Le Tour de Student Participation

NASPAC 6

Also in this issue:
- NASPAC 6 - first reports, papers, photos
- Radical Connectedness ... to Community Action
- Sydney Road Community School Turns 30
- Taking a Risk in Mental Health Collaboration
- NSW SRC 2002: A Report to Students
- International Democratic Education Conference
- Resources: Reference Group, Conferences, Publications

& Incorporating the PASTA Newsletter #29

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This Issue:

Two conferences are reported on in this issue of Connect: NASPAC 6 (the 6th National Student Participation Conference), just recently held in Melbourne in October, and IDEC (the 10th International Democratic Education Conference), held in New Zealand in August.

There are substantive similarities in the aims and intentions reported: sharing of information, networking, inspiring and supporting change, developing ideas and action. Both reports talk of participants' optimism and a sense that the time is right for the extension of these educational approaches that value young people, that challenge them with worthwhile and important things to do and learn, and that stress their participation in making decisions about their education and their lives.

I heard principally of IDEC, while overseas, and couldn't arrange to get there so soon after returning to Australia. However Andy and Geordie from Sherbrooke Community School (in Victoria) managed to get there on very little notice; we hope to hear more of initiatives arising from the conference, in future issues of Connect - especially as Geordie has undertaken to initiate some networking between students in the schools represented.

Of course, Connect has been integrally involved with NASPAC for many years, and for NASPAC 6, I assisted with programming as well as offering some workshops. What a high energy conference of students this was... limited only by participants' lack of sleep! You can read some of the reports in this issue... with more to follow as students tell how they are using the information and inspiration back in their schools.

(Copies of this issue of Connect are, by the way, being sent to all NASPAC participants. I hope that many of you will take the opportunity to subscribe and keep using this magazine as a vehicle for sharing stories, telling tales, asking for advice, and searching for resources.)

Also in this issue are articles about connectedness with community (a paper given at NASPAC 6), about democratic mental health education, about the 30th anniversary of student participation in a community school, and more about trainee teachers' experience and views of student participation.

And a report from the New South Wales state-level Student Representative Council to their State Conference of students in August. Here are student representatives being publicly accountable, and recording what they have done to fulfill the mandate given them a year previously. Their experience is particularly valuable in a context in which we see the ACT Student Network moving steadily ahead, but the Victorian Secondary Student Network stalled. At NASPAC 6 there was a lot of talk about networking - but we clearly need to analyse its value... and understand the barriers as well as the possibilities.

 Doubtless, more on this anon! Until December...

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #138: December 2002
Deadline for material: end of November
National Student Participation Conference # 6

Melbourne, Tuesday October 1 - Friday October 4,

NASPAC VI

Continuing a tradition that began over twenty years ago, the 6th National Student Participation Conference (NASPAC), held in Melbourne between the 1st and 4th October, enthusiastically highlighted the diverse faces of student participation in Australia.

The Conference was attended by over 80 people, who came from five states and territories: Tasmania, SA, NSW, ACT, WA and Victoria. In line with the trend of the last two Conferences, NASPAC 6 was mainly a conference of active students. It was organised and presented by young people, principally for young people who are active in secondary schools. Teachers, parents, consultants and others also attended - some initially as presenters of sessions, but staying to listen, debate, learn and participate.

NASPAC 6 aimed to enable participants to share information, to network, to inspire and be inspired. Thus sessions were organised around developing a common language, about 'big picture' purposes, on specific skills, on telling about experiences. Much of the conference was conducted in small workshop groups and this approach recognised the skills and abilities within the group that could be brought to bear on common issues and problems.

The four days were loosely themed (as indicated on the next four pages): it was important to recognise that student participation meant more than simply 'the SRC', even though that might have been the initial understanding of some participants.

And so the Conference asked on the first morning: "What do we mean when we say 'student participation'?" Participants broke into groups of three (challenged to mix locations and age: "at least one student and one adult; at least two states/territories"), and were asked to design a 'poster' illustrating the shared meaning and understanding within the group.

Common words were heard from many of the groups:
- "working together"; "team-work";
- "appreciating others' ideas and values"; "giving people respect";
- "voice of youth"; "having a say";
- "being heard"; "getting respect (from students, teachers, the community etc)";
- "being active"; "having active involvement";
- "sharing ideas and solutions";
- "developing community";
- "contributing to a positive environment"; "making a better world"; "improving schools";
- "developing new skills";
- "taking control"; "representation" and "democracy".

Common values underpinned the discussion: responsibility, understanding, respect, commitment, patience, including people, assertion, cooperation, integrity...

And common images kept emerging: mind-maps, nets and webs, linkages, world views...

Somewhere in there we first met the analogy of student participation as a bicycle: hence Le Tour de Student Participation (Downunder). This bicycle has a small driving wheel (active students), with a larger front wheel (directions for work in the community). Things can go wrong: the chain can fall off, and hence there's no drive; the wheels can fall off altogether, the bike falls apart and you don't get anywhere; a loose wheel means you can wander around a bit; you need to learn to ride - often by just getting on and having a go; but once you learn, you always remember it...

And the word fun kept coming up - student participation must be enjoyable and purposeful. It must be 'cool'... "because boring people suck" said one note. So there was a lot of laughter at NASPAC 6!

A formal report from the Conference will be published in the near future and sent to participants. For the moment, the following pages provide some first glimpses, stories, reports and impressions.

To get a formal report, contact the NASPAC 6 organisers:
Second Strike Productions
12 Menzies Grove, Ivanhoe 3079
e: NASPAC@second-strike.com
web: www.second-strike.com

October 2002

Plans for NASPAC 7
Tuesday, October 1, 2002

Student Participation: Orientation and Meaning

What Stops or Limits Student Participation:

The whole conference broke into small groups on the first day to brainstorm about the barriers to effective student participation. The recurring themes were then allocated back to groups and each asked to come up with some suggestions in a short time:

- Students who believe it is not necessary: that others will represent them:
  We need to make the SRC relevant to students' needs; compulsory so that everyone is involved (through home groups etc); "remove the Principal and put the SRC in charge".

- Representation is by popularity, not the ability to do a good job:
  We could use a submission form with the teachers checking and giving a list of possible students, then all students vote - there were arguments expressed for and against this.

- Ideas are blocked by those in power; other people who feel threatened:
  Find out who is threatened and how and why etc, and treat it like a problem to be solved; consult with and ask them; talk with them and negotiate to find possible solutions; develop a pilot approach, implement it, evaluate it, re-design it.

- Lack of personal commitment (motivation, the clash between lazy people and some with too much control):
  It is individual responsibility to be motivated; replace lazy people; the selection process is vital; shared roles and responsibilities - explain clearly about the time you have to give.

- Time (after school or lunchtime) and Commitment:
  You could meet during school time; financial support is important - also people coming to school and enjoying classes.

- Not having a plan to achieve goals, that involves all:
  Decide on the main focus of the proposal, make simple and achievable goals, set deadlines.

- Lack of Departmental support:
  Don't give up; get support from some-one at a higher level.

- Perceptions and beliefs that people won't listen:
  Have a go - stop being negative; got to show your views; work as a group; explain to others: "we have more votes than you"; give Principals and others credit when they listen.

- Experienced people who say "I know best":
  Convince people to give us a go by providing reasons and plans.

- Unrealistic expectations from those on SRCs, and from other students:
  a) educate SRC members on their roles before they stand for election; develop an SRC mission statement; make student representatives accountable;
  b) keep students informed of what has already been done; ask students and involve them in the action.

Phanthropy: Student-Run Foundation

Young people in Australia are generous and want to support good causes, but they don’t know how to do it in an organised way. A group of inspired typical teenagers saw how philanthropy could be structured. In this presentation, two of these students shared their experiences in setting up and managing the Melbourne Girls’ College Student Foundation - the first student-run foundation in Australia. The foundation raises funds, calls for applications and then decides how to target its money to make changes in its community (see article in Connect 135-136, August 2002).

Evaluation

Two tools were presented that could be used in schools and other groups. The first, based on the work of Gerard de Kort for UNESCO in Bangkok, allows young people and adults to examine and compare their perspectives on the degree of youth participation across the organisation. The second provides a grid for Student Councils to use to reflect on the range of issues that they tackle. Both these tools are available from Connect. (See Connect 116, April 1999 for the most recent version of the latter tool.)
Day 2

Student Participation in the Curriculum

Wednesday, October 2, 2002

8.30 am Homegroups

9.30 am Keynote Speaker: Participation: Beyond the SRC

Steve Cutting: ABC Talkback Classroom

10.30 am Break

11.00 am Curriculum Model Workshops:
- Student Action Teams
- Civics and Citizenship Education
- Negotiating Curriculum

12.00 am Presentations:
- r.u.MAD*
- Students as Researchers

12.30 pm Lunch & Activities

2.00 pm Skill and Discussion Workshops:
- Researching and Consulting
- Presenting and Speaking
- Organising Events
- Communication
- Spaces for Participation in a Set Curriculum
- Getting Connected

3.00 pm Skill Workshops: repeat of above

4.00 pm Break

4.30 pm Plenary:
Value Clarification Exercise
... on Student Participation and Curriculum

5.30 pm Close

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What is r.u.MAD?

- Making a Difference by addressing the cause
- Helping kids change their world through planning, decision-making, leadership and teamwork
- Student-run projects and foundations
- Web-based tools
- Available from www.rumad.org.au

A four-page workshop outline is available from Connect. Or contact John Davidson, Schools Coordinator on phone: 0410 708 300 or e-mail: john@educationfoundation.org.au

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Student Action Teams
Students as Researchers
Researching and Consulting

These three workshops drew on material recently published in Connect: see issues 128 & 130 (Student Action Teams), issues 129 & 135-6 (Students as Researchers) and issue 133-4 (Consulting Students). We talked about research methods and designed some possible ways of collecting and analysing information.

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Eye contact, posture, engaging your audience.... and that's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to public speaking...

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Getting Connected

David Zynigier's paper at the Conference is included in this issue of Connect - see pages 9 to 12.

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Values Clarification

Prepare two signs: 'agree' and 'disagree' and put these at either end of the room.

Read out a statement eg "students don't have enough background knowledge to negotiate curriculum" and ask people to move to the position they hold. Then challenge someone to justify their position. Ask someone on the other side of the room. Participants may move if convinced by the arguments. Try another statement.

(Variation: four signs along the room - 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree')

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Workshop notes
Meeting Procedures

The group firstly brainstormed problems:
- Members arriving late
- People not showing up at all
- Motivation
- People not confident; not speaking up
- Popularity contest to be voted in
- No formal debate
- Lack of focus
- Some dominant members
- Time management/deadlines
- Events are postponed
- Following up decisions - either don’t have or don’t use an action sheet
- Even spread of issues dealt with

They then brainstormed possible ideas:

**How to motivate:** distribute minutes beforehand; **timing:** lunchtime (esp year 11/12) or during class time (esp years 7-10) or electives time; start halfway through lunchtime;

**Frequency of meetings:** 1, 2, 3 weeks? - depends on efficiency;

**SRC training:** esp 2-day SRC camp; team bonding; get to know people outside the meeting context;

**Room arrangement:** careful of positions of power (person opposite or next to chairperson); right-handed person looks to the right more often; physical setting of the room;

**Attendance:** Making people turn up to meetings; kick them out if they don’t turn up to 3 meetings;

**Agendas:** could be set by the president, secretary/minute-taker or the whole committee at the meeting;

**Minutes:** review at start of meeting; send out minutes/agenda of next meeting;

**Chairperson:** elected president (could be continually serving or rotating); needs to lead discussion; needs to know how to lead discussion/meeting;

**Facilitate discussions:** put people on the spot; shut up people who talk too much;

**Formal debate:** motion - mover, seconder, against, for, against, for; then vote; **benefits** are that it is structured, focused (know their exact reasons), keeps to time; **disadvantages:** must train people beforehand, not everyone gets to speak;

**Casual debate:** benefits: don’t have to wait to speak, more friendly; **disadvantages:** go over time, dominated by loud people;

**Voting:** coloured cards raised at the same time, then attempt to record consensus.

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**NSW Commission**

An overview of work with Deniliquin, Lake Macquarie and Port Jackson District SRCs to build participation strategies and provide advocacy skills training.

Copies of the Commission's Information Sheets and also the TAKING PARTICIPATION Seriously kit are available from the Commission:

Level 2, 407 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010

c: kids@kids.nsw.gov.au

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**Fair School Wear**

Working to eliminate the exploitation of outworkers: in recent years there have been more incidents of outworkers making school uniforms. This workshop presented information and action strategies for SRCs and other student groups.

Information from:

fairwear@vic.uca.org.au

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**DART:**

- Discussion
- Action
- Representation
- Thought

DART is for people who believe that they want a better democratic society. Please note: this has endless potential, just like you.

DART is about SRCs/SUs increasing young people's involvement in public discussion and giving power to the voice of young people ...

(DART notes: available from Connect)

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When I get back to school
I wish to organise a
DART forum for issues
concerning the students at
my school.

Amy, ACT

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Day 3

8.30 am Home groups
9.30 am Plenary:
- What do we Mean by Student Councils? 
  (Activity: Mapping the School)
10.30 am Break
11.00 am Presentation:
- Running a Student Forum (DART - Banyule City Council *)
12.00 am Presentations:
  - Fair Wear *
  - NSW Commission on Children and Young People *
  - Kids Help Line and YACVic
12.30 pm Lunch & Activities
1.30 pm City Tour
3.30 pm Panel and Hypothetical:
- How can SRCs give students real power in a school? (guided and interactive 'fishbowl' panel of students, teacher, parent, Principal)

4.30 pm Skill Workshops:
  - Meeting Procedures
  - Constitutions
  - Passing on Skills and Teaching Others
  - Social Justice and SRCs: including ALL students

5.30 pm Skill Workshops:
  - Fund-raising
  - Publicity and Motivation
  - Role of Teachers in SRCs
  - Persuading Principals and Teachers

5.30 pm Close
Day 4

**Friday, October 4, 2002**

**Student Participation: Networks and Forward**

- **8.30 am** Home groups
- **9.30 am** Group Reports & Presentations:
  - **10.30 am** Break
  - **11.00 am** Group Reports:
    - Regional, State and National Networks
      - Presentations:
        - **Tasmania**
        - **Victoria**
        - **NSW**
        - **SA**
        - **ACT Student Network**
  - **12.00 am** Presentations:
    - **Youth at the Centre**
    - **Training & Networking (Second Strike)**
  - **12.30 pm** Lunch & Activities
- **1.30 pm** Looking Forward Workshops:
  - **Networking: How To**
  - **Working with Education Departments**
  - **National and International SRCs?**
  - **New Possibilities**
- **2.30 pm** Closing Plenary:
  - Resolutions and Decisions - where to now?
  - Close

"NASPAC 6 was the ultimate networking experience. We all met similar people from right across Australia who we will be e-mailing for the rest of our lives..."

*Kate, Victoria*

- **These papers from the Conference are available from Connect - see page 31.**

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**Tasmania**

Tasmania doesn't have a statewide network for or of SRCs. There is the Premier's Youth Advisory Council, but that deals with youth issues in general rather than student issues specifically.

The Tasmanian sector of the students attending NASPAC #6 conference discussed this exact issue on the last day of the conference. Issues that came up in conversation concerned the facts that individual SRCs in Tasmanian schools were not yet very strong and it would be better to build a good foundation before creating anything statewide. The group also discussed the fact that Tasmania's Education Department doesn't seem to place the same amount of value on school SRCs as other states do.

If positive action were taken towards creating a Tasmanian SRC network, the group felt that there would be problems with finding funding. Though this was brought up, there seemed to be a certain level of enthusiasm which accompanied it all the same. The need for this network is obviously present, even if there was a lack of formality to the organisation just some way to transfer information. SRCs and students need to find out what other schools are doing and break down the barriers, find out that they aren't just alone on their own and have a source of support. Other schools may be in the same position.

There would also be the possibility of creating a council of sorts, so that instead of just teachers or principals being linked via a specific group or board, the students would be too. This would create an opportunity for SRCs (if the need ever arose) to pass projects or create policies on mass for the whole state. The proviso for this would be that all schools would have the opportunity to have a representative on the student board.

Coming from a high school which is innovative in its education, yet (in my opinion) somewhat lacking in its SRC and student participation, I think that the need to understand what SRCs have the power to do and change should first be fully understood. Only then would students have a real opportunity to get actively involved in their schooling life instead of the alternative of just floating along without this option.

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**Final Session Decisions:**

In the final plenary session, the following proposals were agreed to:

- information and topics to be sent to SRC groups to discuss and comment on; the replies to be collated and circulated. **Action:** Belinda, Cara;
- a web-site-based discussion list to be set up to build the NASPAC identity and keep the ideas discussed alive. **Action:** Joseph, Todd;
- the e-mail discussion list to be open to other students;
- students from each state and territory to be encouraged to report state and network action onto the e-mail discussion list, Connect etc;
- peak student representative bodies (and their supporting Departments) in each state and territory to be encouraged to contact each other and build national networks;
- student networks to include non-SRC students;
- the conference accepts the ACT Student Network offer to initiate and host NASPAC 7.

Further information will be reported in Connect as these ideas are put into action.
I am sure you will have heaps from this conference that you too will remember well into the rest of your lives. I believe that the experiences that you have, the people you meet, and the discussions you share, shape and alter the person you continually become, so I can surely say that this has had an impact and will do so throughout the years to come. I have so many positive things to say about this opportunity and the power of young people coming together and making a difference... but that would be endless.

Hailey, Victoria

NASPAC 6 confronted not only burning school-based issues, but also tackled some of the bigger picture. It was a chance to see that young people can make a difference...

Kate, Victoria

I think these conferences are really good for me, 'cos I really want the youth of today to be heard, to have a say... and I am so passionate about this stuff, even though I can play up.

James, Victoria

NASPAC 6 was a worthwhile experience as it really gave me the push to put something back into my community and school. The best thing was being able to communicate with other students all over Australia and seeing how they operate things and making new friendships.

I learnt: don't be afraid to speak up no matter how worthless you think your opinions are - they may be useful to someone else.

At the moment we are trying to set up a student foundation (through R.U.MAD) and have an SRC constitution.

Stacey, Victoria

My favourite thing about NASPAC was learning all the ice-breaker games. These are really great for getting to know people - not just their names, but the things they enjoy and what they stand for. I have made a list of these games so that I can use them at school to create cohesion and participation in the student council and general school life.

Genevieve, Victoria

Please take at least something away to implement at your own school or in the community - I know I will. And keep in touch: these are the best ways to develop networks.

James, Victoria

Sooo much fun ... and we learnt stuff too.

Kess, NSW

Keep the networks going
Keep the contact up
Keep the energy going
Keeps the SRCs alive
Keeping watching the skies
for NASPAC 7

Todd, ACT

Photos in this report by Todd Wright; Elephant by Michael Ashton
Radical Connectedness:
Isn’t it time that education came out from behind the classroom door?

“The problems of schools are so compelling and the urge to get in there and deal with what is happening to our children so understandably powerful we sometimes lose the capacity or do not have the time to step back and ask the critical questions about the organisation of the society in which we live.”


We are all committed to making schools a better place - the efforts to improve pedagogy are crucial.

Teachers know, from being in the classroom daily, that the main thing students want when it comes to engaging education is to leave the classroom! Students crave the opportunity to take education beyond the school walls.

‘It is not fair to students who cannot afford to leave school earlier than year 12, given the new structures of work and further education, nor to those for whom schooling is successful in traditional terms, to perform the selecting and sorting functions of the normal secondary school years when that sorting is based on old job and societal structures’ (Brennan, 2001, 23).

Students are the central promise of schools, not existing knowledge, staff or assessment. Students are the reason and the major resource for accomplishing reform (along with teachers!).

‘Secondary schools in the compulsory years ought to be able to provide an education that engages all students and that is of the best possible quality, at the forefront of educational innovation. ... For students to attend school when it is a compulsory institution in a democracy means that society has a large investment in the wide range of what schools can offer a community’ (Brennan, 2001, 20).

As a focus of curriculum development, connectedness has been defended as a valuable pedagogic strategy at least since the early twentieth century work of progressive educators such as Dewey in 1916! The concept of teaching and learning based on community and intellectual ‘projects’ is central to our discussions.

The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard, Ladwig, et al, 2001) is concerned with how student learning, both academic and social, could be enhanced. The study’s original contribution to the school reform debate is to specify which aspects of teaching require our urgent attention.

Classroom teachers must shift attention from the emphasis on so-called basic skills towards what the QSRLS report has termed productive pedagogies. These incorporate intellectually challenging material that is relevant and connected to the children’s lives, recognising that children learn in different ways and have different needs all done in a supportive class room environment.

Students most at-risk of failure, from socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged conditions, are the least likely to be exposed to the intellectually challenging and relevant material. Those most at risk of failure are therefore condemned to mediocrity in a most Kafkaesque way.

‘Schools not only reflect social inequality, they actively contribute to widening that inequality during the secondary years’ (Brennan, 2001, 13).

Connectedness to social and community development aims to produce the solution to social problems through ‘action learning’ and ‘action research’ approaches to schooling and education. Connectedness incorporates all facets of Productive Pedagogies.

What Sort of Connected Education?
Apple (1996, 99-100) writes that ‘few people who have witnessed the levels of boredom and alienation among our students in schools will quarrel with the assertion that curricula should be more closely linked to real life’. The issue is who decides which vision of real life, whose values, are to be taught? The construction of real life on the basis of preparation for often non-existent paid work is in fact the core problem.

‘Schools’ purposes have narrowed too far to a “human capital” argument whereby schools are only valued for their contribution to the economic life of the nation and the future job prospects of individual students’ (Brennan, 2001, 5).

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1 Teachers who are interested in exploring the concepts of productive pedagogies and the New Basics can read about them in more detail on the web at http://education.qld.gov.au/public_media/reports/curriculum-framework/qsr/ where original source material can be downloaded and printed or read on line.

October 2002
Three Final Questions to All Interested in Education

1. Is it possible to change schools without a concomitant change in the social and economic conditions?

2. Is school reform more about raising the achievement level and scores on what the reformers have determined to be "high status knowledge" than improving the lives of the children?

3. The final question is "who is to really benefit" from any changes we make to education?

In the end we are talking about the lives and the futures of our children!

David Zyngier

Bibliography


David Zyngier recently completed the development of the ruMAD? Program - Kids Making a Difference in the Community for the Education Foundation. He is an Education Consultant and former school principal currently undertaking his Doctoral Thesis in education at Monash University. The area of his research is "How School Connectedness can improve student outcomes for all but in particular at risk students." He is also researching the effectiveness of "Non Systemic and Non Traditional Programs" in addressing student disengagement with learning for the Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN.

He can be contacted at:
David.Zyngier@education.monash.edu.au
This paper was presented at NASPAC 6, Melbourne, October 2002.
Active Citizenship ... Student Participation
What does it mean to trainee teachers?

In the last issue of Connect, we published some short articles contributed by trainee teachers at the University of Melbourne, about their perceptions and knowledge of ‘student participation’. Here are four more contributions that arrived after the last issue was compiled:

Student Newspaper at an Alternative School

Collingwood Alternative School is a school which caters to a diverse group of students who either, through personal preference or personal circumstances, do not fit into the mainstream secondary school system.

The school caters in particular to “at risk” students who may have a history of crime, homelessness, family problems, drug dependency issues and/or psychiatric illness.

The school’s curriculum is very vocationally oriented; students aged 15 years and over in the school study for a Certificate in Workplace Placement equivalent to Year Ten but with a focus on employment opportunities.

Despite the school’s vocational orientation, there is scope for practical inculcation into democratic values and citizenship. The school magazine The Alternative Times provides the students with an avenue for creative writing and self expression while critically engaging with current issues and events.

In the Term 2, 2002 edition of the magazine, the “My Opinion” section focused on student responses to the controversial (for the students) question “should councils help stop graffiti by banning the sale of spraypaint to people under the age of 18?” Through this, students at the school were able to express a wide variety of perspectives and opinions springing from the original question, including issues of drug abuse by paint inhalation or “chroming”, vandalism, discrimination by class or race, environmental concerns and the possibility of providing legal avenues for graffiti artists.

The student responses reflected an overall sense of social responsibility along with an active interest in their social environment and their own rights as members of the community.

The inclusion of a student newspaper at the school allows for an ongoing exercise in citizenship grounded in the realities of the students’ day to day lives, as well as requiring an active and responsible participation by the students themselves, while encouraging the development of writing, research and layout skills needed to produce the magazine.

Michael Long

Student Newspaper at a Primary School

I have assisted students on a newspaper that was produced at a primary school with the consent of the school. The newspaper was called THE (under)AGE. The newspaper was the initiative of some of the students. They wished to produce a paper but most of all they wanted to voice their opinions. The students produced the paper in their own time and, in the main, outside of the school. The paper was often devised and set-up in one of the parent’s homes. It was a paper that many students contributed to and the intention was to have no censorship.

The paper was very popular not only with the students but also with the parents. There were puzzles and jokes but there was a social commentary and sometimes political articles written by the students. I would like to emphasise here that the students produced this paper with small assistance from any parent and the contributions were student only. The quality of the paper was very impressive.

The students created through the paper a sense of community and an understanding of how important team work in the outside world can be. They had to deal with deadlines and they had to make some choices on the articles submitted. These were pretty responsible decisions for primary students. The rest of school was very proud of their paper and contributed regularly.

There was, however, a very interesting insight to the world of politics, with one issue being banned. This was because of an article written by one of the students which the principal did not feel was appropriate. The person who wrote the article (also the initiator of the paper and the driving force behind it) could not agree that the article was a problem. The article was modified, however the students didn’t support the censorship and were very angry and a little disillusioned - particularly the author. There were many lessons learnt by many people besides the students. The issue of freedoms however over-rote all at the end of the day! An interesting lesson in life!

Tom Brennan

October 2002
Solar Car Challenge

During my recent school placement at a Melbourne secondary college, I observed some student-centred activities that underline the importance of active student participation in a school environment and beyond.

Last year, for the first time, the school decided to enter the Victorian Model Solar Vehicle Challenge administered by the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Monash University. The competition involved designing a functional solar car, which was to be raced against other competitors during a series of races held at Scienceworks on the weekend of October 18-19, 2001. Three teams from the school competed during the annual Solar Car Competition. The three design teams included both boys and girls and ranged from year 7 - 10. The teams were so successful that they won two awards:

- **Best Entry for a New School in the “Car Challenge”** - presented by the Department of Education and Training.
- **Best Engineered Car** - presented by the Institute of Engineers Australia.

However, the real success of the project goes beyond the awards. As one of the supervising teachers indicated to me, students took real initiative and dedicated their time to the project, which was not part of the curriculum and therefore had to be completed outside of school hours. The students were intrinsically motivated to accept a challenge that went beyond classroom activities, that provided them with the opportunity to be creative and build something that works at the end and allow them to work in a team environment, where students, teachers and parents work towards a common goal. At the same time, through active student participation, students learned about alternative energy sources, scientific principles and about values relating to team work and the benefits of active participation in a project. Furthermore, as a result of the teams’ efforts, one of the teachers and three students traveled to Los Angeles in the United States, where they were invited to present their findings to a conference regarding alternative energy sources.

This is a very good example of active student participation resulting in real outcomes, which motivates other students to get involved as well. However, the success story of these students is not finished yet, as they are currently working on their new designs to enter this year’s competition.

Peer Support

My high school was a boys Catholic private school, consisting of years 5 and 6 as the remnants of a previous primary section, and years 7-12. My graduation from year 6 to year 7 was a great leap in expectation and environment, including a significant influx of new students who joined the college’s secondary classes from adjoining primary schools. This created an unfamiliar and unsettling atmosphere even amongst us ‘old boys’ who were at least a little familiar with the secondary section of the school. Even more daunting and intimidating was the size and confidence of all the other older unfamiliar secondary students we now shared our corridors and playgrounds with.

To aid our transition into this environment, the school endorsed a peer support program, involving selected year 10 students being assigned to groups of year 7s. The year 10s were able to apply for the peer support position and generally were seen as class leaders with a degree of responsibility. They were given a short training session on the needs of the new students. Our Year 7s were sorted in groups of five, and assigned two peer support leaders per group as part of the orientation day. This was in the last week of school in December of the year before starting high school. We met again with our peer support leaders on the first day of school, providing us with familiar faces of bigger boys, a great relief. My peer support leaders were excellent, joking around with us, kicking the football, saying ‘hi’ to us in the playground, showing us the different areas of the school etc. It was definitely a positive and settling experience.

I went on to become a peer support leader when the opportunity arose for myself in year 10, and gave it all the effort and respect the role deserved.

David Ling

Anthony Novack
PASTA NEWSLETTER
# 29 - October 2002

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

For some time now work has been progressing on ways in which the status of teacher advisers in schools can be improved. While focusing on the New South Wales education system, this formal proposal details some specific actions that would assist communication and the pursuit of joint projects that can be easily adapted by other States and Territories. In slightly revised form since its first distribution in April, this document has been distributed to key educational groups in NSW, to PASTA’s financial members and those on the SRCA e-group for comment. If you have still not seen or contributed your thoughts on this document, contact PASTA Secretary: esheerin@ozemail.com.au If you have received a copy and have not yet had an opportunity to respond, your comments (no matter how brief) would be much appreciated.

As a result of the work done so far, a very productive meeting was held in early October between PASTA members and representatives of the NSW DET. While it is only early days yet, plans for a working party that will meet during Term 4 to look at ways in which further support for these issues can be generated have been put in progress. There is also discussion taking place for some further joint Professional Development opportunities to be presented early in Term 1, 2003.

In Term 4 we hope to begin posting a separate members-only booklet to all financial members four times a year in addition to this more widely available Connect newsletter. It will provide more detailed members’ news, more practical leadership lesson plans and resources and a focus on professional development for all systems and levels. Professional Development opportunities in 2003, especially for those working in non-government schools and for new SRC Advisers, will be two features of the first Term 4 issue. Again, your input into what you would find of use in such a booklet would be invaluable. Even better, consider submitting an article on what you or your school SRC is doing.

Finally, PASTA congratulates the Second Strike Productions Organising Committee who put the recent NASPAC 6 together. While Executive Committee Member, Sydney University student Rebecca Heinrich, was able to attend part of it, we are sorry that personal circumstances prevented much other in-person involvement by our members. We trust that our eight varied submissions on a wide variety of topics and genuine words of support were heard and provided impetus for continuing fruitful collaborations amongst all of us working in this field in all states and territories. We appreciated the time and effort made by David Mould in attending our August meeting to discuss some things happening in Victoria. We look forward to news of future such efforts by any group anywhere.

Ken Page
Acting President

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http://hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/

October 2002
A YOUNG LEADER SPEAKS

Iktimal Hage-Ali is a graduate of NSW government schools Greenacre Primary and Bankstown Girls High and was an International Delegate on the 3rd PASTA North American SRC Leadership Tour in 2000. She is currently undertaking a Traineeship with the NSW Commission for Children and Young People. Iktimal has recommended its advocacy training course as a valuable addition to the young people attending this year’s PASTA overseas tour and their respective SRCS or community groups.

"We did not discriminate. Nor were we discriminated against...."

In June this year Iktimal was one of a number of guest speaker at a meeting of NSW Department of Education and Training Senior Education Officers. These District SEOI positions have, as part of their larger welfare-oriented jobs, the responsibility to encourage and develop student leadership and SRCS within district schools.

It is PASTA’s position that Iktimal’s reference in her speech to “Australia’s Future Leaders”, while credible, needs to be put in the present tense. Whether at school or beyond one’s working years in retirement, participation includes being part of action. Now. In other words, being leaders now.

Iktimal’s speech here provides substantive evidence that, within sustainable SRC structures and extended leadership opportunities beyond the school, young people have the potential to be global citizen leaders now, not just at some vaguely defined ‘future’ time.

The following is an edited version of Iktimal’s speech.

PARTICIPATION MUST INVOLVE
SHARED OWNERSHIP OF DECISIONS

The participation of young people in decisions that affect them is not only vitally important, but essential. It gives young people the opportunity to belong and feel as though they have made a difference. Even if their participation does not include life-changing decisions, their input now is significant as they could be the future leaders of Australia.

I have been blessed with many opportunities to participate. As I look at the audience I see my District SRC adviser, Ms Diane Rob, who gave me tremendous support when at high school. Another was my Year 2 teacher, Mrs Bell. SRC was first introduced into Greenacre Primary School then. I still remember the butterflies I had in my stomach as I waited outside the classroom while Mrs Bell took the class vote. There, the SRC participation structure was fantastic. Two children from every class in the school were nominated. Year 6 students would ‘adopt’ a kindergarten student and make sure their voices were heard at every SRC meeting. This encouraged the participation of all primary school students. Both Year 5 and Year 6 students ran the SRC meetings on a rotating roster. This worked well. It prepared Year 5 for their leadership role the next year. It also gave us eleven year olds the feeling of ownership. Although we concentrated mostly on fundraising, we also looked at issues such as bullying and leadership, and learned organisational skills through helping to organise the 75th anniversary of the school.

The great thing I remember most about Greenacre Primary SRC was that it was not targeted at the high achievers. Although I was bright, my behaviour was not the best. Our SRC had disruptive students involved, and students whose marks weren’t always above average. We did not discriminate. Nor were we
discriminated against. Rather, we were enabled to participate. Hence we did.

On catching up with old friends, I found that all of the Executive SRC body at Greenacre Public had become either captains or vice-captains in their respective schools. Except one. He became a prefect. This emphasised to me that participation at a young age ultimately guarantees continued participation for life. Following that younger encouragement, my own SRC experience blossomed. I continued with the SRC at Bankstown Girls High, eventually becoming Vice Captain. Through SRC, I was able to go to the USA and Canada as part of the annual PASTA leadership tours there every year - a trip that has changed my life. It has also enabled me to take part in the National Youth Roundtable, the PCYC, and, most recently the NSW Commission for Children and Young People’s Reference Group.

The young people’s reference group is a group of twelve young people from different walks of lives. With varied ages and socio-economic backgrounds, we have been able to come together and share our ideas and opinions in an environment that encourages our participation. The Commission makes us feel welcome and valued. This is an important aspect of participation. We do not have to adapt to adult ways. Rather, they adapt to ours. A small but tastier example is changing the lunch menu to suit younger preferences.

It is important to realise that SRC is a stepping-stone for external participation. It is important that we foster participation at an early age in order for real participation to occur. Young children being brought up to participate will continue to participate throughout their lives as they will perceive it as ‘normal’. Participation and involvement to me is a normal part of my life. I breathe, I eat, I sleep and I participate.

When I began in the SRC in year 7, the school’s SRC structure was reasonably good. There was a wide range of students with varied opinions and with great ideas to improve the school. Then, two years later, the SRC deteriorated. There was no motivation or commitment left in its members. It no longer attracted a wide range of people, only the high achievers. ‘Naughty kids’ were discouraged from participating. The result was it was not a ‘real’ student representative body. The SRC became a target for jokes and members of the SRC were not considered ‘cool’.

It was while I was in Year 9 that I was elected as a District SRC member. It was through meeting and talking with other students from other schools that I realised how well other SRC bodies ran. I became disappointed with my own SRC.

It was not until the SRC took action and educated the school on what the SRC is really about, that all became ‘normal’ again. That process involved students speaking on assembly and me promoting myself and my trip overseas. When it was announced that I was attending the 2000 PASTA tour to the USA and Canada, my school mates were bewildered. They honestly could not believe that a meeting every Thursday lunchtime - and commitment - could enable you to leave Bankstown, let alone the country. This example motivated a lot of students. With a lot of campaigning my school SRC began to be more effective.

Persistent efforts by the Captains changed the structure to involve more students. High achievers were no longer the sole targets. And by the time I became Vice Captain, we were limited to one charity a term and one multi-day a semester. This limitation was an important achievement as the focus of the SRC had stubbornly remained on fundraising. We wanted to place restrictions that forced us to take a wider role in the school community. We formed publicity, fundraising and editorial teams within the SRC in order to become proactive within our community and encourage the participation of all students.

I believe the SRC deteriorated when I was in year 9 because of poor participation. But why? Most likely because not all students were encouraged to participate, by other students as well as by staff and the wider community, including the media. There was no recognition. Congratulations were not passed onto its members. The SRC was not seen as a power body for the school’s pupils. It was not until the participation structure was altered that the SRC became an advocate for the students, one they recognised.

With all participation strategies it is important that we encourage and provide recognition for the young people involved. Children and young people are tomorrow’s future. We should embrace their opinions and encourage them to give more. Good luck in your participation strategies. I end on the motto used at a recent NSW State SRC conference:

*Participate, It’s Great.*

Iktimal Hage-Ali
STUDENT WELFARE CONSULTANTS
STUDENT LEADERSHIP

A keynote speaker at the same conference was the District Superintendent from Queenbeyan District, Mr Bob Ross. The following is a summary of the powerpoint presentation he gave, outlining what he thought were the key elements on which Districts should be focusing.

PERSONAL POSITION
- What is the ideal YOU are after?
- How do you view your role?
- What input can you make to bring about lasting changes to the system?
- How can student leadership contribute to these changes?

DISTRICT CONTEXT
- You know your District Superintendent
- You know your Principals
- You know your Teachers
- You know your District setting
- You know your Students and their leadership qualities
- You know the culture of student leadership

THE SETTING NOW
- Busy lives of parents and teachers
- Greater student understanding of their rights
- Student willingness to speak out
- Increasingly difficult students
- Middle school issues from primary to secondary schooling
- Recognition of student ability to lead and to express an opinion

DISTRICT PLAN
- Facilitate student leadership in the primary schools
- Cement the link of the middle school with leadership
- Link leadership in High schools to Primary schools
- Spread secondary leadership from SRC into other areas – eg At Risk students, other leaders

'SYou can’t get to second base without taking your foot off first!

SRC STUDENT LEADERSHIP
- SRC – Has to be centred on participative decision making NOT simply fundraising
- Strength comes from a strong district representation
- NSW SRC and State Conference should be key elements in the knowledge cycle for schools
- Strengthen SRC Advisers

OTHER LEADERSHIP
- Students at Risk
- Years 7 and 8 leaders
- Primary school leadership
- Public Speaking
- District Leaders
- Foster an identity and self esteem

FUTURE DIRECTIONS
- Need to develop links between teaching pedagogy and student welfare
- Link for SEO2 T&D/Curriculum to SEO2 Student Services and Equity
- Long term need of the system is to re-establish the relationships between student and teacher
- The student role in this is essential!!!!

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS
- 26 October - PASTA Committee Meeting and Members’ Services Workshop - Professional Teachers Council - cnr. Marion and Norton Sts, Leichhardt, Sydney
- 7 December - Committee Meeting/Members’ Christmas Get-Together - PTC Leichhardt

For 2003
- 4/5 January, 2003 - 5th International Leadership Tour Reunion and Tours Committee Planning Workshop - Central Coast NSW
- February, 2003 (Date to be notified) PASTA Annual General Meeting - PTC Leichhardt
- Term 1, 2003 ‘Fresh Start 2003’ PD Day for New Advisers

AND for 2004
- 3-7 August, 2004 - 2nd International Student Representative Conference (ISRC 2004) - Edmonton Canada (PASTA SRC Tour being organised for this - applications open now)

The PASTA Newsletter is edited by Ken Page and distributed bi-monthly as a supplement to Connect magazine.
The 2002 NSW SRC is the NSW Department of Education and Training’s peak student leadership consultative and decision-making forum and represents all secondary students in government schools. It consists of twenty two (22) members, including two Aboriginal student leaders. It has met once per term in Sydney since November 2001.

A Minutes Summary Page of each meeting is emailed to every district Student Welfare consultant for distribution to every secondary school.

The Recommendations from the 2001 State SRC Conference that the 2002 NSW SRC are addressing are:

1. It is moved that:
   i. The NSW SRC Technology Liaison Officer, or other nominee/s regularly update the NSW SRC website to include details of activities, upcoming dates, SRC resources.
   ii. Individual district SRCs should be encouraged to establish their own web pages linked to the official NSW SRC website.

What ACTION has taken place so far?
The Department of Education and Training is in the process of reconfiguring its website and it is anticipated that a link to a Student Participation and Leadership website will occur within the Student Welfare/Student Well-being section. What might the website contain? Examples are:
   • DET directions for student participation and leadership
   • updates of NSW SRC meetings
   • updates of State SRC Conference Working Party planning meetings
   • a ‘message board’ for student leaders and SRCs
   • contents of the SRC Guide and pamphlet
   • information about possible projects that particularly relate to the theme of this conference Student Well-Being, Positive Relationships.

State SRC Conference participants need to consider the following: the look and feel of the site, any other information that needs to be presented, how often and in what way will the site be maintained.

Question: What do you, the participants at this conference think about this? What ideas do you have?

The group has been working very hard this year on the five Recommendations that were passed at the Student Forum at the 2001 State SRC Conference. The 2002 NSW SRC also set its own goals to work on, and each of the members has liaison roles with various agencies, which are also being addressed.

Our term of office commenced at the end of November 2001 and will conclude at the last meeting on September 20, 2002.

A guide called Your Step by Step Guide to Effective Communications has been developed by the 2002 NSW SRC. A copy is available for each of the 40 districts represented at the 2002 State SRC Conference. Take it back to your district SRC for ACTION in developing a district e-groups: electronic communication system (if your district doesn’t have one yet). It contains suggestions and detailed instructions for methods of improving your communication networks through:
   • establishing a district SRC e-group;
   • joining a multi-district e-group;
   • joining a 2002 State SRC Conference e-group.

This would achieve the goals of improving:
   • communication in districts, particularly for rural areas;
   • the exchange of ideas and networking between districts;
   • dissemination of follow-up information to SRC Conference delegates.

2. It is moved that for recognition of service and dedication at all levels of SRC, a unified certificate, being different for each level, be constructed for SRC members.

What ACTION has taken place so far?
A draft certificate was discussed and decided that a ‘framework’ for a certificate would best be directed at district SRC level. Its design would allow each of the district Student Welfare consultants and the district SRC Executive to complete blank spaces on the certificate according to the accomplishments of the district SRC member.

A hard copy version of the draft certificate was given to each district Student Welfare consultant at their June conference. An electronic version has also been emailed to them. Some districts already have their own versions of a certificate but there are many who do not. The 2002 NSW SRC encourages all conference participants to take ACTION on this recommendation back at district SRC meetings so that the certificate framework will be used.

October 2002
3. It is moved that the NSW SRC lobby the Board of Studies (BOS) and the Department of Education and Training (DET) to incorporate a stronger student leadership emphasis, especially in Civics and Citizenship.

What has been achieved so far?

The Department of Education and Training's Chief Education Officer for HSIE/Civics and Citizenship curriculum met with the 2002 NSW SRC at the March meeting. He stated that the Civics and Citizenship curriculum is already very full and that demands on the Department and the Board of Studies for so many additional curriculum issues is enormous. He believes that there are better ways for students to become even better leaders in schools by:

1. encouraging student representatives on school councils and school committees;
2. gaining membership on school committees that will allow students to have a say on such things as:
   - the way that teachers teach;
   - the length of class periods;
   - whether the school works best with term or semester courses;
   - input into the school's student welfare policies - behaviour codes, school rules etc;
   - promoting student participation and leadership programs within and outside the school;
   - boosting school morale by developing powerful student-led projects.

NSW SRC members encourage ACTION on these issues through the dissemination of the NSW SRC Minutes Summary Page to district and school SRC members following each meeting.

4. It is moved that we create a stronger link between secondary and primary school SRCs through leadership programs, peer support, transition programs.

What ACTION has taken place so far?

The 2002 NSW SRC encourages:

- all secondary school SRCs to visit their local primary schools and speak to primary students about student leadership and participation.
- all secondary schools to invite primary students to attend high school SRC meetings to give them the knowledge and experience of formal meeting procedures and to experience fundamentals of secondary school student leadership operations.
- all district SRCs to organise district student leadership conferences and workshops for primary student leaders and their teachers by using such resources as:
  - the Student leadership framework for primary schools (sent to schools in term 4, 2001);
  - SLIPS - Student Leadership in Primary Schools, a series of practical lessons that has been developed by Northern Beaches District and sent to Student Welfare consultants upon request.
- all secondary SRCs to involve primary schools in Education Week celebrations to be held from 9 to 13 September.

Follow-up by district SRCs after a letter was sent to all district Student Welfare consultants and district SRC members in June to encourage the strengthening of links between primary and secondary school SRCs. The letter was also emailed to the district consultants.

5. It is moved that the NSW SRC encourages schools and districts:

i. to make a submission to the Inquiry into Public Education (Vinson Enquiry);
ii. to lobby the federal and state governments to achieve equitable funding for public schools.

What ACTION has taken place so far?

The 2002 NSW SRC gathered information from its members to formulate a submission that was sent to the Vinson Enquiry into Public Education at the end of 2001.

Dr Ken Johnston, a member of Dr Vinson's team met with the 2002 NSW SRC at its May meeting as a result of the submission. Discussions centred on the physical appearance of schools, funding, uniforms, casual teachers, anti-bullying programs, and student participation and leadership programs designed to improve the life of the school.

Many members of the 2002 NSW SRC have lobbied federal and state governments at a local community level by arranging meetings with local, state and federal members of parliament. Others have written letters to local media sources and members of parliament and taken back information to district SRCs to encourage discussion and ACTION to promote public education.

On July 29, 7 members of the 2002 NSW SRC met with the Minister for Education and Training, John Watkins. Discussions took place about funding allocations for public and non-government schools and the partnerships that exist between federal and state education authorities. He is very interested in future meetings with NSW SRC members.
To promote equity, fairness and participation for all students in NSW public schools

What ACTION has taken place so far?

All SRCs are becoming agents of change to encourage students:
- who are Aboriginal;
- who have a disability;
- from disadvantaged areas;
- from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB);
- who do not enjoy school;
- to participate more in school life.

The 2002 NSW SRC wrote a letter of support for two important DET models: Fair Dinkum and School Life that encourage equity, fairness and participation. It encourages SRCs to promote these models in their schools as part of SRC operations.

A PSFP (Priority Schools Funding Program) Project took place at the end of June when SRC and non-SRC members from PSFP schools in Port Jackson and Wollongong Districts travelled to Dubbo to conference for 3 days with students from Dubbo District schools. The 'equity, fairness and participation' theme really worked and the students have gone back to their schools to develop projects that will encourage ALL students to participate in school life.

The Just Like Us resource for SRCs was distributed to all secondary schools (5 copies per school) in 2001 to encourage ALL SRCs to be 'inclusive' of students who have a disability and involve them more in school life.

Three (3) Aboriginal students are on the 2002 NSW SRC and two (2) Aboriginal students are on the 2002 State SRC Conference Working Party. Twelve (12) Aboriginal student leaders are at this conference as part of new programs for indigenous student leaders. The original one is called SLIKK (Student Leadership is for Kiwi Kids) and originated in Clarence/Coffs District. It has been so successful that funding from Aboriginal Programs Unit (DET) has allowed it to expand to:
- the South Coast (QSCALE - Queanbeyan/South Coast Aboriginal Leaders in Education)
- Campbelltown/Liverpool Districts (PALS - Participation of Aboriginal Leaders in Education)
- Orange District (PLAY - Program for Leaders of Aboriginal Youth)
- Deniliquin District.

In addition, four (4) Aboriginal student leaders are participants at the conference as a result of their election at district SRC forums.

The LIMS (Leadership in the Middle School) Program was presented to the NSW SRC March meeting. It was developed on the Central Coast and is designed to encourage Year 7 and 8 students to participate in leadership activities. It raises the self esteem of students and encourages school spirit and pride. It has been distributed to all district Student Welfare consultants for implementation.

NSW Police Youth Liaison Officers are linking in more DET student leaders to encourage assistance for vulnerable young people to participate in recreational activities organised by Police Youth Clubs.

A Student Participation and Leadership resource package was sent at the beginning of this term to all secondary schools for ACTION by school SRCs. It included a newly printed copy of the SRC Guide, multiple copies of the SRC pamphlet, the evaluation booklet from the 2001 State SRC Conference School Spirit, Building Pride and a pamphlet from the Commission for Children and Young People about the importance of 'including' young people in decision making in schools.

The Commission for Children and Young People's Participation package Taking PARTICIPATION seriously has been distributed to many schools upon request. It encourages all schools to listen to the voices of students in decision making practices in schools.

To promote public education

What ACTION has taken place so far?

A submission was written to the Vinson Enquiry and a member of his team met with the group at the May meeting. Interest has been expressed by the enquiry into coming back to meet again with the 2002 NSW SRC.

2002 NSW SRC members attended the Community, Parents and Police Forum on ways to address safety in school. A follow-up forum is planned next week and the Minister has requested that two (2) NSW SRC members participate.

Letters have been written by the NSW SRC to media outlets promoting public education.

Consultations between Dr Don Weatherburn, head of the NSW Crime Statistics Bureau and members of the 2002 NSW SRC took place at the end of term 2 about ways to improve their research into student behaviour in schools across the state.

Many NSW SRC liaison roles are aimed at the promoting public education such as NSW SRC members on the Commission for Children and Young People's Youth Reference Group, liaison with the Federation of Parents and Citizens (P&C) Associations, the Premier's Youth Advisory Council (YAC), Volunteering NSW, NSW Police Youth Issues and a special interest group to develop a video on teaching as a career.

On Public Education Day last May, one member of the 2002 NSW SRC was invited to be interviewed on the Steve Pryce breakfast program on Radio 2UE. Due to lack of radio time however the interview didn't take place. An initiative of this type may be attempted again in future.

Through liaison with the P&C Association, the meeting with the Minister for Education and Training,
John Watkins took place on July 29. Other than discussions on the funding of public education, the importance of student leadership in schools and the maintenance and refurbishment of government schools was raised. He is very interested in a future meeting with the 2002 NSW SRC.

2002 NSW SRC members are involved in the development of a Departmental approved video called Teaching as a Career. NSW SRC members will interview various teachers in some of our public schools and together with great visuals and young people's music providing a backdrop for the video to be used by careers advisers in secondary schools across NSW. The Minister has expressed a personal interest in the video as the Department is looking at ways to encourage more young people to become teachers.

District SRC members in targeted areas of the state were selected to consult with the NSW Board of Studies (BOS) on the draft PD/Health/PE syllabus.

There are two (2) student leaders (1 NSW SRC, 1 State SRC Conference Working Party members) on the Commission for Children and Young People's Youth Reference Group.

To encourage effective communication at school, district and state level

What ACTION has taken place so far?

The 2002 Student Welfare Consultants, Conference (held for 2 days in June) had the theme of student participation and leadership. The conference was chaired by one NSW SRC member and one State Conference Working Party member. Students from both groups facilitated at the conference and ran some workshops.

Keynote speakers such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, district superintendents, SRC and non-SRC students addressed the conference and six (6) workshops were conducted. The evaluations were excellent and the Student Welfare consultants are now much more enthusiastic to promote student participation and leadership programs.

A guide called Your Step by Step Guide to Effective Communications has been developed by the 2002 NSW SRC and will be sent to all district Student Welfare consultants.

The NSW SRC Minutes Summary Page of each meeting (held once per term in Sydney) is distributed to each secondary school by each district student welfare consultant. The statement at the top of the page asks that it be forwarded to the school SRC for discussion and ACTION.

Every secondary school should now have an SRC 'pigeon hole' or IN tray as it has been a priority of all NSW SRC members for a number of years.

A District SRC Tool Kit was developed by State Office personnel and presented at the June Student Welfare consultants, conference for use by district Student Welfare consultants and district SRC members. One section of it, School/District/School Information Flow and Reporting is designed to improve the two-way information flow and reporting process between district and school SRCs. It contains examples of draft agendas, minutes recording, report sheets, and action plans.

Future additions to this will include roles of a school SRC Communications Officer and a 'tips' section on the use of SRC 'pigeon holes', effective mailing, telephone and faxing techniques, networking and the importance of developing relationships with Front Office staff.
CONSULTATIONS WITH 2002 NSW SRC

- Premier's Youth Advisory Council (YAC)
- Draft Gender Equity Policy (DET)
- Teaching as a Career video proposal (DET)
- District SRC 'Tool Kit' (DET)
- Commission for Children and Young People
- Vincent Enquiry into Public Education
- 'ReconciliACTION' Aboriginal Reconciliation and youth issues organisation
- Chief Education Officer, HSIE on Civics/Citizenship (DET)
- LIIMS (Leadership In the Middle School) Project (DET)
- Handling Allegations Against DET Employees
- NSW Police Youth Initiatives
- UN-REAL Youth Initiative Website
- Peer Tutoring Program to improve student literacy (DET)
- New School Safety and Security Directorate (DET)
- 2002 Refugee Week Website (DET)
- Kick Up the Dust: Annual Australian-Asian Band and Dance Competition, University NSW 31 August

2002 NSW SRC LIAISON ROLES

- Commission for Children and Young People Youth Reference Group (CCYPYRG) - working on youth participation, immigration and its effect on young people
- PASTA (Professional Association of SRC Teacher Advisers) - recent return of 12 students (including two NSW SRC members) from 2002 tour to USA, the 2003 visit to Buffalo, New York and the 2003 ISRC (International Student Representative Council Conference in Canada)
- Federation of Parents and Citizens Association - the recent July 29 meeting with the Minister and NSW SRC members took place because of this liaison role, student participation at the Oz Youth Forum on what governments can do to get young people to participate
- Publicity - writing and article for national student participation magazine Connect
- Special Initiatives - development of Teaching as a Career video by NSW SRC members. The Minister is very interested in this initiative and it will be distributed to every secondary school
- Aboriginal Youth Issues - NAIDOC Week involving the promotion of student leadership awards, promoting student leadership programs eg SLIUk in schools
- Youth Week/Premier's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) - revitalisation of Youth Week 2003 will take place (see later in the conference program), NSW Youth Policy to be launched later in the year
- State SRC Conference Working Party - strong links between the working party and 2002 NSW SRC have developed this year with a NSW SRC member present at the March and May planning meetings.
- Volunteering 'Act Now' website - NSW SRC provided advice on the promotion of the website at http://www.actnow.com.au
- NSW Youth Ombudsman - presenting at the September meeting of the 2002 NSW SRC

SOME RECENT OUTSTANDING DISTRICT INITIATIVES

- Northern Beaches - a trial Student Travel Concession Card. The card is voluntary at present as it is funded by each student and/or the school and costs are built into their school fee contributions. There are plans for it to go statewide eventually
- Mt Druitt - anti-bullying focus in schools across the district
- Lake Macquarie - promotion of school spirit and pride through a performing arts 'challenge'
- Tweed Heads/Ballina - promotion of school spirit and pride theme with a focus on drug education
- Queanbeyan/Batemans Bay/Shellharbour/Wollongong - successfully conducted the 2nd, 4 district South Coast conference on SRC Skills
- Dubbo - school spirit and pride theme, conducted a district SRC induction in the city followed by a screening of the audio-visual Bridges Motivational Media
- Tamworth - focus on Aboriginal student representation. Held an inaugural paired district conference with Moree
- Armidale - focus on Aboriginal student leadership, ASSPA Aboriginal youth group and the use of electronic communication
- Parramatta - development of primary student leadership initiatives, an paired district conference (Ryde) and an Geacross schools, sports carnival
- Blacktown - school spirit and pride
- Bankstown/Fairfield - successful paired district conference on the theme of school spirit, pride and student leadership
- Orange - focus on Aboriginal student leadership through a new program called PLAY (Partners in Leadership for Aboriginal Youth)
- St George - primary student leadership days
- Hornsby - improving primary/secondary links
- Port Macquarie - focus on Aboriginal student leadership. Plans for primary SRC teacher/adviser professional support
- Deniliquin - Aboriginal student leadership program involving Elders as role models, and a planned primary/secondary conference.

The 2002 NSW SRC trusts that you have learnt much more about the group's roles and achievements so far. Please take this report back to your district SRC for tabling, discussion and ACTION.

'If you can walk, you can DANCE. If you can talk, you can SING!'

Report Presenters:
Jy (Griffith); Amelia (Tamworth); Rita (Bondi); Amy (Maitland); Morgan (Tweed Heads/Ballina); Fiona (Clarence/Coffs Harbour); Paul (Parramatta); Joni (Clarence/Coffs Harbour); Jillian (Orange)

Contact:
Amy Martin
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<freckle1986@hotmail.com>
or
Stuart Hearne
Phone: 02 9886 7450; Fax: 02 9886 7543
International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC)

IDEC 2002 was held over eight days in Christchurch, New Zealand - from August 15th to 23rd. It was hosted by Tamariki School and included approximately 200 participants, of whom about half were children and young people. They came from Australia, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, New Zealand, the UK and the USA.

The following statement emerged from the Conference: "The principle that unites the diverse participants in democratic education is an insistence on the Declaration of Human Rights, with particular emphasis on Article 26(2), as the primary framework for the day-to-day practices in all learning environments." (26(2) states that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.")

Keynote speakers at this year's conference included Yaakov Hecht, Director of the Hadera Institute of Democratic Education in Israel. This is the coordinating network of 22 publicly-funded democratic schools throughout Israel, in which over 4000 students are educated. Amuktra Mahapatra also spoke - she is a member of the Education Steering Committee in Tamil Nadu, India, and has been the inspiration behind bringing democratic education to 4 million students in her state. Derry Hannam, Director of the Phoenix Institute in England, sent a report on participative education in English schools, presenting research which shows a direct correlation between participative education and improved GCSE scores.

As well as the keynote speakers, workshops were presented by each of the schools present (ours included) at staggered times so we could all present and listen.

There were presentations by the home schooling and alternative community schools association in the USA, and by the Australian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE). Yoshi Kuyo Nagata, the senior researcher for the National Institute of Educational Research in Japan, focused on the Japanese free school movement as an effective response to school refusal in Japan. Jim Connor has been a teacher at Upattinas in Pennsylvania, USA, and has now initiated The Whispering Seed, a village-based learning community in Thailand focusing on "finding the joy in serving others through cross-cultural exchange and sustainable living practices". The first of these cross-cultural journeys for secondary students is called The Way of the Elephant. It is of two and a half months' duration and costs, in total, $9000. (information available from Connect; see p 31)

This is just a sample of the 28 presentations, workshops, working parties and speeches that formed the conference.

Geordie from Sherbrooke Community School presented in the workshop: 'Being a student in a democratic school' and he initiated the student exchange network along with a New Zealand student, through creating an e-mail list.

A working party was set up to lobby UNESCO in New York to further the aims of democratic education and to provide a permanent presence in New York City for IDEC. The next conference is in Albany, New York.

This year's conference was organised and facilitated by Tamariki free school in Christchurch, New Zealand. Apart from the many workshops and presentations, participants had the opportunity to visit Tamariki and Springhill free schools, visit a Marae (Maori community gathering place), go skiing and take a trip to play with the dolphins in Governor Bay.

The conference was extremely productive, with many networks established and much food for thought generated. Above all, it was an opportunity to meet informally with inspiring educational practitioners.

Andy Moffat
Sherbrooke Community School, Sassafras, Vic
(03) 9755 2007

WREN Becomes IDEN at IDEC 2002

The atmosphere of the 10th International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) was purposeful and optimistic. The tone was set by Yaakov Hecht from the Institute of Democratic Education in Israel, who opened the conference. We will publish his talk and some of the other scripted talks on the website as soon as we can. (also available from Connect, p 31)

Yaakov described three essential elements of democratic education:

- government shared with the students;
- an easy-going social relationship between young people and adults;
- the opportunity for children to choose what to learn and when to learn it.

The latter he referred to as pluralistic learning. Most teaching is concerned with a very small area of human knowledge, but pluralistic learning opens up the opportunity to study beyond the usual limits. This means that young people learn to value and respect different points of view. It is only through such tolerance and understanding that world peace can be assured. The conflict in the Middle East is not primarily between Jews and Arabs, but between people who believe that discussion and reason are the way to growth, and people who believe that it is better to impose their own world-view by force. You find such people in both camps.

His talk ended with a declaration that the hour for democratic education had come, and that together we could make changes not only in education, but in the critically dangerous conflicts that divide the world.
The conference was held at a spectacular site on the inner slope of an extinct volcano, the crater of which had long ago been invaded by the Pacific Ocean. As well as serious discussions and presentations by different schools there were outings to local schools, skiing, sightseeing, shopping and visits to a climbing wall.

The most important decision with relation to WREN was that it should be renamed IDEC, the International Democratic Education Net. Worldwide Real Education no longer seemed a sufficiently dignified title. The word "democratic" was chosen in preference to "free", "child-centred", "progressive" or "non-formal" for the same reason as IDEC is called IDEC—although any conservative can argue against all the other descriptions, few will argue against democracy.

IDEC 2003 will be hosted next summer by Albany Free School, in New York State in the USA, in conjunction with AERO (the Alternative Education Resource Organization) and IDEC 2004 will be in Madras in southern India during January, organised by Amuuka Mahapatra, with the support of Abacus School and CWC (Concern for Working Children). Aumuuka may be the education consultant for the state of Tamil Nadu, where she will oversee the education of six million children.

Networking

IDEC itself is associated with two networks—IDEN (formerly known as WREN) and a list held by Jerry Mintz at AERO (contact directly at <jerryaero@aol.com> or through www.EducationRevolution.org). IDEN is specifically for supporters of democratic education and publishes a data-base of individuals, schools and organisations from all over the world on the web. Jerry produces a book called The Almanac of Educational Choices which lists alternative organisations of all kinds, including home-schoolers and Waldorf schools, mainly in the USA. Jerry also runs the IDEC list-serve (at <idc@edrev.org>.

People at the conference undertook to encourage as many democratic schools as possible to join either or both of these networks, and agreed that AERO and IDEN should exchange all their information.

It was also suggested that existing regional networks should be used, and where necessary new ones should be established. Present at the conference were representatives from NCACS in the United States, the Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education, a Japanese organisation (unnamed) which has contacts in Korea, Thailand and the Philippines, and the Institute for Democratic Education in Israel. AERO has numerous contacts in Russia. Amuuka Mahapatra plans to set up a network in India.

At present the IDEN data-base includes individual schools and even individual people. Eventually it should consist only of a list of regional organisations; each organisation would send out news of developments to the others either directly or through IDEN, and pass on any information it received to all its members, translated if necessary. This would make it unnecessary to have any large central organisation, and would enable regions to organise their own meetings while maintaining their international contacts.

Every IDEC conference gives a new confidence to people who had not realised how widely their ideas were shared around the world. The discovery of IDEC (formerly known as WREN) has something of the same effect. If you share with us such ideals as respect and trust for children, equality of status of children and adults, freedom of choice of activity and democratic governance by children and staff together, and yet do not belong, please get in touch. If you know of other people, schools or organisations that should be included, please encourage them to join either IDEC itself, or the appropriate regional network.

IDEC 2003

IDEC 2003 will be at Albany Free Schoo. Albany's website is at http://www.albanyfreeschool.com, or you can contact Chris Mercogliano at chris@AlbanyFreeSchool.com, or Dana Dennis at dbennis12@yahoo.com.

IDEC 2004

"Dear Friends and Members of the IDEC Community,

For the past ten years, IDEC has been moving around the globe, allowing different schools and organizations the opportunity to organise and plan a conference in their own country. In recent years, IDEC has not only been used to network and support individuals and groups already involved in democratic education, but also as a means of conscious outreach to a larger community, including those involved in mainstream and conventional education systems. Hosting IDEC in India will create the possibility to start a network within India and will help raise awareness on a governmental level of the international growth and support of this movement and way of working with young people.

The Indian sub-continent has a growing number of extremely unique and innovative educational programs, reaching into many different social and economic sections of Indian society. Mohandas K Gandhi, Krishna Murthy, Rabindranath Tagore and many others have been the inspiration not only within India but spanning out into the world. It would be useful to bring fresh perspectives on the ideas of learning and education. One of the aims of this gathering would be to bring the many varieties of educational options together and to support the people who are committed to working with children in democratic ways. This conference would also allow for more networking and organising to occur not only within the Indian sub-continent but throughout all the rest of Southeast Asia.

Amuuka Mahapatra has offered to be the main contact person and organizer for the IDEC to be held in India during the year 2004, with the support of Abacus School and Concern for Working Children (CWC). We are currently in contact with several other projects to see if they will be interested in assisting in some of the organizing work for the conference. So far we have heard from the Buddha Smiles and Mitanikeen who are interested in assisting with the planning.

Because of India's close proximity to Southeast Asia, this would be a wonderful opportunity to extend the invitation to other schools and projects in that part of the world. Jim Connor is currently doing outreach work in Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia, through The Whistling Seal and has offered to assist Amuuka in organizing and networking for the conference to help bring representatives from that area. Within Thailand there is an enormous movement of alternative models of education and children's homes. We will work with the 3rd Global Community Gathering to be held in Thailand this February to network with projects in that region. We are also working on contacts with projects in 5d Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, Japan and Africa that we are in contact with that would be interested in attending.

The conference will be held in the city of Madras in southern India during January of 2004. The weather at this time of the year is rather pleasant in this part of India and there are several projects in the area which people could visit. The length of the conference will be approximately nine days, allowing time at the end of the conference as well as a few short trips during the conference to visit some of the local projects. We are currently looking at several options as a venue for the conference. We would like to set up the housing accommodation so that people can stay in households near the venue to help cut costs and allow people to experience more of the culture of India. Amuuka is planning to organise a pre-IDEC meeting to be held in India prior to January to help in the planning of the conference and to begin to create the network within India. More information regarding details of the conference will be sent out in the near future.

Sincerely, Amuuka Mahapatra and Jim Connor."

October 2002
These two conferences will only be six months apart, but because of their locations both should be well-attended. The Albany IDEC will obviously attract many people from north America, and Madras will be most easily accessible to people from Asia, but it is important that they should not become divided on an east-west basis. If you can’t afford to come to both, do try to come to the one that will give you the most new experiences.

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davidgribble@canetel.net.uk

Worldwide Real Education Network
International Democratic Education Net
http://www.worldwiderealeducation.net

The relevant regional addresses are:
Australasia: AAPAE cecelia@bigpond.com
Austria: Netzwerk netzwerk.institut@aon.com
International: IDEN davidgribble@canetel.net
Israel: IDE: Zahava mahon@netvision.net.il
Japan: Kageki Asakura BXT12516@nifty.ne.jp
USA: NCACS ncacs1@earthlink.net

AAPAE
The Australasian Association of Progressive and Alternative Education provides a forum for discussion, debate and research, a network for sharing and support, and an incorporated organisation for working together on common issues. It has just published its first newsletter.
AAPAE supports education which promotes democratic processes and structures, power-sharing, participation of all in decision-making, cooperation rather than competition, working at individual pace and level.
AAPAE operates the ausschools e-mail network. To join, send a blank e-mail to:
   ausschools-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
ausschools archive:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ausschools
AAPAE website (hosted by Marbury School, SA):
http://www.marbury.sa.edu.au/aapae
Contact:
Secretary, AAPAE,
205 Longueville Road, Lane Cove NSW 2066

Sydney Road Community School, Victoria

30 Years of Student Participation

On Saturday 14th September, at Sydney Road Community School in Brunswick, Victoria, we celebrated our 30th Anniversary. This milestone provided a great opportunity to reflect on the school’s tradition of student participation. SRCS came into existence in 1971 when a few teachers from Moreland High set about creating a school that was small and student centred. This was quite different from the huge schools in the Brunswick area at the time.

One of the original subjects in the school was ‘Community Studies’. This subject was created to encourage students to take an active role in their community. The subject was based around doing things to make a difference as well as learning about the world around us.

The word ‘community’ in our school’s title has taken on a dual sense of meaning. On one hand it represents the sense of community we foster within our population. Students do feel a sense of belonging and have many opportunities to find something in our curriculum that they can excel at. But also, students are encouraged to develop a connection to a wider community.

This ideology has manifested itself in many fun and worthwhile ways. Students have shined shoes on the steps of state parliament to draw attention to the exploitation of child workers, demonstrated their support for Sorry Day by hanging giant banners on the front of the school and marched in numerous demonstrations (most recently for Refugees).

Although much has changed in thirty years, the school has remained very much student centred. This was clearly evident at the 30th Anniversary Celebration where we were entertained all day by student music and were treated to an art show featuring student work that was also organised by a current student.

Lyn Scott and Ralph Gottlib
Sydney Road Community School
TAKING A RISK

BUILDING COLLABORATION IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Building a collaborative model of learning in adolescent mental health education begins by encouraging adolescents to 'take a risk.' 'Taking a risk' involves expressing and valuing personal experiences as a basis to define relevant and important knowledge. "There is no book that will give us the answers. It depends on us and our experience." (Participant p 55, 2000) We encourage young people to take a risk by building a safe environment that respects the self-esteem of all students. "I can feel a sense of pride and I can say: it was an achievement. I feel good how I occupy my time [and that] I am involved in the decision-making process. It is nice to have my ideas supported sometimes." (Participant p 71, 2000)

Adolescent mental health education is defined broadly and acknowledges the important relationship between academic literacy and the social-emotional well-being of adolescents (see diagram 1). School-based issues under the umbrella of adolescent mental health education should address issues of bullying, drug and alcohol education, democratic communication skills and self-esteem. Adolescent mental health education must also be applied to non-school settings for adolescents who have experienced abuse, (physical, emotional or sexual) a traumatic personal event, serious drug or alcohol abuse or experience depression or other serious mental health problems.

A collaborative model of learning aims to enhance the self-esteem of adolescents in all curricular activities. That means that young people determine all decisions on what happens in the classroom and how their learning is practised; they can answer their own question: "why do I need to learn this?"

The Problem

The central problem to be explored in this paper concerns young people who fail our secondary school system and experience significant social-emotional health problems. How do we work with adolescents who are identified as 'at-risk'? How do we collaborate with young people who are relegated to the margins of our school system? Rather than blame the adolescents for their failure, we must examine the structure of mainstream curriculum models.

Deficit-Centred Practice in Adolescent Mental Health Education

Young people who experience social and emotional health problems often get caught in authoritarian learning programs. 'Skills training' programs, where the content is pre-determined, fail to include young people in the dialogue and decision-making process within learning. Research examining 'skills-training' programs concludes that they are irrelevant and often inappropriate in meeting specific needs. Adolescent mental health issues are dominated by deficit-centred practice. In other words, the negative qualities of person - the diagnosis - is given primary consideration.

Diagram 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The social setting of adolescent mental health education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Young people outside of the school system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Young people who fail inside the school system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience a Diagnosed Mental Health Illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have undiagnosed mental health needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Drug and alcohol abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Physical, emotional or sexual abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mental illness:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression, drug-induced psychosis or schizophrenia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deficit-centred education can be described at two levels:

The first is when the diagnosis - the label - of the illness is given greater importance than the self-expressed needs of a young person. The second occurs when the learning process [skills training procedure] gives primary attention to the negative social skills of the person.

The greatest failure of deficit-centred practice is to undermine the self-esteem of young people with mental health needs and obstruct the potential for collaborative learning.

Building a Solution

In the process of building a collaborative model of learning in adolescent mental health education, we began with a single principle. All decision-making in our learning would be a group process. Everyone's ideas, opinions and criticism became important. Following extensive inquiry, a model of 'equal encouragement' (Pearl, A. and Knight, T. *The Democratic Classroom, 1999*) became a point of reference to describe what we were doing. A collaborative learning model built on the principles of equal encouragement included eight qualities: security, comfort, understanding, belonging, competence, usefulness, hope and ownership.

Equal Encouragement: Building a learning environment that encourages young people to "take a risk"

Security

In the arena of adolescent mental health, 'when young people meet a professional, they are often told what to do. They do not feel listened to.' (Social worker p 66, 2000) Our first goal was to listen to the stories and to encourage people to express their self and ideas. Including everyone in the definition of rules and 'expectations' helped make our place for learning safe - physically and emotionally. Understanding difference and 'building trust and empathy' was a critical first step. (Participant p 57, 2000)

It was important that "I am accepted for the person that I am. The illness is part of who I am; it is not all of me." (Participant p 66, 2000) Creating security in the learning environment enabled adolescents to take a risk.

Comfort

Peer group learning was central to the task of making our activities enjoyable and inclusive. "The group encouraged a sense of belonging, a sense of continuity and a feeling of being accepted for who I am and not be judged." (Participant p 63, 2000)

"Peer group support has been an important part of getting me out of myself, out of my illness." (Participant p 77, 2000) Consequently, the social emphasis in our learning was able "to humanise people's experience" by finding "a common and shared language." (Participant p 63, 2000)

Understanding

Our learning and definition of important knowledge was based on personal problem-solving. Through peer group learning, it was important to encourage people to find their voice and ask questions that mattered. Important knowledge in the arena of adolescent mental health included: exploring the concept of self-esteem, democratic communication skills, education about drugs and alcohol, learning about mental illness and treatment, exploring the side-effects of medication, looking at the history of psychotherapy. Local community issues and the daily newspaper headlines were central to our discussions. Defining knowledge relevant to personal needs meant that we were building an understanding of our self and our relationship to the community, the world, and the global village. For young people who know what it means to be rejected and excluded, valuing their self was critical.

Belonging

Central to the idea of belonging and peer group learning was the need to define equality. One participant defined equality as "respect for one another, mutual respect and not being put down if I disagree." (Participant p 65, 2000) Equality, as a guiding principle with clearly defined rights and responsibilities in our learning, encouraged people to play an active role in our curriculum. The idea that everyone should have a meaningful say was "important for my motivation to be a participant and become involved." (Participant p 65, 2000) Furthermore, "being treated equally means that I can have a go. I can express my ideas and not be excluded. I feel it is important that everyone has a chance to speak." (Participant p 66, 2000)

Competence

Young people with social and emotional health needs are familiar with the assessment and examination of their faults. To create and build an alternative, we took a risk and decided that the individual - each young person - was a fundamental, critical source to define knowledge, skills and values. Focusing on the positive - the competence of the individual - was a factor in building motivation for young people to participate in the curriculum. "It is a place where I feel listened to. It is a place where I can focus on my strengths and achievements." (Participant p 56, 2000)
Usefulness

It is important in adolescent mental health that all learning is responsive to the immediate self-expressed needs of young people. Presenting material from a book and giving the instruction "read this because it's good for you" or "read this because I'm telling you" does not do this. Creating a collaborative model of learning is a process of empowerment. "It is a chance for young people to find their voice and to ask questions themselves." (Participant p 67, 2000) Placing open dialogue at the centre of learning involves a risk. For teachers and other professionals, "it is critical to distinguish 'the person' from 'the problem'. Empowering the person, not blaming them, is the key principle." (Social worker p 69, 2000)

Hope

Education for young people identified as 'at-risk' is filled with self-fulfilling prophecies of hopelessness and chronicity. Alternatively, we can value young people as capable of defining important knowledge and finding solutions to their personal problems. Collaborative learning aims "to encourage the person to see their self not just as a patient of the doctor, [rather] to be proactive and find information about their health needs." (Consumer Advocate p 72, 2000) "I feel hope for a change to the better. By contributing and being acknowledged, I feel better about myself." (Participant p 65, 2000)

A collaborative model of learning based on 'hope' can 'empower the person who feels the complete loss of a valued sense of self.' (Consumer Advocate p 65, 2000) Inclusive frameworks in adolescent mental health "must respect the dignity of the individual, regardless of the label or the disability." (Clinical mental health worker p 69, 2000)

Ownership

A collaborative model of learning in adolescent mental health education is directed toward empowerment and "to feel a sense of ownership in all our decision-making." (Participant p 70, 2000) Coercive, authoritarian models in adolescent mental health education are to be rejected outright. All learning activities aim to build informed participation and encourage self-expression. In regard to adolescent mental health, "there is a great importance in being able to speak about the structure of treatment that blocks out self-expression and maintains the silence." (Social worker p 77, 2000) When young people determine the decision-making process in education, they can begin to understand their own style of learning. "I am beginning to see the learning process." (Participant p 77, 2000) Building collaboration in learning involves defining the questions and the answers to immediate, personal problems. Collaborative learning challenges traditional definitions of teaching and authority in the classroom.

"We need to give up control of our authority, of the decision making process and our professional identity. Are we asking the right questions? Are we listening to our terms of reference or theirs?" (L. Davidson, 1999)

The Conclusion

In a collaborative model of adolescent mental health education, there are two sides to 'taking a risk'.

First, it takes a risk for young people to trust their self, express their needs and value their personal experiences. Secondly, all education in the arena of adolescent mental health must be able to take a risk and demonstrate a capacity to listen and to share the decision-making process. A collaborative model of learning in adolescent mental health is built upon young people determining their own questions and answers.

Education remains an undervalued paradigm in adolescent mental health research. Collaborative models of learning can complement clinical procedures in the treatment of serious adolescent mental health issues through education about mental health, treatment for mental illness and the recovery process. Many issues and questions in the arena of adolescent mental health require urgent qualitative research and action for social change. The complexity in defining 'adolescent mental health' requires open dialogue with young people and the development of collaborative learning based on democratic principles.

References

Quotations used in this article refer to my thesis: Developing a democratic curriculum in community-based mental health education, La Trobe University, March 2000

Within the case study the following references were used.

'Participant': Adolescents who have experienced difficulty with mental health or who have a diagnosis of a mental illness.

'Social Worker': Support staff in a community based mental health services.

'Consumer Advocate': Support staff for young people who experience their first episode of a mental illness and receive clinical treatment.

Texts


Davidson, L. 'Collaboration in mental health. Recovery and community Integration.'

THEMHS Conference. The Mental Health Services Conference. Melbourne.

Mitch Musulun
mitchmusulin2002@yahoo.com.au
r.u.MAD Youth Reference Group

The r.u.MAD program, managed by the Education Foundation, will be holding a "youth reference group" to listen to advice on how to ensure our program meets kids' needs and is actually helping young people make a difference. It will be on a Saturday near the end of the year, for about 3 hours in the central city area, and the Education Foundation will pay kids' fares and provide a light lunch.

If you know SRC or other student activists who could give us good advice (or if you're one yourself!) - ring John Davidson on 0410 708 300 or email to john@educationfoundation.org.au

International Conference:
Connections That Count

We are holding an international conference in the Faculty of Education, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow from 11 to 14 September 2003 on the topic "Connections that count - Young People, Social Capital and Empowerment".

It aims to bring together:

- academics and those who study and research the world of young people and informal education
- practitioners who work with young people in a range of services and settings, and
- policy makers and managers from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations.

Main themes of the conference paper presentations will be:

- Definitions and dimensions of social capital
- Social capital and youth organisations
- Social networks, norms of reciprocity and young people
- Building social capital through social networks
- Creating trust and social connectedness
- Family, peer group and the community
- Schools, youth groups and group development
- Young people and solidarity
- Youth participation
- Young people and volunteering
- Citizenship, community and young people
- Peer mentoring and mediation
- Self help networks and action groups
- Youth groups and social cohesion
- Young people and political activity
- The development and strengthening of social networks

To obtain a colour brochure about the conference please email <sarah.harper@strath.ac.uk> and type in your postal address. We will send you conference details and a form for those who might wish to propose a paper for presentation.

Professor Ted Milburn
Centre for Youth Work Studies
Department of Community Education
University of Strathclyde
GLASGOW

Tel: +44 (0)141 950 3602; Fax: +44 (0)141 950 3374
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: (03) 9489 9052 or (03) 8344 9637

Australian:

AAPAE Newsletter (Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education, Lane Cove, NSW) No 1; September 2002

Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA, Deakin West, ACT) Vol 22 Nos 3; September 2002

Education Views (Education Queensland, Qld) Vol 11, Nos 12-15; July-August 2002

Feedback 2001 (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, NSW) Annual Report

Network News (Network of Community Activities, Surry Hills, NSW) September 2002

Professional Voice (AEU, Vic) Vol 2 Issue 1; September 2002

Respect (Office for Youth, DE&T, Vic) August 2002

Startlink (Boronia, Vic) Issues 9; Aug.-Sept. 2002

Student Action Teams (Youth Research Centre, Vic) Newsletter 4; February 2002

Yikes (YACvic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 2, Editions 3; August 2002

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (Melbourne, Vic) Annual Report 2001-2002

Youth Research News (Youth Research Centre, Vic) Vol 12 No 2; September 2002

Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Tas) Vol 21 Nos 3; September 2002

International:

Communicating (ESRC Network Project Newsletter, Cambridge, UK) Nos 1, 2, 4; May, September 2001, February 2002

Communication Research Trends (Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, Los Gatos, USA) Vol 21 Nos 3; 2002

Education Now (Bramcote Hills, Nottingham, UK) Issue 37; Autumn 2002

Leadership (NASSP, USA) Vol 31 Nos 1, 2; September, October 2002

Sustaining Pupils’ Progress at Year 3 (Christine Dockey and Julia Flutter et al, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education) 2001

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

515 Listening to Young Australians - Does the Commonwealth Need a Hearing Aid? (Nicola Roxon, MP - Shadow Minister for Children and Youth; speech at Victoria University Conference: Active Citizenship: Youth Education and Community, 30 August 2002) (5 pp; $0.90)

516 The Ladder of Participation (adapted from Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation, Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF) (1 p; $0.50)

517 Miscellaneous NASPAC 6 Documents (October 2002): a) What is ra.MAD? (John Davidson, Education Foundation) (4 pp; $0.80)

518 b) Fair School Wear Kit (Kylie Wilkinson, Vic) (8 pp; $1.20)

519 c) DART 2002 Information Package (Banyule City Council, Vic) (4 pp; $0.80)

520 d) Information Sheets Numbers 1, 2 and 7 (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, NSW) (6 pp; $1.00)

521 e) Young People’s Reference Group (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, NSW) (6 pp; $1.60)

522 f) NASPAC 6 Papers and Facilitator’s Guide (NASPAC 6, October 2002) (10 pp; $1.40)

523 Pluralistic Learning as the Core of Democratic Education (Yaacov Hecht, paper at IDEC 2002, NZ) (17 pp; $1.70)

524 The Way of the Elephant: A Learning Journey Through Siam (Thailand) (Jim Connor, IDEC 2002) (4 pp; $0.80)

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