Connect
supporting student participation

Get Your Student Council on Target in 2003

Also in this issue:

- Student Councils: Practical Ideas, Surveys, Training
- Glimpses of Student Participation in 30 Schools, Vic
- Radio and Sound! How to SYN FM, Vic
- Operation Boredom, SA
- State SRC Report, NSW
- Building Trust and Empowerment: Mental Health Curriculum
- Resources: Web sites, Conferences, Reports, Camp, Training Days

& Incorporating the PASTA Newsletter #31

Print Post Approved: PP 340646/0008

ISSN 0158-4995

$4.00
This Issue:

At the start of the year, Connect traditionally draws your attention to the need to make sure that all students are active participants in all your plans for the year. Here we go again, with an issue that focuses on both governance and curriculum.

That means making sure that your Student Council is up and going, setting goals, meeting regularly, planning how to achieve results, working out how to represent students' needs in all areas. Is it inclusive? Is it effective? Is it challenged? Is it learning and growing?

The start of the year is also a good time to make sure that your curriculum approaches are based in processes of negotiation - of goals, content and learning approaches - and that they build in productive and valued outcomes for students.

So this issue of Connect addresses both these areas. It provides ideas and tools about developing effective Student Councils - and some links to forthcoming training opportunities for students and teachers. It also profiles opportunities for networking and sharing information, and for having a voice in the larger arenas of educational policy.

Articles here also describe some projects and opportunities for curriculum development. The licensing of SYN FM in Melbourne - a student-run community radio station - provides many opportunities for participation. (Connect has substantial archives about ways in which access to public radio can transform curriculum approaches. Just ask us.) Other areas - projects around social justice themes through the ru.Mad resources; local student action around boredom and recreation in SA - are also highlighted here.

But there are many more ideas mentioned by schools. It was fascinating to look through some school practice descriptions and to pick out comments from 30 primary and secondary schools in Victoria about what they are already doing. As one might expect, the variation within these approaches is broad, but in many schools student participation in both governance and curriculum approaches are innate, and natural to what they do.

Will you join them in practice? Will you tell others about what you're doing?

Roger Holdsworth

Next Issue: #140: April 2003
Deadline for material: end of March
Towards Active and Effective Student Councils

Find out how your Student Council is doing from the people who count

Student Council Survey

This is a survey intended for Student Council representatives to find out from other students and staff about what they should be doing.

Guidance

- This survey can be done in any of three ways:
  1. Face-to-face questioning during breaks and lunchtimes. Researchers will need clipboards!
  2. Handed out to students to fill in and put in ballot boxes (like an election).
  3. Given out in classes to be completed during lessons (possibly Social Education or Citizenship).

- It can be done by students and staff – you may like to compare their answers.

- Make sure students know that it is **anonymous** so you will not need to record their name. However it is useful to know which year group they are in so that answers for different years can be compared.

- To get a good idea of people’s opinions you should try and get at least 10% of the students in the school to complete the survey. These should be spread equally across year groups.

- The following introduction can be printed or spoken: **We would be very grateful if you could answer a few questions for our Student Council Survey. Your answers will help us to find out how our student council is doing and how we can improve. The survey should take around 5 minutes and your name will not be written down.**

- Space has been left for comments after each section. People might have other suggestions or opinions, which may be useful.

- When all the surveys have been completed, you will need to choose a small group of Student Council members to analyse the results.

- Use the Analysis Table to find the totals. If you have carried out face-to-face research, then each researcher could add up their totals on a separate table.

- For parts 1 and 2, you will have 3 totals for each question. These can be converted into **percentages** to give better results (maths experts required!).

- For parts 3 and 4 the answers can be arranged by **rank** with the one with the highest score as number 1.

**What to do with the results?**

The results from the survey should first of all be **published** around the school. You could put them up on a noticeboard or send copies to classes for display. You could make a special edition newsletter or TV news report – don’t forget to quote some of the comments. Teachers, School Council members and local council officials may be interested in the results.

More importantly, the results give you a much clearer view of how the Student Council is doing, and where it should be going. Discuss the results in a meeting – maybe go into smaller groups to talk about each section and share your views. You must work out how these results will influence the work of the council.

Now you know what students want done, you can start **making a real difference**.

**Tips for success**

Why not encourage people to complete the survey by entering them into a **prize draw**? Each person completing the survey would receive a raffle ticket and you could try and get a prize donated from a local business.

---

This survey is adapted, with permission, from one designed and circulated by **School Councils UK** in Britain. Further details can be found at: [http://www.schoolcouncils.org](http://www.schoolcouncils.org)

In England, Student Councils are referred to as ‘School Councils’.
Student Council Survey

Researcher’s Initials __________ Year Group of Student __________ Survey number __________

Part 1: What do you know about the Student Council? (Circle answers)
1. Did you know that there is a Student Council at this school? No Yes
2. Do you know what the Student Council is for? No Sort of Yes
3. Do you know the names of your class/form representatives? No Sort of Yes
4. Do you know how you could make a suggestion to the Student Council? No Sort of Yes

Comments ____________________________________________________________________

Part 2: How effective is our Student Council?
5. Do you feel well informed about what the Student Council is doing? No Sort of Yes
6. Do you think the Student Council listens to other students? No Sort of Yes
7. Do you think the Student Council is helping to make the school better? No Sort of Yes

Comments ____________________________________________________________________

Part 3: What should our Student Council be doing?

The following are things that our Student Council could be doing. Please give each one a mark of between 1 and 5 depending on how important you think they are: 1 = not important, 5 = very important

a) Improve communication between students and teachers 1 2 3 4 5
b) Improve facilities outside school for young people (eg transport, leisure) 1 2 3 4 5
c) Improve school discipline and behaviour 1 2 3 4 5
d) Improve school facilities eg playground 1 2 3 4 5
e) Improve choice and value of school food 1 2 3 4 5
f) Improve teaching and lessons 1 2 3 4 5
g) Manage services for students (eg canteen) 1 2 3 4 5
h) Organise extra-curricular activities (sport, discos, etc.) 1 2 3 4 5
i) Raise awareness of social issues (eg racism, drugs, environment) 1 2 3 4 5
j) Raise money for charities 1 2 3 4 5
k) Raise money for school equipment 1 2 3 4 5

Comments ____________________________________________________________________

Part 4: How can the Student Council improve?

We want students to find out about what the Student Council is doing. Please give each of the following ideas a mark of between 1 and 5: 1 = bad idea, 2 = very good idea

a) Weekly class meetings for all students to discuss issues 1 2 3 4 5
b) Announcements in assembly about the Student Council 1 2 3 4 5
c) Student Council newsletter 1 2 3 4 5
d) Student Council Website and email updates 1 2 3 4 5
e) Noticeboard with news about the Student Council 1 2 3 4 5

Comments ____________________________________________________________________

Part 5: Any other comments?

Is there anything you would like to say about the Student Council or the school in general? Your comments will be anonymous.

______________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for your time!
# Student Council Survey: Analysis Table

## Part 1: What do you know about the Student Council?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you know that there is a Student Council at this school?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sort Of</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you know what the Student Council is for?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know the names of your class/form representatives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how you could make a suggestion to the Student Council?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Convert totals to percentages*

## Part 2: How effective is our Student Council?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel well informed about what the Student Council is doing?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sort Of</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the Student Council listens to other students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the Student Council is helping to make the school better?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Convert totals to percentages*

## Part 3: What should our Student Council be doing?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Improve communication between students and teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Improve facilities outside school for young people (eg transport, leisure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Improve school discipline and behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Improve school facilities eg playground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Improve choice and value of school food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Improve teaching and lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Manage services for students (eg canteen)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Organise extra-curricular activities (sport, discos, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Raise awareness of social issues (eg racism, drugs, environment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Raise money for charities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Raise money for school equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part 4: How can the Student Council improve?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Weekly class meetings for all students to discuss issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Announcements in assembly about the Student Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Student Council newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Student Council Website and email updates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Noticeboard with news about the Student Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practical Ideas for Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and Student Leadership Groups in Secondary Schools

I hope this article will give you, as a student leader, many ideas, approaches and ways in which you will be able to effectively represent your school.

It is important for you to know that, as a member of your SRC or student leadership group, you provide a vital link in voicing the opinions and views of your peers and perhaps, under certain circumstances, a voice for members of your community and/or teachers in your school. It is also vital to realise that your thoughts and views are being taken seriously.

**TAKE ACTION** throughout the year and help to get your SRC or student leadership group operating more effectively than it already does. It is essential to put into action what is relevant to your SRC, your school and the dynamics of your local community.

**Getting your SRC or student leadership group started in 2003!**

A great way to kick-start your SRC or student leadership group is by brainstorming what the members hope to achieve by the end of the year. This should lead to the development of two or three key goals that allow the whole SRC to take action. Remember that the goals need to be achievable! Develop a means of ensuring that the goals are regularly reviewed as the year proceeds. Your SRC needs to be accountable for it actions.

Delegate liaison roles within key sectors of school operations such as:

- Publicity;
- Parents and Citizens (P & C);
- Teacher committees such as Curriculum, Technology, Finance, Student Welfare, Environment, Special School Initiatives;
- School Executive;
- SRC Fundraising.

Every SRC meeting should follow formal meeting procedure with an elected chairperson, secretary/minute taker, treasurer. All minutes should be published and presented to students, staff and the school executive.

In order to have a successful SRC, good relationships need to be developed. To complement this, promotion of the SRC and effective representation is also required. Achieving this is really simple. You could:

- Have a Suggestions Box as extra back up;
- Work with the P&C to develop a joint project(s);
- Recognise and promote SRC members by holding an Induction Ceremony or present a leadership award annually at presentation nights, or even once a term;
- Remind the school visually of the ways your SRC helps the students, school and community. Make the publicity effective and flashy to attract attention. Your Publicity Officer could be in charge of implementing this;
- Give regular reports in your school’s newsletter and at school assemblies;
- Keep the local community aware of positive things that are happening in the SRC and the school and how they can be involved in the school. This can be achieved by an article in the local newspaper;
- Consider holding open meetings where students can personally voice opinions to the entire SRC or student leadership body. Open Forums, where SRCs invite interested students to voice ways of positively improving the school, have proved to be really effective in promoting student democracy;
- Develop a school SRC e-groups with other school SRCs. This allows student leaders to communicate ideas across schools;
- Put up SRC display boards in prominent areas of the school where you can promote the work of the SRC;
- Talk to People! Get their opinions and thoughts because you are representing them!
- Develop links with local primary schools. There is an increasing need for schools to improve links between senior primary students and junior secondary students. This promotes a sense of belonging and connection to the school.

I hope from these suggestions and many ideas of your own, you will be able to make the SRC a fun, exciting and enjoyable experience for everyone. Remember that what you put in is what you get out and the benefits of hard work are very rewarding. I hope 2003 is a highly rewarding year for all SRCs.

Put forward your ideas, develop strategies and **take action**!

Lauren Ross

*Sutherland district member of the 2003 NSW SRC*
glimpses of student participation in 30 Schools

This is a summary of what 30 Victorian primary and secondary schools recently wrote about the current state of their student participation initiatives. This provides both a 'snapshot' of current activity and also an indication as to the range of activities seen to be included under 'student participation' or 'active citizenship' headings:

Primary schools:

"We have an active Junior School Council."

"There are active student leadership opportunities such as Junior School Council, peer mediators, litter angels, 'meeters and greeters', School Presentation Team, Breakfast Program volunteers."

"There is an extensive leadership program, including School Captains and Vice-Captains, House Captains and Vice-Captains, Junior School Council, buddies and monitors. The Australian electoral system is modelled by using preferential voting for the appointment of student school leaders. We have negotiated classroom rules and statements of student rights and responsibilities."

"Selected students from the upper grades are trained as Peer Mediators and are available in the yard at recess and lunchtime breaks to support students experiencing difficulties or minor conflicts. The school operates a Junior School Council; members are elected to the Council, meet on a regular basis and are supported by a teacher and aide to conduct fundraising and to solve issues raised by staff or students. The JSC attend School Council meetings and report on their activities."

"Having children involved in Junior School Council and making decisions, including allowing children to select their peers for positions of responsibility."

"Students participate regularly in community sponsored events such as Anzac Day, luncheons for elderly citizens, Junior Landcare, Junior School Council."

"There is a well-developed procedure for the establishment of specific classroom rules based on the notion of rights and responsibilities within all grades. The Junior School Council operates, meeting regularly and making 'real' decisions about matters of importance to the students. Monitorial and leadership positions are established within the grades and across the school in general. There are several community service projects such as tree planting, environmental protection and monitoring, and activities at local senior citizens homes."

"We are developing our student leaders through involvement as House Captains and Junior School Councillors. Children are involved in Peer Support, World Vision and Buddy Programs. The Junior School Council is actively involved in community projects on a term basis. We invite our local Members of Parliament to school to discuss local issues with our student leaders. Each year the Junior School Council designates a particular value to the naming of a year. Currently it is 'The Year of Optimism'."

"The students participated in the public consultation process for the area's strategy plan. Students developed a concept plan for the redevelopment of the area. These plans were presented to the organising committee and put on public display."

"In recent years, the schools have developed and supported student governance bodies such as SRCs and JSCs and have established student leadership programs."

"We have School Captains, House Captains, Junior School Council, buddy grades, class meetings."

"A Junior School Council has been democratically elected and plays a role in the school's decision-making processes. Citizenship programs at school level include student participation in activities."

"In the last year, the focus has been to include children as active participants in decision-making across the school - Prep to Year 6. A Student Representative Council has operated in the school for some time, with representation from children in grades 5 and 6. Junior School Council was introduced this year, with representation from each year level, Prep to Year 6. The weekly meeting is conducted, led by the JSC President, with minutes taken by the Secretary. All classroom representatives have an opportunity to voice concerns and issues which are then debated. Classroom representatives report back to their classrooms. Two members of the JSC lead the School Assembly each week. They manage the assembly and present a report to the school community. They also report to our School
Council on a monthly basis. Class meetings are a feature of the program in some classes, where children conduct meetings from an established agenda and then plan actions to address issues raised by classmates."

"Student elections, SRC, community involvement."

"We provide grade 5/6 students with positions of responsibility eg House Captains, running the assembly, fundraising etc. Students at other grade levels participate in buddy programs, community involvement, senior citizens, Waterwatch etc. Students are elected to School Council and assist in making whole school decisions."

"An active JSC which addresses student issues and holds fundraising activities for a variety of support organisations."

**Secondary schools:**

"Students participate in areas of decision-making via the College Council, the Student Forum, the Student Leadership Teams and through the house system. Students also participate in cross-age tutoring in local primary schools in the area."

"Involvement of students in various decision-making processes within the school - following the College motto: 'Empowering young people to make a difference'. We have a Student Leader Program, which is involved in many decisions and activities of the school. The Student Involvement Coordinator is a new position that has been internally advertised at a school level. This position will encompass student leadership, SRC, student-based school and community activities, proactive student groups etc."

"We have recently established strong student leadership in the school including SRC, school captains, house captains etc."

"There has been reformation of the Student Representative Council as a Student Leadership Council, and participation in Student Constitutional Conventions. We have developed cross-age tutoring programs between our students and feeder primary schools."

"There is an active Student Representative Council."

"Year 10 students participate in cross-age tutoring with the local primary school. Year 9 students are involved in volunteer work at a local retirement village."

"We upgraded the profile of the SRC by having the Australian Electoral Commission run a formal election with preferential voting. Students participated in the Student Parliament, and are organising a Constitutional Convention."

"Student leadership programs such as Year 11 deputy captains being responsible for a junior year level; Year 9 Mates Program, where Year 9 students are given responsibility for a small group of Year 7 students; student captains and student representatives on School Council; Junior SRC. There are also student-led groups such as the Student Environment Collective and the Social Justice Group. Curriculum initiatives include the Make a Difference (MAD) Day involving all students in Years 7-9 discussing and responding to contemporary social and political issues; the development of real-life learning through community focused integrated curriculum pilots at Year 7 such as the 'Keep It Clean' project which engaged students with local community groups and government agencies to tackle environmental issues associated with local waterways."

"13 students in Years 7 to 10 participated in Photovoice, a project to explore and promote issues related to sexual health and relationships within the indigenous community. This involved a photographic exhibition of students' work. Middle Year students worked together with students from a local primary school to create a mural on the local shopping centre highlighting images of importance within their culture, community and environment."

"Students are involved across all levels in voting for SRC representatives. Electoral representatives come to the school and run the elections."

"Students have representation on four campus Student Leadership Forums. There are informal elections at the three junior campuses, with formal elections run by the Electoral Education Centre at the VCE campus. A college-wide Student Leadership Committee has been formed. The VCE Campus ran a Constitutional Convention with five participating schools. Students undertook all the key roles in presenting this."

"The SRC gives students a voice in the decision-making process."

"Up until a few years ago, the college had a student representative council supported by teacher special payment and time allowance. The position lapsed due to lack of funds. This year, new structures were implemented and student councils were re-established at both middle and senior schools."

"SRC encouraged to become leaders and good citizens; Student Parliament debates."

"There is Peer Support and Peer Mediation, student representation on all major College committees, and an SRC."

*compiled by Roger Holdsworth*
Welcome to a new concept in learning through Radio and Sound!

What is SYN FM?

SYN FM is a recently licensed not-for-profit FM Community broadcaster in Melbourne with the same high-powered signal as commercial broadcasters like MMM, FOX and NOVA. Our signal reaches all of the greater Melbourne Metropolitan area and, in fact, is heard in parts of Gippsland, through to Geelong in the west and reaches beyond Seymour in the North.

SYN is an interconnecting network of individuals, youth organisations and community groups with a particular focus on schools and universities.

The decision of the Australian Broadcasting Authority to award SYN FM 90.7 with a permanent broadcasting license on December 19, 2001, heralds a new era for students and youth in Melbourne. It is the only radio station in Victoria that is dedicated to young people and has access, participation, diversity, education and training as its primary focus. We believe it is an Australian and world first and that it will revolutionise the airwaves.

SYN FM’s basic premise is that young people need to be creators and not just consumers of media. SYN creates a platform for a youth voice, youth issues and a showcase for excellence in youth communication.

What does SYN FM offer to Schools?

Engagement of students through innovative programming practices!

SYN FM was formed from a merger in 2000 of 3TD (a Secondary School Radio Station) and SRA (RMIT University Radio).

Time will be allocated through the Grid to schools to showcase student leadership initiatives, VCAL, VET such as Music in Industry, Civics, Media Studies, etc, and it can be used as a publication point for subjects such as English, SOSE, Science and LOTE. In fact the potential for innovative teaching practices and creative curriculum outcomes are possible across all subject areas.

How?

After consultation with the Secondary Managers, workshops will be held with teachers and students covering topics such as media law, program structuring and studio techniques etc.

Your School will then be eligible to host a weekly show of up to 8 weeks duration.

Your School will provide the presenters, music, format style and basically be in charge of an exciting live radio program. It is a real world experience that will be challenging and engaging to most students. Past experience has shown high level of interest and motivation amongst participating students.

As only three students at a time can be in the studio, opportunities will exist for other students to work on such things as vox pops, music choices, running sheets and production of small radio documentaries and programs.

With the advent of new audio editing software such as ACID, Cool Edit Pro etc, radio production has never been easier. The only equipment needed is a microphone, a good multimedia computer and appropriate software. This set up allows you to have a mini radio and recording studio within your school and it can be replicated at a number of workstations. Students can then be set to work at a number of different tasks with the end result being an audio production piece that can be aired through your designated school show. It can also be put on our website or burnt to CD as a record of an individual’s work.

SYN FM has a commitment to education and training - in fact that is enshrined in our statement of purposes. We believe that engagement of students through innovative platforms such as radio offers long term benefits to our student cohort.

For more information ring Paul Van Eeden (Secondary Manager) on 0417 033 142.

Ask for a copy of the student and teacher SYN FM Handbook.
MadDay ALERT – Friday 28 March, 2003
Are your students MAD enough to Make a Difference?

If you have been involved in developing ruMAD within your school, or simply been an observer of MAD happenings, MadDay is a great opportunity to celebrate your achievements, introduce the concepts of ruMAD or start straight away and launch a brand new MAD project for 2003.

MadDay Friday 28 March is the day on which young people around the state can start to change the world for the better. This year we expect more than 160 schools throughout Victoria to participate. MadDay is all about young people getting active and passionate about something they want to change in their community.

Check out the Education Foundation website at www.educationfoundation.org.au and see what both primary and secondary schools did last year.

This year we will include, in a free MadDay Action Pack, resources, links and suggestions to help teachers and students prepare for their day including three themes:

1. Plastic Bag Use

Australians use more than six billion plastic bags per year. Close to one third of all rubbish is plastic and much of this ends up in our storm water drains. Theme one involves your students finding out about how plastic bags are made and disposed, how they are used and who uses them. You will be provided with links and details to obtain a stenciling kit that students can use to paint a reminder on storm water. You will also receive some sample biodegradable bags donated by Ron Clarke and CEPA Trust to help educate family and community about reducing plastic bag use.

2. Social Justice

MadDay schools will be given materials for students to participate in ‘expressing their views’ on what they believe will Make A Difference to their community. It will be an opportunity for students to explore what their hopes, fears and dreams are for the future and represent them on MAD flags that are flown around the school. You will be provided with flag templates and ideas that will help you introduce the concept to your students. It is a simple idea that will really get your students thinking about how they can make a difference.

3. Your Own Theme

We’ve only highlighted two themes. There are so many more that you and your students may choose to do as a MadDay celebration. It may be something that you are already working on or you may like to develop a new theme of your own. Many great examples are included in your MadDay Action Pack and on the ruMAD website www.educationfoundation.org.au and follow the links to ruMAD?

We are here to help make your day a great success so please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Brigid O’Sullivan on (03) 9650 4277 should you need further information before you receive your MadDay Action Pack. Alternatively you can email me and I would be happy to answer any queries you may have.

Heather White
MaD Day Coordinator
heatherwhite@educationfoundation.org.au

Form One Lane
Professional Development Seminar for SRC Teachers and Students in VICTORIA

Professional Development for SRC Teacher Advisers is a rare occurrence, but it is essential for anyone working with SRCs.

The Victorian Institute of SRCs and Teacher Advisers (VISTA) run a very popular seminar, "Form One Lane", at different points through the year. The first for the year is coming up soon! March 20th at LaTrobe University.

Get in touch with VISTA to find out when other PD Seminars are being held, and when we will be bringing it to your area!
PASTA NEWSLETTER
# 31 - February 2003

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 ON THE WEBSITE

PASS THE PASTA

Farewell 2002

We in the PASTA Committee share the hopes of the world's 'ordinary people' that the new year in which all of you are now doing those usual 'extraordinary things' will have a history more positive than the last few have been.

Yes, many say 'but it's always been thus'. But many, including those who have now or in the past been powerful advocates for the cause of student leadership, representation and participation continue to start each new year in hope. So what if we are optimists?

We in PASTA would especially like to reiterate here our previously expressed sincere thanks to Immediate Past President Jeanne Bow and her Committee Rep husband Graham, both of whom during their years with the Association worked diligently and ranged widely (yes, even to Montana!) in their efforts to spread the good word and do good works. May yours and everyone's efforts be rewarded with a peaceful and productive 2003 for all.

'Fresh Start' 2003

'Fresh Start 2', the second annual in-service day jointly sponsored by PASTA and the NSW Department of Education and Training, will be held in Leichhardt, Sydney on Saturday 15 March (Week 8 of Term 1). We encourage everyone who can contribute to and benefit from such collegial training days to get their application in now. Cost is $40. Your school and SRC would be well-advised to fund your attendance if you can get there.

Benefits of Student Leadership Activities

In 2003 we will continue to pursue the implementation aspects of our "Working Guidelines to Raise the Status of Student Representative Council Teacher Advisers". Input into this document and ways of effecting it on a sustainable basis are always welcome.

A current project stemming from that is also a joint initiative with the NSW DET, this time engaging the participation of representatives of primary and secondary Principals' Associations. Any school level success to come of this project will we trust also help to raise the student body and community profile of student leadership and representational activities for current and future student leaders and systems as well. A summary of some aspects of this new initiative follows within this issue of the PASTA Newsletter. Your ideas and comments are sought ASAP. Please send any such to the PASTA Secretary at: esheerin@ozemail.com.au

'Overseas SRC Leadership Tours' & ISRC 2004

Calendar dates through August 2004 appear within. Our 6th Annual Tour to North American student leadership activities is already well subscribed and applications are now being sought for the proposed special tour for the 2nd International Student Representative Conference in Edmonton Canada. Having initiated this venture in 2000 in Australia, we are proud to be jointly planning the second one with CASSA (Canada) and NASC (USA).

Where are you going now?

We'd like to have a paragraph here about teacher/adviser successes too. In fact we'd like to have a column on them, a full WEBSITE page, a whole book full of all the extraordinary 'extras' you lot commit. But don't document. Remember, it's not happened if it hasn't been written. (Thanks Roger. What wise person did you get it from? - Art Pearl: RH) Send us your stories.

PS: It's no secret. We'd love to have you as financial members too. See the membership form on the back page.

Ken Page

February 2003

PASTA subscriptions and queries:
PASTA Inc., c/- 12 Dyson Drive, Norah Head NSW 2263
http://hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/
Benefits to Schools and Communities of Student Leadership Activities

One current PASTA project designed to improve working conditions for teacher/advisers is another joint initiative with the NSW Department of Education and Training, this time also engaging the participation of representatives of primary and secondary Principal’s Associations. Any school level success to come of this project will also help to raise the student body and community profile of student leadership and representational activities for student leaders and systems as well. The following is a summary version of some of the more detailed ideas currently being considered. It has been prepared by Charles Kingston - PASTA Vice-President - Country - in conjunction with PASTA officers Ken Page and Bob Kijurina. The combined organisations’ subcommittee working on this project (see ‘Pass The PASTA’ column) will be using such material to shortly develop a workable paper and associated presentations to key school, student, parent and union groups. Your input, in the form of further arguments supporting the case or comment on these, is extraordinarily welcome. Please send any such to the Secretary of PASTA at: esheerin@ozemail.com.au or contact the relevant officers directly.

Purposes

- To provide a format and a list of credible arguments for a position paper aimed at principals’ associations, parent and union bodies, student groups, educational institutions and other audiences, on the value of SRCs and student leadership programs.
- To inform PASTA membership, NSW DET personnel and others of such arguments and such a task so that they can contribute to it and to the long-term aim of improving working conditions of SRC teacher/advisers.
- To develop from the paper more comprehensive articles and in-person presentations to state and national audiences - public and private - which make a sound case for the inclusion of such programs within the broad curriculum understandings and expectations of all relevant parties to do with primary and secondary schools.

Perspectives

- Things worth doing are worth doing well.
- Student needs are paramount, but without attention to teacher/adviser needs, the former are never going to be addressed satisfactorily; nor the latter’s interest or ability to ‘go that extra mile’ to meet them be sustained actively over time.
- SRCs and other significant leadership opportunities have been part of Australian schools since the late 50s/60s. With some notable exceptions (only a few of which have been adequately documented), SRCs are still widely perceived, when they are thought of at all, as mere fund-raising/charity/social organisation groups.
- Student Leadership, Representation and Participation Activities have increased in diversity and acceptability, but are, in the main, still labelled and seen as “EXTRA” (as in ‘extra-curricular’ or ‘extra duty’ - ie of less importance or expendable)
- These limited perceptions, misconceptions and narrow views of what is possible are shared by most students and parents, many staff and some administrators. In general, politicians, community groups and, especially the media, applaud the facade - when it makes good copy - but do little to enhance the reality of student decision-making.
- These activities are rarely considered as worthy of being credited on normal school reports or in any ways other than once a year formal presentations or one-off certificates of relatively little impact on the majority nor real understanding of equity. Even normally positive civic-minded groups, in the main, maintain a highly conservative and limited appreciation for what student citizenship and student leadership groups can achieve.
- Parents - and teachers not involved in these areas - generally express neither negative nor positive views of such activities. Contrary to strong views on other matters - eg uniforms, exams or the cultural imperative of sport, they are hardly thought about.
- “Involvement in student activities is the single most important factor in achieving success at university or on the job.” (Though the result of a comprehensive USA survey of ex-high school students done two decades ago, its implications for Australian schools in the 21st Century should not be dismissed.)

Practicalities

- TIME (for teacher/advisers as well as student participants) and a WIDELY RECOGNISED AND ACCEPTED PROFILE (for such organisations) are the two greatest needs to make a start at improving current ‘misperceptions’.
- TRAINING and RESOURCES flow from the above.
- Schools which have initiated and are vigilant in sustaining practical links between student leadership
structures/activities and their school philosophy/aims/in-class curriculum do exhibit a greater sense of student ownership and community responsibility for outcomes. They are happier places for it.

- Properly done, an SRC Adviser’s role is at least equal in potential and workload to that of a current Year Adviser in NSW DET high schools. At present, none of the allocations of time or in-house communication expectations or essential replacement imperatives are applied consistently if at all across the system to SRC Advisers.

- As an interim measure towards achieving that medium term goal, Principal support for SRCs can best be productive by giving SRC Teacher Advisers discretionary time allocation, office space (for SRC students too, if feasible) and a higher school profile.

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

Rationale and Arguments

A summary of the subcommittee’s rationale and arguments to support this case will be a feature in the April Connect issue of the PASTA Newsletter.

Send us your best so we can include them with the rest. (Hey folks, if nothing else you get published!)

Remember that although the PASTA membership year follows the financial year, new memberships taken out now are carried over for the full 12 months from June 2003 ie you gain an extra 4 months membership for nothing.

FOR MEMBERSHIP AND SUPPORT DETAILS:
SEE THE PASTA WEBSITE
http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:
- OVERSEAS TOURS (for advisers and students): suepage@ozemail.com.au
  RalphMurray@bigpond.com.au
- CSC AWARDS (Community Service Certificate Program): RalphMurray@bigpond.com.au or charleskingston@ozemail.com.au
- ISRC, International Linkages and Projects: charleskingston@ozemail.com.au
- Website and Independent/Systemic Schools:
ABN 49 398 096 539

The PASTA Newsletter is edited by Ken Page and distributed bi-monthly as a supplement to Connect magazine.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Categories</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions $88</td>
<td>$88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student $27.50</td>
<td>$27.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas $55</td>
<td>$55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I would like to make a donation to support the Mail Subscription of PASTA Inc.

- I accept a cheque for $...

- Membership includes GST and subscription to Computer Magazine

**What does membership offer?**

- Training and development within the SKC area
- Access to workshops and conferences
- Reduced registration fees
- Regular seminars, workshops and conferences
- Practical workshop ideas for use in schools
- Positive support for SKC leader advisors

**Please check your credit card number before sending this form**

- [ ] Visa
- [ ] Mastercard
- [ ] American Express
- [ ] Bankcard

**Signature**

Date:

Expiration Date:

Amount Paid: $27.50

Note: Keep this section as your tax invoice.

**For the year ending 30 June, 2003**

I wish to apply to join/extend my membership.

**North Ryde NSW 2263**

**PASTA Inc.**

**Mail Subscription Fo**

**Phone:** (02) 964 3322, **Fax:** (02) 964 2344

**Attention:** Open meetings of PASTA Inc.

Please check your credit card number before sending this form.

- [ ] Visa
- [ ] Mastercard
- [ ] American Express
- [ ] Bankcard

**OK**

Please debit my credit card for the amount of $...

- [ ] I would like to make a donation to support the Mail Subscription of PASTA Inc.

**Membership includes GST and subscription to Computer Magazine**

**Area of Particular Interest**

- [ ] Primary
- [ ] Secondary
- [ ] Tertiary
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**Employing Authority**

- [ ] NSW Department of School Education

**Other Details**

**E-mail**

**FAX**

**Home**

**Work**

**School/Address**

**Home/Postal Address**

**Family or Institutional Name**

**GivenName(s)**

**Title**

**Phone Number**

**ABN 49 398 096 539**

PASTA Newsletter 31 - Supplement to Connect 129
A REPORT FROM THE 2003 NEW SOUTH WALES STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL (NSW SRC)

The incoming 2003 NSW SRC met in Sydney for two days of training prior to their inaugural meeting on Friday, 22 November. The group consists of twenty two members with twenty members elected by their district SRC peers to represent their own district as well as their paired geographic district. Two Aboriginal student leaders are selected by a panel as a result of a statewide 'expression of interest'. Their main role is to report on Aboriginal youth issues and Aboriginal student leadership programs.

Some members of the 2002 NSW SRC gave advice on how to be an effective member of the Department's peak student leadership forum, assisted by some experienced district and state SRC teacher advisers.

Members analysed the NSW SRC Constitution, examined effective leadership skills and styles, the importance of effective meeting procedure, communication strategies and action planning. The members are allocated liaison roles with government, non-government or community agencies as well as setting their own goals. The 2003 NSW SRC is also asked to address a series of six resolutions that were passed at the Student Forum conducted as part of the 2002 State SRC Conference

"Student Well-Being, Positive Relationships."

This was the main theme throughout the three days as the 2003 NSW SRC was addressed by such speakers as:

- The Office of Children and Young People which plans Youth Week, 2003;
- The Assistant Director-General for Schools/Secondary Education (DET), Hetty Cislowski;
- The Commission for Children and Young People;
- The NSW Cancer Council and a peer-lead anti-smoking program from the USA called Teens Kick Ash;
- The new School Safety and Security Directorate (DET);
- The Manager, Student Welfare Helen Kerr-Roubicek (DET);
- The Children's Guardian, Ms Linda Mallett;
- The President of the NSW Parents and Citizens Association, Sharryn Brownlee.

As leaders elected to represent all secondary students in government secondary schools, we have an important role that we must play as the voice of the students, particularly in promoting the theme of Student Well-Being, Positive Relationships. We want to promote a positive attitude and take action to achieve our goals throughout the next year.

Ruth Tuulau
Granville District SRC

What tasks would be expected of a NSW SRC member in 2003?

The Department of Education and Training acknowledges the importance of encouraging 'students' well-being and participation in decisions that affect them'. (Strategic Directions 2002-2004)

The Department's student leadership programs support the concepts of equity, fairness and participation of all students in schools. The NSW SRC operates under the auspices of the Department, supports public education and encourages equal participation by both boys and girls at all SRC forums. The NSW SRC represents ALL students in NSW government secondary schools.

The voting process at district SRC forums for membership of the NSW SRC must be rigorous in order to elect the most appropriate young person. Please make use of the District SRC Toolkit (Elections section).

2003 NSW SRC members will:

- be in Year 10 or Year 11 in 2003. Year 12 students are NOT advised to nominate as academic demands detract from NSW SRC involvement
- not have previously served on a state SRC forum
- be an active member of his/her school SRC and particularly the district SRC forum
- perform as a member of a team and effectively contribute to discussions, decisions and action planning at NSW SRC meetings

February 2003
• represent the interests of all students from his/her district/paired district at NSW SRC meetings. All personal interests need to be put aside.
• communicate with his/her paired district prior to and following the NSW SRC meeting.
• prepare a written district/paired district report for tabling at each NSW SRC meeting (in conjunction with the district Student Welfare consultant and/or district SRC teacher adviser co-ordinator).
• attend all SRC meetings in order to facilitate effective representation at school, district and NSW SRC meetings.
• be prepared to undertake a time commitment to NSW SRC participation for the twelve month period which should have the consent of parents/guardian and his/her school. This commitment should not detract from academic studies.
• be an ambassador for his/her school, district and state at various activities and/or forums.
• have knowledge of formal meeting procedure and have ability to act as chairperson and/or minute taker for part of a NSW SRC meeting at some stage during the year.
• be a good communicator with both adults and peers.
• be aware of the Department of Education and Training's student leadership program structure and operations.
• actively promote student leadership programs for Aboriginal students, those students who are from culturally diverse backgrounds, who have a disability and/or are in rural and remote areas.
• take on a liaison role on a committee or with an associated organisation that relates to the NSW SRC (see below). Involvement and time commitment for these roles will vary.
• a list of student leadership and participation projects that have taken place over the past year include:
  * acting upon recommendations from the 2001 State SRC Conference;
  * participation and presentations at the 2002 State SRC Conference;
  * co-ordinating the Student Welfare Consultants' conference;
  * consultations with departmental, government, non-government and community organisations;
  * improving links with the Premier's Youth Advisory Council;
  * participation at the NSW Government's Childhood Obesity Summit;
  * participation in a careers education video on promoting teaching as a career.
  * liaison roles such as Aboriginal youth issues and reconciliation, Federation of P&C Associations, State SRC Conference Working Party, NSW Youth Ombudsman, publicity, technology, school safety and security, special initiatives.

PLEASE NOTE

It is strongly advised that incoming members of the NSW SRC should NOT have previously served as a member of any State SRC group. A major aim of DET student leadership programs is to share the opportunity of state representation with as many students as possible.

Rural based students may require overnight accommodation depending on flight or rail connections. Costs of all travel and overnight accommodation for NSW SRC members are fully reimbursed upon presentation of receipts. Travel arrangements for rural students should always be arranged in conjunction with the district student welfare consultant, including the provision of cabcharges for each meeting. Rural members of the NSW SRC quickly learn how to travel safely between transport nodes and meeting venues by cab using these cabcharges.

NSW SRC is the peak student leadership forum supported by the Department of Education and Training. Membership requires a certain amount of dedication, time and effort; an equivalent comparison would be as a state sporting representative. The many benefits far outweigh any disadvantages. If any member of the 2003 NSW SRC is unable to attend a meeting as arranged eg sickness, members must send a reserve student leader (as elected at district SRC forums) to attend in his/her place.

To have served as a member of the NSW SRC is of great benefit when students' personal resumes are being prepared when seeking employment and/or entry to tertiary courses. A number of student leaders have also sought successful membership of the Premier's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) and the National Youth Roundtable.

Thank you for your co-operation in support of the Department's student leadership and participation programs: an excellent example of a unique initiative in public education.

NSW SRC meeting dates (usually held in Sydney):
• Wednesday-Friday 20,21,22 November, 2002 (Training and meeting)
• Friday 21 March, 2003
• Friday 23 May, 2003
• Monday 28 July, 2003
• Friday 19 September, 2003

STUDENT PARTICIPATION SUPPORT MATERIALS AVAILABLE

See the back page of this issue of Connect for listings and order form.
For some six years, the words 'Higher School Certificate' are instilled in your brain. These simple words can have the overwhelming power of making you laugh, or making you cry. They can make your teeth chatter and your palms sweat. Then suddenly one morning, the letters HSC have no impact on you whatsoever and it is here you realise it is time to find your place in the big REAL world.

After completing the HSC and high school, many young people are faced with a ditch. Suddenly the stability of going to school everyday evaporates from beneath them and they are faced with everyday challenges and have no idea on an appropriate course of action. It is this time of instability which causes many young people to go through a time of anxiety and depression and be unsure of where they are wanting to head in life. They realise they do not have the skills or confidence to deal with some of the everyday situations and issues which may confront them.

High school doesn't prepare you for life; rather it prepares you for the HSC. Students are not taught enough of the everyday tactics for survival in the real world.

During my six year of high school, the most important lessons I learned were not while sitting in maths learning about calculus or reading Shakespeare in English, but rather it occurred when I was out there getting involved in school life and in the community. It was my involvement in student leadership that had the most profound impact on my development and has proven to have been the catalyst for my successes after year 12. Yes, Shakespeare and calculus is important, but we also need to help young people prepare for life after high school. We need to empower young people with skills and understanding that will ensure their success both today and in the future!

In 2003 Banana Power is launching one such program aiming to do just this.

The 2003 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CAMP (NLC) is a 5 day intensive leadership and personal development training program for young people which will equip them with the necessary skills to become better leaders in their schools and the wider community. It is an experience which will give participants the opportunity to undertake a unique interactive, challenging and practical program which will highlight the importance of developing inner strength and personal character while also enhancing their leadership and interpersonal skills. Attitude and perceptions, conflict resolution and negotiation, problem solving and decision making, goal-setting, public speaking, overcoming peer pressure, stress management and career development, relationships, team building, making a difference, servant leadership. These are just some of the areas that will be focused on during this unique five day leadership experience.

The 2003 NLC is being officially supported by the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training.

For more information about the 2003 NLC or for a camp registration brochure please contact BANANA POWER at (02) 9362 1237 or email at bananapower@optushome.com.au

Rebecca Heinrich

Australian National Leadership Camp (NLC) from the 23-27th July 2003; launched in February 2003
Operation Boredom

"Youth want to be heard. They have new ideas and different perspectives than adults. They want to make their mark in the world and affect those around them. Youth want to shape the future because that is where they will live their life." (Education Commission of the States)

Giving young people a voice in the Golden Grove community (a north-eastern suburb of Adelaide, South Australia), respecting their ideas, and allowing them to make their mark in their world is the primary aim of Operation Boredom.

Whilst Golden Grove has won international acclaim for its physical development, many young people in this region say that they are not being catered for in terms of recreation. They claim that transport is nearly non-existent at nights and weekends and that they feel unwelcome in public places, including the largest shopping centre in the region, Golden Grove Village. They claim to be hassled by some security staff and business owners whilst at this centre and are, at times, refused service when they are in their school uniform. If the local community do not want their young people to frequent these places, then they must provide alternatives where they can ‘hang out’ with their friends.

Jennifer Rankine, Member for Wright, commissioned Merydith Willoughby in July 2002, through an internship program at the University of Adelaide, to manage and develop a project that would assist students at Golden Grove High School (GGHS) to link to the wider community, and with the specific intention of giving them a voice in their community.

After several meetings with representatives from ‘Student Voice’1 and the Vice Principal, Mr Peter Phillips, these students consulted widely with the student population at GGHS to choose a name for the project. Operation Boredom was chosen as the project’s name as it is synonymous with the level of dissatisfaction that many have with the provision that has been made for them in the community for recreation. Many young people from this school and all members of the steering committee agreed that youth boredom and lack of facilities is a serious issue and that it needs to be addressed by the general community.

“I believe we gave this project the name Operation Boredom because the purpose of installing the lights at the skate park is to essentially eliminate boredom after the sun goes down. Installing the lights will also give the opportunity for other things to be installed in the vicinity”. Mark, Year 12 student, GGHS

Topics for projects included a graffiti wall, BMX track, drop-in centre, and an arcade, with some students saying: “Just build something for us!” This list of candidate projects was discussed with the school community via home groups, general conversation, teacher involvement, newsletters and in any other forum that was considered appropriate. It was a narrow margin but lights for the SK8 Park won by one vote.

The steering committee met on most weeks throughout the semester. The number of students who attended meetings varied from three to fifteen. One female and one male student were elected as student leaders. This was not expected to be an onerous task for the students but rather as a conduit for anyone wanting more information about the project’s purpose. Because student representation was disparate, at each meeting the group was briefed on project progress. A different student minuted at each proceedings and this information was then disseminated to the group prior to the conclusion of the meeting.

New members were welcome to take part in meetings or to join the steering committee of Operation Boredom at any time. Up-to-date information about the project was published in GGHS’s newsletters, spoken about in home groups and at as many other forums as possible by students and teachers.

Participants in Operation Boredom developed a range of project management skills whilst attending numerous meetings and workshops for this project. Networks have been created with a number of organisations in their local community, the youth development officer of the local council, local businesses and with the service organisation, Kiwanis.

1 Student Voice is the name of the student representative group at GGHS.
It is not only meeting skills and project management skills that have been developed by students since Operation Boredom has begun. A member of the steering committee joined with the specific intention of it assisting her to improve her essay writing.

I got involved in Operation Boredom because I thought it would help me to develop my strategies for my essay writing and assist me to improve my time management skills. Year 9 student, GGHSS

Operation Boredom has the potential to change the culture of Golden Grove community from a region where many of its young people feel that their voices are not heard, to one where their ideas are respected and where they are able to have a say in the future development of their region. It is a goal of all those affiliated with Operation Boredom that this project will be the catalyst for young people in the Golden Grove community to commence a process of change, and that will create networks in their community leading ultimately to increased trust, cooperation, growth and development in their region for all citizens.

In Australia, as in many other countries, civic engagement has been in decline for a number of years. Research shows quite clearly that when young people are involved in volunteer activities whilst at school they are more likely to continue this throughout their adulthood. Projects such as Operation Boredom can be used as means to encourage and foster active citizenship in communities as part of their public education system, with the specific intention of empowering young citizens. The common thread between similar projects is that the facilitators are serious about assisting young people to unlock their true potential whether they are 'A' students or whether they are disenfranchised from mainstream education. It is also an opportunity to link local government, state government, other similar projects, community organisations and local businesses for the benefit of our young people and the wider community. These young people can be and be seen to be an asset to their community.

As the Internship concluded at the end of November 2002, Merydith Willoughby's involvement also ceased. Denis Crisp, a key employee of Jennifer Rankine, will now be Project Organiser. For further details please contact him at: deniscrisp@bigpond.com

Bibliography

Start the year with a boost!
SRC training in term one!
Get it happening now!

SRCs need a full opportunity to work out their plan for the year, to determine their priorities. If they are going to really make a go of 2003 they need to begin now, start the year as a solid team, ready to go. The SRC can achieve even more than before!!!

Training is equally relevant for primary schools and secondary schools, just as it is vital for student councils at any level - whether highly successful or struggling to hold a decent meeting. Everyone benefits from additional training.

What does training require?
NB: You can run your own training days! Your students have lots of expertise already that you can draw from.

Student Councils should train in the same way they function: Students in control!
- Training should be based on discussion and discovery, and not on lectures and worksheets;
- All sessions should be interactive, student led wherever possible. Anything to be different from normal classes;
- A training day can run for any length of time, and can even be several sessions over a series of weeks, or an SRC camp for a few days. To really get something out of it, training should be a minimum of one full school day;
- Often it is a good idea to arrange the training day off-site, and maybe even out of uniform;
- Most importantly, a training day must contain elements that are specially pertinent to your SRC. Standardised programs are no use: you need to accommodate for the unique needs of your student council.

Second Strike Productions is a small business that specialises in providing tailor-made training days for student councils. Whatever stage your SRC is at, we can write a program to suit your needs. We have been involved with SRCs for several years now. Give us a call to discuss the possibilities!

Second Strike Productions
(03) 9855 8900
leadership.training@second-strike.com
www.second-strike.com
BUILDING TRUST AND EMPOWERMENT

PATHWAYS TO COLLABORATION IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This aim of this article is to describe a collaborative model of learning for adolescents identified as ‘at-risk’ and who experience difficulty with social and emotional health. Specifically, the article will highlight the importance of building trust and empowerment through peer-group learning.

The collaborative model of learning will examine a social skills training program and strategies that can empower adolescents to address important issues in mental health. The structure of the article will be based on three questions central to all curriculum development. What? How? Why do I need to learn this?

THE BACKGROUND

Building a collaborative process in adolescent mental health education began as an action research project to develop a relevant and meaningful social skills training program. The program was directed toward adolescents who have experienced social and emotional health problems, and were on the fringes of secondary school education. Consequently, a discussion group was established to support participants in developing and enhancing their personal and social skills. The needs of adolescents in the program were multiple and complex in their relationship. Many were living in boarding houses in inner city Melbourne, living in poverty, socially isolated, had a diagnosed mental illness or undiagnosed mental health needs. Significant issues in adolescent mental health, as described by participants in this research project include:

- the personal experience of a traumatic event;
- a form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse;
- a history of drug and alcohol abuse;
- significant problems with literacy and/or a specific learning disorder; and
- a personal sense of hopelessness as a consequence of unemployment, poverty and social isolation.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO LEARN?

Determining the content of learning in adolescent mental health education

Traditionally, social skills training courses are presented within an objective, abstract framework. The material is often irrelevant and fails to connect with the everyday language used by adolescents. The importance of self-esteem is often neglected through deficit-centred practice in adolescent mental health, where the negative qualities of the adolescent are given primary attention.

Young people will ‘switch off’ when social skills training are presented on a A4 photocopy outlining the five steps to improve communication skills, improve self-esteem or better ways of dealing with conflict.

Adolescents in the discussion group wanted to have a say, express their voice and determine the content of all our learning activities. What do we mean by “social skills training”? Our definition of social skills included three related themes: self-esteem, communication skills and personal problem-solving (dealing with conflict). As a facilitator of the peer-group learning process, the challenge for me was to take a risk and trust the value of open-ended dialogue in our learning. The stories and personal experiences of each person in the group became an important source of knowledge and enriched our learning process.

The self-esteem of the adolescent is critical in a curriculum that aims to promote social and emotional wellbeing. We began our discussion by talking about each person's strengths, abilities and interests. Personal interests in music, art, television and local community news provided topics and themes for learning. Common and shared needs formed a basis to building trust and encouraging peer-group learning. The strengths of individual participants in the group were the starting point to address significant issues in adolescent mental health. Topics in our discussion included education about mental illness, learning about medication, discussion about drugs, alcohol and harm-minimisation, the importance of counselling and exploring local community services in the area of housing, health, education and employment services.

HOW DO WE LEARN?

Working out the process in adolescent mental health education

The collaborative process in adolescent mental health education is based on peer-group learning. Peer-group learning is a means of providing social support, and being able to humanise extreme experiences of trauma, loss and grief. Peer-group learning and social support is effective in breaking the cycle of isolation and exclusion often felt by adolescents who fail in mainstream education and experience difficulty with mental health.

The importance of peer-group learning in adolescent mental health education is highlighted by the fact that very few adolescents with significant mental health issues access counselling services. This is due to high costs and the strict eligibility criteria of community health service agencies.

The success of the peer-group learning process was a result of two mutually dependent features:

- The development of Individual Learning Plans and provision of one-to-one (Key-Worker) support;
- An ongoing collaborative process in all planning and evaluation.

1. Individual learning plans

Through the development of individual learning plans, adolescents are able to identify and document their personal goals and develop strategies in their own words. Individual learning plans balanced personal interests (e.g., interest in art, access to local art galleries, accessing art groups) whilst addressing social issues such as access to, and information about, local housing, employment and education services.
The process of the individual learning plan is more important than the outcome. The quality of the professional relationship - the collaborative process - demands that we see the person and not just 'the illness' or 'the diagnosis.' Each participant was able to choose their key-worker to support their individual learning plan. Through a combination of one-to-one support and peer-group learning, adolescents were able to articulate, in their own words, important issues and obstacles to their mental health needs. Finding their voice and expressing their personal goals was a critical turning point, and the beginning of a sense of personal empowerment. The individual program plans became a critical source for ideas and topics to be explored further in the discussion group.

2. What is “collaboration”?

In our discussion group, all decision-making was a group process and everyone’s perspective was important. The curriculum process of planning and evaluation became an ongoing, continuous feature of our weekly forum.

Talking about the quality of our collaboration in the group activities was critical to the success of the peer-group learning process. Our ongoing conversation about collaboration in peer-group learning focused on the importance of everyone being given a fair-go. The values of mutual respect and ability to value, and understand ‘difference’ was central to our learning process.

Participants of the discussion group began to feel a sense of empowerment, shared ownership, responsibility and influence in determining the content and process of all our learning activities. Participants of the group occupied key roles in taking notes of our discussion topic, facilitating discussions, developing an agenda for our discussions and providing an informal induction process for new participants. As a result, participants were able to develop skills in self-expression and listening, an ability to compromise and value difference, practise skills in negotiation and problem-solving and learn new ways to deal with anger in a positive way.

Traditionally, the ‘type’ of adolescent determines the format and structure of social skills training. Conservative, authoritarian models of social skills training are unnegotiable, dependent upon a question-and-answer format and neglect open-ended dialogue or collaborative process. ‘Collaboration’ is often confused with group-work on set tasks and students completing an evaluation form at the end of the program.

“Why do I need to learn this?”

Important goals in adolescent mental health education

‘Why do I need to learn this?’ is a critical question in adolescent mental health education directed toward promoting social and emotional literacy. When adolescents have direct influence and control over the learning process, they gain a personal sense of motivation and empowerment to be involved in the decision-making process. In this research project, two goals were important.

First, the purpose of adolescent mental health education is to inform, educate and empower adolescents to adopt responsible approaches to their social and emotional health needs. The collaborative learning process aimed to encourage the individual to find their voice and trust their ability to self-advocate within the peer-group context. By taking active roles in our curriculum development, adolescents began to reflect and understand their own style of learning. The qualities of trust and empowerment within peer-group learning enabled individuals to take a risk and explore significant issues.

The second goal in adolescent mental health education is to empower the adolescent beyond the classroom or a closed environment isolated from the local community. A key decision in the development of our curriculum planning was to ensure that half of our calendar of monthly events were located in a local community setting, 'off-site.' Adolescents expressed the need to keep the learning process dynamic and not get stuck in repetition. Meetings were arranged with other adolescent/youth service groups, community health services, clinical mental health services, environmental groups and community legal-aid centres. Informal seminars and conversations were organised on a variety of topics including mental illness, the importance of medication and counselling, spirituality and hope, Buddhism, and enhancing self-awareness through meditation. The socially dynamic element to our peer-group learning process gave participants experience in self-advocacy when meeting local community health and welfare services.

On reflection, the peer-group learning process was a pathway, 'a stepping stone' for adolescents to build a link between their personal interests, their immediate health needs and resources in the local community.

Conclusion

Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. (To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee; p. 283)

Adolescents in this research project on collaborative learning identified empathy and an ability to value ‘difference’ as critical skills in developing their social and emotional literacy. The peer-group learning process enabled young people to stand in each other’s shoes and “walk around in them.”

This article has described a collaborative approach to learning in adolescent mental health education based on the principles of trust and empowerment.

As educators, we need to take a risk and build new types of relationships based on dialogue and mutual respect, to develop a critical, holistic understanding of the complex issues in adolescent mental health. Adolescents identified as 'at-risk' can play a leading role in curriculum development and ensure that the skills, knowledge and values within the learning process are both personally relevant and socially significant.

Underlying the collaborative approach to peer-group learning in adolescent mental health education was the importance of not only exploring the social process within our learning environment, but also the social context of life in the local community. By valuing the stories and experiences of adolescents, we were developing a holistic understanding of our self as a social being.

Mitch Musulin
mitchmusulin2002@yahoo.com.au

This concludes an article from Connect 137, October 2002
News and Reviews

School Councils UK
At School Councils UK we have been working with schools up and down the country to help them involve their students in meaningful decision-making and active citizenship.

We are very excited to let you know about our brand new web site which is at:

http://www.schoolcouncils.org

We hope you will take a moment to browse the site, which is full of new guidance and resources for those working to increase the participation of young people. New information includes:
- School (student) council badges and resources;
- Case studies of good practice;
- Information on the new UK School Councils Network;
- Curriculum guidance;
- Sample document templates.

The site is designed for both young people and adults, with many features for enhanced accessibility. We would be particularly interested in your feedback, which can be submitted via the web site. If you would like to be kept informed of updates to the site and news about school councils, please register by emailing us at info@schoolcouncils.org

IDEC 2003
The International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) will be held in the USA in July 2003. All the information is at: http://www.idec2003.com

We'd love to hear from Australians planning to attend. See the report on IDEC 2000 (New Zealand) in Connect 137.

Participation of Young People in the Planning and Delivery of Youth Services and in the Media
As part of an internship for her public policy degree, the convenor of YACVic's Youth Reference Group, Michelle Blanchard, has recently completed a report on young people's participation in the planning and delivery of services for young people in the Oakleigh Electorate.

The report is now available online at http://members.optusnet.com.au/~m.blanchard/index.htm.

Prue Hill, a member of the YACVic Youth Reference Group has also been busy recently completing a study placement at YACVic as part of her degree in public affairs. During her placement Prue undertook research into young people's participation in the media. An executive summary of the report 'Having a say: Young People's Involvement in the Media' appears in the latest edition of YACVic's YiKES! newsletter.

River Health Conference
17 - 21 October 2003
It's on again! The highly successful Murray-Darling Commission (MDBC) International River Health Conference will run from October 17 to 21, 2003 in Mildura. The Conference, which first ran in 1999, attracts over 600 students and teachers from across Australia and countries around the world.

For more info: For more information, contact Arron Wood ph 03 9329 3736, email him at: arron@fire-starter.com.au or see the conference website: http://www.riverhealth.com

Social Educators' Association of Australia (SEAA)
2003 Biennial National Conference
Social Education for a Changing World
Rydges Hotel, Exhibition Street, Melbourne
July 9-12, 2003
Conference Themes:
- Environmental Sustainability; Discovering Democracy - the way forward for Civics and Citizenship Education;
- Indigenous Issues; Rediscovering Social Justice; The Challenges of Globalisation; Values in a changing world.

Local and Overseas Publications Received

Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA, Deakin West, ACT) Vol 22 No 4, November 2002
Education Links (Centre for Popular Education, UTS, NSW) No 65, Spring 2002
Home Educaion Information Sheet (AERG, Daylesford, Vic) http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au
Network News (Network of Community Activities, Surry Hills, NSW) December 2002
Research Developments (ACER, Vic) No 9, Summer 2002
Starlink (Boronia, Vic) Issue 48; November 2002
Youth Research News (Youth Research Centre, Vic) Vol 12 No 3, December 2002
Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 21 No 4, December 2002

International:
Communication Research Trends (Los Gatos, Ca, USA) Vol 21 No 4, 2002
Education Now (Nottingham, UK) No 38, Winter 2002
Foxfire Core Practices in Action (Kaye Collins and Margie Bennett, Foxfire, Georgia, USA) Volumes A and C; August, 2002
Leadership (NASSP, USA) Vol 31 Nos 4, 5; December 2002 and January 2003

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

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

Code Description/Pages/Cost
528 Youth and Citizenship: Looking at perceptions of citizenship among young people (Elton Consulting - project information sheet) (1 p; $0.50)
529 Young people on boards and committees: American and Australian experiences (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, July 2002) (21 pp; $2.10)

Friends of Connect
By subscribing at a higher rate, the following have helped keep Connect going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following contributions since the last issue of Connect:

Supporting Subscribers ($50 pa):
Dr Helen Hayes
Leanne Carr and Mary Hudson

Sustaining Subscribers ($100 - two years):
Auburn Youth Centre
Dr Peter Carey
Pat Thomson

Is Your Connect Subscription Up-to-date?
The number on your Connect label tells you the issue with which your subscription expires. Please renew promptly - renewal notices cost us time and money!

Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA)
Conversations
10th Biennial Conference: Celebrating 20 Years of ACSA
28-30 September 2003; Adelaide, South Australia
(Reduced rate registration before 30 June)
Contact: ACSA Secretariat for registration information: acsa@acsas.edu.au; phone: (08) 8463 5875

February 2003
Copy or use this form to subscribe to Connect and to order materials from Connect:

To: CONNECT, 12 Brooke Street, Northcote 3070 Victoria Australia

From: Name: .................................................................

Address: ........................................................................ Postcode: ......................

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

I/we enclose a new/renewal subscription to CONNECT:
(circle amount) 1 year 2 years
- an individual or personal subscription $20 $40
- a primary/secondary school student subscription $5 $10
- an organisational (school, library etc) subscription $30 $60
- a student organisation (SRC, JSC etc) subscription $10 $20
- a supporting/sustaining subscription $50 $100
- a lifetime subscription: ... forever: ...

$1000

Subscription Sub-total: $ ............

MATERIALS:

Back issues of Connect ($4 single; $6 double issue). Circle issue/s required: $ ............
- Cross-referenced index to contents of Connect back issues ($3) $ ............

Miscellaneous Resources:
- Students and Work - 1985 Connect reprint booklet #5 ($5) $ ............
- 'Youth Radio' issue of 3CR's CRAM Guide (1985) ($1) $ ............
- Democratic Decision Making in Schools - Victorian PEP (1987) ($3) $ ............
- Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work (1996) ($7 or $12 for two copies) $ ............

Foxfire Resources:
- Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($25) $ ............
- Foxfire: 25 Years (Dubbeday) ($25) $ ............
- A Foxfire Christmas (Dubbeday hardcover) ($25) $ ............
- Shining Moments - Foxfire video (1 hour) (loan for 1 week: $5) $ ............

Documents:
- Photocopies of the following documents: ............ $ ............
- Cross-referenced Index to photocopies of documents ($3) $ ............

(all prices include postage and packaging) TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ ............