his contemporaries are now anachronism. However, the professionals who work with institutionalised kids must address human rights issues and acknowledge children's rights as there is always need for change.

The Video

In 1986, a need was identified to provide a vehicle for the boys at Baltara to evaluate their institutional life. A video documentary was an obvious approach. Funds were applied for and obtained from a variety of trusts, the Youth Affairs Division, PEP, School Improvement Plan and the Victorian Teachers Union. Further support came from the Human Rights Commission and from Open Channel.

Jane Lawrence, one of the producers, identifies student empowerment as being central to the aims of the video. "We wanted them to have control over the script and the views presented. The video shows what kids wanted to pin point about Baltara."

Production Process

In order to encourage these views, the director (Michael Webb) spent six months with the students, working shopping production approaches, cameras and so on. He supported them in expressing opinions and attitudes and these formed the basis for filming over two weeks towards the end of 1986.

What sorts of issues are highlighted?

The students in the video talk about:

* their concern about the strategies and behaviours they learn from each other;
* the repetitive boredom of the centre;
* the 'unfairness' of the court system.

They also identified that there was a specific age - 7 to 8 years old - where they saw themselves "going wrong."

So three students of this age from another school were taken into Baltara and filmed and interviewed about their reactions. They talked of analogies with prisons - "they saw it as better than a prison," says Jane, "because of the programs running there - but they still saw it as a prison underneath all that."

Use and Availability

It is hoped that the video will be useful as a teaching and discussion tool in schools, tertiary institutions, community services and so on. Teachers of social issues and media may find it particularly useful.

It will probably be shown on television in Melbourne in March 1988, but is already available for borrowing or purchase.

For more information, including cost, contact:

Ian Bunting or Sam Nicolazzo at the Baltara School, 950 Park Street, Parkville 3052. Phone: (03) 389.3301 or contact Jane Lawrence: (03) 481.8576.
Give children a say in how run, says top-level report

By JAMES BUTTON, education reporter

Students should have more say in decisions about what they learn, how they are assessed, and how their school runs, according to a key State Government report.

The report, by a ministerial working party, recommends that students down to primary school level should have the chance to evaluate the content of the classroom. It urges all state education committees setting school curriculums and policy should canvass students' views.

'Student Participation in Schools and Technical and Further Education' was completed in June but has yet to be published. Members of the working party included the acting chairman of the State Board of Education, Mr Don MacLean, the executive director of the Education Ministry's Schools Division, Mr Jeff Dunstan, and representatives of government and non-government schools, teachers and students.

The report found that student decision-making was a valuable preparation for society, that students-who took part in decisions became more actively engaged in learning, and that students were more likely to accept decisions if their views were taken into account.

The report calls for the work of student representatives to be acknowledged in school reports and student profiles and, where relevant, to be credited towards meeting course requirements.

While acknowledging that the high turnover and numbers of part-time students in TAFE make student participation difficult, the report recommends that the ministry develop a coherent policy on student involvement in decision-making, including curriculums and assessment.

The report found that while male English-speaking students predominated among student representatives and calls for strategies to include the views of females, students with disabilities and students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Male student representatives on regional TAFE boards outnumbered females seven to one.

It suggests a number of strategies for involving students, including surveys to gauge student opinion, class time set aside to allow students to discuss issues, single-sex student meetings for particular needs, and student organisations in both primary and secondary schools.

Students on school councils should be encouraged to become involved in all council responsibilities, including education policy, finance and budget planning, care of school buildings and responding to Government policies.

The report recommends that the new Victorian Certificate of Education, to be phased in from 1990, allow flexibility for schools to select specific course content, and encourage student input into courses. School-based curriculum development provided greater chance of student participation.

Teachers in the Secondary and Tertiary Entrance Certificate, which gives students in more than 100 schools a say in curriculums, say that the VCE will cut student involvement. But the chairman of

TAFE students want a say on new tertiary education bodies

from T. Falconer, coordinator, the Victorian TAFE Students' Network

As the statewide body representing the interests of TAFE students, the Victorian TAFE Students' Network views the latest decisions of the Cain Government regarding technical and further education (TAFE) in Victoria with considerable dismay and concern ('The Age', 20/11).

Not only has the Government failed to consult TAFE students about the proposed changes, but it also appears to have excluded student representatives from the new further education committees and State Training Board — the peak decision-making bodies replacing the current TAFE Board.

TAFE students vote, work, endure unemployment, pay taxes, and indeed bear the full legal, financial and political responsibilities of citizens in Victoria. Yet the Cain Government continues to ignore their status as adult citizens, and to deny their legitimate right to influence decisions affecting their education and welfare.

Such an omission highlights stark contradictions in government policy on social justice and student participation. Both policies commit the Cain Government to "expanding opportunities for genuine participation by all Victorians (including students) in decisions which affect their lives".

The recent announcements about TAFE, however, suggest that neither policy commitment will be implemented.

If the Government aims to improve the quality and relevance of TAFE to industry and community needs, then it must realise that TAFE students provide the most direct and effective link between TAFE, the workplace and the community. Client participation is the best guarantee of quality, relevance and accountability.

Unless the Cain Government moves hastily to honor its commitment to social justice and student participation, through direct student representation on the new decision-making bodies in TAFE, then it should brace itself for an inevitable backlash. Denied consultation and representation, TAFE students numbering close to 180,000 will undoubtedly express their dissatisfaction and vote accordingly at the next state election in 1988.

Trudy Falconer, Melbourne.
Encourage students to have their say

One of the weaknesses of the school system is the discouragement of consultation and initiative. The decisions on everything from curriculum to school uniforms are made by the teachers or other adult authorities. The pupils are rarely, if ever, asked to express a view. And even if they were, there is no guarantee that their opinions would be heeded. For pupils, school life is basically anti-democratic. That is the way it has always been; that is probably how most school principals would like it to remain.

However, a Victorian ministerial working party has come to a different conclusion. In a report on student participation in schools, the working party recommends that students should have more say in what they learn, how they should be assessed and how their school is run. It says that students down to primary level should be given a say on the content of courses. It also suggests that where students are represented on school councils, they should be encouraged to become involved in the full range of council responsibilities, including education policy, finance and budget planning, and care of school buildings.

We can see no objection to this. On the contrary, such a policy should help to break down the sense of alienation that many schoolchildren have about the school system. They feel excluded and so they turn their back on it. A second reason is that participation would be a valuable preparation for the workforce and for community life at large. It would boost their confidence and their sense of individuality, as well as encouraging them to speak up and to be active rather than mere recipients. Those are all qualities a properly balanced school system should encourage. One major reservation, however, is the suggestion that the work of student representatives should, in some circumstances, be considered as part of their course requirements. This is a bizarre suggestion which, if adopted, could only serve to undermine the value of assessments. Otherwise, this is an enterprising report that deserves the Government's sympathetic consideration.

Activist says students want 'real power'

By PETER SCHUMPESTER

At 17, Ms Rachel Callahan, a student activist and aspiring MP, is already a political veteran.

Ms Callahan was one of two student representatives elected to a Victorian Government ministerial committee, which has recommended changes to give students more say in the education system.

The committee's report says students should have more say in decisions about what they learn, how they are assessed and how their schools are run. The report was completed in June but has yet to be published.

Ms Callahan, who celebrated her last day as an HSC student at Montmorency High School yesterday, said students wanted "real power not tokenism" in education decision-making.

"We want increased participation by students, not only token participation. We want to be part of decision-making at the high-school levels like the State Board of Education and the Education Council, and to have access to the Education Minister," she said.

Ms Callahan: interest in student politics a mystery.

The origin of Ms Callahan's interest in student politics is a mystery to her, as it does not come either from her father, a bus-driver, or her mother, a teacher. Her political life begins in student and school councils before she was elected to the Northern Regional Board of Education as a student representative.

She was optimistic the Government would act on the committee's recommendations.

"It's famous, of course, for Government reports to be shelved. However, I think that because of the positive attitudes towards this report and the acceptance it has already received within the community, the minister will be wanting to go ahead with it," said Ms Callahan, who will study economics and politics at university next year. "There's no avenue or support within the Education Ministry for students to take initiatives towards student participation," she said.

Board of Education and the Education Council Board and to have access to the Education Minister," she said.

She said surveys by the committee had found students were apathetic about the education system because of their lack of a say.
These ideas and comments were produced and published by students on the Junior Council at Maryborough Primary School (Vic) at a recent student conference.

The Junior Council may:

- help to get better facilities for the school by:
  * getting students' ideas
  * speaking and working with the other decision makers in the school
  * fund-raising
- help to make school rules
- carry students' ideas to the School Council
- make suggestions for improving the school grounds
- organise more suitable activities for the students
- elect the School Captains
- make suggestions to make our school safer
- form a school band
- select a President, Secretary, Treasurer and School Council Representative.

A Junior Council Representative is a person who:

- passes on the whole grade's views, not just their own
- is fair
- reports back to the grade what happens at Junior Council meetings
- asks the grade what they want
- is able to pass across the general feeling of everybody
- does what is right for the grade
- doesn't make rash statements without the necessary organisation or funding to back them up
- listens to what the grade says
- is able to think of solutions to make things work
- thinks up ideas as well as getting their classmates' ideas
- decides on things
- never refuses others' ideas or says that they are stupid
- gets a wide range of views
- is prepared to back suggestions
- makes sure that statements are realistic
- thinks of productive ideas to enhance the school and the grade
- uses people's ideas to think of other things
- never makes fun of other classmates' ideas.
The opportunity for students to participate in the decision-making processes of their schools has existed for a number of years at individual school level, but rarely at the regional, state or national level.

Before looking at the events surrounding the development of the Victorian State Student Forum Planning Group, it might be useful to delve into some of the history of student organisations at regional and state level, with a focus especially on Victoria.

1970s

In the 1970s, a state secondary students' organisation existed in Victoria called the Victorian Secondary Student Union (VSSU). It was apparently quite a strong organisation, at one point claiming to have rallied 3000 secondary students together for a student strike and march in protest over state government funding cuts and curriculum issues (1974). In 1975, the VSSU participated in a national conference of secondary students in Sydney.

The VSSU and the national conference were resourced by the Australian Union of Students (AUS), the union of tertiary students, who provided some staff resources to assist them.

The VSSU aimed to establish branches in every secondary school in Victoria, both government and non-government.

Not long after 1975, however, the VSSU drifted apart. With no on-going support structure, it relied upon the enthusiasm of a few students, who grew older and left school.

1980s

There wasn't, until 1984, any organisation of students at any level other than odd 'pockets' of inter-school networks which operated on-and-off locally or regionally. The most significant of these was the Student Working Party in Melbourne's western suburbs.

In 1984, with the beginning of the Participation and Equity Program (PEP), the first opportunity for Victorian students to be involved in state-level decision making appeared in the form of the Student Advisory Group (SAG). This was a group of students whose task was to play an advisory role to the Victorian (Government) State PEP Committee. The group was supported by PEP staff, had a substantial budget and met approximately monthly for the last half of that year. Students from Western, Northern, Tullamarine, Maroondah and South Central Regions were involved with this group, with some rural representation at times from Shepparton, Wodonga, Mildura and Geelong. In 1985, the staff support position wasn't filled for some time and the Group disappeared.

In Other States

On the 29th July 1985, the State Council of Students (SCOFS) was formed in South Australia at a conference of students. That conference followed a United Nations Youth Association conference in April of that year, where the idea of a state secondary student organisation was first considered. SCOFS was initially supported by the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) which provided administrative support (their relationship was very similar to that between the SSFPG and YACVic - see later). SCOFS received a grant of $1000 from the SA Ministry of Education in 1985 and, with continued support and assistance from the Ministry, PEP and other sources, was successful in gaining another $3000 to employ a project officer. In September of 1986, SCOFS received another grant of $5000 and an allocation of 10 hours per week of a Ministry staff member's time to provide support and develop a training kit of material. SCOFS has continued to develop, holding a training camp in April 1987 (see Connect 45).
SCOFS has managed to develop a strong base of support since it was founded. It has helped to organise a large number of conferences and workshop activities for students in South Australia and has been, and still is, very active in supporting student participation in that state.

In New South Wales, the State Association of Student Organisations (SASO) was formed in December 1985 at a conference attended by over 60 students and about 20 adults. SASO held another state conference in November 1986.

We gather that SASO is no longer in existence but that in NSW there are some regional student networks still operating.

The Movement Begins ...

In 1985, International Youth Year, the first Victorian State Student Conference was held. With the help of PEP resources, student networks had begun to appear and become very active in most city and rural regions. The State Student Conference was attended by four students from every region, plus the conference planning group of students and a few support adults. Overall, more than 60 students and about 20 adults attended.

Amongst many other workshops and recommendations, the issue of a continuing state student structure was discussed, culminating in a recommendation that "A state-wide Student Advisory Group be established". Not much came of that recommendation though a lot of the other conference recommendations were taken very seriously and acted upon over the following year.

... And Continues: Forming the SSFPG

In 1986, the State Student Conference was held again and roughly the same number of people attended. The conference discussed a wide number of student issues and held a specific workshop around the topic of a state student body. The workshop group was enthusiastic about establishing a state secondary students' organisation, but felt that the State Student Conference wasn't the appropriate time or place to decide what the organisation would be like. They made a resolution that a working group should be created to work towards the establishment of a state student body that could represent the views of secondary school students. Unfortunately, in the chaos of the last day of the Conference, that resolution was overlooked and never officially decided on.

The issue, however, didn't end there. I was a student member of the Conference planning group and a facilitator of the original workshop. I got together with Roger Holdsworth (Youth and Student Participation Officer with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) and contacted all of the students who attended the State Conference by mail, inviting them to meet together.

The first meeting of the "Towards a Victorian Association of Secondary Student Organisations Planning Group" was held on the 13th December 1986 at YACVic. Six students attended the meeting: Kim Jeffs, Gemma Pinnell and Phillip Vlahogiannis from Eastern Region; Thanh Le and Liz Wheeler from Western Region; and myself, Mark Ryan, from Tullamarine Region. A number of other students sent apologies. Roger Holdsworth from YACVic provided administrative support.

The group set about deciding some objectives. It was decided that there should be a state forum of students held with the specific purpose of establishing a state student organisation - there would be no question of the validity of any decisions made at it. The planning group was very concerned that any decision along those lines should have to be representative. The group set about planning a forum or conference to which about 60 students would be invited, specifically to discuss ongoing support for and strategies to develop a state student organisation.

The following is a general time-line of events from the beginning of the State Student Forum Planning Group, until the State Student Forum of Saturday 7th November 1987:
13.12.86: The group decides that a forum should be held around March or April; that regions should send pre-informed teams; that Government and non-Government school students would attend. Jobs are allocated: to submit for a grant; to produce an information paper. A rough budget is formed.

17.12.86: General enquiry about the availability of funds is sent to all known funding bodies, Government etc. The Group decides on 60 students, 15 adults, 10 planning group and a possible 15 other guests - a total of 100 for the forum. Possible venues are checked and costed.

9.1.87: Thanh Le drafts a letter to the Victorian Division of Youth Affairs regarding funding. Group officially becomes the State Student Forum Planning Group.

13.1.87: General letter enquiring about the possibility of funding is mailed to a list of Government and non-Government organisations.

9.2.87: Letter to the Division of Youth Affairs requesting an additional $3000 to the $1000 for small grants: initiatives' application. Information paper to regions, giving a timeline of events and asking for support and participation.

26.2.87: Eastern Region Student Network meets and expresses concern over the lack of official auspice of the forum by the Ministry of Education. The meeting gives its support in principle but expresses that it would not be willing to participate unless the issue of legal auspice was dealt with.

26.2.87: Discussion of responses: PEP Schools Advisory Committee is concerned about legalities and responsibility; Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) Committee and other regions also are concerned about auspice. Informal meeting to be set up with the Ministry to discuss support/auspice.

11.3.87: DSP says it won't be involved unless in conjunction with PEP. It is decided that the group produce and publish a case for and against a state student network for discussion. Planning and agenda for forum discussed. Regions have notified as to when they are meeting and whether they can contribute 1/12 of the forum's costs - some are willing to contribute, others are still discussing.

25.3.87: Meeting between SSFPG and Ministry people to discuss support and auspice. The meeting is a little awkward to start with. The general outcome is that it is recommended that the Ministry and the SSFPG must plan any forum in partnership. The suggestion is to begin the process of planning again. PEP is phasing out and is reluctant to have any ongoing support role. Future support for any State Student Network established at a Forum was discussed - Ministry people express general interest in this.

31.3.87: Chris Harris (Tullamarine Region) joins the group. Apology from Darian Anderson (Northern Region). Tullamarine Region and Northern Region each elect 4 students to attend the Forum. Letter drafted to the Division of Youth Affairs on delays in the approval of the grant. Reactions to the Ministry meeting are mixed: We won't get far without support. How much involvement by the Ministry means control? Do we want an 'institutionalised' state student network? Will it be just a 'consultative mechanism' for Government? The group considers four options:

* work in partnership with the Ministry;
* approach other non-government organisations for support;
* do it ourselves - by ourselves;
* call it off - become a 'case-study'.

The group decides against the fourth.

Two further options emerge:

* hold an 'open' forum to decide on whether a network is wanted; or
* decide now on a network and call the first meeting of it.

Decision on this to be made next meeting.

14.4.87: Options discussed; decision deferred again to next meeting.

6.5.87: Division of Youth Affairs advises that the $1000 is on the way. SCOES offer support/advice. Group decides to write to the Minister for Education seeking legal auspice and inviting members of the Ministry to join the planning group. Similar letters to PEP, DSP and General Manager, Schools Division.

23.6.87: DSP asks questions of the group and a reply outlines what is requested of DSP, role of consultants at the forum and responses from other areas of the Ministry.
The State Student Forum

The State Student Forum was held at the Youth Affairs Council and was attended by about 40 students (with apologies from many more) and about a dozen adults involved with young people, as guests. An apology from the Minister for Education was received.

The SSFPG began by giving some background to the Forum day, itself and YACVic, then began a series of workshops focussed on the level of participation in the students' schools, their involvement with inter-school and regional networks and the degree and type of support available to them.

The focus was mainly on identifying support needs for student participation, particularly for networking, in 1988 and sources from which this support could be gained. Representatives from the following organisations spoke about the support their group could offer to students: Ministry of Education: School Community Officers, Disadvantaged Schools Program, Regional Consultants, Participation and Equity Program, Ministerial Working Party on Student Participation, School Improvement Plan, School Council Liaison Officers; Victorian Federation of State School Parents' Clubs; TAPE Student Network; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria; Youth Workers (local government and other).

The support needs identified by the students ranged from direct financial resourcing, 'lobbying' support and advice from organisations and 'established' groups of adults, to gaining moral support from students within individual schools and in the larger community, as well as having access to community youth workers and facilities.

The most important support needed from organisations was identified as: publicity/lobbying, use of communication networks and financial support/resources - and it was clearly stated that student organisations should be independent, with support by adults but not control. I think a really good expression of this principle is in the quote from one student: "For equal participation to happen, it has to be a participation of equals."

Some decisions were made about immediate plans of action:

What? A State Student Network

Who? This group to meet again. A management group made up of volunteers to set up a state-wide network - with the eventual aim of having some representativeness.
The new management group for a state student network will have the following tasks:

* meet again
* look for avenues of funding
* lobby VFSSPC for support
* write to the Ministers for Education and Labour
* convene another BIG meeting
* inform other schools:
  - a newsletter
  - a report of this meeting
* contact support people (teachers, consultants)
* get administrative support
* set a date!

The new group is the State Student Networking Party. For the moment, it can be contacted C/o Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 14-16 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy 3065. Phone: (03) 419.9122.

Good luck!

Mark Ryan

Victorian Support Contacts 1988

PEP (1987 only):
  Government schools: (03) 329.5677
  Non-Government schools: (03) 663.7099
DSP: (03) 329.5677
Victorian Federation of State School Parents Clubs (VFSSPC): (03) 699.1977
School Council Liaison Officer (SCLO):
  Regional Offices
School Improvement Plan (SIP):
  Regional Offices
Youth Workers: Local Council office or
  Susanne Wells
  Hugh O'Brien: (03) 547.0511 or
  YACVic (03) 419.9122
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic): (03) 419.9122
Australian Network of Secondary Students (ANSS):
  (03) 537.1833
TAFE Students Network: (03) 662.1351

An S.R.C. neighbourhood meeting with students from many schools
TAFE: FROM SCHOOL TO TAFE

Many secondary school students choose to continue their education in TAFE, in apprenticeships, traineeships, certificate and VCE courses. Many have been active participants in SRCs, School Councils, regional committees, and in classroom-based decision making. Many others may be looking forward to entering an adult learning environment where students are given independence and responsibility in decisions affecting their courses and campus life. A TAFE College often holds this appeal for secondary students.

In the past, however, the level of participation in decision making by both types of student has tended to decline on entering TAFE.

Some students limit their involvement to little beyond class attendance to meet course requirements, and choose not to participate in student forums or College committees. Others become disillusioned at the lack of apparent participation and student-controlled organisations and forums in many TAFE Colleges. Both groups may be discouraged by the general unwillingness to give students a genuine say in decisions affecting their education and welfare.

With the formation of the Victorian TAFE Students' Network, present and future TAFE students now have a chance to take control of student affairs and influence decisions in their College and the system as a whole. Established in April 1987, the Network has rapidly become the acknowledged statewide representative body for TAFE students. The Network is committed to:

* supporting student participation
* advancing student interests
* fostering student solidarity
* promoting student rights.

It provides a coordinated and effective voice on issues affecting all TAFE students across the state. It embraces country and city, part-time and full-time, on-campus and off-campus students. It represents all students, regardless of gender, race, class or disability.

The Network has had input in 1987 to decision making in TAFE at the state level, and will continue to represent student interests on statewide issues. Extensive links have been established with student organisations on TAFE campuses across the state. Successful campaigns and conferences on student issues have been mounted in the past few months (eg the campaign against fees for apprentice catch-up classes).

What can the Network offer new TAFE students? First, it provides an accessible contact point and forum for TAFE students and their College-based organisations to raise, discuss and take action on issues and problems affecting them. Secondly, it can offer support and resources for existing student organisations facing resistance on campus, or struggling to become more active, effective and representative bodies. Equally, where none already exist, the Network can help students to establish SRCs, unions and associations on their College campus. Advice on student rights and running campaigns to improve conditions is always available.

Finally, the Network gives TAFE students the opportunity to develop and extend their participatory and decision-making skills, and to meet and talk with other concerned and committed students.

So if you decide to continue your studies in TAFE, don't become apathetic, disillusioned or inactive. Join your campus student body, take steps to form one with other students if none already exists, and contact the Victorian TAFE Students' Network. Student participation depends on you becoming actively involved and exercising your right to influence decisions in the interests of all TAFE students.

The Network meets on a regular monthly basis and invites all current or intending TAFE students to attend. The Network Coordinator is also available to come out to secondary schools in Victoria and talk to students about TAFE and the Network.

For further information on the Network and how it can support TAFE students, contact:

Trudy Falconer
Julian Pocock
Coordinators
Victorian TAFE Students' Network
Phone: 662.1351 or 663.5611 ext 462
The previous issue of Connect contained an article on 'TAFE PEP Student Power'. The article referred to a statewide TAFE Participation and Equity Program (PEP) conference, which was organised and attended by PEP students.

To refresh your memory, the aims of the conference were:
- to increase student participation;
- to actively lobby on behalf of all PEP students for a replacement program for PEP in 1988.

One outcome of the conference was to create an on-going TAFE PEP Student Board.

Since the conference, all participants have fully recovered and found a new wave of energy - energy which has created the PEP Student Board and increased student participation. The Board is currently in full operation and has designed its aims and decided how they are going to achieve them.

The aims of the Student Board, and the methods of achieving them are:
1. To create a statewide PEP Student Network which will encourage student involvement and information-sharing between programs.

Regional representatives and other interested persons as members of the PEP Student Board will be responsible for distributing information and obtaining feedback from all programs across the state, thereby creating a Statewide PEP Network open to input from all PEP students.

2. To promote greater awareness of issues concerning students and young people within PEP, TAFE and the wider community. To encourage students to organise and take action around these issues and so encourage and empower students to take an active role in determining their futures.

Through the establishment of the PEP Student Network, information which is not available to all students will be distributed. Board members will be actively working within community and TAFE organisations and so gathering information relevant to PEP students. The Board will devise strategies for action which will involve all students and also support and promote students to take action on matters concerning them.

3. To take continuing action on the motions passed at the Statewide PEP Student Conference.

The Board shall write statements on behalf of the student body as directed by the motions passed at the Statewide Conference and circulate them to the relevant authorities. It will also meet with relevant bodies and organisations to devise further strategies.

4. To actively lobby on behalf of students for a replacement program for PEP in 1988.

The Board will contact politicians, ministers, community organisations and the press to voice student opinions concerning a replacement program for PEP. The Board will also work with the PEP Task Force established by staff to work towards a replacement program.

5. To network with other organisations including the TAFE Student Network and College SRCs.

The paid workers will liaise with the TAFE Student Network, the PEP Task Force, other student bodies and community organisations and report back to Board meetings.

6. To have input to the evaluation of PEP.

Regional representatives will canvas their regions for student evaluations of the Statewide Conference and PEP in general. The Board will have input to the evaluation based upon this gathered information.

The Student Board is currently being coordinated by a full-time paid worker, Frank Deserio, who is an ex-PEP student from Preston. Frank’s coordination duties include:
* to oversee and coordinate the on-going campaign initiated at the Statewide PEP Student Conference. This includes following up the various motions passed at the Conference which will involve sending statements to relevant organisations and authorities and, when necessary, meeting with these groups to pursue further action;
* carry out administrative work concerning the Board’s activities;
* circulate information eg Board meeting minutes and agendas etc to all programs;
* to liaise with and be the contact person between the Board and the wider community, including Government Departments, politicians and community groups;
* To liaise with and attend meetings when necessary of other bodies engaged in similar work eg PEP Task Force, TAFE Student Network;
* to follow up decisions made at Board meetings eg mailouts, researching.

The selection process for members of the Board was that students who expressed interest at the Student Conference and any other students could
nominate themselves or be nominated by any other student.

These students' responsibilities are:
- to fully inform the Board of all relevant information obtained;
- to work on an evaluation of the Statewide PEP Student Conference;
- to work cooperatively when duties overlap;
- overall, to participate in Board activities and to attend weekly Board meetings which are held every Saturday at Footscray TAFE.

Frank Deserio
(Board Coordinator)
Dianne Currier
Serena Trencher
(Board members)

The launch of the Victorian TAFE PEP Student Publication Xpression at the Statewide PEP Student Conference. L to R: Maria Jacovelli, Dominic Rulakowski, Serena Trencher, Dianne Currier, Johnathon Gin.

TAFE PEP: From The Students' View

In early October, a video production was started to document an evaluation of Victorian TAFE PEP in 1987 from a student's point of view.

WHAT IS PEP?

PEP refers to the Participation and Equity Program. Each TAFE College throughout Australia offered at least one such program. Overall, Victoria offered 74. Each program focussed on different skills: a Media course at Holmesglen, Horticulture at Burnley and Media and Business Studies at Collingwood for example.

The aims and objectives of PEP were:
- to develop people's job search skills to enable them to take up employment or further education;
- to build students' self esteem and self confidence;
- to focus upon targetted groups of migrants, koories, rural disadvantaged, women and the long-term unemployed.

To attend courses, you had to be aged between 16 and 24 years and to have been unemployed for at least six out of the past nine months. Students who attended courses received a training allowance of their unemployment benefit plus an extra $15 per week (if under 21) or $30 per week (if over 21).

PEP has been funded by the Commonwealth Government for the past four years, but funding ceases at the end of the year.

Is PEP being refunded? No. Yet PEP has been extremely successful according both to numerous students who have undertaken the course, and to the
coordinators of the courses.

At this stage, bureaucrats are ignoring the success story of PEP and instead are introducing a 'new $32.5 million training package' which focuses on several programs based upon skills training in industry.

The proposed programs for 1988 at this stage seem as though they will be ignoring the core curriculum and objectives developed in PEP.

VIDEO

Is anything being carried out from a student's point of view to influence the decisions about the proposed programs for 1988?

Yes, the Victorian TAFE Board has funded a $40,000 20-minute video production project. Data collection, questionnaires, research projects and so on, are useful but can fail to gain access to powerful and immediate student responses. The video form of evaluation can be easily viewed by all types of people, from PEP students to bureaucrats who may have an interest in the future of such programs.

The guidelines of the project are:

- to evaluate TAFE PEP in 1987;
- to focus upon the targeted groups of women, rural disadvantaged, migrants, koories, and the long-term unemployed;
- to provide a positive angle on TAFE PEP;
- to provide an evaluation from a student's point of view.

The argument for the video is that the decision makers don't even know what views students have of their courses, the most valuable aspects of the courses, how the programs satisfied their desires and needs, how the programs have helped students discover and recognise their goals, and to a lesser extent, what aims or improvements would they like to see incorporated into future programs.

The responses of students through a video will be of tremendous value and have considerable influence on the TAFE Board in its development of future programs and policies. Similarly, such an evaluation would be valuable to government agencies, bureaucrats and decision makers who are involved with the development of future training programs.

PRODUCTION

The video production crew are PEP students from Holmesglen TAFE. Their involvement as students is of great value and, in addition, this project is a valuable opportunity to utilise student media skills in a real life work situation.

The production team also includes two research coordinators. One of these, Nigel Derricks, is currently a PEP student working part-time on the project. I am the other research co-ordinator, an ex-PEP student, working full-time.

The major administrative responsibility for the project is being taken by Express Australia, who have also contracted a professional script writer and a video artist. Express Australia is an independent non-profit media organisation which has provided much technical support to youth organisations in their development of media promotions.

PROGRESS REPORT

The video project is of twelve weeks' duration. The first four weeks were the pre-production, research and development stages. These involved the selection of TAFE PEP programs to be used in the video.

Seventeen programs have been selected as being programs that focus upon the targeted groups and a variety of skills, where students are able to highlight particular issues verbally, and where there is excellent visual material.

Currently, we are in the first week of the four-week production stage. Last week, a crew visited rural programs at Mildura, Horsham, Bendigo, Shepparton and Wangaratta. Leongatha and Yallourn are still to be visited.

Currently, the metropolitan programs that are being filmed are Brunswick, Holmesglen, Moorabbin, Collingwood, Dandenong, Frankston, Prahran, Outer Eastern, Northcote, Footscray and Swinburne.

Part of the crew is working on contacting ex-PEP students, policy makers and key employers as a resource for the video.

Research is also being followed up on statistics on the outcomes of PEP in previous years and on what employers require of prospective employees when interviewing them. This background information appears to be useful to incorporate into the video.

The next step in this four-week phase will be to produce a rough cut of the video and the last four weeks will be the post-production stage.

Then, the big launch will be held on the 22nd of December 1987.

Serena Trencher
Research Coordinator
The following is a report I presented to the Westernport Regional Board of Education at their meeting on 12th November 1987. At this meeting, the Board accepted the report.

In the near future, I will be writing a revised edition of this report to present to the (new) Southern Metropolitan Regional Board. I intend to distribute these reports as widely as possible to bring problems that hamper student participation to the attention of those who may be able to assist in rectifying these problems.

The main issues I wish to bring forward are:

1. Increased numbers of students on Regional Boards.
2. Students elected prior to the first meetings of the Boards or early in the year.
3. Strict and sufficient guidelines for procedures for election of students to Regional Boards.
4. Regional funding for Student Representative Councils.
5. SRC supervising teachers to be given sufficient time to carry out their duties.
6. Regional Boards to accept a policy of support for student participation.
7. Students on Principal Selection Panels.

These are issues and problems that I have encountered during my participation as a student. At present I am a member of:

- Chandler High School SRC
- Chandler HS Curriculum Committee
- Chandler HS Finance Committee
- Westernport Regional Board of Education
- Ad Hoc Committee for Student Participation.

Recently, I was a member of two Student Forum planning committees and the planning committee for the "Participation: The Westernport Experience" Conference, and I am the alternate student member of the Westernport Regional Board of Education.

**BACKGROUND**

For the past few years, students have been becoming increasingly involved in decision-making bodies within the Ministry of Education. Student participation is becoming a household word as students become more involved and more effective within the Ministry of Education, and this has had a very positive and enlightening effect. Students should be assisted in every part of their participation as the results are worthwhile. Such results include broadening students' learning and increasing students' knowledge of the system they work in. Students can also bring forward problems and difficulties in the schools to decision-making bodies. Student participation greatly increases a student's confidence and ability to speak in front of other people.

**STUDENTS ON REGIONAL BOARDS**

The change that has recently been made to allow students to become members of Regional Boards and not have to be on School Council was a very wise and productive move by the Ministry. But the system in which students are chosen for the Regional Boards still leaves much to be desired.

At present, students are not chosen or elected to the Regional Boards until March, while all other members take up their positions in January. The students are somewhat disadvantaged as other members introduce themselves to the Board long before the students attend their first meeting. It then may take several months for the students to become acquainted with the Board as it is already functioning completely and all other members know how it works.

The reason for this problem is that the guidelines for nomination and election of students are insufficient to effectively introduce students to Regional Boards. On the 1st October 1987, the Chief Executive sent a memo to the Acting Chief General Manager of
the Schools Division, which was entitled "Establishment of New Regional Boards of Education". In this memo, the only guideline for the nomination of students is:

"The identification of students for possible nomination by the Board will commonly occur through networks established in the Region."

This is extremely inefficient as all other members' election procedures are strictly pointed out. The students are treated as an afterthought and this severely affects their performance on the Boards. The students must be elected before the first meeting of the Board for the students to meet their full potential.

There is also a need for increased student numbers. The number of students that will be in the Southern Metropolitan Region is approximately 107,500. The students are, by far, the largest body within the schools, and yet they are only represented by two students on each Regional Board. This situation is inadequate for students' views to be brought to the Boards. The staff-to-student ratio in high schools is one to 12.5. The teacher and parent representation by far out-number the students on the Board.

The results could only be positive if there were greater numbers of students on the Regional Boards. A suggestion to remedy this situation is, along with a parent and teacher returned from each electorate, to return a student as well. At present co-opted positions could be well served if one or more students are co-opted to give greater representation of students within the Regions.

For effective student participation on Regional Boards, a number of changes must be made. Students must be elected before the first Board meeting, and there must be greater numbers of students on the Boards. At present, students can experience difficulties in effective participation on Regional Boards and so changes must be made.

**SUPPORT FOR SRCS**

Student Representative Councils are a very important part of the school system. They are responsible for bringing students' views to the attention of those in charge of the schools. If the problems of students were not brought forward, then the schools would have trouble improving and moving forward. SRCs also make improvements in the schools themselves, solely for the students' benefit. But the problems SRCs face severely restrict their performance.

One of the major problems that the SRCs face is a shortage of time. The fact that SRCs are required to raise their own funds adds to this problem. This is not always the case, but it is often inconvenient for schools to fund SRC projects from their relatively restricted budget. A possible remedy for this situation is for SRCs to be funded or be able to request funds from the Regions. This would lead to much more productive SRCs and dramatically increase their effectiveness — as their time will be devoted to tasks and not to raising funds.

Another problem for SRCs is that there are no guidelines for the time that the SRCs' supervising teachers are given out of class for SRC business. In some cases, supervising teachers are given half time off, but in other schools the supervisors are given only two periods free. To remedy this, guidelines must be set out within the Ministry so that supervising teachers are given at least six free periods.

**SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS ON BODIES**

Students are continuously becoming more involved on decision-making bodies such as Curriculum and Finance Committees and School Council. Within the Ministry, students participate on Conference and Forum Planning Committees and the Regional Boards of Education. Students can make great and positive differences to these bodies.

Student participation has a great future within the Ministry of Education and should be assisted in every way. A terrific way for this to be done would be for all Regional Boards to adopt a policy of support for student participation.
An area in which students have no representation, but could be of great assistance, are the Principal Selection Panels. The panels are an extremely important decision-making body, yet they do not represent all parts of the school. Students have very important views on what they wish to see in a Principal, and yet these views may not be presented to the panels. Students need to have a place reserved on Principal Selection Panels for the panels to represent all interested parties.

Student participation has come a long way and, with changes, has a lot further to go.

Paul Martin
Year 11, Chandler HS, Vic
Alternative Student Member
Westernport Regional Board of Education

With advice from:
Chandler High School SRC
Mr G Coxens, Administration Secretary, Westernport Region
Mr J Haddad
SRC Supervising Teacher, Chandler HS
Ms L Sparrow, PEP Consultant, Westernport Region
Mr E Crowther
Acting Principal, Chandler HS
Mr G Hault
School Council Liaison Officer, Westernport Region
Mr D Richards and Ms K Van Gils
Student Members
Westernport Regional Board of Education

What's In It For Me?

Involvement: SRC, School Council, Student Network

* A better understanding of your school's decision-making structures.
* A better understanding of the difficulties involved in making changes in schools.
* A better relationship with teachers through problem sharing.
* Improved interactive skills (listening, speaking, questioning, helping).
* Meeting new people; new friends.
* Increased confidence in your ability to work collectively with friends, adults and new people.
* An understanding of meeting procedures and collaborative decision making (including the views of all concerned).
* Improved self-esteem and confidence through public speaking.
* A sense of achievement ... when things finally happen!
* Improved ability to express your ideas, thoughts, construct arguments, prepare reports, plan a campaign.
* A degree of satisfaction knowing that you have helped others.
An increased sense of 'ownership' of your education (extremely important). It is only when you make decisions yourself that you will truly value them. These decisions will be worked at with a lot more determination than those imposed on you by teachers or parents.
On 16th July 1987, we six students representing South Australia attended the Biennial Conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) - "Curriculum '87", which incorporated the theme of "Participation and Access: Myth and Reality?" which was held at Macquarie University in Sydney.

We expected to be sitting in the wings of the conference as a token representation. But in most cases, we found that not only were our views encouraged to be aired, they were also respected and responded to. This was very important as it made us feel more involved and more confident both during and after the conference.

The major drive of the conference was a workshop. We took part in a workshop on 'Strategies for Student Participation'. We felt that this was most valuable to us dealing with three major areas of interest:
1. The Student Experience
2. Classroom Negotiation
3. Student Participation and the Role of Student Government.
We felt that the workshop was not only an extremely useful learning experience, but a chance to put our views, as students, forward. Some of the other issues dealt with during the workshop, included:
   a. democracy
   b. equity and respect
   c. responsibility
   d. support and training
   e. motivation.

Attending the conference gave us a great level of responsibility. We were there to achieve something, but what was it?

We realised that some of the papers and plenaries would be a little out of our league, but we were determined to come back with a sense of accomplishment. As students, our main objectives were to listen and to learn about how students could participate in a more productive way. We wanted to see how students could feature prominently and have a say in the operation of a school and have a say in their education.

After working through the papers and workshop, our goals and expectations had been sufficiently achieved.

Our future achievements were brought to light in a quote from our workshop:
'Slowly, slowly the gentle stream,
Erodes the hard rock.
We shall break through
Softly and surely.'

We found a great number of systems and ideas on how to make student participation more realistic in our schools. We were able to discuss many points with adults from various universities and schools who gave us greater insights into possible ways of overcoming the barriers which prevent student participation from occurring.

Some important points were:
* Students need to feel comfortable and be in a warm classroom atmosphere in order to participate fully.
* Teachers are reluctant to let students negotiate and participate in deciding on classroom matters as they feel they will lose too much 'power'.
* We found that SRCs can achieve a lot more than initially thought if students recognise their Council's potentials.

The conference focused on 'Curricula in Australian Schools' and tried to solve the problems associated with these but the conference missed a major factor in education - the students. All students are involved in education in one form or another, but very few students actually participate in the process of education.

There were 330 teachers but only 10 students. The curriculum needs to be changed by both teachers and students, but, at present, students are an under-utilised resource in the educational policy area.

After the conference, a new challenge started: making others aware and sharing with them what we had learnt. It was a little hard to organise to all get together again as three students are from Christies Beach High and three from Marion High, however both schools have started on the right track. Some
things that have been done include writing a constitution (Christies Beach); talking at staff meetings, which gave some quite interesting responses (Marion High), and for both schools, the information has been very rewarding and useful for the SRCs' operation in the schools. We hope to use all the information we have collated to help others who also may be interested in the issue of student participation.

It was a marvellous participation exercise for the six of us, but it was an even greater learning experience in which we have gained knowledge. We could never have hoped to learn otherwise.

Hank Macht, Louise Souter, Kelli Chappel
Marion High School, SA
Christine Brice, Andrew Watts, James Smith
Christies Beach High School, SA

**NT: STUDENT NETWORK**

Gabfest is an event held annually in which secondary school students from all over the Northern Territory gather and discuss topical issues affecting the student body and the concerns with which they will have to deal once they have left secondary school.

Held in Darwin at the Beaufort Hotel from the 8th to 11th August, this year's Gabfest consisted of two representatives of each secondary school in the Northern Territory, with three representatives from newly established schools and a conglomeration of guest speakers and observers.

Led by Roger Holdsworth as coordinator, the discussions soon had an atmosphere of friendliness and, before day one was out, everybody was relaxed and calm and this lent to the quality of the brainstorming and discussion periods as nobody felt inhibited.

After a wide and interesting variety of speeches by guest speakers on such topics as the bicentenary, sexual harassment, apprenticeships/traineeships and defence, the Gabfest was split into groups to discuss what they felt were the major issues on which some action was deemed necessary.

These points were debated and analysed for some time and finally a list of major issues was created. Of these points, it was decided to recommend some course of action to be taken to alleviate or change the situation.

The full list of recommendations were contained in the last issue of *Connect*. However, more details on the first recommendation are:

(a) That a network be formed from representatives of all secondary schools.

(b) That the structure of this network be:

(c) That this Gabfest appoint an executive group from each of the Northern and Southern groups to set up the network.

(d) That this network apply for a grant to support the network.

(e) That the network consider and come up with action on:
- bridging the gap between year 10 and 11;
- student-teacher relations;
- effective SRCs;
- more student participation in the running of schools, curriculum and council activities;
- more defined roles for on-campus police.

(f) That the executive group report back to schools on these matters.

These recommendations are being acted upon and the first meeting of the Southern Regional Northern Territory Students Network is due to be held in the near future. A list of network contacts is almost complete. Becky Tibbets from Dripstone High School in Darwin is the new Northern Territory representative to the Australian Network of Secondary Students.

By the end of the year, it is hoped that the entire list of recommendations will have been addressed.

The Gabfest finally broke up, giving all involved many ideas and the innovations to be implemented in their schools. In the eyes of everyone involved, Gabfest was extremely helpful, informative and great fun.

Tim Stoddart
Sadadeen Secondary College
Alice Springs, NT
LETTERS: HELP!

Oral History

1.

I'm still having the greatest of difficulty chasing up anything on cultural journalism. I'm in a situation that requires some help. I have started a community newspaper in historic Morpeth. Everybody loves the gossip and community info. But I want to give the publication a bit of depth. There are lots of characters who want to talk.

I wanted to get some idea of the Foxfire approach so this overworked school teacher could look at the style and start the process off. I hope to involve the kids once I get a bit of confidence.

Can you help? To be frank, I've been caught out as I was confident I could get this oral history feature going quickly. I didn't reckon on not being able to find much to help me.

Ross Bell 12th September

2.

Morpeth is a most interesting historic village. Because it was built on a private land grant, it is clearly enclosed and easily defined. Between 1832 and 1890, Morpeth was a major river port - many people stepped ashore in Australia for the first time here. The Bond Stores and the famous "Campbell's" Store meant that people from all over northern New South Wales came here to buy supplies and drag them home by horse and bullock dray. My relatives remember the long lonely months of waiting while "Dad" was away getting stores at Morpeth - he was gone three months!

In about 1890, the railway arrived and the role of the river declined. The town of Morpeth grew quiet. Behind was a legacy of beautiful homes and public building and a rich store of folk-lore about the past.

In the last few years, people have become more aware of the heritage of the buildings. Control plans and heritage listings have meant that the bricks and mortar part of our history face a fairly safe future. Thoughtful faithful restoration has attracted thousands of people to visit here and enjoy the shops and sites.

But there's so much more here than bricks and mortar. For the people themselves have their own rich story to tell. The chemist/dentist who served here 40 years and whose Christian names had passed from memory. The nurse who laid everyone out for 40 years and will still 'do' for friends - she takes her own door to lay out the dead. In the farms, the traditional methods of husking corn linger on on a few farms.

As we prepare ourselves for the Bicentenary, our people know they have a tale to tell. We re-started the newspaper - it's small, non-profit and monthly, but it had a marked response. People are starting to see they have something to be proud of. Here is a little town of less than 1000 people with a real, dynamic life. Morpeth is not a toy or a life-size replica. It's alive and breathing and something to be proud of.

Our 'Foxfire' is designed to record the people part of the story. It will reflect the human side of our life. The story of the railway, the ghost of Morpeth House, the undertaker who was so much loved, the Mayors of this town before incorporation into the city of Maitland. All of this and so much more - the terrible floods, the snake stories - they are all in the hearts of these people.

I knew we had to get them out of heads and on paper. I have little enough skills in this area. But when I stumbled onto Foxfire I felt that I had an example. Only time will prove if it's true.

There's one indication that we're on the right trail. I told people what I wanted to do. While the self-appointed historians aren't too impressed, it takes me longer to get home each day. People see you and want to talk and talk and talk. I think we're on the right trail. All I have to do is keep up.

Ross Bell 21st September

3.

Thank you so much for the loan of the material. A real inspiration to me. I have spent so much time trying to dig up other references to oral history - what a battle. And much of what I've found is deathly dull.
I'm not sure what the magic of Foxfire is, but suspect that it's a response to a love for the mountain people. I've already done my first few interviews and started the magazine off. Fully sold out with pressure to sell more.

My own little efforts are along the model but represent a more collaborative effort, using two or three people to work together on a topic or theme. The individuals are starting to emerge as well.

Meanwhile I notice that some of my teaching has changed, even though I can't directly involve any of the kids at this time. We're working on the War Memorials at the moment and finding out who the people were and what became of them. Much more moving stuff than I had suspected. It really gets rid of the "Boys Own Adventure" nonsense when you can get WW I down on a local level.

Ross Bell 22 November
PO Box 34, Morpeth NSW 2321

Careers

I'm very interested in Careers Projects both in New South Wales schools and on an interstate basis. As a consequence of this, I would be very grateful if you could supply information and details of any innovations, plans, strategies etc which have been developed in your area in recent times which relate to careers/work experience/school-community relations/student enterprises/equal opportunity projects/student research and development activities etc.

Max Dewes
Deputy Principal, Gulgong High School
Bemore Street, Gulgong NSW 2852

WRITE!

We rely upon and welcome your letters and contributions. If there's something interesting happening, we want to know about it. Don't ask ... don't hesitate ... just sit down and dash off a brief (or long) description. If you have a photo or drawing, even better. We can't pay ... but we'll send you a free copy!
It's seldom that the results of research are so immediately useful as these pamphlets. Nayano Taylor has spent two years as Evaluation Project Officer for PEP in South Australia, looking at the operation of PEP committees in that state.

The material she collected - about access, process and outcomes, has been presented as a booklet plus five pamphlets that can be used by school communities to monitor, evaluate and improve their practices.

"I want to share the things I have found out about how committees make participation work, and how they sometimes fail. I hope that this booklet and pamphlet series, which summarises my research, reading, thinking and writing about school committees over the last two years, will do that sharing for me."

As well as the "Parents, Students and School Committees" booklet, the pamphlets are: "Access: how easy is it to join a school committee?", "Meetings: successful committees consider their process", "Students: students should be on school committees", "Parents: school committees need parents" and "Organisers: organisers need to plan for committees".

These materials are highly recommended and can be obtained from the PEP Office, FAI Building, 3rd Floor, 101 Flinders Street, Adelaide 5000 SA.
NOT JUST ANOTHER TOKEN

"... Pressure has been progressively mounting on all youth oriented organisations to establish procedures which actively engage the participation of young people."

The Australian Association of Youth Clubs has developed a kit to assist youth organisations to examine their own goals and practices in relation to youth participation. The kit has three parts:

1. A conceptual framework, including a definition, an analysis of factors which necessitate it, a philosophical rationale and an outline of the major issues surrounding the establishment of practical working models.

2. Some 'read-reference' guidelines for the introduction of a participatory approach together with some useful references.

3. Brief studies of a range of recent and current initiatives.

Copies of the kit may be obtained from Magdi El Hag at the Victorian Association of Youth in Communities (VAYC), 60-66 Leicester Street, Fitzroy 3065.

RELAY

Relay is a British Community Radio Magazine aiming to "play an important part in the lively current debate about the setting up of community radio in Britain". It is published bi-monthly and includes regular items on programming, projects and stations developing around London, Britain and internationally, listings, news and a technical insert in each issue.

For information about subscriptions, contact:

Relay Radio Magazine
Unit 109, Bon Marché
444 Brixton Road
London SW9 8EJ UK

YACVic ON RADIO

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has started to present the 'Youth Home Time' Show on Melbourne community radio station 3CR each fortnight (4.30 pm Monday; 855-AM). The first program included an outline of current developments in the student network in the Tullamarine Region, state and national student networks, and more.

The program prompted the following letter:

"Wow! I heard you and Denise Higgins on the radio this week, talking about student rights, employment, training and education, statewide student networks and the Richmond Youth and the Law project. Fantastic - 'the Connect of the Air'!"

Lesley Podesta
Friends of Connect

We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following financial contributions since the last issue of Connect:

SUSTAINING SUBSCRIBER ($100; 2 years):
Acrobatic Arts Community School
(Wodonga, Vic)

PATRON SUBSCRIBERS ($20 pa):
Libby Knight (Kirwan, Q)
Ray Davis (Preston, Vic)
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Victoria Triggs (Coburg, Vic)
Joan Benjamin (Nth Fitzroy, Vic)
Peter Mildenhall (Research, Vic)
Trish Britten (Shepparton, Vic)
Jacqui Mason (Coburg, Vic)
Peter Dorrell (Ascot Vale, Vic)

Publications Received:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:
Focus (Albert Park HS, Vic) No 5, Oct 87
Minerva (Exhibition HS, Vic) No 1, 1987
Rave (Winlaton, Vic) Nos. 31, 32; 1987

Other Sources

World of Work Newsletter (CDC, Canberra, ACT) November 1987.
Youth Participation Kit (AAVC, Fitzroy, Vic)
Parents, Students and School Committees (PEP, Adelaide, SA)
Where There's a Will There's A Way To Be Heard (PEP, West Melbourne, Vic)
NTE Update (Newspaper in Education, USA) Vol 13 No 7 October 1987.
Create (VC OSS, Fitzroy, Vic) No 14, September/October 1987.
Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) September, October, November 1987.
Communication Research Trends (UK) Vol 7 No. 4.

SRC PAMPHLETS

Student Representative Councils have often asked for readily accessible resource material to assist their operation. How do we have an effective meeting? How do we report to classes?
The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has produced a series of six small pamphlets for SRCS and similar groups. They cover the topics: 'Why Have an SRC?', 'Making Decisions', 'Formal Meetings', 'A Good Representative', 'Reporting Back and Getting Ideas' and 'Organising'.
The pamphlets contain outline ideas plus suggested activities and further reading. They can be used individually or as a structured development exercise.
The pamphlets are available in two package forms. One copy of each, together with an introduction and a resource listing costs $5 (postage included). Class sets of 20 copies of 31 any particular pamphlet cost $10 (including postage) - or $60 for a class set of 20 copies of all six pamphlets.
Contact:
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
14-16 Gertrude Street
Fitzroy 3065
Phone: (03) 419.9122
To: CONNECT, The Newsletter of Youth Participation in Education Projects, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 Victoria Australia

From: NAME: .......................... ADDRESS: .............................................................. .................................. Postcode: ..................

SUBSCRIPTION: $10 for a 1-year subscription ......................... $ ...........

$5 for a 1-year subscription (concession rate) .. $ ...........

$20 to become a PATRON SUBSCRIBER (for one year) . $ ...........

$50 to become a SUPPORTING SUBSCRIBER (one year) . $ ...........

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LITERATURE:

* Back issues of CONNECT (circle one/s wanted) .. $ ...........

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6/7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13/14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22/23, 24, 25, 26, 27/28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37/38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46/47 ($2 each)

* You and Aunt Arie ($15 + $3 postage = $18) .... $ ...........

* Riff Raff Soundtrack LP ($8 plus collect) ....... $ ...........

* Tutoring ($2) - Connect reprint #1 ............. $ ...........

* Students Publishing ($2) - Connect reprint #2 . $ ...........

* Students and Radio ($2) - Connect reprint #3 .. $ ...........

* Students and School Governance - Connect reprint #4 - coming SOON (send no money yet)

* Students and Work ($2) - Connect reprint #5 ... $ ...........

* Ascolta Radio Group 1983 Report ($2) .......... $ ...........

* Ascolta Radio Group 1984 Report ($2) ........ $ ...........

* 'Youth Radio' issue of CRAM Guide (3CR) ($1) .. $ ...........

* Youth Advocacy Report ($2) - LaTrobe University $ ...........

PHOTOCOPIES: Copies of the following articles:

Numbers: ........ ........ ........ ........ ........ ........ ........ $ ...........

INDEX: To Connect and 'Articles Available' to issue 17 (October 1982) (80c) ................. $ ...........

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