Negotiating NASPAC 4 and ACSA

The Fourth National Student Participation and Australian Curriculum Studies Association Conferences

SO, WHAT HAPPENED?

The reports ...

In this issue:
- Negotiating Computer Studies with Students
- Made in the Middle: US Songwriting Project
- South Australian Student Forum
- Student Participation in Tasmania
- EdWeb ... AYF Report ... Brisbane Forum ...

and incorporating .... the PASTA Newsletter
This Issue

The 4th National Student Participation Conference took place at the University of Sydney in early July and was enjoyable, enthusiastic, energetic, frustrating, inspiring, annoying ... all of that! The report in this issue of Connect tries to provide a bit of a flavour of reactions of the 100 participants, as well as a 'straight' account of what happened. The Conference was largely organised by secondary school students from NSW, with support from the PASTA group, and the writing of this report reflects the same student-centred orientation.

The Conference structure and content exposed, to me, the continuing dilemmas and tensions that exist between thinking of student participation as (simply) SRCs, and the wider orientation. It demonstrated how 'easy' it is to focus on enhancing 'the voice of students', and how much more difficult it is to move beyond 'voice' to issues of 'action', 'agency', 'influence', 'partnership' and 'roles of value'. I'm sure these debates will continue with all the passion that appeared at NASPAC 4.

Also in this issue, the Professional Association of SRC Teacher/Advisers (PASTA) contributes what will hopefully be a regular newsletter section. This extends Connect's readership to include members of a group actively working in primary and secondary schools to support student representation. Equally, it brings a wider pool of participatory curriculum issues to these teachers. We should hasten to add that these are not alien ideas to them, as PASTA's work at the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) Conference indicates; the PASTA Newsletter contains a report of those workshops.

Connect is taking a short break after this issue, but will be back with another huge double issue in February 1998. Copy for this is due by the end of January. Already we plan to include Steve Wilson's article on students theorising about curriculum, but there is plenty of scope for your input.

In the meantime, if you order materials from Connect, we'll be making arrangements to meet such requests, but please bear with us and forgive any slight delays that occur. Have a good Christmas break and, together, we'll ensure that 1998 is a productive and exciting New Year.

Roger Holdsworth

Deadline for material: end of January
Almost 100 students and teachers spent three days of their holidays (in most cases, though Tasmanian and Queensland participants came during school time) at Sydney University talking about various aspects of student participation. This high energy conference, largely run by NSW students, brought together people from Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

The following are necessarily brief glimpses of some of the Conference sessions, put together by a documenting group that met on the final day. A more detailed report is planned to be sent to all participants later this year.

Day 1:
Who We Are and Why We Are Here

12.00 Opening - What Do We Mean by Student Participation?

The conference opening provided a vision for the three days - a chance for people from around Australia to share what they had been doing. But this Conference has a long history, and a short skit provided some of that ‘past’. Sometimes chaotic, sometimes funny (sometimes intentionally), sometimes confusing ... the skit reminded participants of previous student participation conferences/workshops in 1980, 1981 and 1995, and of the range of organisations and structures that have existed in Australia in the past twenty years.

Many participants brought an object to symbolise their participation and they introduced themselves by showing these - posters, gavels, minute books, documents, pins and badges and so on. ‘Student participation’ was understood in many different ways - but in common, participation was ‘doing’ rather than ‘a thing’.

2.20 pm What is on offer now?
What is planned?
A ‘walk through’ the program.

3.00 pm Seminar Series 1:
Structures for positive participation programs
These seminars provided participants with the chance to hear of a range of student participation programs. Here are some examples:

- Leadership - What is it?
  Training for it.

The workshop included about eight people. We discussed such issues as why some people don’t have as strong leadership skills as others, whether we have to have leaders, and what we can do about improving skills. Do teachers use students’ leadership powers as they should? We talked a lot about how we could teach leadership in schools, and whether there was any way of encouraging leadership. This topic had many different views and opinions: it was interesting hearing different sides of the story from other schools, and how they cope with leadership issues. We also looked at some typed-up sheets given to us by our group leader, which included many people’s quotes on ways to improve others’ and our own leadership skills, and why some don’t appear to have the ‘natural ability’ to lead. Many opinions were expressed about all of these subjects and good conversations started. The workshop was very interesting and many ideas shared. We all walked away with many ideas to help improve our own and others’ leadership skills.

Carin Drew

- Peer Support: Its Future?

As a key aspect of student participation, Peer Support is greatly relevant and necessary in our schools. It does have a future, but this future is one that requires it to work to its full potential. We need to move the program beyond ‘seniors playing games with juniors’, to develop skills such as communication, assertiveness and problem solving.

The current problems/challenges with the program are that:

- Leaders are not properly trained; training days are often cut short;
- Leaders may actually have a negative influence on the juniors and abuse their respect;
- Problems that arise in groups are often shrugged off by the leaders;
- There is not always teacher supervision.
Suggestions for improvement:
- Get secondary school students to help write the program. They know what is relevant and how to present the material most effectively;
- There should be a definite difference between primary and secondary programs;
- The programs can be tailored to the specific needs of each school.

One possibility is to have a Student Committee that will review the program each year to decide on the focus points.

Dara Read

- The Media

The group started by discussing possibilities for students to become involved in making media. Examples of students producing local newspapers, radio and video programs were outlined - there were several experienced and active programs in the group - and plans were developed as to how these might be started in other schools. In particular it was noted that it was possible to start 'small' eg with a radio station broadcasting over the loudspeaker system inside the school (a way for the SRC to advertise and get notices to students) and then look for opportunities to extend this outside the school eg through community newspapers, radio or television.

The second half of the workshop was taken up with discussing how students could influence the media - particularly to project a more positive picture of young people. No particular 'answers' were reached, though there was an enthusiastic debate about censorship in the media!

Roger Holdsworth

- Leadership Skills Curriculum

This workshop was packed with not only the values of leadership, but the value of leadership being recognised in our curriculum. The group found out about a one unit leadership course which is designed to show and bring out the value of leadership to everyone, throughout their lives. Leadership is a long term skill that is not nearly recognised enough. There was discussion on our perception of leadership, student council involvement, and what SRCs are achieving and what they should be achieving. It was very encouraging to see so many people excited about leadership, and where you can take it.

Ingrid Kleijer

- SRCs

The Student Representative Councils workshop involved discussion on the structure of SRCs in NSW and the lack of overall structure in the other states. Throughout the conference many participants indicated the need for an SRC structure and this was certainly obvious during this workshop. What individual SRCs were doing within their schools was another point of discussion along with the roles that SRCs should have. The group learned about steps that can be taken so that SRCs can work to their full potential. Sections of Agenda '97 were also highlighted in order to show that the NSW Department of Education considers SRCs to be a significant aspect of student learning.

Gemma North

In addition, there were groups on:
- Stress and Time Management
- Peer Mediation
- School Councils

4.50 pm Participation Groups

Each day, mixed groups of students met with a student conference organiser, to share information and to reflect on the day’s work. For many participants, these provided a valuable chance to get to know what’s happening in other areas, and to plan joint initiatives.
Day 2: How to Participate: Schools and the Wider Community

9.30 am Keynote: Being an Australian Citizen - Whose Agenda?

NASPAC participants had the opportunity to listen to and learn about the issue of Aboriginal Reconciliation in both a general session and in a later smaller seminar.

John Scott, Senior Policy Officer for the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, spoke of the background to the 'Wik Decision' and of his experiences living with the Wik people in the West Cape region. Through his travels he realised (and urged us to realise) that many of those who judge and form opinions on Aboriginal land rights, reconciliation and compensation issues, have no substantial or accurate data to support their views. One of the analogies he used to illustrate the existing ignorance and lack of Aboriginal education in Australia, was that of the contrast between our knowledge of Native American tribe names, and our knowledge of Aboriginal tribe names. He pointed out that there are actually five tribes which live on the west region of the Cape Yorke Peninsula - together they are considered a 'nation' (in the same way we hear of the Sioux nation) rather than as tribes.

The further facts presented by John reinforced the long-lasting and lingering effects of our nation's past ill-treatment of Aborigines. Statistics show that Aborigines have the lowest life expectancy, the greatest number imprisoned and unemployed, and the worst health and literacy of any people in Australia.

The most alarming and shameful aspect is the way that Aboriginal people are portrayed. In early history books, the term 'Aborigines' was listed under the section for 'Diseases'! John reminded us that, although we have come a long way, Aborigines are still described as a 'ripened mob', 'greedy' and 'selfish' - descriptions influenced by these early history books (written by white people who probably hadn't even spoken to an Aboriginal person) and through responses to the present stance that Aboriginal people are taking to recover their stolen land, and to get compensation for their stolen children and for the abuse inflicted on them.

The phrase that still echoes in my mind (and I think in everybody else's) is John's suggested approach to reconciliation: "Guilt is not what we should feel about our history; rather we should feel shame. Shame is a necessary precondition for healing. Remembering and grief will be followed by healing."

Brianna Ragel

10.10 am Debate

This entertaining debate between two teams of students, was on the topic: "Is the republic the way forward?" The 'for' and 'against' teams each had three students.

The first speaker for the positive team said that being part of the monarchy was slowing Australia down. Australia needed to be independent and be seen as an independent country. All Australia's power is with the British Queen who doesn't really seem to care about Australians.

The first for the negative side talked about the problems with other countries who have become republics: there are no gains by becoming a republic and so many different risks involved.

The next speaker for the positive side said that the powers of the monarchy are the same as for a republic, that we are really independent already, and we should just make it official. Being a republic and changing political systems doesn't mean changing tradition. Other countries who have become a republic are totally different to where Australia is now.

Speaker 2 for the negative mainly said that a republican agenda is just a smoke-screen, hiding the real issues. A republic would just give unlimited power to certain individuals and deny our history.

The final speaker for the positive side debated that the Australian flag doesn't represent Australia - it isn't Australian, but British.

Finally, the case for the negative was summed up by the speaker who stated that Australia's flag is our history, and that Australia's history is very important to ordinary Australians.

August-October 1997
The debate was very passionate, and some good points arose on both sides and were argued strongly. Everyone watching was very involved and many different opinions of who ‘won’ were shared. Overall, everyone spoke well and the debate was enjoyed by all.

11.40 am  Panel: Current State of SRC Structures

This panel provided the opportunity to hear from SRC representatives from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

Anna Samson, a member on the State Student Representative Council in NSW, opened the panel with the state committee’s views and future goals. Two of these goals included:

- the denunciation of the myth that SRCs are simply set up for financial support and fundraising;
- the need to encourage greater male representation in leadership activities such as the SRC.

However, Anna’s final suggestion of a national SRC seemed to arouse a passion among all participants and this was consistently supported by each speaker thereafter.

The representatives from Brisbane not only educated and inspired us, but also entertained participants with their account of jobs and problems that their school’s SRC have helped to complete and solve. They gave the instance both of the establishment of a Breakfast Club, and also of lawfully graffitied toilets - with times set aside for students to actually go in and write on the walls (the SRC’s solution to the obscene and prohibited graffiti that used to occur).

In South Australia, there have been two recent statewide student forums with representatives from many schools. The recent one was to provide advice on sustainable futures.

Representatives from Tasmania’s Rooni College spoke of their SRC structure (influenced by the separation of the 7-10 High Schools and the 11-12 Colleges) and the lack of (to date) Government support for greater SRC status. Another major hindrance expressed was Tasmania’s geographical isolation.

Similarly, in Victoria, there has been no Government support for SRC structures and networks have gradually died away. The Victorian students present came from two areas - one in the city and one in the country - and they planned to revitalise and link up their networks.

In summary, the common plan of action was to expand and increase SRCs’ status in individual states by getting all state governments on board. It was resolved to develop combined schools’ SRCs, state SRCs and, finally, to look to the year 2000 - the deadline set for the birth of Australia’s first national SRC.

2.30 pm  Seminars: Issues and Problems, Views and Solutions

This second set of workshops dealt more with the issues faced by students and skills needed to become active participants in dealing with these issues. Some examples were:

- Drama

  “Drama is an important part of everyday life,” they told us. Sure, we’d heard it all before. But we were soon to learn that this wasn’t a workshop for the ears. Led by two boys who have had more that their fair share of clowning around - James Salvanidis and Andrew Phanartzis - the workshop went beyond the fun and games and struck down the barriers of image and self-confidence that so often inhibit young people today. Participants learnt that reasons for shyness and lack of self-confidence are due more to feelings within oneself, rather than external features or factors. “There is no model for what a person should be like”... and through acceptance of this fact, we were encouraged to enjoy the pleasures of socialisation, free from fear. Often the first step for the shy is to leave their lives momentarily and act out a different role, pretending they are someone else. The energy from this is then brought back into their real personality, giving rise to a deeper understanding of who they are. It was this understanding, powered by our inner energies, that gave us as a group confidence when dealing with both ourselves and others.

Carlin Drew

David Toynne
• Poverty/Unemployment
  A program operating in inner and western Sydney was highlighted. In particular, there was a lot of discussion about the tutoring program offered to students who weren’t achieving in school. The links between poverty and lack of school success were also explored. Two videos on the work of the agency highlighted its initiatives.

• Reconciliation
  Indigenous people need rights both here and abroad. We discussed issues about the Stolen Generation with DJ Ah Kee and Delina Davison - both had experience of the stolen generation in their own extended families. We discussed the booklet about the tragedy of this issue “Bringing Them Home?” which tells many people’s stories, nightmares and horrible experiences.

  Boe Schramm, Tanya Harris and Kelly Martin

• Drug Education
  We talked about many drug related issues ranging from effects of drugs on us as individuals and as a school community, the portrayal of drugs in the media, and the long and short term effects of so called soft and hard drugs. Many of us had witnessed the effects of drugs on our friends and families, so we talked about which groups were the main drug users in our school communities and the social influences on young people. Suppliers were often older ‘friends’ out to make some money.
  Different drugs were a different problem in different areas but all expressed concern over tobacco and alcohol abuse. We discussed drug awareness and education programs in schools, and saw the need for a multi-directional approach, not just confined to health lessons but using student seminars, specific drug education lessons, parent information and so on.

  Boe Schramm, Tanya Harris and Kelly Martin

• Families
  Barbara Holborow, former Children’s Care Court Magistrate, spoke of her experiences in dealing with dysfunctional families and young people in crisis. She spoke of people learning to live with each other in a complex social world. Education is the building block to awareness and understanding. We would have less gaols if we went back to deal with the problem areas in families. Governments need to address these issues.

  Boe Schramm, Tanya Harris and Kelly Martin

• Homophobia
  Homophobia was a workshop that dealt with an important problem within the education system and the wider community. Members of the workshop learnt about instances where homophobia can occur and the avenues that should be taken after an incident. Discussion was held on the stereotypes involved with homophobia and incidents where it had occurred. Homophobia is not a joke that is held amongst friends; it can ruin people’s lives and in some cases lead to suicide. While all forms of discrimination should not be tolerated, we also learnt that homophobia is a problem that can discriminate against people whether they are gay or not.

  Andrew Green and Gemma North

There was also a group on:
• The Anti-Violence Kit (See article in Connect 105)

4.30 pm

Participation Groups:
The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

The participation groups focused on this session on: why do the big fish suddenly shrink into little fish? It was felt there was a need to continue the confidence and exuberance generated in primary school, that culminates in year 6 (year 7 in some states). Suggested ways of doing this were by having:
• combined activity days between the primary schools and high schools;
• family groupings;
• year 7 orientation camps;

There were no evaluations and reactions available for these groups.

Evaluations and Reactions

• "I think the first day was quite surprising. This day could be more exciting, so it would give an urge for students to come the following days."
• "Some of it went over my head because some of it was like ‘oh, remember last year, well that’s what we’ll do.’ I wasn’t there last year. I loved the Leadership Course."
• "I liked the leadership course the best."
• "All I thought about when I went home was: ‘I hope that this gets better.’"

Generally comments about Day Two were more positive:
• "Day two was an educational day. I learnt a lot about reconciliation. My seminar on anti-violence was very helpful and I found out things I didn’t know."
• "Some good information - but what was the relevance to student participation?"
• "I really think the debate was great. I also learnt a lot about how SRCs run around Australia."
• "The debate had no matter, but excellent speakers."
• "The national panel became boring and no questions were answered."
• "I liked the speech by Barbara, as she gave us a great idea of what she felt."
• "Today was excellent. I found it really interesting and inspiring. Lots of things happened which were very touching."

The criticisms led people to suggest changes for the next conference:
• "We need a forum and no restriction on what is said."
• "I think a specific goal should be set in people’s minds, so that each participant can help move the conference along to a great goal. This could be done by using the end of each session to make recommendations to be continued in each state."
Evaluations and Reactions

- "Some thought might be given to greater 'student participation' in the conference. At times the agenda seemed a bit dominated by 'non-student' issues. The wider view of leadership and participation at the beginning narrowed into an SRC focus only. There are many other forms of participation that could have been explored."
- "An idea for next time may be to have a specific theme running each day or the whole conference. I really enjoyed the conference, but I may question the relevance of some aspects even though they were fun."
- "The debate should have been followed by discussions. People don't travel from all over Australia for lunch!"
- "Far more organised. Better time management and make more use of the students ie don't cut short discussions because they are the reason we are here: to discuss issues and to sort out problems. The debate, though entertaining, was irrelevant. Don't waste time of the valuable interstate and NSW students. Don't be so stuck to time limits so discussions can be continued."
- "I expected the conference to be big and exciting, but also disorganised - I was pleasantly surprised. But as a group facilitator, I feel that I would prefer to have had some training (not so last minute) in group running. I think there should be room for discussion after all key speakers and general sessions."
- "If details about the optional topics were sent out, people could have indicated interest and saved time by not having to cancel seminars."
- "All should be able to attend, because it's great to see how other things are run in different states and get ideas on things we can change."

- peer support groups;
- years 7s visit year 6s to 'teach them the ropes';
- orientation day;
- Junior SRC - to promote junior leadership;
- junior captains;
- an award system to encourage year 7s.

Overall, it was concluded that respect between the year 7s and the rest of the school should be exchanged and that the year 7s are too great to be overlooked or ignored at school.

Dara Read

Day 3: Planning for actions and acting on plans

9.30 am  The ACZA Conference

Robyn Cusworth and David Smith from the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACZA) Conference provided information about the national curriculum issues that would be discussed at Curriculum 97 - which immediately followed NASPAC 4 at Sydney University. They talked both about ACZA as an organisation and also went through the Conference program, highlighting areas in which students were and could be actively involved. They extended an invitation - central to ACZA's work - for the active participation of students in all areas of these curriculum discussions and planning.

10.00 am  Action Planning Sessions

The third and final round of seminars focused on action arising from the discussions during the Conference.

- USA Visit

The planning group heard first about the outline of the proposal: 50 possible positions for students with 5-7 staff members; travel to Los Angeles and then to Derby, Kansas for the National Association of Student Councils Conference. During the Conference, students will stay with host families, and then attend a leadership camp. There will be some time to tour in Los Angeles.

The cost will be around $5000, and this includes accommodation and food for the Conference, accommodation and food for a leadership camp, accommodation and breakfast for touring, and some funds for group activities.

Applications of interest will need to be sent in, and then formal applications written and received by early October. Positions will be announced in November. From the US end, students must be between the ages of 15 and 17 years. The group discussed criteria for selection, but no final decisions were made.

The group felt that people attending the US Conference should also have some involvement in the Sydney 2000 Conference, as the information gathered would be of great assistance there.

For more details about applications, contact Ken Page - see information elsewhere in this issue of Connect.

Jessica Williamson

(see further details in PASTA Newsletter, page 24 of this issue.)

- National Student Governance Structures

A national structure - to be or not to be?

Before it will 'be', it is necessary to develop strong SRC structures in each respective state. The various state representatives at the conference are very focused on broadening and strengthening their state structures - it is definitely a 'step by step' process: you can't build a house without bricks.

The key to its success will be to learn from the flaws in existing state structures - to do everything they do well, one thousand times better! At present we are looking at consolidating the state structures before focusing on the national structure in the future.

Dara Read

(see further details in PASTA Newsletter, page 22 of this issue)
Year 2000 Conference

The aim of this group was to establish the rudiments of a working party to organise an international secondary student conference in Sydney in the year 2000. There had been plans for a visit to the US NASC Conference in 1985 - there was and still is a lot of international support and interest, and connections with the USA, Britain, Germany, Scotland, Africa etc.

The group brainstormed ideas for an international conference: motivational sessions (students will have come from all over the world!), information sharing, a debate, rest days and tours, embracing/discussing technology, international community ideas, moral issues, international presentations eg on SRC issues, leadership stalls, a market day, a formal dinner.

The length of conference could be anything between 3 and 10 days, with possibly 1000-2000 participants. That means that venues and accommodation will become an issue.

The year 2000 will be a great year in Australia, with the Olympics and the Paralympics generating interest and sponsorship possibilities. If the Conference is immediately after the Olympics, airfares will probably be low. It could also coincide with semester breaks at the University. Other links with the Olympics could be made eg students working as guides.

A lot of organisational issues were discussed (financial assistance, application forms, balance of participants, transport, poster designs, publicity etc). Subcommittees of this working group should look at things like themes, speakers and so on.

The steering group will keep in contact through e-mail. Greg Arrow will set up e-mail links. The steering group should meet again in person when the 1998 US tour students return from the NASC Conference to get a de-briefing on the organisation there. Charles Kingston is the contact for further information.

(see further details in PASTA Newsletter, page 25 of this issue.)

Reporting Back

Members of this group are the reporters and writers who have put this account together. The workshop was used as a time to plan who would do what, and then to start to write accounts of the various sections.

PASTA

Teachers and student conference participants met to talk about the work of PASTA, the Professional Association of SRC Teacher/Advisers. They talked about extending PASTA's organisation to other areas of Australia, and about current projects and plans of the association.

(see further details in PASTA Newsletter, page 21 of this issue.)

12.00 noon Motivational Address:

From a Victorian ex-student - talking about how participation in student governance had assisted him, and about the importance of planning, organisation and commitment.

1.00 pm Final Participation Groups and Closing

A 'wrap up' and fond farewells - until next time... (see possibilities, page 23 of this issue.)

Evaluations and Reactions

Where to now? The Conference spent time on the third day planning further events. Here are some participants' comments:

- "The vision is 'big' but we are missing the 'small' aspect - what are we doing about student leadership and participation at the local level?"

- "To have a national organisation, we need a reason! The real issue should be ensuring that it's meaningful at a local level."

And finally, people talked about what they, and others, got out of the Conference - the outcomes:

- "I talked to a lot of students from around the nation and discovered different values and ideas of others."

- "The energy and enthusiasm was very positive. Most people (mainly students) I spoke to were very enthusiastic about having learnt so much about what was happening elsewhere. The pity was that so much more could have happened."

- "I think that skills have certainly developed over the past few days."

- "Now I can take it back to my school and use it to my advantage."

- "The real value will be able to be measured when people start acting on the discussions brought up at the conference."

Reports on NASPAC 4 by Greg Arrow, Carlin Drew, Andrew Green, Tanya Harris, Roger Holdsworth, Ingrid Klevjer, Jamila Lyndon-Watt, Kelly Martin, Gemma North, Brianna Ragel, Dara Read, Boe Schramm, David Toyne, Jessica Williamson.

NASPAC 4 Organising Committee: Michael Selway (Chairperson, Sydney Boys HS), Greg Arrow (Bathurst HHS), Lucinda Bartram (Maroubra HS), Luke Blyth (Hawkesbury HHS), Jeanne Bow (Kogarah HS), Colin Ellis (Granville South PS), Mayden Houchar (Granville South PS), Joriel Jiminez (Merrylands HS), Virginia Kim (Granville South PS), Charles Kingston (Bathurst HS), Kylie Kozakiewics (Granville South PS), Lisa Lloyd (Bathurst HS), Ralph Murray (University of Newcastle, Ourimbah), Adrian Patra (Healthcote HS), Andrew Phanartizs (Hurstville Boys HS), Dara Read (Sydney Girls HS), Shani Reynolds (Concord HS), James Saivanidis (Randwick Boys HS), Anna Samson (Penrith HS), David Smith (Sydney Boys HS), Anna York (St George Girls HS).
‘Stepping out of the box’

The beginning of one teacher’s journey into negotiating with students.

This story carries the voices of two participants: Marita Rabone, a teacher in a Sydney metropolitan high school, and Steve Wilson, an academic from the University of Western Sydney. It results from research conducted by Steve in Marita’s school, the purpose of which was not to conduct narrative inquiry with Marita or any other teacher, but to investigate the relationship between dimensions of school context and student participation in the school. However, towards the end of the study, it became clear that Marita’s experiences were significant and that she had a story worth telling. This is the purpose of this article.

The article attempts to convey a journey undertaken by Marita in her role as a teacher of Computer Studies courses. In helping Marita to reflect upon her pedagogical practices, it could be considered an example of a joint construction of a teacher’s experiences (Fosnot, 1996). It could more generally be described as a narrative study (Beattie, 1995; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), which has been defined as “collaborative inquiries by researcher and practitioner into the everyday experiences and practices of educational professionals, the ensuing accounts of which are mutually constructed” (Beattie 1995, p. 63). However, it must be described as such with some qualification. This inquiry was not the focus or intention of the study. Because of this, the relations between researcher and practitioner were not about investigating Marita’s practice but about assisting Marita in her practice and informing the study about student participation. Consequently although this account has been jointly constructed, it is in its early stages of construction. It does not have the elements of longitudinal negotiation of constructions that characterises Beattie’s (1995) study, the trading of stories between researcher and practitioner evident in Grant (1991), or elements of negotiated research design found in Webb and Blond (1996).

This is therefore the first ‘airing’ of Marita’s story, and is perhaps a first step in its refinement. The story is constructed in two parts. Marita is a teacher of 20 years’ experience, some of those as Head Teacher of a Home Economics Department. In the first part, she tells her story of becoming a Computer Studies teacher in her school, a position new to her, and how she came to accept negotiating with students as the solution to the problems confronting her. In the second part, Steve provides his response to Marita’s story, examining the significance of Marita’s metaphor of the ‘box’, and noting the factors which were influential in Marita’s attempts to change her practice.

Setting the Scene

The case study research on student participation had been conducted at Marita’s High School for 22 months before she became an active participant. Part of this research had involved Steve interviewing students and disseminating consolidated student constructions of schooling to school participants. Much of the thrust of student constructions centred on the critique of classroom experiences and school approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers displayed interest in student constructions and developed theoretical responses to the views students put. However, there was little in the way of specific attempts to change classroom practices as a result of student views. Many dimensions of school context seemed to contribute to a teaching/learning environment in which student views were able to be ignored. A treatment of the research in progress was provided in Wilson (1995).

Marita was the exception. She was one of six teachers who volunteered to use an adapted version of the Challenge Checklist in her classroom. The Checklist, developed by John Baird and others (Baird, 1994), is a questionnaire for students which provides teachers with feedback relating to the classroom environment and teaching and learning issues. Of the teachers to participate in this exercise, Marita seemed to respond positively and actively to student concerns. The student data caused her to reflect upon and improve her approach to teaching by utilising practices of student negotiation. It was this process of change that captured Steve’s attention. Marita’s story provides us with insights into what teachers confront in their day to day roles and what factors might work to assist them in including students as active participants in classrooms.

Marita’s Story

The Computer Studies meeting was drawing to a close. I openly challenged each teacher to consider negotiation as a tool to use when planning student learning experiences in each unit of work: “Loosen up a little. Listen to your students. Suggest that they might like to design their own experiences. Think about the learning styles of each student: are your lessons meeting their needs and allowing students effective dialogue?”

Further discussion was planned for the next meeting.

Where had these ideas come from? Negotiation and learning styles are not new concepts, yet are underutilized in high school education. My own experience reinforces this, because I have made little use of negotiation over a 20 year teaching span. But now I have had cause to reflect on what causes people to change their behaviour or teaching styles. What happens to the creative, motivated teacher over a period of
time? Throughout my career I have been challenged on many occasions to consider my role and purposes as a teacher. Home Economics, the subject area I had been trained to teach, had undergone subtle but significant changes, many exciting and stimulating, but some difficult to acknowledge and put into practice.

After a break from teaching for child rearing, I had returned to teaching two days per week part-time at a 'disadvantaged' school in a large central business district. Teaching here set me on a huge learning curve. The school comprised a large English as Second Language (ESL) component amongst its students, representing up to 50 different cultural groups. Teaching here was a shock, because my prior experience had not prepared me for teaching such a diverse range of students. My teaching style did not appear adequate - particularly my pacing of work to meet different levels of need and student understanding.

My position at the school soon increased from two to four days per week as the Technological and Applied Studies (TAS) Faculty expanded its range of subjects. One part of this expansion was the growth of Computer Studies subjects, and it was here that I was asked to take a Year 9 class. I was not prepared for this: I had no experience, no skills, no passion! How was I to approach this demand to teach Computer Studies?

Fortunately my position was one of job-sharing: sharing these classes with a teacher of similar disposition and experience. We joined ranks and adopted a 'one step at a time' approach, dividing the preparation and the workload. Neither of us were computer literate and we recognised the need for research and training. Our computer skills developed and our information base increased, and we sought guidance from other, more experienced computer studies teachers.

**10C Computer Studies**

The following year I was now considered to be more knowledgeable in Computer Studies, and I picked up two Year 10 Computer Studies classes. I had taught some of these students in Year 9, but some I hadn't taught before. Both classes were large in terms of the numbers of students and in terms of student size, as they were dominated by males. However the ability mix was not fairly distributed - one class appeared to be quieter, more interested, and above average intelligence. The other (10C) was very rowdy, undisciplined and most of all had a short attention span.

10C was the biggest headache. Each lesson we would struggle with each other verbally for quite some time before any kind of teaching actually began! The students in this class did not respect 'good' learners and constantly went out of their way to disrupt the learning of a few conscientious individuals. Everything I tried appeared to fail. The students didn't seem interested or happy, and neither was I. It was a time filled with frustration and anxiety.

Teaching 10C brought back the feelings of inadequacy I had experienced the previous year. When I sought advice from other Computer Studies teachers they had an offhand, inward looking approach to sharing resources and expertise. So I felt very much pushed in at the deep end. I was certainly frustrated in my attempts to learn more about teaching the subject.

Because of the student attitudes to the subject and the advice I was getting from other teachers, I ended up teaching them in a very traditional way. I mean a safe way. I used a known formula, a known approach: a textbook centred, teacher centred model. It gave me tight control (I thought) over the learning process. It was my reaction to classroom discipline problems. As they worsened, the lessons got tighter, with little or no student interaction. I observed other experienced Computer Studies teachers approach the subject in this way, and without realising it I was adopting similar practices. I suppose due to my inexperience in this teaching field and my lack of self-confidence I had fallen into the easy way out! Lesson preparation was minimal - we used the textbook!

Looking back, I realise I had begun building a box around myself - reinforcing it with structures that appeared 'safe' and fairly successful. I was utilising practices that did not create drama, were easy to handle and control, and led students into a conventional and predictable pattern of learning. I was trapping them in their own little boxes.

This approach wasn't achieving anything positive. We would do 'battle' every lesson, neither side winning, just a wearing down to the point that nobody enjoyed Computer Studies. My stomach would knot as I approached the classroom each lesson. I had prepared the lesson thoroughly, so why the anxiety? It was like an incomplete jigsaw puzzle - pieces missing! I have since realised that it is often difficult to stand back and observe your work objectively and to remain unbiased in the hectic school situation (heads down). It's like being on a fast merry-go-round, and to step off isn't easy. I think that is why, when the opportunity came to be involved in the Challenge Checklist, I took it.

**The Challenge Checklist**

Steve Wilson, a lecturer from the University of Western Sydney, had been visiting our school as part of his PhD research into student participation in a secondary school. Steve regularly visited Faculties and spoke with students in class and in the playground in an attempt to paint a picture of student participation in our school. At one point, as part of this study, he invited teachers to participate in giving a survey to our classes that would give teachers feedback on how students felt about the class.

I volunteered to do this with 10C Computer Studies because I thought the Checklist might unlock or uncover reasons for the poor attitude to Computer Studies - their needs, expectations, and the strengths and weaknesses they perceived in teaching and learning in Computer Studies. I also believe, as teachers, we are accountable and must be prepared to evaluate our work. I was curious to see what the kids thought - what did I have to lose?

Steve asked that as part of the process students be given the results and be allowed to discuss them in class with their teachers. He suggested that we put 10C into small groups and have each group investigate one questionnaire item in detail, examining why the response had been
answered in that way, and what could be done about the issue. I was happy to do this, and we spent a double period in class discussing the Checklist results.

While some results were positive, others were not. The positive results were that 74% of the class felt that Computer Studies was quite or very important; 73% said they got on well or very well with me, their teacher; 82% said they got on well with other students; two-thirds said the classroom was “a good place to learn”, and 74% said that they understood the work (which I found bemusing, as many were failing their assessment tasks). The negative results were that 57% felt the topics weren’t interesting; 78% felt that they did not do “different or unusual things”; the class was essentially split on whether they did “practical activities” in Computer Studies; one-third said that the classroom was not a good place to learn, and 57% said they did not enjoy the work.

I agreed with the results and acknowledged that my feelings had been similar. It always comes as a shock to hear what others have to say - yet I was surprised at so many positive comments. They didn’t hate me, they just weren’t happy with all aspects of the subject. Some of the important issues raised in the discussion were that, whereas in Year 9, work had seemed interesting and practical, in Year 10 it was seen to be too theoretical and book driven. Also, students resented being in the ‘worst’ of the school’s three computer labs - an old, small, converted classroom. This lab contained the oldest of the school’s computers which were continually breaking down, were slow, and had the least interesting software on them. These big Year 10 boys, when added to the computers, just didn’t fit into this room comfortably, and this environment seemed to contribute to their negative attitudes to the subject.

Deciding to negotiate

Although I was a bit down after learning of these student attitudes, a few things happened that helped me to be positive about the future. One was a discussion I had with Steve about how to respond to student concerns. Steve and I discussed student participation and the philosophy of student involvement and decision making. We agreed that if student viewpoints are taken seriously and are listened to, then students will have a sense of well-being and of being valued. He suggested I think about using small group work and project-based learning, and giving students some choice in what they learn. He also gave me a couple of chapters on negotiation, written by high school teachers, from the Boomer et al (1992) book, Negotiating the Curriculum. I found these to be fascinating and very helpful, because here were teachers who had faced classes just as disruptive and difficult as mine, and who had won through by listening to them.

The second thing that helped was the presence of a young student teacher, Michael, in my 10C class. He had been present during the discussions about the Checklist results, and he and I spoke about what we could do. We planned a collaborative approach to our current unit where we gave students more time at the computers by setting up a group project in which theoretical work was appeared to be more settled and focused. With two of us in the room, they sought help more readily. They appeared positive about having more and more relevant computer time. They accepted the theoretical work better. And I felt better about going to the class. It was good being able to discuss things about the classroom with them, rather than having each lesson a confrontation as it had previously been.

Having done this, I reflected upon the possibilities of negotiation in the future. For me, negotiation presented an approach that welcomed
the opinions and dialogue of the students. It seemed to answer the needs of the students to have ‘more say’ in their learning. From previous reading I had been interested in (but not implemented) the discourse on different learning styles, and felt negotiation was a way of enabling students to make learning decisions for themselves - to throw the game back into their court.

However, I had only observed the successful negotiation techniques of my own children's Primary school teachers. My son thoroughly enjoyed a 'Space' unit in Year 5 because he could choose the way he completed it. The teacher had provided lots of variety and choice in the subject. I remember thinking, and saying to a few colleagues around this time, that students seem to have these opportunities and skills in the Primary school, but when they come into high school we seem to help them 'unlearn' how to accept responsibility for their work.

Nonetheless I decided to design a unit of work for 10C in third term based on principles of student choice and negotiation. In the meantime, I negotiated with the senior Computer Studies teacher to have our lessons moved into the most up to date of the computer laboratories. The room was brighter, roomier, and the computers had better software. The students really seemed to appreciate this effort.

The new unit of work involved Graphics. I explained to the students that there were parts of the course that were ‘set in concrete’ and not easily negotiated. They had to do graphics, for example, and there was certain content that would be tested in the end of year exam. However in the unit, I provided them with lots of internal choices. They could nominate to do one of 11 different projects or, if they wished, develop and negotiate an alternative within the parameters of the topic. Some students asked could they work in pairs or small groups, and this was also negotiated. I came to encourage this, especially amongst the girls, as I had read that girls work better in group situations. I also encouraged students to use a wider variety of resources for this unit than simply the textbook. I wanted them to be more adventurous, and encouraged them to use the internet, video and television. I felt nervous at the beginning of the unit, because it was a new strategy, and one the students weren’t used to. But I was prepared to persevere. I wanted to follow it through until the end of the year, and as the students responded to it I felt more satisfied and confident with the approach.

Effects of Negotiation on 10C

These students really fell quite quickly into working in this way. Imagine a classroom where students knew that there is a certain amount of theory to get through, but when they do it is up to them. Theory was provided now by activity sheets rather than through the text alone, and constituted about one third of the work. Students did the theory when they were not able to access the computers, and I was able to become a facilitator in the room, helping individuals with their work. Those who were not doing their theory were working at the computers on a variety of projects, some individually, others in groups. The most advanced student decided to design a video game using graphics: something I couldn’t really help him with because he was more advanced than me, but he appreciated being given the scope to test his talents. Other students worked in groups and designed graphics-based advertisements, games, newsletters, publications and cartoons.

The classroom became a better place, no longer a battle ground but more of a laboratory or library, with students working on their individual ideas and projects. Students seemed to be more motivated, less disruptive and more cohesive. Overall, I would say the effects of this approach were: increased student interest and motivation, more classroom discussion, better communication, and more excitement; students forming more congenial and cohesive groups (though still not angels), and the academic outcomes described below.

A further outcome was that I certainly felt better about teaching this group, and felt like I was achieving something.

Another interesting result was in the quality of student work. All students actually submitted their projects and produced a work portfolio! Students who I had to try to drag work out of during second term handed it in on time. I vividly recall two students coming to me in the playground the day after the work was due, handing it to me and apologising for its lateness. Previously, they wouldn’t have bothered. Also, student results in the yearly examination were marginally better than the half yearly results. This is significant because while we were doing the negotiated unit of work we virtually ignored the exam, whereas the entire subject in the first half of the year had been virtually exam driven! My overall feeling is that I wish I had begun doing this earlier in the year: I could have avoided all those battles.

Effects of Negotiation on Colleagues

An interesting result of my efforts to negotiate with students was that some of my colleagues joined me in using my teaching approaches. It began by me approaching other computer studies teachers with specific expertise to do some team teaching with me. For example one was an expert in CAD drawing, and came to address my class about this. Gradually I began speaking with other Computer Studies teachers about 'negotiation', and found that we gradually developed a level of communication and cooperation that had not existed before.

Later in the year I assumed the role of Year 10 Computer Studies coordinator, and led the development and implementation of a unit of work across the four Year 10 Computer Studies classes that utilised elements of negotiation. In all classes, for example, students were free to select or develop a project as the learning focus for the term, and emphasis was taken off the use of the textbook and preparing for the exam. This provided these teachers with challenges in managing classrooms where different types of work were happening at the same time. Towards the end of the unit, one teacher became particularly worried how he was going to assess projects that produced a great range of different products. To support each other I organised regular meetings between this team where we could
discuss these problems and their solutions.

In 1997 I became Computer Studies coordinator for Years 9 and 10 and continued to encourage the design of units of work that are more flexible. Teachers now feel freer to negotiate room changes and share resources. In whole-school meetings I now speak on the benefits of negotiation and try to facilitate negotiation and small group work throughout the school. I have been placed in charge of organising Year Team meetings, where Year 7 teachers conduct cross-disciplinary planning for Year 7 classes, and I want to introduce ideas for negotiation and small group work to year 7 teachers. Many staff are already using these processes. However, many are still in the dark inside their boxes, and rarely look outside.

Conclusion

In a short time I have become re-committed and confident in my teaching because I have found an approach to teaching which enthuses students to accept responsibility in the classroom. It is my enthusiasm for these approaches that has led me to lead meetings of other teachers, and which found me addressing the meeting I described at the beginning of this account.

Yet the basis of it all, negotiating with students, is something that takes time and energy and effort. At the beginning of this year, with my new classes, I found I had to introduce the concept slowly. Many students had not been asked to make these sorts of decisions before and were hesitant or reluctant to do so. It is difficult to design work units that take account of these student feelings yet gradually lead students to accept responsibility. That is the challenge.

Steve’s Response

As I stated at the beginning of this article, what interests me in Marita’s case are the circumstances in which she found herself initially (teaching a difficult, unmotivated and intimidating class), the strategies she used to solve her problem (forms of student negotiation and participation), and the results of her efforts (improved student attitudes and performance, and enhanced personal and professional esteem for the teacher). Marita’s story is a small but compelling verification of how student participation is theoretically supposed to affect classroom events. It is an important story because it represents a successful attempt to improve a classroom environment through consultative rather than confrontational strategies, yet so often teachers are encouraged to see the assertion of their power as the answer to these sorts of problems.

The Building of the Box

The ‘box’ metaphor that Marita chose for the title of this article is an interesting one because it implies that she felt enclosed, perhaps trapped, in circumstances that did not encourage her to reflect upon her teaching. What she was focusing on was survival in the face of a hostile group of students. Marita and I have partially discussed what caused the box to exist. As we do so further, we will undoubtedly clarify some of these issues. From my perspective, the following factors contributing to her sense of being trapped were:

- feelings of being a ‘novice’. Marita had 20 years of teaching experience and had been promoted to Head Teacher level in the past. Yet, despite her experience and ability, the fact that she was new to teaching Computer Studies, and feelings that she had few skills in the area, led her to doubt her capacity to confidently teach in the way she was able to do in her substantive area. The self-doubt was compounded by her confrontations with the class. This self doubt was apparent on a number of occasions when I was present. On one occasion she commented, “Sometimes I’m not confident teaching them. I’ve had no training with computers, so I’m just learning by experience” (fieldnotes, 8/5). When I arrived to give Marita a copy of the 10C Checklist results, Marita exclaimed, “Well, how did I do? Oh no, it’s not that bad is it?” (fieldnotes, 28/3).
- confrontation with an apathetic class. 10C were unacademic and did not relish being at school. After my first meeting with them I noted:
  The class was very unsettled ...
  While Marita was attempting to review an assignment … kids were talking to each other and twiddling pets. There was quite a bit of low level noise … The atmosphere/body language in the room was one of restrained boredom - adolescent people, bordering on adulthood, kept continually in large groups. Restless, with an abundance of tolerance and goodwill, but little in the way of commitment (fieldnotes, 19/3).

However, Marita obviously felt tested by them and did not necessarily recognise goodwill. On the day we administered the Checklist she began the lesson by talking quite harshly to the class. What she was doing was getting the upper hand, nipping any problems in the bud. This was surprising to me, for I had not heard her talk like this to students before. It was only weeks later, after she had begun her first tentative steps at negotiating, that she mentioned to me the nervousness with which she approached the class, saying: “I’m a mature woman, but I still feel sick at times going into this class. Some of them make animal noises” (fieldnotes, 8/5). She also made links between these feelings and her pedagogy: “We all get in a rut, I think, and with this class I was using the textbook a lot, because I wasn’t confident” (fieldnotes, 8/5).
- the entrenched culture of teaching the subject. Surprisingly, Computer Studies turned out to be textbook driven. According to Marita, most of the teaching undertaken by her senior colleagues was of this type. The program they followed was written by the senior Computing teacher, and students undertook one ‘cross-the-year’ examination each term which examined this ‘theory’. These factors had a bearing on how Marita taught. Interestingly, Marita did not teach this
way in classes where she was more confident and had more autonomy. When we began to examine how she could change her pedagogy and I suggested providing choice and small group work, she revealed that she did use such methods, but with other classes:

In Design and Technology with Year 7 I simply give them a piece of fabric and a design brief; I don’t tell them what they’ve got to make. They have to come up with the design and the product. And they’re wonderful! They come up with some things that I couldn’t possibly imagine... But that’s TAS. In Computing I sometimes feel out of my depth (fieldnotes 5/6).

The Year 7 Design and Technology syllabus specifically recommends such methods, and it is significant that Marita did not generalise their applicability to the different context of 10C CS. However, it seems that her lack of confidence, her desire to control her class and the prevailing pedagogy demanded by her peers all helped Marita to create her ‘box’ with 10C Computer Studies.

- a sense of professional isolation and powerlessness. This also contributed to the building of the ‘box’. Luckily Marita shared her initial Year 9 class with a colleague. In Year 10 however, when she was expected to follow a more ‘theoretical’ program, she had little contact with her colleagues in Computer Studies. When Marita suggested to a colleague that they meet about Year 10 Computer Studies, he replied, “Why do you want a meeting?” The senior teacher saw it as his duty only to write the program, not to develop the staff teaching it. This caused Marita, before she became more assertive about student participation, to simply accept the status quo and get on with her teaching. This teacher isolation and lack of pedagogical leadership were common characteristics in a number of Faculties in the school.

Marita’s ‘box’ was therefore complete, and its materials were fear, habit and isolation, lack of confidence, lack of fulfillment, and lack of school leadership. These are common catalysts amongst teachers who have low morale (Dobbins, 1986), have difficulty reflecting on their roles and practices (Nias, 1987), and difficulty accepting change (Fullan, 1991; Dinham and Scott, 1996). What is interesting in the case of Marita is that she has been able to ‘step out of the box’, and it is worth considering why.

Stepping Out of the Box

Marita made her decision to step out of her ‘box’ quickly, once she saw the need to do so. In my view there were a number of important factors which enabled her to do this:

- her enthusiasm for personal reflection and action. Marita is by nature an enthusiastic teacher who continually thinks about her teaching. She evaluates new ideas carefully rather than simply dismissing them in favour of her traditional practices. So, when one part of her responded to 10C with controlling strategies, another part was not happy with this approach because she knew it would not address fundamental problems in the classroom. In a sense, Marita was seeking solutions, and this is what made her respond to the Challenge Checklist invitation.

- the opportunity to hear student voice. During my research it became apparent that few teachers were aware of student opinions of their teaching or classroom environments. Although most teachers were interested in general views held by students, only four seemed to relish the opportunity to hear specific student opinions about their teaching. Marita was one of these. Although each of these teachers found the prospect threatening, they also valued the chance of opening up for a more particular way of responding. That is, making a difference.

- the willingness to be a risk taker. Marita was initially prepared to test new teaching strategies in the hope they would improve the classroom situation. Further, she was later prepared to lead and persuade others to take these risks. In a school where traditional approaches to teaching were the norm, she even decided to take the ‘ultimate’ risk, speaking out at a full staff meeting and advocating the use of negotiating with students and providing them with choices. For Marita, ‘stepping out of the box’ has meant something beyond improving relations and practices in 10C Computer Studies. It has given her added meaning to her teaching and a new ‘mission’ in her school. In this process she has been reinvigorated by her rediscovered confidence and is assuming a significant whole-school leadership role in attempting to have others understand the benefits of listening and responding to students in the classroom.

The Impact of Student Negotiation

In reviewing the benefits of student negotiation arising from Marita’s story, a number of issues are clear. Obviously Marita has derived
personal benefits, including a more positive outlook on her teaching, a feeling of closer and more positive relationships with her students, and feelings that students are enjoying the work.

For me, however, as someone interested in the development of secondary school curriculum, Marita’s story reinforces accounts from others who have been involved in ‘middle school’ curriculum initiatives, centring on student participation and negotiation, that have resulted in significant increases in student pride, motivation, participation and performance in relation to their schooling (for example, Daugherty, 1995; Goldman, 1995; Harris, 1994; Jones, 1995). Through a few simple initiatives she was able to achieve a more settled ‘tone’ in her classroom, by making students feel like their views were being acknowledged. Marita’s strategy of continually asking their views about her ideas for the future contributed to this rapid change. Within one month of giving the Checklist to her students Marita was able to claim she liked teaching the class.

A few months further on I visited 10C in their new home, in the ‘new’ computer lab, and observed the class at work. What I saw were students working independently, individually and in groups, on a variety of negotiated projects. In my fieldnotes I contrasted this with my earlier impressions of an unsettled and uninvolved class:

The classroom tone was remarkably different. Students were all engaged, either at the centre desks working on a crossword puzzle (theory) ... or at the computers on their tasks. There was no loudness, no belligerence. All students, except one, felt the class was better. Some were already looking forward to their projects for next term (fieldnotes, 19/9).

Students made other comments expressing satisfaction with the new tone of the class. One said, “It’s better than last term. Last term we mainly copied heaps of stuff from books and answered questions. Now we have more time on the computers” (fieldnotes, 19/9). Another commented, “We do much more practical things now. And more interesting. It’s good being able to choose things you’re interested in” (fieldnotes, 19/9).

By having the courage to listen to students and step out of her own box, Marita is right in believing that she has begun to help her students step out of their own boxes. Students who had no interest or sense of ownership in academic work began, through Marita’s experimentation with student negotiation, to take themselves seriously as learners. This is the truly important theme in Marita’s story, and one about which she should feel justifiably proud and encouraged.

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References


There is a huge white plastic marquee complete with chandeliers and gas heaters at the back of the Adelaide Oval and for two days in early May this year, it was the venue for the second South Australian Statewide Students’ Forum. The planning committee, consisting of teachers and students from Department of Education and Children’s Services [DECS] and officers from DECS and the Department for Environment and Natural Resources checked out lots of possible sites, but decided that the ‘tent’ met the criteria: it was central, close to the YMCA where country students were staying, parents would be able to find it to drop and pick up city students and it had room for whole group and small group sessions. A large space was required because 250 students, 10 from every district in the state, came to have their say on what DECS and DENR needed to do about sustainable living.

The planning process took a long time and even at the last minute, Committee members were still panicking about details - would there be enough food for everyone? Would the microphones work properly? What if one of the guest speakers pulled out? What would happen if it rained? Would the mix of students work - after all Year 4 to Year 12 is a big spread - would the little kids get bored? Would the large numbers of Aboriginal students, including the Anangu group all the way from the Pitjantjatara lands in the far north of the state, be left out, or would the process help everyone to understand each other’s points of view? Would the various adults who were home group leaders have programs organised so that kids would not only learn and share, but also get to develop ideas for policies and programs? Would the bureaucrats who attended not say too much?

And how did it go? Three student journalists wrote a report of the two days’ events for the DECS newspaper and here is what they said:

For approximately 250 South Australian students, the days of Monday 12th and Tuesday 13th of May involved a lot of hard work and listening. These students attended a forum on the subject of ecologically sustainable living. This was a follow up to the first Students Futures Forum, held in 1995, and there are plans to hold more of these meetings annually.

Many of the students involved were members of environmental groups in their school or community, and had recognised the need for ecologically sustainable living. A lot of them were also involved in SRC and other student organisations. Their grade levels ranged from Year 4 to Year 12 and they came from both the metropolitan and country areas. Five students and ten adults were responsible for the planning and running of this forum, which they have been preparing since October last year.

The forum opened on Monday morning with an introduction by two student members of the planning committee, and a speech from Denis Ralph, the Chief Executive Officer from DECS. There were two keynote speakers, Dr Barbara Hardy and Mr Buck McKenzie. Dr Hardy was South Australian Citizen of the Year in 1996, and is an officer of the General Division of the Order of Australia. Her speech was on the topic “Living now for the future - living sustainably” and it was quite interesting and informative. Mr Buck McKenzie told an Aboriginal story which he combined with one of his own. He gave the groups an effective demonstration of what it feels...
like to lose a part of your culture to ‘progress’. After each key note speaker, the students broke into home groups where they discussed ideas about what was presented and wrote these down for the Forum song. The Forum song was composed by Nick Vall, and was rehearsed by students in preparation for the closing ceremony.

After lunch, there were elective workshops on the themes of Waste, Energy, Water and Habitat. Students learnt a lot about these aspects of the environment and came up with many original thoughts about what can be done about them in schools.

For the last section of the day, students separated into three different groups. One group went to the Adelaide Zoo, another to the Bicentennial Conservatory, and the final group went on the Indigenous Food Trail through the Botanic Gardens. The groups that visited the Conservatory learnt about the importance of tropical forests to ecologically sustainable living and also how the conditions inside the Conservatory are controlled from a computer. On the Food Trail, students learnt about how various plants are used by Aboriginal people as ‘bush tucker’ and medicine. The visit to the Zoo involved learning about endangered animals and their part in the environment.

At the beginning of the second day, the Forum was addressed by a panel of young environmentalists - Tara Jane Pomeroy, Vicki Jo Russell, Jade Cosh, Michael Marner and Malcolm Lane. Jade and Michael are students at Port Vincent Primary and talked about their school’s nationally awarded programs. Tara Jane is a Year 12 student at Aberfoyle High School who is involved in developing an environmental plan for her school, and Vicki Jo talked about what you can achieve as an individual. Malcolm is an indigenous park ranger and he talked about the care of the land and the need for everybody to get a good education to understand the issues involved.

Afterwards, the home group discussions continued and each group planned their presentation for the closing ceremony. The resident cartoonist, George Aldridge, moved around the groups, and produced twelve cartoons based on the students’ ideas. These were displayed throughout the final session of the conference and will be published so that every school can have a set. During the closing ceremony each group presented their views on helping the environment to the Hon Mr Lucas, Minister for Education and Children’s Services, and the Hon Mr Wotton, Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources. Many of these presentations were extremely creative and included such things as short songs, poems, plays and stories. After each group finished they presented the Ministers with a scroll containing the full range of their ideas and views. The Ministers jointly announced to the students that they had decided to form a Youth Environmental Council to provide ongoing advice and ideas and to support a network of young environmentalists. The planning committee for the student forum would take on the job of getting the Council up and running.

Before Mr Denis Ralph gave his closing speech, the students and Nick Vall performed the conference song to the dignitaries who also joined in. All the students who participated felt that it was an extremely worthwhile and interesting occasion, and hoped that there would be more of these forums in the future.

Holly Dear [Year 8], Sarah Dinsmore [Year 9], Chris Letherby [Year 8] - The Heights School

A conference report is currently being written with recommendations for the development of a DECS Sustainable Living plan. Planning for the 1998 student forum has not yet begun. Student participation does not yet have an official place in DECS structures, although more districts have begun to organise district student gatherings as a result of the 1997 Forum. It is to be hoped that the momentum will continue!

Holly, Sarah, Chris and Pat Thomson
Made in the Middle
or
How to Write a Song With Middle School Kids Who Think You Look like Their Mother

In January, 1997, I undertook a four month songwriting/recording project with 450 students at Jefferson Middle School in Eugene, Oregon. The CD we produced, Made in the Middle, is a collection of eighteen songs written by each of eighteen different language arts classes at Jefferson. Every student in the school participated in this project, which included the writing and rehearsing of the song as well as the on-site recording. In addition, eighty students also had the opportunity to tour Sony's compact disc manufacturing plant in Springfield, Oregon.

I wanted the kids to understand that the CDs they buy start with a single person with an idea that he/she sets to music. I wanted them to know that making a recording was something that was within the realm of possibilities for them. I wanted them to hear themselves singing songs they had written themselves.

The trick to getting a class full of kids to write collectively was finding ways for them to participate individually: no small task. My job was basically to write the song with/through the kids. The idea was that it's their words, but I made their ideas cohesive in a way that they don't even notice. The basic principle is that the kids brainstorm about everything from the topic to "what rhymes with 'last'?" and then we vote. We take it step by step.

The first step in the process was the selection of song topics by each class. We did this through brainstorming and discussion; in some cases we had to take a vote in order to choose between two ideas. We selected song topics from issues that were being discussed in class, fiction and non-fiction books being read by students, and in one case the song was based on an interview that a class did with a Latina activist from Eugene.

Each class spent five to six 45-minute class periods writing and learning their song. The first day or two was usually spent on selecting a topic that everyone was interested in and about which everyone had some information. The topics for this project ranged from homelessness to junk food, from being late to class to the political chaos in Zaire.

Here's where we got a few of the topics:

Laura Odom's sixth grade class based their song on a biography they had read of Sitting Bull, a chief of the Ogalas Sioux. The first thing we did was come up with a list of facts that they had learned about him from their reading. We based the verses on those facts once we had chosen (by voting). About three days into it, I asked the class to imagine what Sitting Bull would look and act like if he came in the door of their classroom. We got lots of ideas on the board and then distilled them down to "when I close my eyes/I see long black hair/I see pain and pride/shining in the eyes of Sitting Bull."

Friendship From Afar was written by an eighth grade class who wanted to talk about their sister school in Guatemala. Before we actually started writing we had to come up with what exactly it was that they wanted people to know about their relationship with this school. One of the students had the idea of using some Spanish words in the song. We got a list of English words that were important and then one of the kids in the class who spoke Spanish translated them. At first we were going to use only one Spanish word, 'amistad' which means 'friendship' but there were some others as well, so we included three in the chorus.

A class of sixth graders wrote Journey to the Heart of Zaire based on the writing of their African teacher, Dr Tshionyi, who had returned to his homeland after being in the US for twenty years and had come back and written the book. The conditions are so horrible in this country that most of what we wrote was pretty depressing. It was Dr Tshionyi's involvement with the writing part that gave us the line of promise, "Zaire, you will rise again." Before we had the melody, it seemed like the song was going to be pretty bleak, but it became a reggae song, giving it a feeling of hopefulness.

Usually I would get an idea for the melodies that seemed to fit with the mood and topic of the song, and would bring it back to the kids and ask them what they thought about it. If they wanted changes, we made them. While I finally wrote the melodies, I asked them what kind of mood they wanted etc, and then ran the ideas by them for their approval.

Most of the kids were REALLY sceptical before we started, and the more we got into it the more they liked it. Getting them to sing was pretty hard: almost all of them came from elementary schools with no music teachers.

"I thought it was a really neat idea a school making a CD- but I was wondering how it was going to come together!"

(Ashlee Rodriguez, 14)

"I never really thought I could write a song and I thought it was really amazing that an entire class could write a song together."

(Melinda Russial, 14)

In April, Don Ross, of Don Ross Productions spent two days at Jefferson recording the eighteen songs. He set up his microphones and tape decks in the choir room and even closed the gym for two days to make sure it would be quiet. Each of the
Looking back at the whole project, and if I were going to do it again (and I do want to do it again), I would be more specific with the teachers about what I expected in terms of their involvement and support. I might not try to include the whole school because the negativity that some kids brought to class was really detrimental. On the other hand, those were the kids I most **wanted** to participate!

*Debbie Diedrich*

**Copies of the CD Made in the Middle are available from Jefferson Middle School for US$10 plus postage (US$1 in the US; US$3 elsewhere):**

Jefferson Middle School  
1650 W. 22nd Avenue  
Eugene, OR 97402 USA  
Website: http://www.jefferson.land.edu

If somebody wants to talk about the project, they should contact me.  
Debbie Diedrich  
PO Box 12178, Eugene, OR 97440 USA  
<diedrich@efn.org>  
http://www.efn.org/~gordon_k/babes.html

*(Debbie Diedrich is a singer-songwriter from Eugene, Oregon. She has published two of her own CDs, as well as contributing to two CD releases from her group, Babes With Axes. She has worked on songwriting projects with young people through the University of Oregon as well as McKenzie elementary school in Blue River, Oregon.)*
PASTA NEWSLETTER
# 3 - JULY/AUGUST 1997

PASTA is the acronym of the Professional Association of Student Representative Council Teacher/Advisors. Founded in New South Wales, Australia, in February, 1995, our Association exists to support in whatever ways possible those who work with and support programs of student participation, representation and leadership.

SEE OUR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION AND APPLICATION FORM IN THIS ISSUE

'THE TEAM' ...... (OUR CURRENT PASTA COMMITTEE)
- Ralph Murray - President and CSC Co-ordinator (University of Newcastle, Ourimbah Campus)
- Charles L. Kingston - Vice President, National & International Affairs, SRC 2000 Conference Co-ordinator & Editorial Team (Bathurst High - now retired)
- Colin Ellis - Vice President, Primary & Editorial Team (Granville South Primary, Sydney)
  - Gae Regan - Vice President, Country (Richmond River High, Lismore)
  - Lucinda Bartram - Vice President, Metropolitan (Maroubra High, Sydney)
  - Bob Kijurina - Secretary (Robert Townson High, Campbeltown, NSW)
- Ken Page - Treasurer, Co-ordinator for 1998 USA Trip & Newsletter Liaison (Gorokan High, NSW)

Committee Members:
- Jean Bow - Editorial Team & Special Projects (Kogarah High, Sydney)
  - Michael Selway - NASPAC IV Co-ordinator & ACSA Liaison (Sydney Boys High)
  - Peter King - Internet Co-ordinator (Ungarie Central, NSW)

Vacant Positions:
- Vice President, Independent Schools
- NSW SRC Student Representative.

PASTA PRODUCES NASPAC IV
THE NATIONAL STUDENT PARTICIPATION CONFERENCE BRINGS STATES TO THE PARTY
The 4th National Student Participation Conference, recently held at the University of Sydney, brought together nearly 100 students and advisers from five states of Australia. PASTA, in association with Connect, has been proud to be the organiser of this significant event and congratulates the NASPAC IV Committee (especially its Chairperson, Michael Selway of Sydney Boys High) which made it possible. Well done guys and gals. A full report of the Conference is contained within this special double issue of Connect.

WE ALL WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR SUPPORT

University of Sydney
Australian Curriculum Studies Association
David Smith, Robyn Casworth & Joe McNamara (Faculty of Education, University of Sydney)
Les Eastcott - Vice-Chancellor/Director University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus
Kevin Gardner - Consultant, NSW Dept of Education
Dick Stratford - Principal, Sydney Boys High
Jan Gerard - Principal, Bathurst High
Jenny Young - Principal, Merrylands High
Granville South Public School

The St. George District SRC (NSW)
Stuart Hearne and the NSW SRC
Barbara Holborow - Former Children's Magistrate
John Scott - Senior Police Officer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission
DJ Ah Kee - Executive Officer and Delma Davison - Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
Exodus Foundation
Sue McIlrae and The Peer Support Foundation
Greyhound Bus Company
Village Cinemas
FUTURE DIRECTIONS
NATIONAL STUDENT STRUCTURES ON THE HORIZON

A future for the nation's young and active citizens may be a present reality if the action planning group looking at national structures at the recent student conference has its way.

At present New South Wales appears to be the only State in Australia with an officially sanctioned and government supported SRC State structure. The NSW SRC, consisting of 20 students selected at District level and rotating annually, has been going since 1992. This body, meant to be representative of students in government schools, is supplemented by the still longer running (since 1987) State SRC Conference, held each year in early August and catering to 120 students, originally based on the ten Regions of the state system, now altered to consist of 40 separate Districts.

While South Australia once had SCoSs, the State Council of Students, and Victoria had the SAP or Student Action Project, these ceased to function in their respective states six to ten years ago. Indeed there once was even a national body known as ANSS, the Australian Network of Secondary Students. It was supported by PEP (Participation and Equity Program) funding, existed in the mid-80s and drew student representatives from State or regional organisations, met regularly to consider policy and practical issues, and held a number of national conferences/workshops. These and other such historical models - successful for a time but not lasting - are outlined in the "SRC & JSC Resource File" published originally in the June 1996 issue of Connect.

The prospect of creating and sustaining a national network is something that PASTA as an association (as well as those present at the NASPAC Conference) is both well qualified and motivated to pursue. The large and enthusiastic Victorian contingent at NASPAC IV is returning to its home state ready and willing to attempt to get something started again there.

However, the combined states group working together at the Conference felt there was no need to wait until each state had its act together. A national structure - or at the very least a beginning with annual national conferences or student parliaments - could be just the catalyst needed to move even well beyond the current NSW model, which though better than most, still has a long way to go in achieving real representation and active student involvement in decision-making.

Thus, we may not even have to wait until Hobart in '99 but aim sooner - say, even Term 1 in 1998 - for a gathering in Canberra, perhaps even in the old Parliament House. Such would also be a fitter time and place to announce to the nation those selected to represent our country abroad in Derby, Kansas at the 63rd annual National Student Council Conference in the United States.

ACSA 1997 CONFERENCE
Negotiating the Curriculum: Whose Agenda?

STUDENTS AND PASTA SPEAK UP FOR THEMSELVES

The Australian Curriculum Studies Conference which followed NASPAC IV gave ample scope for students and PASTA Advisers to talk to some different audiences about student participation and leadership. We thank the organisers for this.

Students Anna Samson and Joriel Jiminez capably responded to the third day's Keynote Address by Professor Judyth Sachs from the University of Sydney. Her lucid talk 'The Challenge of School-University Partnerships: Walking the tightrope between theory and practice' was clearly translated by the students to cover student partnerships as well. The plenary session audience was duly impressed and welcomed this student input.

Likewise that of Bathurst High students Lisa Lloyd and Greg Arrow who took first positions at the final day's plenary panel reviewing the whole conference. Such an opportunity made up somewhat for the many who went shopping the previous day instead of listening to Greg and Lisa's paper on 'Students on School Councils'.

PASTA Vice-President (Primary) Colin Ellis, had a keen audience of primary people for his round table discussing the Granville South Public School student parliamentary system. Unfortunately, because of the present climate in NSW schools, he was unable to bring his students.

Joriel's roundtable on best practice in SRCs and the first day's roundtable on secondary school decision-making structures were both well attended, with valuable new contacts made.

The papers presented by Charles Kingston on 'The Leadership Curriculum' and Jeanne Bow and Anna Samson on 'Facilitating Collaborative Partnerships' are, like that of the Bathurst High students, available on request. They will also be published later in ACSA papers.

** NEXT ACSA CONFERENCE **
27 Sept - 1 Oct, 1999
PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
TASMANIA 1999

Surely one of the nicest things to happen at NASPAC IV was to meet the visitors from other states. Thanks to Ross Appleby and the students from Karingal Secondary College and other schools, and to Liesel Collings and her charges from Bairnsdale in Victoria, to the South Australian contingent of Pat Thomson, Stephen Roberts and Leah Ayles and to the group all the way from sunny Queensland.

Special enthusiasm from Tasmania came in the form of Kim Roberts and Jaimee Scaife from Rosny College in Hobart. Not only did they attend both NASPAC and the ACSA Conference following BUT they made the daring offer to host NASPAC V sometime in 1999. We can hardly wait to once again visit that beautiful state. Thanks 'Islanders'. You're on!!!
SRC AMERICAN TOUR 1998

THE RETURN TO EMERALD CITY

Derby, Kansas, US of A.

Well, that’s the venue for the 1998 NASC (National Association of Student Councils) National Conference - 27 June to 1 July. It’s the 63rd such annual event in the student council calendar in the Northern Hemisphere - a proud tradition begun in Oklahoma in 1931.

More to the point, we hope to be there. That is, some 50 secondary student leaders from all over Australia and a few of us lucky PASTA SRC Teacher Advisers. OZ returns to the land of Oz, for Kansas was the state from which the legendary Dorothy came.

Our very own ‘Dorothy’ didn’t travel to Kansas, but the also legendary Maree Marshall of West Wyalong, New South Wales did attend an NASC National Conference in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania in 1985, the United Nations decreed International Youth Year. Maree represented all of Australia, speaking in front of over 1500 students and advisers from all 50 states and Canada. She, plus her and our ‘wizard’, Charles Kingston, now of Bathurst and PASTA, are the only two we know of from down under to be at one of these events.

In addition to attending this Conference it is anticipated that we would be able to participate in a five-day National Student Leadership Camp, one of several held each northern summer at various venues across the USA and meet members of various state SRC Associations. To finish this once in a lifetime experience students will see the sights of Los Angeles including Disneyland, Knotts Berry Farm, Universal Studios and Tijuana, Mexico.

The leadership training received will put you in good stead both to assist SRC leadership in Australia as well as prepare you for your future leadership role in the wider community. You would be expected to pass on your experiences through any available venues to your school, district or State bodies. We are seeking those students who will be in Years 9, 10 or 11 in 1998 who are prepared to make this commitment.

The trip will cost you up to $5000. Interested students as representatives of their school, state or nation should consider fundraising and sponsorship to offset the cost of this exciting experience. The tour will be fully supervised by experienced SRC teacher/advisers. You will need to apply in writing giving reasons why you should be selected to represent your country on this tour. The deadline for such initial expressions of interest is the end of November, 1997.

For further details contact PASTA through our Treasurer and Trip Organiser:
Mr Ken Page, 12 Dyson Drive, Norah Head, NSW 2263.
Home phone: (02) 4396 6485 Fax: (02) 4393 1157

LEADERSHIP

DERBY
NASC Conference 1998

MAGIC

It’s now time to redress that balance and make our presence felt. YOU TOO can be part of our contingent. We will be leaving during the last week of June next year and returning around the middle of July. This 21 day tour will afford students the opportunity to travel with other student leaders from various states of Australia and attend the most important and largest conference of its kind with over 2000 American, Canadian and Caribbean SRC students and advisers.

YOUTH ’98 (16-19 APRIL, 1998)
UNIVERSITY of MELBOURNE

THEME: “Young people - Public Spaces; Public Voice”

For details and registration: contact Youth Research Centre: (03) 9344 9633 <yrc@edfac.unimelb.edu.au>

Connect 106-107:
INTERNATIONAL SRC CONFERENCE 2000
THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP WORLD COMES TO SYDNEY

PASTA is proposing this First International SRC Conference for late September/early October during the Sydney Olympic Year in 2000. The aim is to gather together as many overseas and national visitors with direct interest in student councils and other student leadership activities for four to five days of intense and varied participation activities. We are hoping more than 1000 students and advisers will attend.

Already there is great interest from our colleagues in the United States and Canada, where such conferences have been the norm for over 60 years. The trip to America next year (see accompanying article) is in part designed to give as many students and advisers as possible an idea of what can go into such conferences and how they can be organised.

The SRC 2000 STEERING COMMITTEE was formed as one of the action planning groups at the recent NASPAC IV Conference at Sydney University. The Committee is open to anyone who has ideas, time and enthusiasm. PASTA Vice-President for National and International Affairs, Charles Kingston and Bathurst High student Greg Arrow are presently the “central command headquarters”. They can be contacted at:

1 Gladstone Street, BATHURST NSW 2795
Ph: (02) 6332 2603 or Fax: (02) 6332 2302
e-mail address is <jarro01@postoffice.csu.edu.au>

For those in Victoria, you can also contact:
Liesel Collings and Bairnsdale Secondary College student
David Carter through these e-mail addresses:

<liesel@b150.aone.net.au> or
David’s at <VKing@b150.aone.net.au>

Other current NSW members of the Committee are
Adrian Graham - Bathurst (ex-student), Anna Samson - Penrith, Anna York - St. George Girls, Chris Parker - Ashfield Boys, Bee Schramm - Corrimal (near Wollongong), and Ralph Murray, President of PASTA - University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus.

Other Victorian members at present are Sarah Walker - Berwick SC (Melbourne), Stuart Ellis and Helen Smith - Karingal Park Secondary College. Mr. Kingston emphasises that more members are welcome.

Amongst the ideas for the Conference so far suggested are:
- Motivational speakers (eg Olympians, Paralympians, recognised SRC leaders),
- information giving,
- leadership skills workshops,
- international presentations - student leadership projects highlighted,
- embracing/using technology/internet and e-mail HQ for participants,
- ideas for international community projects,
- moral issues,
- market day and exhibits,
- formal dinner, day tours,
- performances (something uniquely Australian),
- Rock Eisteddfod or Schools Spectacular presentations,
- formal recognition of participation,
- rest days,
- guides for Olympics and Paralympics.

This is a BIG project and we welcome any ideas or assistance you may be able to share with us.

SRCs to OZ 2000

August-October 1997
MEMBERS NEWS

We welcome all new members of PASTA and are encouraged greatly by the many who 'signed up' during or after the National Student Participation Conference. We wish to remind both old and new members that membership fees are annual, as of the Annual General Meetings held in April. If you have not yet renewed your membership from last year, we ask you to do so as soon as possible.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST EDITION:
A big welcome to David Nebauer of Tasmania, to Liesel Collings (Victoria), Shani Reynolds (Sydney), Corey Irlam (Sydney), and everyone from Kogarah High School (Sydney).

FLASH
* Bathurst High School (Central West, NSW) has renewed its annual institutional membership until the conclusion of our International SRC Conference in October, 2000! Now that's long-term much appreciated support.
* Need Action Research Advice? Contact member Les Vozzo - Faculty of Education, C/o 4 Brigalow Ave Camden NSW 2570
* Les also has information on RAEEA - "Researchers Affecting Education Association" (Les has suggested perhaps a combined Conference in '98) and SETI (Scientific and Cultural Aspects of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence)
* National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre - Paul Dillon - 02 93989333
* Disabilities Council of NSW - Kevin Byrne - Suite 2102, 323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney (Phone: (02) 92867226 or Freecall: 1800 044548 or Fax: (02) 92112271)
* Our Newsletter could be more regular soon. As in this edition of Connect, we are hoping soon to amalgamate with Roger's esteemed publication and have a newsletter such as this out with each edition - six times a year apart from the double issues such as this and the next one. That's the good news. The not so good news is that it will necessitate a probable increase in ordinary member fees from the current $30 to $50 (or, get real, the extra cost of one standard main meal or two entrees!!!)
* At present, our Newsletter Editor-in-Chief is Ken Page. He's the one with the fancy computer anyway. The editorial team also consists of Charles, Jeanne and Colin. Contact any one of we four with contributions.

INTERSTATE CONTACTS:

THE VERY GOOD NEWS is that Ross and Kim have tentatively agreed to attempt to set up our first interstate PASTA District Branches.

Please contact them if you are in Victoria or Tasmania:
* Ross Appleby: Karingal Secondary College, Frankston, Vic 3199
* Kim Roberts: Rosny College - Bastick St., Rosny Park, Tas 7018 Ph: (03) 6244 9200 Fax: (03) 6294 9299

Other interstate contacts:
SA: To be advised
Qld: Robert Hughes - C/o North Street Sub-Centre, Cnr North and West Street, Rockhampton, Qld 4700
ACT: Peter Weddell - Department of Education - Canberra
AEU (Australian Education Union) - Sharan Burrow, President 120 Clarendon St., South Melbourne 3205 Ph: (03) 9254 1800 Fax: (03) 9254 1805

Citizenship and Civics contacts:
* Civics Education Group (National) c/o Dr John Hirst - La Trobe University, Victoria
* Sue Ferguson, Project Coordinator, Civics and Citizenship Education, Curriculum Corporation, St Nicholas Place, 141 Rathdowne St., Carlton, Victoria 3053

CSC AWARD

Be watching next issue for an outline of the new CSC Awards and how your organisation can be involved. Officially launched at the recent NASPAC IV Conference, this award is jointly sponsored by PASTA and Newcastle University, Central Coast Campus at Ourimbah.

| BRONZE | SILVER | GOLD |

Connect 106-107:
LETTERS TO PASTA

June, 1997

Dear PASTA

Received your package of goodies - lots of interesting reading. Unfortunately I won't be able to make NASPAC due to other commitments - please give my apologies plus a hello to those I know! The program looks very interesting and I'm sure will be a great success. . . . Hope to catch up with you sometime.

Regards,

Gae Regan

Editors' Note: Gae is our current Vice-President for Country Affairs and works at Richmond River High in Lismore, NSW. She has been involved for many years in both regional and local SRC activities and attended numerous state SRC Conferences.

September, 1996

Dear PASTA

. . . I think it's time - if you really want to shake things up - to attack the powers that be with a different presentation. Rather than only talking “leadership” we/you need to make school timetables more flexible to give room for all ‘extra’ activities that take students out of classes they need to be in. I remember that my friends doing 3 Unit Art were out of class just as much as I was, if not more. For Years 10 - 12 initially, timetables should be structured more like university lectures. In conjunction with timetable changes should come changes to curriculum and lesson plans so that each lecture has relevance . . . Time for “leadership” or other subjects comes between regular lectures. Maybe then leadership courses can be run at various times (ie flexible). PASTA sounds really good. In a lot of schools the SRC is only as strong as its teacher/adviser. Many SRCs die out because of apathetic teacher/advisers. If PASTA can inspire and encourage teachers to be positive forces for their SRCs it’s got to be worthwhile . . . I attribute my success to the leadership activities I have done. I have confidence to meet clients, sort out problems, organise my boss, etc; because I have been through something similar with SRC. I am happy to help . . . I owe future students the avenues to experience what I did . . .

Regards,

Jackie Wood

Editors' Note: Jackie was a dedicated and active SRC Representative at Kelso High in Bathurst in the early 1990s. She extended her skills at various district, regional and state student leadership conferences. She was a key student staff member at the 1982 Student Future Conference in Bathurst sponsored by the National Schools Network. From 1991 through 1993 Jackie was one of the main students involved in getting the NSW SRC up and running and served two years as Western Region Representative. She is now working as Assistant to one of the main executives in a Sydney legal firm.

May, 1997

Dear PASTA

. . . My role here involves fighting the good fight in an attempt to avert the economic and social decline of a once great regional area of Tassie . . . I work with community groups, individuals, small business and large corporations on projects which create jobs, retain services (or introduce new ones), and promote the region to potential new investors and visitors . . . After receiving your letter . . . I was reflecting on the RASG, Youth Forum, IYY days and realised that many of the skills I learnt during these times I utilise nearly every day in my role as an economic development practitioner. I rarely leave home without my butchers paper and pens. I recalled being called into [the principal’s] office at one stage and being counselled about the amount of time my extra curricular activities were taking me out of class . . . In making my case, I suggested that what I was learning through these activities was of far more value to me than Physics or Chemistry would ever be, and I think I was right . . . Thanks for the information about PASTA and the CSC. Congratulations for remaining committed to the cause so strongly for so long. As we students come and go, you and your colleagues have remained true to the cause . . . Please find enclosed my membership form for PASTA. I would value being included as a supporter of the organisation.

Warm fuzzies to all,

David Nebauer

Editors' Note: David was a dedicated, confident and very active SRC Representative at Willyama High in Broken Hill in the mid 1980s. He utilised his skills at various district, regional and state student leadership conferences. David was a key student staff member of the IYY (International Youth Year) State Steering Committee in 1985. He was also on the Youth Forum (NSW) Management Committee, Publicity Officer (and heaps of other things) for RASG and an early student presenter at the 1987 ACSA Conference at Macquarie University in Sydney. We welcome David as a valued and valuable member of PASTA.
What does membership or PASTA offer you?

Membership Form

Please check your credit card number before sending this form.

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Credit Card

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Please indicate your credit card for the amount of $_________

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If you choose a cheque for $__________

[ ] [ ]

Complementary $15

[ ] [ ]

Contribution $20

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Student $15

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Countries $30

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Other (please specify)

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NSW Department of School Education

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Employer Authority

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I wish to apply to renew my membership for the year ending 30th June 1999.

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For the year ending 30th June, 1999

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Signature

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NSW 2040
Rosny College, Hobart, Tasmania

Our SRC - and Hearing About Others!

Rosny College in Hobart, Tasmania, is a year 11-12 college of about 1200 full-time students. The SRC at Rosny is going particularly well this year, as we found out after sending representatives to a state gathering of SRCs held in June this year. There they discussed the sorts of things they have achieved in their various schools and the structure and running of their own SRCs. It was really encouraging for us to compare how we run things with how the other schools do, and to share ideas with them, as well as list all of this year’s achievements and plans. It is often very easy to become involved in your own SRC structures and not see what you are doing as anything special or out of the ordinary, as we have found. Although there is room for improvement, we realised we were doing better than we thought.

Rosny College SRC

Rosny’s SRC consists of 40 members, six of whom are elected executive members. These six positions (co-presidents, co-secretaries, vice-president and treasurer) were available to anyone at the start of the year who was willing to put themselves forward and campaign for the elections, held on 10th March. These elections were set up by the electoral office, however it wasn’t compulsory for students to vote. Those who didn’t get in were still able to be involved with the SRC, along with any other students, because no-one is excluded from being a member, as the SRC is a recognised 50-hour course labelled ‘Club Administration’.

The SRC is made up of seven sub-committees, which allow students to be involved in whichever areas they are interested in. They are as follows:
- community service committee;
- environment committee;
- social committee;
- student support committee;
- publicity committee;
- sport committee;
- finance committee.

Each committee has co-chairs, with a minimum of four other students and each (except the finance committee) begins the year with a budget of $300 and the option to apply for extra funding if needed. This money is gained from the student body who are each charged an extra $2 on the book levies at the beginning of the year, giving us a budget of $2400.

Committee meetings are held regularly, either weekly or fortnightly, depending on the committee and what they are doing at the time, and the executive meetings are held every three weeks and are open to any SRC members. The president runs the executive meetings, with the support of Kim Roberts, as our student adviser. At the present time, Kim is the only staff member involved in the SRC, however in the future, we are aiming to have staff support for each individual committee in order to increase the skills available to us and to involve more staff in our decisions.

At these meetings, we discuss future events and decisions to be made and each committee gives a short report to the group about each of their individual activities. We follow formal committee procedure because often we have more than 25 students at the meeting.

Whenever needed, a student assembly will be called to let the rest of the student body know of relevant events, and in these assemblies a report is given from each of the committees as well.

So far this year, our SRC has done the following things:
- purchased an electronic scoreboard for the gymnasium;
- had regular lunch-time bands playing in the common room;
- organised and held a ‘Fun Olympics’ day;
- organised for the end of year formal celebration;
- investigated our toxic waste disposal and paper recycling;
- rallied to oppose HECS fees rise - 30% of the protesters were Rosny students;
- run the 40-Hour Famine;
- had a mural in the common room painted;
- held four assemblies.

Our future plans include:
- reunion of SRC members;
- other community service fundraisers - Green-up Clean-up Day, Jump Rope for Heart, PJ Day, Daggy Dress Day, Jeans for Genes;
- look into SRC network at district and state levels, and greater participation at local council; look into curriculum delivery and staff mentoring for sub-committees.

So far this year we have also had two training evenings for the SRC, where we had guest speakers come and teach us about leadership, organisation, public speaking etc, which have been very worthwhile.

We also have student representation on the following staff committees:
- curriculum;
- resources;
- publicity and public relations;
- College Council;
- staff meeting;
- canteen.
Sydney Conferences

The SRC also paid for me to attend both the NASPAC and the ACSA conferences in Sydney as their representative, and in fact the only student representative from Tasmania. Before attending, I'd heard very little about either organisation, but have returned with a fountain of knowledge (and 81 pages of notes).

I personally found the NASPAC conference really encouraging and inspiring for a number of reasons.

First, it was a really valuable time of interaction with other students who are obviously interested in the same areas of SRCs and student participation in schools as I was. Often in Tasmania, we feel very isolated and a little cut-off from what is happening on the 'mainland', so it was great to get together with other students from around Australia and share our different ideas and ways of doing things. From these discussions, both Kim and I realised how well off we are in Tasmania in the areas of student participation and involvement in the curriculum. It seemed to us that although we may not be as large as some of the other states, or have the same strength of networks between schools and SRCs, we appear to be a step ahead when it comes to student input and voice. In Tasmania, we are quite free as students to voice our concerns and be a part of what is being decided concerning our future. The students' opinions are valued and taken into consideration, whereas in some of the other states, there appears to be a lot of tokenism, mainly due to government regulations.

I was also encouraged by the student leadership taken, particularly at the NASPAC conference. As students, we often aren't given a lot of opportunity to run conferences or hold forums, and take the initiative to get together with other students and have discussions and debates. This really inspired me to see what can actually be done when students got together with fairly similar goals and aims. These discussions were really worthwhile because it allowed me to see things from other perspectives, which I perhaps hadn't thought of.

Secondly, I also learnt a lot from the guest speakers who spoke to us about their field of work. It was once again encouraging to see and know that adults valued student input and were working to see us reach our full potential.

The ACSA conference was also very worthwhile, and even though it was directed more at adults - teachers, parents and educational reformers etc - I still learnt a lot and found it a real eye-opener as to how teachers feel and how schools are run. It is very easy, as a student, to cruise through schools without giving a second thought to the curriculum and the behind-the-scenes work that goes into the smooth running of a classroom, so this was valuable for me as a student. I also found it great to discuss how we feel as students on a number of issues regarding the curriculum and its delivery, not only with other students, but also with those attending the ACSA conference, and to compare how we see things.

So overall I found my trip to Sydney very worthwhile and only wish more students from not only Rosny College but also from the other schools in Tasmania, could have attended.

Jaimee Scarfe
Rosny College
PO Box 424, Rosny Park 7018
A Tasmanian Perspective on Student Participation

The recent fourth National Student Participation Conference (NASPAC 4) held at Sydney University was a revelation for some and a confirmation for others. For some, it revealed the fact that young people everywhere are asking the same questions. For others, it confirmed the fact that they are still ignored - albeit politely.

Tasmania is no exception. However, having attended the NASPAC conference, we are convinced that Tasmania is at the crossroads regarding student participation, and needs to consider carefully the direction it takes. Students and educators need to approach the issue with an appreciation of what could be achieved or lost.

As a teacher at the conference, I was challenged by students' perceptions of what is real and what is preface. As educators, we must ask ourselves the question: Are we for real? Our students are certainly asking this question of us. For too many years, token gestures and condescending rhetoric have been the response to student pleas to be included in the decision-making process. Young leaders at the conference were of the view that when students are given a genuine voice, they will generally respond with respect and value the collaborative relationships that develop.

It was stimulating to attend a conference organised and run by students. The organisation was loose at times, but the enthusiasm and excitement over-riding the program was refreshing. Reflecting on the NASPAC conference, I couldn't help comparing it with the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) conference that followed. In many ways it was the antithesis of NASPAC - but then it should have been! The organisers probably had ten years more formal education and twenty to thirty years more experience. I make this point because I often hear criticism of young people for not being well organised, poorly dressed and unaware of time. This criticism is only fair when students have been given plenty of time to develop skills and to practise those skills frequently. However, our present curriculum does not allow students to learn and practise skills integral to leadership. Charles Kingston's (1997) paper on 'The Leadership Curriculum', written for the ACSA Conference brings attention to the fact that most of what students learn about leadership is categorised as extra-curricular by educators. We expect students, even the most gifted, to simply acquire leadership skills by some osmotic process. When they do not, we are surprised and even critical. It is therefore encouraging to know that ACSA is focusing more on student participation in the decisions made regarding curriculum construction and delivery.

Educators need to take the lead and establish collaborative relationships with students. We need to give them our ears and they need to feel their opinions are valued. Through the years, phrases such as 'develop to their full potential', have almost become cliches. They are certainly part of the rhetoric that has given lip service only to creating a curriculum that will provide opportunity for 'full potential' to be reached. While students feel on the outer, with little chance of practising leadership skills or of participating in the decision-making process, they can never fully develop their potential.

Rosny College in Hobart has made significant moves to address these issues. The SRC, a body of 40 students, has one or more representatives on almost every college committee. In a recent survey of students serving on these committees, this is what they had to say:

"Staff members respected and valued our opinions and we did theirs.... At first we were a bit embarrassed about speaking but now we are quite comfortable about sharing our views.... We were asked to ... assist ... in designing a survey (to investigate A courses) which has worked out well."  
(Nicola and Leanne - Curriculum Committee)

"I've found my experience to be very rewarding. Already I have been assigned many responsibilities and on most occasions given the opportunity to be heard. The input I give is received and valued seriously, but more importantly I know that I am being listened to: as a result I look forward to each meeting excitedly."  
(Kirstin - Transition and Liaison Committee)

"I think teachers are beginning to realise there is some value in students speaking for students. Generally there is equal treatment and I believe our input is valued, even though teachers still think they know best."  
(Brook - Harassment Committee)

"Being on a staff committee gives me a chance to see another side of school life. It enables me to interact with the school staff in a respectful environment. I am able to voice my opinions and bring them to an area where they might be heard and consequently be a help to the student community."  
(David - Harassment Committee)

"I've enjoyed my time with the staff committee. I think it is important to have a student on the committee who will speak up because it can be a bit daunting. I'm given plenty of opportunity to have an impact and I believe my views are valued by the others on the committee."  
(Rowan - Resource Committee)
These statements indicate that Rosny staff are developing collaborative relationships with students and that those relationships are valued. We need to continue to build and complete the paradigm shift from one of student exclusion from decision making and a devaluing of leadership skills by the ‘extra- curricular’ tag, to one of student inclusion in the decision making and a valuing of leadership skills by a redefining of the curriculum. Rosny is making good progress.

One of the highlights of the NASPAC conference for me, was to listen to Barbara Holborow, the former NSW Children’s Magistrate and now successful author. She disagreed that youth are our future. She believes they are our now! Barbara is convinced that young people must initiate change in areas that affect them most. She raised many questions, but the most significant for educators was: Why do we tell young people how they have to change, without ever listening to them? Of course this was a major issue for NASPAC students.

One of the organisers, Anna Samson, was a respondent to a paper delivered at the ACSA conference. In her speech, she identified changes that have occurred as a result of listening to young people. The new approach to drug education (harm minimisation) is a good example. Anna was careful to point out that although there is much evidence to suggest that developing collaborative relationships is the best way to proceed, there is still much tokenism and a fear by teachers of losing control.

We returned from the NASPAC and ACSA conferences with a greater appreciation for what we have at Rosny College, and a little more tolerance for our state government. The Tasmanian government is encouraging students to have a voice. At a student forum recently, the Hon Sue Napier MHA, Minister for Education and Vocational Training, expressed the view that there should be student representation on the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board (TASSAB). This view is also supported by the present Board chairman. We hope that student representation on the Board will influence the directions that curriculum construction, delivery and definition take in Tasmania. Maybe this is a naive view, but then to believe exclusion and turning a deaf ear to students’ needs and protests is the answer, might not be naive but is extremely foolish.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question asked of us by many students: Are you for real? This question becomes particularly relevant in the context of the federal government’s push to introduce the teaching of citizenship into Australian schools. Many teachers would not disagree with the principle of building a stronger identity for young people. However, students at the NASPAC conference would agree wholeheartedly with Peter Carey (1996) who says: “If civics and citizenship education is to be successful, students need to be placed in an active role, engaging them with the real world. Active participation, he says, “has the potential to facilitate the development of active and informed citizenship with knowledge, skills and attitudes, and processes to behave ethically, to question and challenge injustice and to participate as equals.” If we are for real, then we should be listening carefully, and creating a curriculum and school environment that allows and encourages active participation by students in the decisions that affect their education and future.

Kim Roberts
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Recommendations for a Statewide Student Support Services Office in Tasmania

Senior Secondary students have been encouraged to take up active citizenship as part of the democratic process. They were warned, however, against token representation and that genuine representation would take time and commitment on their part. Students from independent, Catholic, and State senior secondary colleges in Hobart were given the advice by three of Tasmania’s parliamentary leaders- Minister for Education, Mrs Sue Napier, representing the Premier, Mr. Tony Rundle; the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Jim Bacon and the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens, Mrs Christine Milne - at a forum organised by the Student Leadership Team of Guilford Young College in association with doctoral candidate, Mr Peter Carey and Student Co-ordinator Mr Brian Marshall.

The forum was to seek parliamentary support for the establishment of a statewide student support services office that would lead to training and a greater say in student affairs at government level.

Each of the leaders spoke for about 10 minutes before questions were taken from the floor.

Student leaders and teachers from St. Mary’s College, Elizabeth College, Rosny College, Claremont Community College, The Hutchins School, Hobart College, The Friends School, Fahan School, St Michael’s Collegiate College and both campuses of Guilford Young College participated.

While each of the speakers congratulated the students on the proposal, their support was qualified.

Mrs Napier said she wondered if existing services could be better utilised or if a new structure would be needed. Mrs Milne said she would like to see much more regional networking as a test of calibre and commitment. Mr Bacon said that if it were to be real representation, it needed support. An open cheque book could not be provided but the proposal was asking only for bare necessities.

Underpinning the proposal is greater student participation in colleges. "Fundamental elements of successful student participation in governance are information, communication and coordination," the proposal said. "The three functions require a co-ordinated development and implementation. A new infrastructure instituted at the statewide level is needed that provides a more cohesive and systematic way of developing and sustaining student participation in system wide and local governance."

It was obvious from questions, and later a show of hands, that most of the students were not aware of structures already in place, especially YNOT, a non-government youth network designed to make the contact between young people and service providers especially geared to the young. One of its functions was to be open to new participation structures which, the speakers agreed, the forum was asking for. Mrs Milne said she was excited that student activism was alive and well and praised the students for their courage and vision.

She was critical of adults making decisions on serious youth issues including youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and violence, without speaking with the young.

"Life is about choices," she said. "You can go with the flow or you can stand up and be counted."

Mr Carey, who is undertaking doctoral studies in Social, Cultural and Administrative Studies at Charles Sturt University, said he was pleased with the outcome of the forum. "Student representation on TASSAB working committees, the University Council and the Tasmanian Education Council was given the unanimous support of the three speakers. The Student Leadership Team hopes to coordinate on-going meetings with other student leaders in Southern Tasmania in order to develop action plans for the development of an effective network process and the establishment of a student support service office suggested in the proposals."

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Addressing Issues in Student Participation: Workplace Analysis and a Written Account of the Development of Improved Student Participation Pathways and Practices

This article presents a written account of the development of improved student participation pathways and practices at Guilford Young College in an attempt to address issues in student participation. A workplace analysis by the author examines the present constraints to and possibilities for improved student participation at the College.

Introduction

The initial phase of this participatory study has centred on discovering the nature of current student feelings and perceptions about Guilford Young College, its climate and practices, particularly in reference to the participation of students in governance.

Before we begin planning to improve an educational situation Kennis and McTaggart (1988) suggest:

we must have a fairly clear understanding of what we are doing now; we must also have some understanding of our own (and others) educational values; we must know something about the way our educational work fits into the wider context of schooling and society; we must have some general historical understanding and some historical self-understanding of schools and schooling (Kennis and McTaggart 1988 : 54-55).

These suggestions should assist the action research team with the kinds of questions posed as we define our own 'thematic concern'.

The Research Setting:

Guilford Young College, Barrack Street Campus

Guilford Young College is conducted under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Hobart and the Leaders of the five participating Religious Congregations.

The Governing Council consists of:

* The Archbishop of Hobart (or his representative),
* The Director of Education.

The College Board is established under the Governing Council. It formulates policies for the conduct of the College, in consultation with the Principal, staff, parents, students and friends of the College. The Principal is appointed by the Governing Council, and is responsible to the members for the functioning of the College as a faith community, as well as establishing and supervising the pastoral and educational standards and practice. Each Campus has a Dean who is responsible along with the Principal for the conduct of the Campus. The Registrar is responsible for the financial administration of the College.

Guilford Young College was established in accordance with the doctrines, laws and educational ethos of the Catholic Church. It is therefore concerned with the development of the student within this context.

The College, sharing in the mission of the Church, seeks to make the Gospel central to all its activities. Its reflective attitude finds expression in compassion and the pursuit of justice in the spirit of Jesus (Guilford Young College Handbook 1997).

Students belonging to other faiths and denominations are accepted on the understanding that they will attend and show respect for Catholic Liturgies and support the ethos of the College. Staff members must possess personal and professional qualities which enable them to make a positive contribution to the life of the College, by living out and promoting 'the teachings of Jesus Christ, and challenging values which are contrary to those of the Gospel'.

The College seeks to work with parents in passing on the important values and life skills which help develop the whole person. Participation of parents in all aspects of the life of the College seems to be encouraged. Lines of communication include newsletters, reports, organised parent teacher meetings and interviews. Parents may request personal interviews with tutors, subject teachers, the Dean or the Principal. A Parents and Friends Association is seen by the College as an ideal way for all parents to participate in the life of the college community.

College structures seem to reflect the collaborative model in the formation of teams which combine the talents of the members in order to meet the complex educational and spiritual needs of the college community. The team approach is said to bring together the wisdom and experience of people who support and encourage each other in their ministry and is again reflected in the approach to leadership and in participation in committees within the student and parent bodies.

The Collaborative Leadership in the College aims to identify, realise, utilize and unify the gifts of all those in the College community. The Principal works closely with the Deans who are charged with the organization of their respective campuses and the welfare of those who make up the local community. Teacher Administrators and Co-ordinators meet with these and exercise professional and pastoral care in their areas of responsibility (Guilford Young College Handbook 1997).

Students are encouraged to develop participation and leadership skills and knowledge through the Student Leadership Team and its staff-student committees. All Year 11 and 12 students of the Guilford Young College community are encouraged to participate in its committees. Six staff-student committees were established in 1997 at each campus. These committees consist of two student leaders from the Student Leadership Team, a staff representative and students from both the Year 11 and 12 student body. It is an expectation of the College Ministry and Curriculum Leadership Teams that the committee structure will facilitate and support improved student participation levels at Guilford Young College.

They also hope the staff-student committees will benefit the Year 11 students by giving them the process, experience and time frame to acquire the necessary leadership skills and knowledge needed to seek membership of the Student Leadership Team in 1998. The committees established were:

1. Environment

The role of the Environment committee is to ensure that the college environment is as comfortable and as 'user friendly' as possible. It is hoped this could be achieved through ensuring adequate and clean facilities are available at each campus for all members of the college community.

2. Communication

The role of the Communication committee is to promote awareness of college activities, through the various channels, to generate school spirit. The committee hopes to provide the necessary links.
between the student body, the student leaders and the teaching staff.

3. Sport

The role of the Sports committee is to provide opportunities for participation in a wide range of sporting activities, both rostered and social, promoting team work and a sense of involvement within the school community.

4. Charities and Fundraising

The role of this committee is to:

(a) raise and manage funds for the benefit of the students and their activities throughout the year,
(b) support selected charities and organisations, and
(c) raise funds for charitable works throughout the year.

5. Health

The role of the Health committee is to raise awareness of, to promote, and to encourage healthy lifestyle choices. This committee works in conjunction with the health nurse and counsellors. Members of this committee keep all issues dealt with as confidential.

6. Pastoral Care

The role of the Pastoral Care committee is to promote a community spirit within the College; to develop a system of care and concern for students, especially those who may be left on the outer; to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to be involved in the College; to build on the traditions of the past and to build on the Guilford Young College identity.

The Action Research Team Established

I wrote to the Principal, Sister Pamela Davis on the 2nd September 1996 asking for her permission to undertake my research task for the Doctorate of Education at Guilford Young College. I met Sister Pamela and her Deans (Mr. Chris Smith, Dean Barrack Street Campus and Mrs. Bobby Court, Bowden Street Campus) on the 14th October 1996. Approval was given to proceed in 1997 at the Barrack Street Campus. The Action Research Team was to consist of the twelve student Life Leaders Team (6 boys and 6 girls) and their Year 11/12 staff leadership committees from the Barrack Street campus. Mr. Chris Smith, Dean of the Barrack Street campus, appointed Mr. Brian Marshall (a Student Co-ordinator) as liaison person for the research study.

At the first meeting with the Leadership Team a decision was made to meet on a Wednesday, fortnightly, before school, at 7.30 am in the St. Virgil’s room of the Guilford Young administration building.

This seemed the only suitable time available because of the students’ heavy work load and commitments. At this meeting the research purpose, its action research approach and the time schedule were explained.

Various consent forms and a Plain language statement of the research study were distributed for parents and students to read and sign if they wished to participate in the proposal. A student survey was circulated with a request to each participant that they complete the survey before the next meeting. The survey would give me a better understanding of:

(a) what student participation means to the students, and
(b) what structures were presently available to them, if they wished to actively participate in the college community.

I hoped this information would help me to:

(c) ascertain whether students considered the existing structures/processes were effective, and
(d) give students an opportunity to indicate new structures or processes that they thought might enable greater student participation levels at the college to flourish.

The Action Research approach offers a democratic sharing of ideas and decisions by all participants. It is a process that relies on consultation and collaboration to reach consensus when making decisions. To ensure that the rhetoric is realised, that the theory is translated in practice, there are several integral ingredients of this management process - active participation by a broad range of people and time is required for effective dialogue. Time must be built into the process - time to allow for all the participants to express their views, time for them to reflect and critically appraise all the available information before reaching a final decision. Time well spent will, in the long term, save time. With involvement and practice the process will become more efficient, which in the long term, is more likely to promote individual and collective fulfillment. Some institutions and organisations of our society have, for pragmatic reasons, adopted the idea of management (action research) approach (the Employee Involvement Program).

The Thematic Concern: (The Initial Reflection)

Guilford Young College is now three years old. Its existence was born out of the restructuring process of Catholic education in Southern Tasmania. Previously students attended Catholic schools or colleges from Prep to Year 12. Guilford Young College is now the only senior Catholic secondary college in Southern Tasmania. St. Mary’s College Hobart, retained its senior classes. St. Mary’s College community decided it did not wish to be part of the restructuring process at this stage. It considered it had the resources and student numbers to offer a wide range of subject choices for those students attending its Year 11 and 12.

Participation levels have been pleasing at Guilford Young College in its first three years, but the College Leadership Team has expressed a wish to improve the student participation levels in all areas of College life. The formation of the Year 11 and 12 staff-student committees is seen as one way to improve student participation levels at the College and the leadership skills of the Year 11 students seeking to nominate for the Student Leadership Team in Year 12. At present the two student Campus Leaders (Head Boy and Head Girl) and the Student Leadership Team have direct access to the Principal and the Deans at each campus. They also have a staff representative at each campus to assist them. Mr. Brian Marshall is the staff representative of the Barrack Street campus as well as a campus Student Co-ordinator.

At our second meeting we collated the proposed schedule of ideas and strategies which the Student Leadership Team might seek to implement on approval from the Dean. Many of the ideas and strategies were contained in the student surveys given back to me before the meeting. Others were ideas and strategies taken from past experience as Director of Student Support Services at the Hutchins School, Hobart. Some were contained in an article published in Connect (the journal which advocates on student participation issues) or have been suggested and implemented by other student bodies throughout Australia. A definition of the level of student participation desired and (outcomes) was also discussed. I put forward the following proposal for consideration.

The proposal sought to recommend to the Student Leadership Team that they accept and put forward to the Principal and her Deans approval for the following statement of student participation and student communication pathways to be included in the 1998 College Prospectus.

ugust-October 1997

35
Reconnaissance Product

There are two significant factors that have constantly re-emerged in my discussions with teachers and students at the College that they believe will affect the degree to which participation can be developed: the skills of the participants, and the climate in which they are operating. They see the need to assist teachers, parents and students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of them to actively participate in their school, and provide them with a supportive school climate so that this participation is realised. Many teachers at Guilford Young see dialogue as the essence of schools with a supportive school climate. Dialogue, they suggest, provides the opportunity for all the various participants to debate and reach agreement on educational values and objectives.

Such schools, it was suggested, depend on ‘an atmosphere of mutual respect’ and ‘a re-education process which preserves self-esteem’. In discussion with students and teachers they specify some characteristics to look for:

1. Goals
Have students, parents and teachers participated in the formation of school policy? Do those goals include such statements as: ‘Respect is the basis of any relationship ... everyone; parents, students and teachers have a contribution to make. It is the job of the school to recognise this and work in an atmosphere of mutual respect.’

2. Communication
Is there adequate communication between teachers and teachers, between teachers and administrators, between teachers and students, and the school and its community? ‘Lack of information is an important barrier to overcome. Unless administrators have open channels of communication it can be very difficult for teachers to find out just what is happening in a school. How much more difficult is it for parents and students to obtain accurate, relevant and concise information?’ To the students, schools might be regarded as relatively ‘open’ or ‘closed’, depending on the degree their communication systems allow for student input. In a very open school with a supportive climate student input could be:

- communicated by the route that would be most immediate and direct for the student,
- communicated to any member of the school staff,
- critical of the school as well as supportive, and
- expected to have some actual impact on the school other than a symbolic response.

3. Use of Resources
What attempts are there to assess the resources available to the whole school community including students? Do individuals and groups within the school feel inter-dependent on each other? No one person or group should have control. Not only will people be more committed to decisions they have participated in making, but the task of decision-making is too complex for any one person and must be a group function.

4. Morale
Do people want to stay? ‘There has to be a sense of well-being and satisfaction.’ Schools with qualities of trust and openness tend to create an environment conducive to co-operative planning.

5. Innovation
Is there room to grow, develop and change? ‘Policies should be subject to constant revision and adjustment to changing circumstances and new knowledge.’

6. Problem Solving
How are problems dealt with? ‘Problems will always arise, but in an open school the problems are coped with and solved with minimal energy. Conflicts are not avoided but treated as an indication that change may be needed.’

Possibilities and Proposals

Phase two of the participatory study, informed by the literature review, explores how these students and teachers can develop the forms and content of exchange, observe and measure the level of participation (its outcomes and judgements about them), and assess their impact on the level of student participation.

In ‘practical’ action research, outside facilitators help action research group participants to articulate their own concerns, plan strategic action for change, monitor the problems and effects of changes, and reflect on the value and consequences of the changes achieved. Practical action research may be thought of as a stepping stone to ‘emancipatory’ action research, as the facilitator’s role of sounding-board and guide to the process of self-reflective practice is later taken over by the participants themselves (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 203).

This seems the case at present with the Guilford Young Action Research Team. Students lack the understanding and experience in the process of self-reflective practice compounded by students being constrained by time, heavily involved in day to day college studies and curriculum activities.
I am hopeful, given time and experience, the students involved in the action research study will become competent reflective practitioners capable of emancipating themselves and critically examining workplace practices. At present the process of 'practical action research' has articulated the following proposals for action planning and change.

Proposal 1: Lifting the profile of the Student Leadership Team

Proposal one included:
1. Permission to contribute a written report in the monthly College Newsletter, and
2. Run and organise student based assemblies.

The action research team felt that acceptance of proposal one would assist the Student Leadership Team lift its profile within the College community. Results would include:
- contributions would be seen to be valued by that community,
- participation in school affairs would be seen by the student body to be taken seriously by the college administration,
- ideas and successful contributions could be communicated in order to encourage wider student participation. Research has shown that increased dialogue and a supportive school environment are key factors in increased participation.

At present the College Newsletter contains, in part, a message to the parent and student community from the Principal and the Deans of the two campuses. The Action Research Team felt that it was important that the Student Leadership Team should also be allowed to provide a monthly message. As the official representatives of the student body, the team felt the Student Leadership Team had a right to contribute to the newsletter. The team also felt that unless the Student Leadership Team was seen to be respected for its contribution to the college community and taken seriously by the college administration it could not expect to be taken seriously by the student body or successful in encouraging student participation. In other words, representation should be seen to be real not token.

It was the belief of the Action Research Team that if the Student Leadership Team were to successfully foster improved student participation, the student leaders must have a higher profile and have the means to communicate their ideas and successful contributions. Student administered assemblies would further enhance the Student Leadership team's profile.

Approval to contribute a written report in the monthly College Newsletter and administer student based assemblies was given to the Student Leadership Team by Mr. Chris Smith.

Proposal 2: Recommendations for acceptance to the College Leadership Team

1. A statement of student participation and student communication pathways to be included in the 1998 College Prospectus. This proposal includes the establishment of a student support team and office with four specific aims and 14 recommendations that we considered would enhance the process of student participation.

The Campus Leaders, Sarah Ramsdale and Sean Smees met with the Dean Barrack Street Campus, Mr. Chris Smith and the Principal, Sister Pam Davis, to present the action research team's proposal. Representation on the various committees of the Board (Planning and Strategies, Building, Publicity and Policy) was approved except for student representation on the Finance Committee. The Principal considered that student access to this committee was inappropriate because of the need for confidentiality, principally relating to sensitive family financial information. The students were happy with this explanation. At the meeting it was also decided that initially, only students from the Student Leadership Team would sit on Board committees. Student membership on the committees would be open to the general student body later in the year. At this time, students could nominate for a position on the committees. It was agreed that elections would be conducted by the Student Leadership Team and the successful students invited to participate. A letter from the two Campus Leaders to the student body was enclosed with the students' Interim Reports and states:

In the not too distant future it may be possible for some students to be involved in some of the College Board committees, such as Planning and Building...

New opportunities are opening for us, as young adults, to become involved in the running of our College. Our campus committees are a fore-runner of what is to come: please accept this invitation now (S. Ramsdale and S. Smees 7 April 1997).

2. Representation on the college Curriculum and Ministry Team was opened to discussion. It was the opinion of the Student Co-ordinator, Mr. Brian Marshall, that they could be confident of a positive response from the Curriculum Coordinator, Mrs. Viv. Hale, and the Coordinator of the Ministry Team, Mrs. Eve Prendergast. Sean Smees was asked by the action research team to write letters seeking approval to join the Curriculum and Ministry Teams before the next meeting. Approval has since been given to join the Ministry Team. Membership to the Curriculum Team has yet to be approved.

The main concern expressed by the Curriculum Co-ordinator and her Subject Co-ordinators was the unnecessary subject of students to staff differences on curriculum issues. This was considered by the Curriculum Team as undesirable. Further discussion with Mrs. Hale, the staff-student advocate (Mr. Brian Marshall) and student leader Mr. Sean Smees has been productive. We must remember that at school students will be faced with different values: teacher values, parental values, peer group values and those of their community.

When they leave school, students will continue to be subjected to all sorts of irrational forces. What the school can do is to make the student fully aware of the diversity of opinion, to help the student reflect on this diversity and to become capable of assessing for themselves and...
deciding for themselves what is true or false, right or wrong. This can be done by independent judgement and active participation, not guarded protectionism. Teachers are often concerned to avoid the charge of subtle indoctrination. This ceases to be so when independent judgement and active student participation is encouraged. In other words, it is a contradiction in terms to say that a student is both autonomous and indoctrinated.

3. In order to enact recommendation 13 and 14 of proposal 2, the Action Research Team sought the permission of the Dean to organise a forum entitled "Recommendations for a Statewide Student Support Services Office" between three prominent community leaders and a member of the College Student Leadership Team. The community leaders invited to participate were the Premier of Tasmania, the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Tasmanian Greens Party. June 25th 1997 was the date accepted by the guests for the forum.

The Forum was a great success. Each of the speakers congratulated the students on the proposal. Senior Secondary students were encouraged to take up active citizenship as part of the democratic process. They were warned, however, against token representation and that genuine representation would take time and commitment on their part.

Students from Independent, Catholic, and State senior secondary colleges in Hobart were given the advice by three of Tasmania’s parliamentary leaders: Minister for Education, Mrs Sue Napier, representing the Premier, Mr Tony Rundle; the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Jim Bacon; and the Leader of the Tasmanian Greens, Mrs Christine Milne.

The forum was to seek parliamentary support for the establishment of a statewide student support services office that would lead to training and a greater say in student affairs at government level. Each of the leaders spoke for approximately 10 minutes before questions were taken from the floor.

Student leaders and teachers from St. Mary’s College, Elizabeth College, Rosny College, Claremont Community College, Hobart College, The Friends School, Fahan School, St Michael’s Collegiate College and both campuses of Guilford Young College participated.

While each of the speakers congratulated the students on the proposal, their support was qualified.

Mrs Napier said she wondered if existing services could be better utilised or if a new structure would be needed. Mrs Milne said she would like to see much more regional networking as a test of calibre and commitment.

Mr Bacon said that if it were to be real representation, it needed support. An open cheque book could not be provided but the proposal was asking only for bare necessities. Underpinning the proposal is greater student participation in colleges. “Fundamental elements of successful student participation in governance are information, communication and coordination ... the three functions require a co-ordinated development and implementation. A new infrastructure instituted at the statewide level is needed that provides a more cohesive and systematic way of developing and sustaining student participation in system wide and local governance” (Appendix A).

It was obvious from questions, and later a show of hands, that most of the students were not aware of structures already in place, especially YNOT, a non-government youth network designed to encourage the contact between young people and service providers with services especially geared to the young.

One of its functions was to be open to new participation structures which, the speakers agreed, the forum was advocating for. Mrs Milne said she was excited that student activism was alive and well and praised the students for their courage and vision. She was critical of adults making decisions on serious youth issues including youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and violence, without speaking with the young. "Life is about choices," she said. "You can go with the flow or you can stand up and be counted.

Student representation on TASSAB working committees, the University Council and the Tasmanian Education Council was also given the unanimous support of the three speakers. Mrs Napier said “with restructureing of the TASSAB Board there will be opportunities for student involvement ... I can see that it would be helpful.” Mr Jim Bacon said “there should be student involvement in what they do ... students should have some say ... but the representation should be genuine representation not token representation by adults; they needed the support as suggested in the student proposal”. The students hope to coordinate on-going meetings with other student leaders in Southern Tasmania in order to develop action plans for the development of an effective network process and the establishment of a student support service suggested in the proposal.

Proposal 3: A proposed schedule of ideas and strategies which the action research team might seek to implement on approval from the general student body and College Leadership Team.

From the list of ideas and strategies discussed at staff-student committee meetings and tutor groups the following initiatives were accepted for action planning and submission for approval by the students to:
help provide facilities and equipment for the new netball/basketball courts,
organise lunch time events,
foster cross campus links,
establish a student to student link with the network schools,
organise a peer support program for network schools, and
institute a peer tutor timetable for fellow campus students.

Approval to proceed has been given and these activities have been enacted or are in process of implementation.

The Participatory Dilemma

Increased dialogue between administrators, teachers and students and improved communication pathways has increased the general student body’s interest in participating within the Guilford Young community. Like teachers, the Student Leadership Team at Guilford Young College see prior participation training and experience and increased dialogue through improved communication pathways as essential in ameliorating student participation. They have recognised that student participation practices effectively communicated can induce further participation. However, the students faced the dilemma, how do you successfully cater for improved student participation before those students lose interest? The Student Leadership Team will meet next term to reflect on the following possibilities:

* accountability and the need to delegate responsibility to other students,
* time allocation or curriculum accreditation eliminating the penalties considered by students associated with participation,
* support the establishment of a student support services as outlined in Appendix A,
* organise programs to train students for participation in governance, staff training in student development, and review and planning for encouraging greater student participation in governance,
* consider a process to break the quagmire barrier - participation inhibited by students, caused by:
  - embarrassment, timidity and low self esteem,
  - self-centredness and self indulgence,
and participation inhibited by:
  - the short academic year in a college designed for Years 11 and 12.

The need for accountability and the delegation of responsibility

Whereas students’ participation in governance is both appropriate and necessary, students must appreciate that they have a responsibility for entering effectively into this process. Full and accurate representation of constituent concerns and interests is the essence of effective student participation. Therefore, student representatives must be accountable to an officially recognised student government association or organisation, in this case the Student Leadership Team. By virtue of their position as representatives of the student body as a whole, student leaders have a responsibility to see that their organisations and activities serve students effectively.

If participation levels are to grow within a community, student leaders need to delegate responsibility and share the leadership, management and the co-ordination of activities, otherwise it is likely these will stagnate or collapse once a student leader leaves; or if a student leader becomes over committed, they can become ineffective, burnt out or seen as ‘aristocrat’, alienating their peers.

Eliminating the penalties associated with participation

A school’s curriculum consists of all activities that take place under its guidance and direction. Student activities are therefore an inseparable part of the instruction that takes place at school.

As the leading group supporting and promoting such activities, student councils should have their meetings during school time. This also means that participation on student councils should be counted as ‘credit’ for students and that the time teachers spend working collaboratively with them should be considered part of their instructional load.

It is important to note that projects and activities are the means by which student councils reach their goals. Student councils must be careful to avoid sponsoring activities that seem to be nothing more than busy work. The worth and value of each proposed activity must be considered carefully, and the activities should reflect genuine interests, needs, and concerns of the students and the school community. Factors that I see inhibiting students from being involved in decision-making include: time allocation and the timing of meetings, and the lack of accreditation and acknowledgement that such work is an important or intrinsic part of curriculum and the learning process.

According to Holdsworth (1966), the mere presence of youth in school is insufficient, and consideration needs to be given to the role that students have in shaping the processes, practices and policies of their educational environments. If students are to ‘participate’, they need to know how and they need to have the resources (time, skills, democratic structures) to do so.

In collaboration with interested students at Mount Carmel College we developed an A course that they could undertake as an accredited syllabus for the Tasmanian Certificate of Education - a syllabus that students in Years 9 to 12 could choose. It was approved by the Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board (TASSAB) in 1995.

Student Participation 9/70 WS501A and 11/12 WS511A gives students the opportunity to have some control over their daily lives and their futures within the school environment. Students who are involved in decision-making, trying to improve educational outcomes for themselves, will be given accreditation for such work which they do outside the classroom. Student Participation brings students into direct, real and non-artificial encounters with their social environment and hence allows students to question the human values and psychological processes of human interaction which relate to social justice issues.

The course (if they choose) will allow a student in Tasmania accreditation and certification for time spent by them at school in out-of-class and/or classroom negotiated community participation issues, activities, projects or programs. It is activities/curriculum issues which students themselves decide and choose to undertake. The syllabus assists students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of them to actively participate in their school environment and the wider community. It is a course constructed by students. The syllabus requires a participatory research approach, fostering the establishment of ‘participation culture sites’ within the college community. Student Participation is designed to assist students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of them to actively participate in their school environment and the wider community now and in the future. This subject advocates the use of the curriculum in engaging young people as informed, skilled and active participants. The syllabus emphasizes effective communication, collaborative decision-making, and developed planning, co-ordination and management skills. The syllabus enables students to build a valued role as independent, responsible and productive members of society whilst giving students accreditation for such role development.

August-October 1997
Training programs to gain knowledge and skills in participation

If students are to make sound policy judgements and effectively represent their constituency, student representatives need to be fully informed and knowledgeable about committee matters.

This will maximise their effectiveness, and will inspire mutual respect and trust as colleagues in shared governance. To the degree that faculty, staff, and administration work to bring about effective student participation, students will find natural and appropriate roles within the total governance structure. Several conditions should be fulfilled by the college to support student responsibility for involvement in shared governance.

Every college should ensure to students, in a timely manner, the availability of pertinent documents and materials related to governance activities. Resources should include, but not be limited to, background materials, including copies of past minutes, meeting agendas, and related documents.

The college should provide appropriate means to strengthen student knowledge and understanding of governance issues in order to increase student preparedness, to foster greater self-confidence in student leadership roles, and to enhance student credibility. Appropriate means should include:

- in-service training and orientation conducted at the beginning of each academic year for the purpose of building trust, fostering team-work, and preparing for meaningful participation in the governance process.
- the provision of ongoing consultation services such as regular, timely meetings with committee chairpersons, the development of mentorships, or other alternative means of sharing with students, supported by both faculty, parents and administration.

A college commitment should be made to providing the comprehensive student development needed to facilitate and support the governance work of students, and to provide leadership development and training for student representatives. Student development and training should be provided by qualified staff. At a minimum, a student citizenship course should be available to students interested in governance.

For example, the TCE framework syllabus Community Studies is available to Year 9/10 and Year 11/12 students. This brings together a choice of A course subjects: Student Participation, Club Administration, Student Support and Preparation for Adulthood.

The colleges should, in both word and deed, recognise the importance of student governance. Therefore, they should respect the integrity of, and provide appropriate support for, elections initiated by the Student Leadership Team (and, with the support of the Student Support Services Office) to conduct elections for the purpose of assessing a student representation fee or a student body centre and operating fee, as accorded by law.

Leadership training, which an increasing number of schools provide for students involved in activities programs, has direct benefits. Stiles (1986) describes a leadership training program in one school for fifteen high school girls who were elected to the student council. Through the program the girls developed greater self-confidence and leadership ability, and they assumed greater responsibilities in subsequent years.

A process to break the quandary barrier

The students at Guilford Young College have appreciated the collaborative and democratic approach taken by the College Leadership Team. The team has been supportive and considered thoughtfully all student initiatives as they have been presented. Educational research has consistently shown that autocratic schools have a debilitating effect on student self-esteem. A 'Democratic' climate has facilitating effects (Deeber and Hay 1977) and when choice and freedom is denied, self-worth is threatened (Moustakas 1966).

As Director of Student Support Services at The Hutchins School in the 1980s, I articulated the fact that student councils must aim to enrich the lives of students through teaching them that they do not have to be apathetic - that it is possible to be part of the world around them and that they can make change happen. Workplace experience has demonstrated a desire and willingness for Year 11/12 students to take on leadership roles and participate actively within a K-12 school environment.

On the other hand, students, in a specific Year 11/12 school environment seem to become more self-centred and self-indulgent when they lose perceived opportunities to give, and be role models. We need to make students aware of the value of participation for themselves and the community, and help them find new
way to contribute under these circumstances. According to Mather (1985), students should serve the self, the school, and the community.

Mather says students can better themselves as they learn what kind of roles they are best suited for. Leatt (1987) also states that a basic responsibility of schools is to provide learning experiences that will prepare students to fulfil their role as individuals capable of making intelligent decisions on personal, social, and political issues.

The developing young adults in our schools are seeking an identity for themselves in relation to society. By promoting a wide range of school- and community-based activities, we can provide a platform encouraging the development of skills and values needed to help students play their rightful role in society' (Leatt 1987 : 4). Joekel (1993) also reports several important findings from research involving student activities. A study of the Scholastic Aptitude Test found that 'the best prediction of creativity in mature life was a person’s performance during youth in independent, self-sustained, ventures and when students participate in school activities, they derive feelings of self-worth and self-actualisation, they learn useful skills, their social and emotional development is enhanced, and they become highly motivated'.

However, student participation in Years 11/12 is curtailed, due to a short academic year, interrupted again by mandatory school events, part-time work, school holidays, family commitments, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, classroom attendance, study demands and on-going assignments, tests and examinations. All these limit a student's ability to become involved. As adults we know it is a matter of balance. If we teach students this, we help them understand there is a time for work, a time for giving, and a time for play. We can encourage students to set goals and priorities, and show and encourage them how to manage their time effectively.

Recapitulation

While the author believes there is little argument against participation at the school level, particularly when the full implications of devolution are realised, major forces and arguments are predominant if students are to be included at the level above the school. The Guilford Young proposals include a set of actions to be taken to ensure student membership on statewide and school governance committees and task forces.

The proposals also grant student representatives the same rights and privileges as other members, schedule meetings to accommodate as much as possible students' time and resources, recognise the Council of Student Body Government and local student body governments as the official representatives of the state's students, and encourage student representatives to maintain their school's scholastic standards.

It is also recommended that pertinent documents and materials be made available to students in a timely manner, that orientation and ongoing consultation services be offered to student representatives, that a Student Support Services Office be created, and that services be established and maintained to recruit and train students for participation in governance.

A school will be much more effective in carrying out its purposes if there is communication between administrators, staff, students, parents and the community and a sense of shared responsibility for its destiny. Education research has shown that students do best in areas they are interested in and where they contribute to its planning and development (Jones and Jones, 1986; Gow and Balla, 1988).

Student participation can be seen as a logical consequence of Commonwealth and State Government policy directions over the last two decades. For example, the Schools in Australia Report of the Interim Committee for Australian Schools Commission (May 1973) stated:

responsible participates as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves (24 : 10).

Whereas most schools and colleges provide for student membership on a limited number of governance committees, students have not had the opportunity to participate fully in the formulation of policies, as well as in those processes for jointly developing recommendations for action, that have or will have significant effect upon them; nor have they been accorded the same rights and privileges generally held by their fellow members. Students, faculty, staff, and administrators should know they are part of, and belong to, a community of learners.

Involvement of students in local governance structures student retention and identification with the institution and its goals. Moreover, methods for building a community of interest include effective methods of student governance and of communication among students. Ensuring greater participation for students would directly benefit both them and the institution by creating greater incentive to participate and rendering the collegial process itself more meaningful for all.

It is no good expecting people to feel committed to the purposes of an institution if concrete provision which permits appropriate participation is lacking and communication is distorted. In particular, Goodlad (1984) and Middleton et al (1986) state that a considerable minority of students in schools have negative attitude towards school, and student participation is an important factor in increasing student commitment to schooling (Holfordsworth 1986, Glasser 1990).

Each institution has to work out its own arrangements in the light of its own idiosyncrasies in a way which grants students more rights to representation without either threatening the academic freedom of the teacher or denying the status of staff in relation to the advancement and transmission of knowledge. In brief, the authority structure in education must be 'rationalised'. In secondary schools the difference in status between teachers and students is more marked than at University level. The difference however is only one of degree depending on the age of the student and the type of responsibilities that they are competent to carry out.

In Australian schools, a principal has a high degree of autonomy. It is their prerogative what they do regarding involving teachers, parents and students in decision making. A great deal of cynicism and apathy will be born if a facade of democratic governance is preserved while all important decisions are taken elsewhere. This is likely to produce alienation.

In a school we must not only ask to what extent its organisation should be democratic, we must also ask what contribution it makes to education for democracy, in the development of rational autonomy - to produce thinking people who can participate as decent, law-abiding, respectable and conscientious citizens in our community.

Peter Carey

BED, M Ed Stud, MACE, PAACE

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Mount Carmel College, Hobart, Tasmania

I DON'T THINK I'M READY
FOR SUCH BIG CHANGES
IN EDUCATION.
Appendix A

Proposed Student Participation Outcome [for the College Prospectus]

Guilford Young College has a strong expectation of students that they actively participate in the classroom, in sport, in the performing arts and in the faith development of the college community. There is also an emphasis on the students of Guilford Young College being involved in the administration of the College through their membership of the Student Leadership Team and/or its various staff-student committees, including those of the College’s governing bodies. The Student Support Services Team and office collaborate in the management of student affairs which embodies the curriculum, discipline, pastoral care, community participation and personal development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section elaborates upon commendable initiatives for Student Participatory Activities. The proposed initiatives are intended to provide guidance and direction which Guilford Young College may choose to follow as it develops its own processes for encouraging greater student participation.

A. ENHANCING ACCESS TO THE PROCESSES OF GOVERNANCE

Whereas most schools and colleges provide for student membership on a limited number of governance committees, students have not had the opportunity to participate fully in the formulation of policies, as well as in those processes for jointly developing recommendations for action, that have or will have significant effect upon them; nor have they been accorded the same rights and privileges generally held by their fellow members.

Students should know they are part of, and belong to, a community of learners, faculty, staff, and administrators. Involvement of students in local governance promotes student retention and identification with the institution and its goals. Moreover, methods for building a community of interest include effective methods of student governance and of communication among students. Ensuring greater participation for students would directly benefit both them and the institution by creating greater incentive to participate and rendering the collegial process itself more meaningful for all. Providing the same rights and privileges recognizes the role of students as participants, as colleagues, and as status-holding members of the college.

B. IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY

Whereas students’ participation in governance is both appropriate and necessary, students must appreciate that they have a responsibility for entering effectively into this process. Pull and accurate representation of constituent concerns and interests is the essence of effective student participation. Therefore, student representatives must be accountable to an officially recognised student government association or organisation, in this case the Student Leadership Team.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The college should formally recognise the Student Leadership Team as the official body representing the enrolled student population.
Student representatives who serve on college governance committees or task forces should be recommended or, where appropriate, appointed by the officially recognised associated student organisation or its equivalent. The representatives are to be fully accountable to that body (the Student Leadership Team). Achieving student equity and diversity should be a significant factor in student appointments and nominations.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

Students should be encouraged to maintain the scholastic standards of the college while serving in governance capacities.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

Student representatives should be expected to work within the established parameters of the governance process.

**C. IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF REPRESENTATION**

If students are to make sound policy judgements and effectively represent their constituency, student representatives need to be fully informed and knowledgeable about committee matters. This will maximise their effectiveness, and will inspire mutual respect and trust as colleagues in shared governance. To the degree that faculty, staff, and administration work to bring about effective student participation, students will find natural and appropriate roles within the total governance structure. Several conditions should be fulfilled by the college to support student responsibility for involvement in shared governance.

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

Every college should ensure access of students to pertinent documents and materials related to governance activities. Resources should include, but not be limited to, background materials, including copies of past minutes, meeting agendas, and related documents.

**RECOMMENDATION 10**

The college should provide appropriate means to strengthen student knowledge and understanding of governance issues in order to increase student preparedness, to foster greater self-confidence in student leadership roles and to enhance student credibility. Appropriate means should include:

* in-service training and orientation conducted at the beginning of each academic year for the purpose of building trust, fostering team-work, and preparing for meaningful participation in the governance process. Those planning to participate in college governance should be involved and
* the provision of on-going consultation services such as regular, timely meetings with committee chairpersons, the development of mentorships, or other alternative means of sharing with students, supported by both faculty, parents and administration.

**RECOMMENDATION 11**

A college commitment should be made to providing the comprehensive student development needed to facilitate and support the governance work of students, and to provide leadership-development and training for student representatives. Student development and training should be provided by qualified staff. At a minimum, a student citizenship course should be available to students interested in governance. For example, the TCE framework syllabus Community Studies is available to Year 9/10 and Year 11/12 students. This brings together a choice of A course subjects: Student Participation, Club Administration, Student Support and Preparation for Adulthood.

**RECOMMENDATION 12**

The colleges should, in both word and deed, recognise the importance of student governance. Therefore, they should respect the integrity of, and provide appropriate support for, elections initiated by the Student Leadership Team (and, with the support of the Student Support Services Office) to conduct elections for the purpose of assessing a student representation fee or a student body centre and operating fee, as accorded by law.

**D. IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND CO-ORDINATION**

Of all the proposed initiatives, this is perhaps the single most potent and productive for encouraging greater student participation. The diversity of student needs and the complexity of the community college system have fuelled the need for better efforts by the state to facilitate communication and planning between the state and local levels. New approaches are needed to co-operatively develop and maintain a system that makes governance at all levels more accessible and responsive to students. Fundamental elements of successful student participation in governance are information, communication, and co-ordination. The three functions require co-ordinated development and implementation. A new infrastructure instituted at the statewide level is needed that provides a more cohesive and systematic way of developing and sustaining student participation in systemwide and local governance.

A statewide student support office and a similar office for the college student body would be responsible for overall co-ordination and communication to meet student needs and to strengthen their opportunities, their effectiveness at the local level, and their links to State-level governance. This would require significant effort in terms of support programs, effective use of resources, increased communication and co-ordination between local and state levels, and increased accountability for carrying out student responsibilities in governance and finance. The lack of funding for these activities presents a serious obstacle to the stability and potential success of the new student role in governance. Successful student participation at the system wide level requires the on-going support and involvement of professional staff in determining directions and priorities, improving co-ordination on a day-to-day basis, and conducting research and planning.

Such support is essential if students are to take their proper role in governance.

**RECOMMENDATION 13**

The Student Leadership Team of Guilford Young College requests the State Education Governing Body to appeal for State funds to:

* establish and equip a student support service office, including facilities, rental, postage, communication, computer equipment, supplies and printing costs.
* establish a professional staff consisting of one executive director, one full-time clerical support staff and one student intern.
* reimburse travel and meeting costs incurred by student representatives and professional staff for participation in advisory committees, task forces, and for conducting workshops and conferences.
* pay for printing, word processing, and mail costs related to the establishment of publications to facilitate communication and to promote student participation in student elections.

**RECOMMENDATION 14**

The Student Leadership Team of Guilford Young College requests the State Education Governing Body to appeal for State funds to:

* undertake to establish and maintain State-administered services to assist students and colleges in recruiting and training students for participation in governance, staff training in student development, and review and planning for encouraging greater student participation in governance.

Programs and staff development efforts should combine traditional and emerging delivery methods. Where appropriate, workshops, conferences, and technical assistance should be augmented by new technologies, such as tele-conferencing and computer bulletin boards.
Brisbane Youth Advisory Forum

On Sunday, 3rd August 1977, the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland held the first of a series of Special Meetings with representatives of young people's groups within a two-hour radius of Brisbane. The focus of the meeting was to gauge interest by participants aged between 17 and 25 years in their commitment to organising young people's role in State Government decision making.

Motivations for young people's attendance ranged from wanting to increase networks, gain skills, create action plans, discuss and create positions on issues, and to act as an independent consultation body. One young person summed up what brought them there as: "I want to find ways to channel creative juices constructively and actively - soul feeding." These views and the results of the forum in general challenge the stereotype that all young people are not interested in politics.

Out of the ten participants representing North, South, East and West Brisbane areas, key issues were identified by using small group discussion and collective decision-making processes. A selection of priority issues include youth representation in government, health, employment, education and training.

There are three specific tasks initiated by the forum participants in which young people will liaise with relevant government departments, investigating their role in decision making. The three areas to be addressed are transport, youth consultation and government, and how young people are perceived by the media.

The project will be launched in November and there are still lots of openings for more young people 12-25 years of age, living within two hours of Brisbane, to become involved on many levels.

For further information, contact Hanna Jenkin (young person) who is the Project Coordinator at the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) on Mondays or Fridays on (07) 3236 5400.

'Any Which Way You Can'

"Any which way" is the sort of answer given by many young Australians about how they manage without enough income or support. In areas of high unemployment and social disadvantage, problems faced by young people urgently require adequate resourcing to combat the lack of community resources and deep feelings of social alienation they experience.

According to a report commissioned by the Australian Youth Foundation (AYF), in some cases alternatives to unemployment and alienation can lead to crime, including shop-lifting, drug-selling and burglary.

The 150 page report, entitled 'Any Which Way You Can', is by criminologist Dr Rob White and researchers from the University of Melbourne. Their report is based on interviews with 550 young people in the Melbourne suburbs of Coburg, Collingwood, Dandenong, Footscray, Knox and St Kilda. These areas were chosen because they are experiencing rapid economic and social change.

Some 400 of those interviewed were aged between 14 and 17, and the rest between 18 and 25. They are from diverse ethnic backgrounds - about one third did not use English as the main language at home. Most live in areas of serious unemployment, low incomes and high rates of social security payments.

According to the interviews, the overall crime rates and 'shadow economy' levels are high among young people short of money and support. Dr White warns that the figures are indicative rather than precise, because researchers could not ask direct questions about individual illegal activities.

Asked their opinion, 80% of those interviewed said they thought that needy people of their age made some money from crime either to 'supplement' their income or for 'basic survival'.

Dr White said the report tells 'what it is like on the frontlines of economic recession'.

AYF Chairman Brian Burdekin says, "The Report provides valuable information on the impact on young people of current economic and social conditions. Like other AYF projects, the report is intended to stimulate constructive debate and positive reforms in economic policy and community services.

"Employment initiatives such as those currently funded by the AYF are evidence that positive steps can be taken to help redress the disturbing trend to social division and discrimination experienced by many young people in our society," he said.

Any Which Way You Can may be purchased from the Australian Youth Foundation for $30. Contact the AYF at Suite 302, 134 William Street, East Sydney  NSW  2010. Phone: (02) 9357 2344; fax: (02) 9358 5635
EdWeb, an on-line database of curriculum resources and professional development providers was launched in March 1997. This Internet educational site has been specifically designed for Australian schools.

Two years ago, three teachers and a website company manager first discussed the feasibility of establishing an educational resource database that would simplify the search for relevant teacher and student resources. In March 1997, those earlier discussions came to fruition with the launch of the EdWeb education site on the internet. The site contains references to over 2000 videos, CD ROMs, books, educational kits, audio tapes, web sites, presentations, courses and excursions in a searchable database.

"We knew that many curriculum resource providers were having difficulty bringing their products to the attention of students and teachers. Each year, hundreds of resources for schools, many of them distributed freely or at cost, are developed by government departments, industry associations, corporations, community service groups and the like, but few teachers and schools find out about them," explained Diana Wolowsky, one of the teachers behind the establishment of EdWeb.

"We also knew that teachers find searching the web very time consuming and frustrating. Web search engines usually throw up thousands of sites for each search request, and most of the sites listed are not what the teacher or the student is looking for. Our idea was to have a database built around the eight key learning areas and the levels and strands of the National Curriculum."

EdWeb started with two databases and is adding more. The first was a resource bank, searchable by the kind of resource you want: print, video and so on, and by the key learning area, the subject area and the year level for which the resource is required.

"A teacher looking for a mathematics resource to do with statistics suitable for the middle secondary years, simply clicks the relevant boxes on the search page and up will come the range of relevant resources. By clicking on the resource they want, they are taken to a new page containing a description of the resource, its cost (many are free), who developed the resource and how it can be obtained. Building the database to this point has taken a great deal of effort, but we're pretty pleased with the feedback we are getting from teachers."

The second data bank contains listings of professional development providers and this directory can be searched by key learning areas and topics such as school leadership and management, school governance, vocational and career education and so forth. Teachers searching the database for training resources can find out who is available to run a session on a chosen topic, whether courses were available, and what training videos, CD ROMs and print resources are available for borrowing or purchase.

"We are constantly updating information and adding new resources to our searchable databases. We recently added fifty links to websites appropriate for teacher and student use, and over one hundred and fifty video titles. Our goal is to add at least one hundred new resources each month."

Further developments of EdWeb include the addition of a school fund-raising database and a regularly updated guide to the best educational sites on the web.

EdWeb can be visited at:

http://www.edweb.com.au

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Skipping Stones
A Multicultural Magazine

Skipping Stones is a non-profit children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity and celebration of cultural and environmental richness. It provides a playful forum for children from different cultures and backgrounds to share ideas and experiences.

Now in its ninth year, Skipping Stones publishes bi-monthly during the US school year. We accept art and original writings in every language and from all ages. We invite you to participate in this exciting project with your submissions, subscriptions, suggestions and support.

In Skipping Stones, you will find stories, articles and photos from all over the world: Native American folk tales, photos by kids in India and Ukraine, letters and drawings from South Africa and Lithuania, cartoons from China. Non-English writing are accompanied by English translations to encourage the learning of other languages.

Send your creations, such as essays, short stories, plays ... under 750 words, or poems less than 30 lines, typed or neatly handwritten. Original artwork (drawings, cartoons, paintings or photo essays with captions) are limited to 8 pieces. Include your name, age and address on the back of each page.

Sample copies are US$5 (airmail $6); subscriptions (5 issues): individuals: US$25; institutions: US$35; airmail US$5 extra. Low income discount: 50%; multiple (5 or more) copies: 25% discount.

Skipping Stones
PO Box 3939
Eugene, Oregon 97403-0939 USA

Can students go without TV for a week?

Eumemmerring Secondary College in Victoria has initiated the Click Off-Click On project to encourage students and families to try life without TV for a week. The project grew from concerns about national statistics showing declining levels of student fitness. Click Off-Click On is supported by the Victorian Department of Education and a number of business and community organisations, who have helped Eumemmerring to develop the activities.

Participating schools receive a kit of ideas and proformas for use in building a school program and discussing the issues with students and families. Registering students receive an activities pack ($2.50) of things to try during their school's 'Turn Off TV Week'.

Brochures about the program have been mailed to Principals of all Victorian schools. Further information can be obtained from Eumemmerring Secondary College by phoning: (03) 9700 1333 or faxing (03) 9700 5356. Registration for the program closes on August 25th.

Information is also available on the Click Off-Click On web site:
Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can’t lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on:
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STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:

College Scene (Mount Carmel College, Hobart, Tas) Vol 3 Issue 2

People Out West (POW) (Footscray City SC and VUT Faculty of Arts, Vic) Edition 1, June 1997

Pulse (City of Borounda Youth Services, Vic)

Overseas:

Noun (Burlington, Vt, USA) Vol 19 No 1, Summer 1996

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:

Education Alternatives (Caulfield East, Vic) Vol 6 Nos 5, 6 (issues 55, 56) July, August 1997

Network News (Network of Community Activities, Surry Hills, NSW) June 1997

Noticeboard (VCOSS, Vic) Vol 10 No 5, June 1997

Seen and Heard: a foolproof guide to the youth vote (Barbary O'Brien and Ollie Black, YACSA, SA)

Starlink (Students at Risk Program, DSE, Vic) Issues 17, 18; June, July 1997

Student Leadership (PASTA, Leichhardt, NSW) Vol 2, Term 2 1997

Swan Hills Homeschooler’s Grapevine (Jane Brook, WA) Special Bulletin, July 1997

YACSA Round (YACSA, Adelaide, SA) May/June 1996

Youth Options (Youth Bureau, DEETYA, Canberra, ACT) June 1997

Youth Studies Australia (NCYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 16 No 2, June 1997

Overseas:

Communication Research Trends (Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, Missouri, USA) Vol 16 No 4, 1996

Education Now (Education Now, Nottingham, UK) No 16, Summer 1997

Educational Resources 97-98 (National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, VA, USA)

Leadership (National Association of Secondary School Principals - Department of Student Activities, Reston, VA, USA) Vol 25 No 9 May 1997

Skipping Stones (Multicultural Children’s Magazine, Eugene, Oregon, USA) Vol 9 No 2, March-April 1997

When Students Have Power (Ira Shor) University of Chicago Press, 1996

Documents

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

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

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439 The potential of student theorising about curriculum, Steve Wilson (Paper at ACSA Conference, 1997)
(14 pp; $1.40)

440 ‘Stepping out of the box’ - the beginning of one teacher’s journey into negotiating with students, Marita Rabone and Steve Wilson (Paper at ACSA Conference 1997)
(13 pp; $1.30)

441 I remember Bookie and Mouse’ - the Student Leadership Curriculum, Charles Kingston (Paper at ACSA Conference 1997)
(9 pp; $1.20)

442 Students on School Councils, Lisa Lloyd and Greg Arrow, Bathurst HS students (Paper at ACSA Conference 1997)
(20 pp; $2.00)

443 Facilitating Collaborative Partnerships, Anna Samson and Jeanne Bow (Paper at ACSA Conference 1997)
(15 pp; $1.50)

444 Negotiation (Tasmanian English Study Design) - (notes from ACSA Conference paper session)
(3 pp; $0.70)

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Miscellaneous Resources:

• Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work (1996) ($7, or $12 for 2 copies) $ ...........

• SRC Pamphlets Set (6 pamphlets; Youth Affairs Council of Vic) ($5) $ ...........

• Democratic Decision Making in Schools - Victorian PEP (1987) ($3) $ ...........

• Student and Work: Connect reprints (Victorian PEP, 1995) ($5) $ ...........

• ‘Youth Radio’ issue of 3CR’s CRAM Guide (1985) ($1) $ ...........

Foxfire Resources:

• Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($25) $ ...........

• Foxfire 9 (Doubleday Anchor) ($25) $ ...........

• Foxfire: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($25) $ ...........

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