Beginning teachers: building models of student participation

Also in this issue:
- NASPAC 6 - all the information
- Student Voice, Consultation, Action, Citizenship: Canada, UK, USA, Australia
- r.u.MAD?: "Toolkit for Change Not Charity"
- Students as Researchers
- Youth Action for Education Change in the US
- SRCs: Models, Strategies, Training, Resources
- Resources: Reference Group, Conferences, Publications

& Incorporating the PASTA Newsletter #28

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This Issue:

Thanks for bearing with us as we present another double issue of Connect, a little time gap since last issue, but hopefully the enhanced size and variety of content makes up for the delay.

Over the last 4 months, I’ve been travelling and, for part of that time, having interesting conversations about developments in Citizenship Education and student networks in England and Scotland, about Student Voice in Canada, about students as researchers and educational change agents in the USA and UK, and about student networks across Europe. And, of course, talking about initiatives in Australia. One correspondent responded: “I have always been impressed by the quality of thinking and work around youth development/engagement that comes out of Australia.” This issue contains some information about these international initiatives.

It was also a delight to return to find moves underway here for another national gathering of people around ‘student participation’ - at NASPAC 6. Connect was closely associated with convening national student participation workshops in 1980 and 1995, and has played a more distant but supportive and ‘advertising’ role in 1981 (Adelaide), 1997 (Sydney) and 1999 (Hobart) - with the latter two organising under the NASPAC acronym. I hope to see you there this year.

The ‘student participation’ umbrella is a broad one. Last week I challenged trainee teachers at the University of Melbourne to write about this area - what assumptions and experiences do the ‘next generation’ of teachers have? Some of their responses are featured in this issue, and I hope to follow this up with further comments in next issue. But be warned: I don’t think I’d necessarily give the title ‘student participation’ to all of what they describe. In my mind, there’s a broad continuum which starts somewhere in the area of ‘inspiring and creative teaching’ and ‘student-centred learning’ and moves towards authentic learning, real roles of community value and shared decision-making. Student participation is, to me, a dynamic (rather than static) term, that describes approaches that are always under challenge, always discontented (and hence “can do better”) and that are intensely related to context and possibility. Thus we can applaud initiatives, but always dream of ways of further enhancing students’ participation - their decision-making and their engagement with real, purposeful outcomes that go beyond the individual/classroom/school.

Many issues to pick up on there! And many provocative and, hopefully, useful articles here. Next issue, it’s back to ‘normal’ - whatever that is!

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #137: October 2002
Deadline for material: end of September

Front Cover:

Many years ago, we gave primary school students a pile of off-cuts and junk and asked them to build models of their Junior School Councils. The example represents the construction of models of student participation by trainee teachers.

Cartoon by Bronwyn Hall.
What is NASPAC 6?

- **National Student Participation Conferences** focus on enhancing and strengthening student participation practices around Australia. Each Conference is a showcase of great ideas for schools and a chance for people to discuss some of the issues they are facing. Each NASPAC is a conference about ideas, solutions and increasing the standing of this thing we call 'student participation'.

- As you might have guessed already, this is the 6th National Student Participation Conference. Previous workshops/conferences have been held in Melbourne (1980 and 1995), Adelaide (1981), Sydney (1997) and Hobart (1999).

- NASPAC 6 is relevant for everyone working on primary or secondary student participation. Both students and professionals in this field can gain much from NASPAC.

- While a large focus of the conference will be on Student Councils in schools, many other aspects of student participation will be addressed. Every opportunity for students to get involved in something other than teacher-centred curriculum activities has a valuable place, and NASPAC 6 will be the place to enhance these programs too.

- Do you need to collect some new ideas? Maybe you're looking for some innovative answers? You probably have some great experiences to share. This conference brings together people from all over the country; so this is your opportunity!

- Four solid days worth of fun, activities, workshops, presentations and discussions. And let's not forget the socialising. You will meet exciting people from across the nation, make great new friends and maybe find people who will be able to work with you post-conference!

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**Workshops!!!**

Here is a short-list of the workshop topics we will be examining ... just to whet your appetite.

**Student Councils**
- "What happens when they don't work?"
- "Constitutions"
- "Getting the attention/support of the Principal"
- "Starting from scratch"
- "We want to do more!"
- "Teacher support/training"

**Civics and Citizenship Education**
- "How can we get this really moving in my school?"
- "New ideas and strategies"

**Student Clubs and Activities**
- "What can we do in my school that anyone can get involved in?"
- "Teachers control all our co-curricular activities!"

**Networking**
- "What networking opportunities exist?"
- "Who can I connect with through the whole year?"

And this doesn't even include the range of presentations already lined up, or the great showcase of projects, or the presentations you will bring. Be ready to work hard; expect great results.
Money Stuff

The organisers are endeavoring to keep costs as low as possible for this conference.

Conference registration fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>$115.00</td>
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Discount fee: $85.00 (Student and Adult)

You can attend for the discount fee:
- If 5 or more people are coming from your school or organisation,
- If you belong to a student participation association accredited with NASPAC 6 (call us to find out more)

The organisers will be trying to arrange extra funding to assist with travel costs, especially for those participants coming from far away. Ask about this.

The registration fee includes covers:
- Conference Pack
- Breakfast and Lunch for four days (not dinner)
- Formal Dinner on Wednesday Night
- Accommodation for four nights

The registration fee does NOT cover:
- Travel
- Dinner except for the formal dinner

Students could ask for financial support from their Student Council; after all, the SRC will be the one gaining the benefits! You don’t need to pay all at once, so there’s plenty of time to raise funds. Just a $20 deposit is required to register.

Organised by:

NASPAC 6 is being organised by a group of students, ex-students and teachers, with previous involvement in NASPACs and a range of student participation initiatives.

Second Strike Productions is coordinating the Conference organisation.

- 22 Menzie Gve, Ivanhoe 3079 Vic
- (03) 9855 8900; 0412 743 951
- NASPAC 6@second-strike.com
- www.second-strike.com

Further details:

NASPAC 6 will be held in the Melbourne metropolitan area. Further information about the Conference location, program etc will be sent to you on registration.

Call for presentations:

The organisers want you to present at NASPAC 6 - contact them for application forms for papers, workshops and other presentations.

David Mould
Conference Manager

Register Now

Photocopy this form for each person attending NASPAC 6.
More information will be sent to you as soon as possible.

μ Full Name: ________________________________
μ School/Organisation: _______________________
μ Address: ___________________________________________
μ Phone Number: ____________________________
μ Email: ________________________________
μ Amount Enclosed: __________________________

($20 deposit or full amount)

☐ “I have sessions I want to present at NASPAC 6”

I understand that there will be no refunds should I be unable to attend:

Signed: ______________________________________

Send To:
NASPAC 6
22 Menzie Grove
Ivanhoe 3079 Victoria

Treat as a Tax Invoice upon payment:
ABN: 27 114 356 798
Cheques Payable to:
“Second Strike Productions”
Empowering Young Students to Become Active Citizens Through Real-World Problem Solving

BY NANCY NAGEL

Celia, a first year teacher, walked into her fifth-grade classroom at the end of August. She saw rows of desks, stacks of textbooks, several binders containing the state curriculum guides, and boxes of workbooks. While Celia knew she would be working with the state standards and requirements, she wondered how she might also address her students’ interests and concerns. Most importantly, she wanted to engage her students with important topics and involve them in rich learning experiences that raise new questions and include their voice in both what was learned and how learning takes place in her classroom. She was aware that students need opportunities to practise a democratic way of life (Dewey, 1916). Celia was committed to finding a way to bring the community into the classroom and the students into their community.

"Why are we learning this? Is this going to be on the test?" Questions such as these are posed frequently by students when they perceive that the intent of learning is to pass a test or provide an answer considered correct by the teacher. Questions are different in Celia’s classroom at Roosevelt School. Her students are engaged in learning and in constructing knowledge and understanding as they explore issues of importance to them and to their community.

Roosevelt Elementary School is located in an inner-city neighborhood. Over one-half of the school population are African-American students, and nearly two-thirds of all students qualify for free or reduced lunches.

These ten and eleven year-olds spent time examining the playground itself, discussing who uses the playground, thinking of what changes might help reduce vandalism, and finding ways to include the community in improving the playground.

During the early fall, children in this fifth grade class raised concerns and questions about vandalism on the playground to Celia. "Why is the playing field so muddy? My jeans are covered with mud after recess. Did you see the gang writing on the walls near the cafeteria? How can we play basketball when our nets are ripped off?" In listening to her students, Celia found the key to engaging them in their own learning. Because of their strong concerns regarding the playground, Celia decided she would work with her students to actively address the real-world problem of vandalism on the school playground. In doing so, she would be empowering her students "to become members of the public, to participate, and to play articulate roles in the public space" (Greene, 1985, p 4).

LEARNING AND REAL-WORLD PROBLEM SOLVING

A classroom expands beyond the traditional four walls and into the community when students seek information and analyse possible solutions to real-world problems. These ten and eleven year-olds spent time examining the playground itself, discussing who uses the playground, thinking of what changes might help reduce vandalism, and finding ways to include the community in improving the playground. Students collected, organised and presented data from surveys that they developed. They covered an entire bulletin board in the classroom with representations of the survey results shown in bar graph and picture graph format. Using the chapter on graphing in the fifth grade mathematics textbook as a resource, along with different graphs they found on internet sites and in the local newspaper, students created their own graphs to display their data.

Several students decided that grass needed to be planted to reduce the mud on the playing fields. They measured the playground and then used mathematical formulas to determine how much grass seed would be needed to re-seed the playing fields. The steps of their formula were then posted on the wall, showing the process for determining the amount of grass seed needed.

Another group of students built a model of the ‘new’ playground, to show changes they were planning to implement. The playground model was displayed on the counter, with a large sheet of paper attached and a note asking students to comment on
the design. Other students wrote a letter to the principal and then met with the parent association to request funding to purchase playground equipment (see Figure 1). This group prioritized the major needs for the project, determined approximate costs, and outlined the main points of their presentation. They then practiced the presentation in front of their classmates. All of the small groups met as a whole class about once a week to share their findings and update each other on their research and activities.

Throughout this two-month project, students were engaged in meaningful learning. They spent approximately one hour a day, three to four days per week, in their small or whole group work. These students cared greatly about their school environment and wanted to improve the playground both for themselves and for the younger children at the school. Rather than studying a hypothetical problem in a textbook, they were examining a problem that mattered to them and to their local community. This led to relevance in their learning and to discovering the process of becoming an active citizen.

At the same time, students drew from different curriculum areas or disciplines as needed. For example, students were using mathematics as they figured the square yardage of the playground. They used art, mathematics and design technology to build a model of the playground. Strong communication skills were necessary in preparing a presentation for the Parent Teacher Club. Scientific knowledge was helpful in selecting a hardy grass seed and interpreting planting instructions. Social issues were present in discussions about vandalism and gangs. Throughout the entire unit, the curriculum was integrated, and knowledge from different disciplines was drawn in as needed. "Far from being ends in themselves, the disciplines are means for answering generative 'essential' questions" (Gardner and Boix-Mansilla, 1994). Rather than fragmented learning with mathematics, language arts, or social studies each treated as a separate and unrelated discipline, students utilised multiple discipline areas.

In our everyday life, this is similar to how you or I would utilise different curricular areas. For example, if we are presented with making a decision and voting on an issue that has environmental consequences, we are likely to base our decision on a combination of scientific knowledge, social concerns, and the financial or economic impact of this measure. We do not think in terms of disciplines in isolation from each other. Yet in our schools, children often experience curriculum as fragmented and unrelated either to other curricular activities or to the community. "Our students need to be able to use knowledge, not just know about things. Understanding is about making connections among and between things, about deep and not surface knowledge, and about greater complexity, not simplicity" (Perrone, 1994). With real-world problem solving, the curriculum becomes integrated and relevant as children construct meaning and make connections to their world. Students are immersed in an important problem-solving process, making decisions based on their knowledge and understanding.

**WHAT IS REAL-WORLD PROBLEM SOLVING?**

Real-world problem solving is a philosophy of teaching and learning through which students work together to solve a problem of priority to them and to their community. There is no simple or apparent solution. Real-world problem solving requires input from experts in the field and access to current knowledge. Students no longer look for a quick or short-term answer. The goal of learning shifts to gaining critical information in an effort to solve or resolve an important problem or concern. Students acquire this knowledge as they research the problem and develop and test potential solutions. The term 'real world' is not meant to delineate learning within or outside the school, but rather to emphasise the essence of student ownership of the problem, solution and learning, and the connection with the larger community (Nagel, 1996).

The classroom that uses real-world problem solving provides for rich, in-depth learning, with students constructing knowledge as they research possible solutions to a problem. This research requires students to ask questions, seek answers, and make sense of the information. The curriculum supports student learning, with multiple disciplines used without boundaries or artificial divisions. The teacher's role is to invite students to experience the world, ask questions and seek answers, and assist them in understanding the world's complexities (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). Learning is grounded in gathering information, processing this information, developing or selecting
the best solution, and sharing the findings and results with interested parties.

Examples of real-world problems include limited water supply, land usage, the coexistence of animals and humans, or the effect of wildfires on a local community. Each of these real-world problems has been studied by different groups of students, with the solutions reflecting their learning and their desire to contribute to and improve their local community. The students learn how to become active citizens as they discover solutions to their concerns and problems. At the same time, they are immersed in a democratic curriculum, with numerous opportunities to explore issues, pose solutions to problems, and follow through with their solutions (Apple and Beane, 1995).

**Assessment and Real-World Problem Solving**

In authentic learning settings, with real-world problem solving, assessment must also be authentic. Authentic assessment occurs most naturally when in context and when assessment addresses genuine concerns and problems of the students (Brooks and Brooks, 1993). It would not make much sense to administer a multiple-choice test as a sole measure of learning at the completion of a real-world problem-solving unit. There are numerous opportunities to check for learning through the entire unit. Celia found natural places to assess student leaning. When the students decided to prepare presentations for the Parent Teacher Club meeting, Celia asked the students to determine "what a good presentation would look like." From student responses, Celia developed a scoring guide that depicted different levels of expertise and used the students' vocabulary to describe these different levels. Students decided that providing correct information, using a clear, loud voice, having frequent eye contact, and making the speech interesting were the key criteria of an excellent presentation. From these criteria they determined what attributes would make a 1 (needs more work), a 2 (good), and a 3 (excellent). (See Figure 2.) Students listened to each others' presentations and used the scoring guide to select three students to speak at the Parent Teacher Club meeting. The scoring guide provided clear guidelines for developing a presentation and explicit expectations for student learning.

Celia also matched the assessment to state standards and benchmarks for communication skills and oral presentations. By working from the required benchmarks for learning at this grade level, she incorporated the presentations as part of the required state assessment for her students.

A portfolio, in which students collect artifacts of their work that they feel depict their learning, is an assessment format congruent with real-world problem solving. The portfolio might include writing samples, artwork, photographs of projects, or mathematical problems. Jordan's portfolio contained a written copy of his presentation to the Parent Teacher Club, a group report summarising the rationale for selecting a specific type of grass seed, a drawing of the playground, an explanation for determining the square yardage of the playing field, and the letter he had written inviting the City Park Commissioner to school. His portfolio documented both the problem-solving process and his individual learning.

Other authentic assessment formats include demonstrations, projects, town hall sessions, group forums, debates and interviews. A teacher's role is to select assessment formats that allow for meaningful evaluation of student learning and to involve students in determining both how and what to assess. A combination of assessment formats provides multiple ways for students to communicate their knowledge.

In this classroom, assessment was linked closely to the curriculum. Celia was cognisant of the learning goals and standards required of her students in different curricular areas and incorporated these skills and learnings throughout the problem-solving experience. Throughout the unit, students demonstrated their knowledge and learning in meaningful and relevant ways and were active participants in designing the assessment formats.

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**Parent Club Presentation**

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<thead>
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<th>Rating Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did I provide important information?</td>
<td>Told no facts</td>
<td>Told 2 or 3 facts</td>
<td>Told 4 or more clear, important facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could my audience hear me?</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did I look at my audience?</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>A few times</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was my presentation interesting?</td>
<td>Sounded boring</td>
<td>Interesting some of the time</td>
<td>Very interesting and makes me interested</td>
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**Figure 2. Scoring Guide**
RESOLVING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Determining what amount of playground space should be allocated to different activities clearly reflected students' individual perspectives. Two groups were most vocal. One group insisted that more space was needed for soccer fields while another group wanted to add to the existing basketball court, as only one hoop was available. When hearing the differences of opinion, Celia asked the students how they might determine the best use of the playground space. After much discussion, some resistance to changing their original points of view, several students suggested surveying all of the students in the school to find out where they now played and where they felt they needed more space. Based on the data, students decided to build a model to represent the survey results.

The model of the playground incorporated feedback from the survey. Prior to developing the model, students analyzed survey data and interpreted the results. They found that more students wanted to add basketball play areas on the playground. After making a bar graph to display the survey data, they designed a playground with two new basketball courts. They also decided to expand the soccer playing field when they re-seeded the original playing field. Celia and the students looked at the surveys, determined the accuracy of the data interpretation, and examined the connection between survey findings and the playground model. This project provided assessment of student learning in survey development, data interpretation, and accuracy of displaying data. At the same time, students learned to base decisions on information drawn from the whole group's preferences, rather than reflecting the choice or opinion of a few students.

CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNITY

As the fifth graders neared completion of their study of the playground, they planned a community day to clean the school grounds, paint over graffiti, plant grass seed and small plants, and install new playground equipment. They posted signs around their neighborhood to invite community members to participate in this special event. When the big day arrived, the 29 students were delighted with the turnout. More than 100 people arrived to help with the project. The following week, the Commissioner of Parks for the city came to the school to rededicate the playground, and to acknowledge the work the students had done and their contribution to their community.

Beyond the actual change in the playground, the students also experienced the process of how to make change in a community. These young children studied traditional subjects for their grade level. They learned about mathematics, design, communication, art, science, social studies, and language arts. But they learned all of these subjects within the context of real-world problem solving, and within the context of what mattered to them and to their community. Each day when they arrive at school they see the results of their work. Although they live in an area that has been the target of gang activity and vandalism, these children have learned how to be a positive part of the change process and how to work together to improve their community.

STUDENTS AS ACTIVE LEARNERS AND ACTIVE CITIZENS

With real-world problem solving, real learning takes place. Students are interested in asking questions and finding solutions beyond what might be on the test this Friday. This curriculum does not take the place of learning basic skills or traditional knowledge. Rather, students are involved in asking important questions, and in using skills and knowledge in active, integrative learning to research and seek answers to these questions. The integrative approach "does not ask whether there should be subject matter or skills but rather how those are brought into the lives of young people and used by them" (Beane, 1995). These ten- and eleven-year-olds learned how to initiate change and make improvements in their community as they studied the problem of school vandalism and implemented solutions to this problem. Within the context of real-world problem solving, the fifth graders constructed new knowledge and understanding. Not only did they learn mathematics, language arts, social studies, communication skills, science and knowledge from other curricular areas, they were empowered as they learned how to become active citizens contributing to the betterment of their community.

NANCY NAGEL (nagel@clark.edu) is an Associate Professor of Education at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon (USA) where she coordinates the elementary intern program, teaches elementary school mathematics, and works with teachers and schools in implementing real-world problem solving. She is author of Learning through Real-World Problem Solving: The Power of Integrative Teaching (Corwin, 1996), and co-author of Early Childhood Education, Birth-8: The World of Children, Families, and Educators (Allyn and Bacon, 2002), and Gender Consciousness and Privilege (Falmer, 1999).

REFERENCES


Active Citizenship ... Student Participation
What does it mean to us?

Our actions in implementing student participation practices are shaped by both our values (our hopes and beliefs) and by our previous experiences. When we start teaching, these come together: we bring to our first practices what we have been learning about, and what we have already seen or experienced in schools.

So Connect asked pre-service teachers-in-training at the University of Melbourne to write short descriptions of the practices and issues they’d encountered within the broad field of “student participation”. What did student participation - practically - mean to them? This is what some of them said:

**Governance**

**Where do students stand?**

As a student teacher who has completed two placements, both at private schools, I was amazed to discover how involved students were in the planning of school curricula and extra-curricula activities.

My memory of secondary school and student involvement in these activities was limited to having a prefect system. The role of the prefect was to attend fortnightly meetings to discuss issues or problems that they felt should be made known to the teachers and relevant school committees. This was the only avenue available to voice the needs and concerns of all students. From my observations during my placements, the current role of all students has far exceeded this.

The new system allows and encourages students and teachers to work closer together as members of the same team. This team supports and values the opinions of all as a united team of learners and educators rather than a hierarchy of principal-to-teacher-to-student. Giving students a voice gives them a sense of involvement and control over their learning and their learning environment. This empowers the students, developing in them a sense of community respect and security in the knowledge that their voice will be heard. It allows them to feel they are being accepted as intelligent, effective members of the school community. Even though this voice may sometimes be directed through a year level or home group representative, the more students feel they are being heard, the more they will be willing to voice important issues.

During my second placement I was interested to learn that not only did they have a prefect committee, but they also had year level and home group representatives. This created a vast web of student representatives, all communicating with one another, ensuring that any issues or concerns within a home group were addressed with the year level representatives. Any school-wide issues that could not be addressed within a specific year level were passed on to the prefects and the staff committees. Looking at this network of student involvement, I was surprised at just how many student issues were being addressed and followed up.

From my days at school I can remember the futile struggles we had with the school committee to get things changed, especially when it involved uniform policies. During my last placement, students were able to implement a wide range of changes within the school as well as organise and plan a number of activities with full teacher support. Some examples of such student implementations were:

- The planning and implementing of a variety of lunchtime activities during Maths/SOSE Week. This included a 'Weakest Link' competition, a maths treasure hunt and a number of educational talks by international students.
- The students were also able to organise and plan a free dress day for Jeans for Genes day.
- The students were also the instigators of introducing creative art pieces around the common rooms and hallways to make the school more vibrant and appealing to visitors.

I think students involved in this positive school environment benefit greatly by enhancing their leadership skills and developing independent, creative thinkers. It is giving them a positive outlook towards becoming an active member of the community and will undoubtedly aid them in becoming productive participants within the
community at large and in their future work places. I realise that this level of student involvement is not broadly undertaken by all schools and that this observation is only based on a limited range of personal private system experiences, but I think that student-teacher co-operation like this can only benefit the school and more importantly the students.

Daniel Foster

The SRC

I think most schools have a Student Representative Committee (SRC), which is like a union through which students can negotiate with teachers.

I went to a private girls' school, and there were over three hundred students in my year level. From memory, I think about 15 were voted onto the SRC. At each assembly, a few representatives would tell the students what issues or ideas for changes had been posted into their pigeonhole, which of these had been discussed in meetings, and what had resulted from the discussion.

Being a large school, not many students had the opportunity to join the SRC, and some were probably deterred from volunteering because the 'popular' people usually got voted in. I couldn’t be bothered volunteering. Well, that is what I told my friends, but looking back now, I think I was just apprehensive about meeting with a bunch of confident, popular people.

However, the SRC did benefit all the students. Everybody was able to suggest ideas and issues to be discussed. These could be posted into the SRC pigeonhole, so it was not necessary to seek out a representative and tell them personally. Although as part of the student body, I felt a bit like a peasant ruled by the SRC government, we did feel that our ideas were valued, as many were addressed in the meetings, and resulted in changes being made in the school. These included improvements to the year 12 common room, changes to school rules and the organisation of events for the students and charities. Although many of the changes made by the SRC were small and perhaps trivial, it showed the students that the teachers cared about their ideas and problems, and gave us an opportunity to voice our opinions.

Alicia Teather

Minimalist Participants Given Value

An SRC does allow students a sense of purpose and status in the school community. Members are given recognition and are valued for “putting forward a motion.”

At a Melbourne girls' school - a very prestigious private school with a very stringent framework - young women have been encouraged to voice their concerns through their SRC representatives for over 20 years. These representatives have been nominated by their peers at each year level and have then been voted in through a democratic ballot.

SRC members have assembled each month with the Coordinator to discuss any concerns. Their active participation has never been encouraged to enter the domain of academic curriculum; this has never been challenged nor has there been just cause, as the system has functioned accordingly and has never been questioned. Rather, students have been encouraged to consider ergonomic issues, for example, concerns were raised regarding the traditional school bag, and as a result the back pack was introduced. The SRC has been instrumental in making changes to the menu in the school canteen, as well as the school uniform and book shop supplies.

Although minimalistic in participation, the SRC was introduced to serve society, a hidden curriculum implemented to groom young women to “take their place in society” and make fundamental changes, standing as pillars.

Maria Paoli

Organising Forums

StAR Students Exposed

The Country Connections Committee launched an innovative program for students at risk (STAR) in country areas in 1997. The program was devised in order to expose rural students, who were classified as 'at risk', to real life issues and where they stand in the broader community.

Our introduction to this program was as year 10 students in a rural high school who were chosen to attend several Country Connection programs and then host a program of our own. We formed a committee and endeavored to identify what local StAR students were in need of and begin to organise an appropriate program to address their needs.

After attaining sponsorship from local businesses, we booked various speakers and
... our experience of student participation

Performers from a range of backgrounds, including HIV positive persons, a drama group consisting of ex cons, reformed drug addicts plus a variety of vocational professionals from TAFE, University and Business. The day consisted of speakers and workshops with each of the groups.

We gained and developed a wide array of skills including communication, organisation, time management, negotiating and an exposure to a variety of people with different backgrounds and experiences. It was fantastic as a student to have the control to be able to make a positive impact on other student’s lives and learning.

The day overall proved to be a success in terms of breaking down the prejudices and ignorances that often occur as a result of living in remote areas.

We believe that this experience should become an integral part of schools’ curriculum, not only in country areas, but also as a broader part of the Victorian School Curriculum, because many of these issues are not just country specific. As students and residents from rural, country areas we gained an invaluable insight into topics that are traditionally classified as taboo. The responsibility of providing this exposure should not be wholly placed on the teacher but rather something students should be encouraged to explore and develop with each other.

Sue Isaac and Jessica Baker

Peer Mentoring

I attended a school in Western Australia that implemented the idea of peer mentoring. The main aim of it was to help students adjust into their first year of high school. Towards the end of the year students from Years 8 and 9 would come to the Year 7s (in Western Australia, Year 7 is still primary) and each student would be assigned an older student to help them adjust into high school. The mentors would take us under their wing and be there to answer our questions and dispel any rumours we had about “scary” high school. These mentors were also there for us when we started high school and remained a constant source of support for as long as we needed it. The school also implemented one period a month to be set aside for the mentors and mentees to meet together. I think this was a great idea and the benefits for both the mentees and the mentors was immense. The feedback from parents was encouraging and the whole program really helped create a sense of school community. There is a new principal at the school now so I am not sure if this is still in place.

Lara Heaney

Primary School Buddies

Increasingly these days, students are given more responsibility within the school setting. A number of programs and initiatives have been established giving primary school aged students the chance to develop and present a topic they understand well, to a group of younger children.

The Buddy program, as it is known, is run in many schools successfully. At a Melbourne Primary school in the higher socio-economic bracket, such a program is run where grade 6s are paired with preps. Every single student in grade 6 is required to teach a topic to do with citizenship to their prep partner each week. The grade 6s are even expected to develop their own formal lesson plans and are assessed on this and their reflections. For example Traffic and Traffic Safety is a topic that needs to be taught to the younger students in order for them to function in society. For this topic the grade 6s were provided with a book to read to the preps which gave them the basis of their lesson. They are then asked to come up with an activity based on the information in the book. For example some students chose to make stop signs, looking at the shape, colour and the words. The prep students then get to take home their creations.

Victoria Gilbert
These systems are valuable because they give a new set of responsibilities to the grade 6s. The most important outcome of this interaction is that those students in grade 6 who do not normally apply themselves are able to see the value of helping the preps. This gives them great confidence many of them are unable to get elsewhere in life.

The grade 6s also gain a respect for the teachers when they realise how hard it is to actually teach. They choose how they will present the topic to the preps, and so it gives them some freedom in the curriculum constraints.

We believe the above program illustrates effective inclusion of students in shaping and helping to teach others the curriculum.

Victoria and Aimee

Peer Support Programs

In discussing active student participation in schools we will be drawing from our teaching experiences at the primary and secondary levels. We will be looking at the positive and negative aspects of two student support programs which take the shape of the 'Buddy' system (primary) and the 'Big Sister/ Little Sister' system (secondary).

These programs aim for students of varying ages and at different levels of schooling to interact in a positive and supportive environment to assist in the transition from kindergarten to primary school and from primary school to secondary school. The objectives of the Buddy System are to support preparatory students with experienced students in grade 3 and up. This may take the form of literacy assistance and social development amongst other activities.

While the system seems successful at the primary level, we have observed that it is not always the case at the secondary level. Speaking from personal experience, some students do not experience this system as a positive contribution to the well being of the school community and their own school experience; instead students at the senior level may often feel that the responsibility of peer support is imposed on them. We would argue that it is these barriers that need to be overcome in order for peer support programs to better benefit their participants.

In order to improve the effectiveness of these practices, continued promotion and support for both peers and the students receiving peer support are vital. How can this be achieved? By initial and continued 'bridge building', activities aimed at developing a positive rapport between the participants. Activities may include consistent allocated time where participants have the ability to get involved in informal events such as a picnic or casual tutoring sessions, amongst other activities.

The peer support programs are a valuable resource for schools and students if implemented effectively. It is a meaningful way for senior students to make a contribution to the school and can provide a safe and supportive environment for new students.

Claire Johns, Lara Bailly, Renee Caravona and Matthew Eyles

A Treat to Read

It's hard to believe that it's been almost 20 years since I sat on those beige steps that led down to the library of my neighbourhood public school. As an 11 and 12 year old, I used to sit on those steps, during many lunch hours and read to younger students for twenty minutes or so.

An Award of Excellence program was newly created. Geared towards students who wanted or could volunteer their time, a variety of work options were made available: helping with office tasks, assisting janitors, or reading to students in earlier grades. I liked to read, so I sacrificed part of my valuable lunch hour. It was not an easy decision to make. How many 11 year olds would want to spend time at school reading to 5 or 6 year olds? There were sports stars to emulate after all.

I wish I could say that I volunteered purely from the goodness of my heart. I wish I could say I was alert of the responsibility to and for these future citizens. But I can't say that. I was eleven and aware, however, that how much work you did resulted in how many points you received. Points could earn you gift certificates for food or record albums. With this incentive, I carried out my task diligently and professionally with the future in mind.

For those involved, the process was a success. Ice cream, companionship, learning, Duran Duran and having our service acknowledged by our peers, teachers and family felt good. It still does. Without knowing it, my decision to volunteer as a tutor performed a valued role within my community. I explored books with our future thinkers, plumbers, leaders, sport stars, chemists, actors, teachers, textile buyers, travel agents, moms, dads...

Stuart Morris
Cross-Age Reading

The experience that I am relaying did not come through my teaching rounds but was observed through my son’s primary school experience. In his early years I quickly discovered that there is perhaps no more hierarchical environment than a primary school. I vividly recall collecting my son (Kyle) from school in grade one when he shrieked with horror as I began to take a detour down the ‘big kids’ corridor. On another occasion he doubled over in laughter when I inadvertently took a drink of water from the girls’ drinking fountain. While clearly such rules and protocols have their place (not least of which to ensure the children bounce primarily within their own weight division), I did feel that, rather than being a member of a broader school community, Kyle saw himself as a participant in a narrow echelon of school life, as related to the other grade levels as Australia is to Mexico.

Then the school introduced a voluntary cross-year level tutoring system that focused on reading. Whilst it is voluntary, there are rewards for the mentor; such participation was acknowledged in school newsletters and through the individual students’ reports. As another incentive the activity was conducted at a time that students were not required to give up significant amounts of their own time. And so the simple fact of reading with an older student (Kyle was in grade 2 and I recall his mentor, Nick, was in grade 5) had a significant impact on both Kyle’s reading and his feeling of belonging to a school community.

Kyle’s motivation to complete readings was immediately increased. As distinct from other homework tasks, a chapter needed to be competed, not because he was told he must or was concerned about his teacher’s reaction, but because he was planning to discuss it with Nick.

It is difficult to overstate the benefits that I had noticed. Kyle has taken to reading in a way that I could only dream of doing, specifically through an introduction to Harry Potter and the books of Paul Jennings (backed by the assurance that his role model thinks such books are cool). Significantly, the experience has influenced Kyle to behave in a similar way. He is looking forward to being Nick to the next generation of Kyles, acknowledges his responsibilities to other students and has enhanced feelings of participation and ownership in the school culture.

Andrew Corr

Cross-Age Tutoring

My second teaching round was an eye opening experience. It was at a rather under-resourced school in the western suburbs and, as someone who went to a private school and has taught instrumental music in Kew and Brighton, I wasn’t prepared for what I saw.

The school’s motto was “The caring, sharing school”, and I can honestly say that most of the staff went beyond the call of a teacher (if there is such a thing)... This school also ran a cross-age tutoring program, where year 9/10 students chose an elective for one semester to travel to a local primary school to tutor and big brother/sister young people who will probably have the same lack of opportunities that they do. The program gave some of these students an opportunity to mentor young people, and to re-inforce their own knowledge in an area. It also gave them a chance to use the knowledge that they had gained in class, and motivated them to continue learning. The real big thing for me was that some of them decided, after six months, to aim to continue along this path as a career choice. It was one of the most rewarding educational experiences I have ever seen, and I would recommend this sort of program to any school.

Andrew Arney

Classroom Curriculum

Sharing Knowledge

I remembered an incident while I was on teaching rounds where I had to teach a Year 8 class of students about different types of machines: Class 1, 2 and 3 ‘levers’, pulleys, wheels/axles, different types of gears etc. As part of the process, students were working with Lego sets to construct different types of models that incorporated the different aspects/types of machines. The students enjoyed this fairly well as they are still young enough to enjoy working with Lego (even the girls!) and beyond even just because they had to.

One of the models required construction that involved “rack and pinion gearing”. One student (a boy - and, no, it probably doesn’t matter that it was a boy) asked me where this type of gearing is mostly used. Being the relatively mechanically uninformed student teacher that I am, all I knew was that it had something to do with cars and steering but that was it. I remembered from a previous class that one of
the other students was very mechanically minded - I suspect he will eventually become a mechanic as his interest and knowledge of mechanics appears exceptional compared to his peers.

I asked this student to elaborate as I happily acknowledged I could not answer the question. He then proceeded to give a dissertation on "rack and pinion gearing" to his classmates that would have completed his apprenticeship on the spot. For me it highlighted the value of peer teaching and also the value of relating studies to real life. In an ideal environment, we would be dismantling cars and pumps and numerous other mechanical objects, but as so often is the case, time and resources are limited. But it was a strong reminder for me of the wealth of knowledge students bring with them to their studies and how willing they are to share it with others when given any opportunity.

Megan Pilkington

Science Fair

While on teaching rounds at a multi-age classroom primary school, I was very impressed with the Science Fair that is apparently a yearly event they have at the school. It is compulsory for all Grade 6s to submit an entry in this Fair but not compulsory for all other year levels. The Fair lasts for one day and is held at night time and is run quite similarly to an opening of an art exhibition, with invitations going out to parents, friends and the media. Finger food and beverages are served by waiters, while the guests wander around and look at the science experiments the children of all ages have designed. Experiments included how crystals are formed, voice and technology, and how a Bungee Sling shot works.

This fantastic idea is the talk of the school for many weeks before and after the events. The idea could go one step further and have the children actually help with the actual organisation of the fair.

Jenni Thompson

Mini-Farm

At our school we kept a range of animals including guinea pigs, mice, rabbits, an aviary housing cockateels and canaries; kids would even bring their dogs to school for the day. These animals were owned by individual students or by the whole class. We were responsible for feeding them and making sure they were safe from foxes. We would bring compost and leftovers from home to feed them and spend our lunch times cleaning and maintaining the area. This responsibility extended throughout the holidays, so kids living near the school organised a roster and took turns in feeding and checking up on them.

The mini farm was initiated by students in grades 5 and 6. We learnt how to look after a range of animals, from their feeding and breeding habits to maintaining their surroundings. We also learnt about the responsibility that goes with wanting and owning an animal. For interest sake the school is situated in the Eastern suburbs, not the country.

Amy Murphy

Creating Multimedia

I grew up (not so long ago) in a household that had a computer, and my secondary school offered typing as a core subject. My years of schooling included regular bouts of computer assisted learning, albeit primarily in the form of word processing and small-time internet searches. A well-rounded education I'd have said, but a far cry from the computer literacy boasted by students these days.

'Online-learning' and multimedia curricula are becoming increasingly ensconced into classroom settings and students' learning habits. Being computer-literate in today's schools and society is not merely an added bonus, it's a necessity.

At a school where I undertook a teaching placement recently, I was amazed by the extensive role that multimedia plays within the school curricula. Further to this, I was even more impressed by the active participation of all students in this arena. The school is attempting to transcend the traditionally demarcated boundaries of teacher/student domains by giving students greater control over their learning, and an opportunity to explore the world of multimedia. Watching students film, edit and present video material, make powerpoint presentations, search the internet and showcase their creations was quite remarkable. Year 8 students were even given the responsibility of designing and creating the school's intranet service.

It was incredible to witness the changing patterns of teaching and learning first hand. Particularly noticeable was that students from all disciplines had a terrific sense of ownership of their learning. They actively partook in decision-making processes, negotiation of assessment, subsequent activities and the chance to display their learning to their peers.

Kate Harcourt
Rock Eisteddfod

When I was in year 11 I helped the team painting the sets for our schools Rock Eisteddfod entry. The next year my Art teacher (who was overseeing that year's set production) asked me personally if I would like to work on the new sets, and co-ordinate the other helpers while she was busy. She explained that it was a big job, and I would need to give up my lunch times to do it, but the experience was fantastic for me. Not only was I able to participate and contribute to the production of the sets, but also my creative opinion was highly valued, I was given the responsibility of supervising the other team members, and I was formally recognised for my contribution. It was a great experience for me, to feel like I was valued as a person, trusted, and my skills respected.

M Buckingham

Classroom Trials

Typically, examples of student participation involve situations in which the students assume roles of responsibility outside of the classroom, sometimes even outside of the school. This is not to say however, that such responsibility cannot be bestowed on students within their own classroom.

Imagine a class where three students repeatedly fail to complete tasks, and the usual forms of discipline do not appear to be working. It was decided that they could either accept the teacher's usual decision (fail mark, re-do etc) or they could take their chances with the rest of the class through a 'mock trial'. A classroom of 24 students could be divided into three trials, each consisting of around eight students. Within each trial, four students (including the defendant) will be working for the defence, while the other four will be on the prosecuting team. In the courtroom, the teacher will act as the judge, while students from the two concurrent trials will act as audience and jury respectively. Whether defending or prosecuting, students will have tasks they will need to carry out. The defending team will need to prove that the accused really do have a viable excuse, and that they made every effort to complete the work. Conversely, it is up to the prosecuting team to prove them wrong, as well as decide on an appropriate course of action/punishment, possibly by interviewing other teachers.

This sort of activity is an example of where students are positioned in which they are required to critically examine their roles as students. Though the teacher may guide and mediate as necessary, the trial outcomes would largely be up to the students. Responsibility through student participation, but on a much more local scale.

Travis Lee

Negotiating Options

During my first teaching round, my objective was to encourage independent learning within the democratic student-centred learning classroom structure. It promoted effective and prosperous learning.

At the beginning of the English lesson, I presented the students with a list of five options in regards to the study method of the text. I asked them to make a choice. When they finally did, I was truly impressed as to how focused and absorbed they were with the task. There was a lot of positive feedback and support among group members. I discovered that as soon as I gave the students the power and the responsibility to make decisions, like the responsibility of 'choice' they developed an "inner discipline", to quote Barbara Coloroso's term. For example, when someone disrupted the reading, he was immediately told to be quiet by three of the students.

I think when a student is given responsibility, it is very much like inheriting ownership. They will do everything and anything in their power to make sure that nothing happens to the thing that is inherited. This whole notion of ‘belonging’, feeling part of, which is fostered in this democratic/cooperative classroom is part of the essence of quality, effective learning and teaching. It had greatly enhanced the students' performance, confidence and motivation.

O McCluney
Providing School Services

Our Own Canteen

Student initiative formed the foundation of my school’s philosophy and the true sense of empowerment that gave us as children and adolescents a profound affect on one’s confidence and sense of self.

One example of this initiative was our canteen. Unlike our neighbouring schools, resources and school luxuries were few and far between. We decided however that we wanted access to the usual junk food that teenagers crave, and went about organising the set-up of our own canteen. We found the perfect spot in an old storage room that had a window facing the drive-way. We spent the weekend scrubbing floor and walls and installed our donated pie warmer. A few calls to local food wholesalers, a simple menu, some petty cash (which we all chipped in for) and we were ready for business. Our group consisted of five students and we decided that any profits would be pooled for our out-back trip (another student project). Monday lunch time and the car park was swarming. In retrospect the driveway may have been a hazardous place to have 20-30 kids fighting for positions in a queue, but at the time that small window was all we had. Who knows what visitors thought when approaching the carpark, especially when the water fights broke out!

Amy Murphy

Issues

Maximum Participation - Maximum Benefit?

It is difficult to determine the true extent of a student’s participation. What is a huge effort for an introvert may be the equivalent to a halfhearted effort by an extrovert. Previous experience, mood of the day and weather, can be significant factors in determining student participation. The most important factor is the activity. The more control the students have over the activity the more they seem to participate.

But in line with Anthony Giddens’ (1984) theory of normative illusion, I argue that maximum participation does not necessarily mean maximum benefit for students.

The present reality for secondary students (particularly in the junior years) is absence of autonomy. What they eat, when they sleep, whom they see, is mostly determined for them. To award them autonomy over their learning has the same effect as an extremely poor person winning a large amount of money. It is true that the person wants the money but the ensuing adjustment period will more than likely be destructive rather than constructive. In the case of secondary students, the adjustment period is prolonged because their autonomy does not run across all aspects of their life. The point is that I found student-based activities (which evoked a great deal of participation) to waste a lot of time because students focused their attention on exploring their newly defined boundaries.

It is unreasonable to expect students to participate in the manner necessary for personal and academic growth, when the context of the activities is clearly hypocritical. Students are held to ransom: “Participate or else.” Their position in society makes it clear to them that their opinions are not truly valued. So they endure our activities and give us participation when it is demanded. Students learn the level of participation required to appease their teacher. The diversity of personalities in a classroom makes it impossible for the majority to be deeply engaged even some of the time. Participation in classroom activities is given in the same way as adherence to parking fines: the focus is on the consequence rather than the rhetoric. I argue that maximum participation does not necessarily mean maximum benefit for students.

Mario Cenacchi
Student Voice

The role of students’ participation in the school community is vital. It is the pre-cursor to them taking an active role in community life, and being an active agent in their own life. Students need to be both encouraged and supported by the school community to participate in school life such as the Student Representative Council (SRC), School Council, and peer tutoring. The school has an ethical responsibility to work collaboratively with students, to make them feel empowered, and able to affect change in their environment, and effect decisions relating to themselves (Holdsworth, 2000: 359).

According to Holdsworth (2000: 355), it is vital that students’ participation is valued by students and perceived to be meeting a genuine need. Through their involvement with the SRC, student representatives should work collaboratively with teachers in order to meet students needs. The SRC at one school we visited consists of two student leaders from each year level. It is considered to be a forum for the ‘Student Voice’ in issues concerning students. For example, students at the school participate in the Cross Age Tutoring program. VCE students volunteer to work with individuals or small groups of students on their future assignments. Another program that encourages student participation in the curriculum is the Peer Support Program. A number of Year 12 students volunteer to work with year 7 home groups to ease the transition from primary to secondary schooling.

Holdsworth (2000: 359) also states that it is essential that the student voice is not merely used in a tokenistic exercise, whereby student voice is overridden by the school. Additionally, the issue of whether the entire student body is represented by the SRC also arises.

Why should student participation be a significant aspect of education?

Students are taught about democracy and citizenship in subjects such as SOSE and English. Learning about these concepts is inadequate without reinforcement through ‘real life’ situations. Via the students’ role in these positions of authority, they are learning about how these concepts are translated into the school microcosm.

Education should not only be about acquisition of knowledge and skills. A vital goal is to produce informed and active citizens who are able to participate in the social and political life of the community, both in the present and the future. We need to show our students that they can make a difference. Students should not feel that education is irrelevant, a battle to get through, an acquisition of knowledge and skills that will not be used. Students should not feel a lack of relevance of the curriculum (Holdsworth, 2000: 354).

Students’ participation in school governance and curriculum is necessary to model the democratic system used to govern the country, and give students a ‘hands on’ experience with the process, so that they may experience first hand both positive and negative aspects of the system. This enables them to be informed and active citizens.

References:


<http://www.jpc.vic.edu.au/community/service>

Sylvia Kostzyi and Pennie Hadjithimou

Teaching That Involves

In my limited teaching experience, I have noticed one particular aspect that separate the ‘good’ teachers from the ‘great’ ones. This is their ability to involve their students in the task or discussion. Not only does this impact on the students’ learning abilities, but it also excites the instructor. This relationship between the active student and the teacher is bi-directional: both inform and educate the other.

Classes that involved all students in tasks that were meaningful and had purpose were enjoyable and actually fun - for everyone involved. They were also different to ‘regular’ classes and, even better, they were unpredictable. Every class was different, because one never knew where the discussion or activity would go to.

Students appreciate the opportunity to discover on their own, rather than sit in rows and write. Teachers appreciate it because their students are involved, interested and active.  

Rebecca James

Are all these examples what you would consider 'student participation' to be? Are some just 'creative teaching' or 'student centered learning' without having the essential elements of student participation? What are these essential elements? What examples are missing from this collection?

This exercise was conducted with a very short time-line (in one week). The next issue of Connect may carry more stories in this series... Even your own examples ...
Students as Researchers takes the practice of improving education for all one stage further than many other attempts. It relies on the fact that not only can the students come to school to learn, but that they can - and indeed must - be an integral part of the school's own learning. Schools cannot learn how to become better places for learning without asking the students. It acknowledges that neither staff nor outside researchers are necessarily ideally placed to ask questions that allow people to get to the root of key issues, or subsequently get honest answers from students about things that matter to them. It would have been ground-breaking to develop a project which consulted students in an attempt to rectify the first problem, but that would still have left the second unsolved. It is with the aim of solving both that the Students as Researchers project revolutionised school-based research in Sharnbrook. The research is undertaken by students, working with staff, on behalf of students, into the views of all those affected by the topic of the research. Students as Researchers tackled both issues of (a) who wrote the questions (by making students key players in this process, hopefully resulting in more pertinent inquiry) and (b) the honesty of responses from students. A fundamental factor in Students as Researchers is that students will be more honest with fellow students than when answering questionnaires for staff to read. There is less, if not no, fear of reprisals from fellow students where there might be from staff.

The work of students as researchers undoubtedly benefits the school, but in my experience also benefits those involved with the work on a personal level. There are not many opportunities for protracted teamwork in classes. Those available do not include working with students from different year groups; neither do they usually involve working with a member of staff except for assessment purposes. Working with fellow students and staff on a genuinely equal level, tangibly building on the basic notions of respect and value discussed in the training, provided me with a unique experience. Staff and students alike learnt to respect the other individuals in our groups for the exact qualities that might usually cause contention. For example: that somebody else holds a different point of view to your own, or everybody holds a different view to each other, helps a group to get the most out of their research. Continuing blindly along one's personally favoured course of action can lead to disastrous consequences, whereas both explaining your own reasoning and listening to that of others helps you to identify the best options. As long as the common aim is always borne in mind, a group of very different people can work together effectively to achieve it. These are all invaluable lessons that can only be fully learnt and appreciated when put to practical use, as in the Students as Researchers project.

The skills of conducting research we were taught had applications far beyond the Students as Researchers project. Learning to look beyond questions before even asking them, to their potential impact and ramifications, encourages you to consider the sensitivities and delicacy of a system, thereby minimising the risk of its disruption. The ability to write or ask an unbiased set of questions which will not offend, but will nonetheless uncover weaknesses and ways to improve on them is a skill in great demand. It is also a very rewarding and exciting skill to be allowed, and encouraged, to develop.

Working in supportive group environments encouraged the members of the project to grow in confidence. The group forum, in which opinions and ideas were freely expressed, clarified and sometimes changed, necessitated us exercising and building on existing communication and (especially) diplomatic skills.

As my involvement in the project continued, I came to realise more and more that every student is a valued member of the school community, and that how they feel about it does matter. This knowledge not only had a profound effect on a personal level for myself and the other students involved in the project, but also on a school-wide level encourages students to be honest with the school. The research projects undertaken provided the student body with another opportunity to express their opinion, in the knowledge that it would be taken seriously. This kind of knowledge creates an ethos of respect in the establishment, encouraging the student and teaching bodies, both fundamental to the school's development.

Personally, I think Students as Researchers underlines that it is not only the duty of the staff and the school to improve, but that it's also the students' duty. I don't mean duty in the sense of it being a chore. For me it became a great pleasure and something I was hugely driven to do. The feeling of giving something back to the school, my fellow students and future students in an on-going way, was fantastic. I would not initially have claimed to care particularly about my school (though I came to); but throughout, I always cared about my schooling! I care about education and making the most of it for both students and staff, and I think Students as Researchers helped other students to as well.

Students as Researchers had an impact in many ways. It changed how some staff at the school considered their students, encouraging them to think of students more as equals, and a source of help in making the most of their teaching. It also changed how students thought of themselves. They came to feel like a more valued and respected resource, and to recognise the fact that they were actually an education knowledge base.

Beth Crane

PASS THE PASTA

It was with regret that at the April meeting the committee accepted Jeanne Bow’s resignation from PASTA. After several very full and rewarding years as an officer of the Association, the last two and a half as President, Jeanne (from Kogarah HS in Sydney) has decided for personal reasons to take a well-earned break and concentrate on family and career needs for a while. We are certain that her spirit of voluntarism and spacious ability to work on the details of many fine projects will surface once again in many voluntary capacities. It is with a great big warm fuzzy hug of thanks that the PASTA Executive Committee, and its members generally, farewell Jeanne from her position as PASTA President. Any members or others wishing to thank or contact Jeanne personally may do so by writing to the PASTA Secretary (esheerin@ozemail.com.au) who will be happy to forward such to Jeanne.

Ken Page has been confirmed by the Committee to fill the role of Acting President until the next AGM in February 2003. Please contact Ken (suepage@ozemail.com.au) until this time with any matters that needs to be directed to the President.

On a more pleasing note it is nice to welcome many new members to PASTA. Since the last edition of this newsletter the total membership has more than doubled. Many of the new members come from non-government schools and from States and Territories outside of NSW. Both these developments are positive catalysts to action as we this year discuss in earnest an evolving national structure that will cater for all systems and all parts of the country to give substance to our already existing national ASIC registration.

Over 3 years ago PASTA began putting together some ideas on structural changes within schools to formally improve the conditions and status of those teachers working with SRCs and other valued leadership activities. One of the final accomplishments of outgoing President Jeanne Bow was to see the submission on these matters reach the stage where it could formally be distributed amongst key parties for feedback and lead to practical steps being taken on the implementation of agreed upon recommendations. This has now been distributed to key educational groups in NSW and to PASTA’s financial members for comment.

The current document is titled “Submission to The Department of Education and Training (DET) for Support In Principle of Working Guidelines Between PASTA and DET to Raise the Status of Student Representative Council Teacher Advisers”. It has a rationale and brief history of the development of the document and several longer sections detailing some specific actions that would assist communication and the pursuit of joint projects between PASTA and the NSW DET.

A shorter redrafted version is also in the pipeline to make the principles and proposed actions more generally relevant or adaptable to other systems and other states within Australia. If you would like to see the rationale or contribute to the details of this document, please get in touch with PASTA.

Ken Page
Acting President
PASTA

http://hsc.csu.edu.au/pta/pasta/
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM AT AQUINAS COLLEGE
PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA (2002)

The following article explores a student leadership developmental program currently being undertaken at Aquinas College in Perth. Aquinas College is a Catholic day and boarding school in the Edmund Rice tradition. It celebrates a heritage which dates back to Christian Brothers’ College, St George’s Terrace, Perth, founded in 1894. In 1958, the College was relocated to its present site at Salter Point.

From its foundation, the College has been under the governance of the Christian Brothers and as trustees, they continue their close relationship with the college. The College motto, “Veritas Vincit” - meaning “truth conquers” - is a touchstone for all those in our community to seek the truth as a way of life. Comment and examples from elsewhere, especially those which come from similar contexts, are most welcome (see contact details at the bottom of this article.) The author, Mark Dell’Oro is a West Australian member of PASTA, the Professional Association of SRC Teacher/Advisers in Australia.

Leadership is much more than mere transaction between people

Leadership involves helping people transcend their own self interests for the good of the group, the consideration of their long term needs to develop themselves rather than focusing solely on their immediate wants or needs. Hence the notion of “transformational leadership” - the focus on “being” a leader, transforming oneself from follower into leader - this is the essence of leadership formation at Aquinas College.

Adolescence is a critical time for leadership development. Sustaining the development of leadership in adolescence reinforces self-esteem, prevents or minimises risk-taking behaviours and serves as a strong foundation for successful adulthood. Yet many adolescents are either never allowed the challenges or fail to use the opportunities to act as leaders. In many educational settings, much of this leadership remains untapped, dormant. In its place breeds a form of “social loafing”, a reluctance to take on responsibility or accountability for actions. This problem is particularly evident with adolescent boys. Leadership for them is an elusive concept, the domain of a few who are “blessed” with those fine qualities.

Many adolescents confuse and continue to equate leadership with management and supervision, the “bossing” of others around them. However, much of the contemporary research indicates that leadership of a more inclusive, positive sort can be taught by providing opportunities for individuals to develop their own potential, to exhibit “moments” of leadership throughout their lives and in differing circumstances. Leadership qualities are exhibited in a number of ways by different personalities. Many of these stem from personality or character, but many also are teachable, and can be learned and demonstrated in a variety of environments.

The Challenge

In its broadest context, the challenge is in two parts. One, to research and evaluate what leadership structures and programs exist in Australia and internationally. An initial foray into this area is rather surprising. Few schools have formalised their structure, while many educational institutions run a variety of programs which provide leadership opportunities in an informal context. They just happen.

The second challenge will be to develop and implement a structure and accompanying programs which is sequential and provides for continuity from Year

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:

• OVERSEAS TOURS (or advisers and students): suepage@ozemail.com.au
• CSC AWARDS (Community Service Certificate Program): RalphMurray@bigpond.com.au
• ISRC, International Linkages and Projects: RalphMurray@bigpond.com.au or charleskingston@ozemail.com.au
• Website and Independent/Systemic Schools: charleskingston@ozemail.com.au

ABN 49 398 096 539
4-12. This is a daunting task. Much of this will involve tying in the existing infrastructure of programs which run in the College into one unified, clearly recognized direction, where all boys who attend Aquinas will be given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

As with most major tasks, certain foundations need to be put in place. Possibly the major one will be the development of an overarching College leadership vision statement which incorporates the fundamental core values - respect, truth, excellence, compassion and friendship. Within this process, we need to identify what qualities, characteristics, traits and values we view applicable to each of the three sub-schools within the College.

Preliminary research indicates some sequential direction with the development of leadership:

Junior School: Year 4-7
- students need to "see" themselves as leaders.
- there needs to be a focus on initial awareness of their leadership potential and abilities

Middle School: Year 8-9
- students expand and strengthen their leadership potential and abilities
- they are given concrete opportunities to enable growth in leadership skills and confidence via interaction

Senior School: Year 10-12
- students exhibit some mastery of leadership skills in specific areas and activities of life
- they become increasingly autonomous and able to lead from the front.

Four dimensions of leadership can also be found within each of the above developmental stages:

1) Leadership Information and Attitude

What young children, adolescents and adults know about leaders and leadership is the basis for maximising their strengths and minimising their weaknesses in their own active leadership. This is normally acquired through various role-models, from family, from school, from religion, from community and from history. The more these are studied in the context of leadership as part of the overall curriculum of the school, the better the knowledge foundation for active leadership as family members and citizens students will have.

A second dimension, attitude, refers to thoughts and feelings towards identifying ourselves as leaders. Leadership can be learned. It does not mysteriously appear. Nor, where multiple opportunities exist for it to be practised, does it mythically disappear.

2) Communication Skills

Effective communication is a critical aspect of leadership, as it is of life. The exchange of information, thoughts, action plans and evaluations are essential to effective and caring leadership. There needs to be careful consideration of not only "what" is said but "how" it is said.

3) Decision-making Skills

The crux of good leadership is choosing between competing courses of action. Good leaders take into account input from everyone around them as well as basing their decisions on their own values and beliefs.

4) Stress Management Skills

How people react to and deal with stress in their lives affects their physical, emotional and mental health. Too much stress in a group affects the social health of the group. Leaders not only need to be aware of this but have well-developed mechanisms of coping with it. The ability to cope and manage stress is fundamental to adolescent's ability to lead, without resorting to risk-taking behaviours such as drug taking or relaxing into apathy from boredom with nothing challenging to do.

The key question is how will this be achieved? What strategies are in place already at the school? Which ones need to be developed further to enhance these skills?

Not surprisingly, many of these programs exist as part of the infrastructure of Aquinas College. There are a number of academic, sporting, cultural, social, and spiritual programs which operate in the College providing for the holistic education of students. Many of these exist in their own right, and some are simply proactive, pro-service "satellite" programs, which give "value-added" benefit. These include our widely acclaimed and successful Community Service and Environment programs. Our unique Retreat program offers opportunities for all of our students, to self-reflect and maximise their own personal growth. The challenge will be to draw in and tie these together, and at the same time develop an appropriate structure whereby Aquinas students, their parents and teachers will have objective evidence of their leadership skills.

Initial ideas include:

- Junior School Leadership training program (within already timetabled classes and/or through specially targeted workshops or camps devoted to leadership skills training commencing 2003)
- Development of Middle School Leadership portfolios (to integrate with already existing resume and career oriented initiatives)
- Establishing a Student Representative Council (previously non-existent, it would be part of the objectives of the leadership program to link this intimately with current leadership structures such as the Prefect system and sporting leadership roles)
- Successful completion of a major task/assignment in the senior school as part of the criteria for Prefect nomination. (Community Service/Environment)
- Pastoral programs with a focus on the development of Leadership skills (throughout the whole school)
- Re-introduction of Peer Support with representation across the year levels

The potential value of the following in profiling, supplementing and sustaining the reality of multiple leadership opportunities, of which these are current examples, is enormous:

- Year level retreats, which incorporate Christian aspects of Leadership.
- In-servicing of sports captains and vice captains regarding their specific roles.
- Review of Boarding Leadership roles
- Role of Camps in providing Leadership opportunities. (evolving into students as staff working alongside teaching, parental and community input)

Where to from here?

Semester One will be a period of intensive consultation, reflection and feedback, with not only the major stakeholders - students, staff, parents, within the College community - but with outside organisations which possess expertise in the area of leadership development. It is certainly our hope that we will be in a position to develop and begin the implementation of the new leadership structure by late 2002 or early 2003.

I would encourage the Aquinas College community, and anyone with any comment or degree of interest in this program - especially those with experience in similar educational contexts - to contact me on (09) 9450 0387 or email at markd@aquinas.wa.edu.au

Mark Dell'Oro
Director of Leadership

As the inaugural Director, my initial task is to research what existing leadership programs/structures operate in Australia and internationally with a view to developing and ultimately implementing a structure which best serves the needs of students at Aquinas College.

APPLY NOW FOR 2003 - 2004 OVERSEAS LEADERSHIP TOURS

School student leaders and advisers in all states and all systems are encouraged to apply or make enquiries regarding these wonderful educational and professional development opportunities.

Contact Emails:
suepage@ozemail.com.au and/or charleskingston@ozemail.com.au

PASTA Newsletter 28 - Supplement to Connect 135-136
POSITIVE EMPOWERMENT FROM STUDENTS TO STUDENTS

The annual National Youth Week activities in April 2002 in NSW had a very special flavour dear to the hearts and minds of Connect readers everywhere. Rebecca and Lisa were both delegates on the 1999 PASTA North American SRC Leadership Tour and were heavily involved in student leadership whilst in high school, including ISRC 2000. Upon their return from the Tour, they set up BANANA POWER. PASTA is proud to have been a catalyst in helping students to create and become leaders and teachers of others...

Read on...

BANANA POWER IN 2002

The honourable Mr Larry Anthony, Federal Minister for Children and Youth affairs officially launched BANANA POWER's new summit days during the recent National Youth Week (7-14th April) “Bring it on!” Mr Anthony, along with the directors of BANANA POWER Rebecca Heinrich (19) and Lisa Bollard (20) believe “What BANANA POWER provides will empower Australia’s future and ensure the youth of today reach their optimum level of potential.”

During youth week summit days were held in the Hills, Northern Beaches and North Sydney areas for both primary and secondary school students. Regularly offered summit days aim to give participants a unique insight into leadership by attending interactive seminars and small group workshops looking at motivation, goal-setting, communication, public speaking, personal development and problem solving.

Beyond giving the young people practical skills to use in everyday life, BANANA POWER's 2002 summits also hope to raise their awareness of issues which they face day to day.

Partnerships have been established with various organisations including YAPA, Commission for Children and Young People, local councils, 2010, Youth Suicide Prevention Australia, New Horizons tutoring and The Red Cross. Workshops were held which allowed the secondary students to talk about first aid and what to do if an emergency involving drugs or alcohol occurs, learn how to recognise if a friend is depressed, discuss how to lobby and advocate for change in your school, find out the best methods of studying, look at acceptance of people’s differences and the issue of homophobia and learn what services and resources are available for youth in the local community.

The primary school summits theme on the “CIRCUS” saw participants partake in exciting and educational initiatives which focused on team work, peer pressure, problem solving and communication and listening skills.

Highlights for the week included seminars by Johnny Cass (TV Celebrity big brother and personal fitness trainer), Priya Cooper (Gold medallist paralympian), Jess Kiely (young successful entrepreneur), live circus performances, the “Up, Up & Away” dreaming balloons and an address by audience favourite, Robyn Moore (voice artist/professional speaker) who in her none other than Blinkie Bill voice exclaimed “BANANA POWER is extraordinary!”

BANANA POWER is run by young people FOR young people and Bec, Leis and their dynamic team of staff are now planning for further summit days to be held, including a proposed state-wide “Girl Power” conference and summits to be held in rural NSW.

For more information on BANANA POWER or our 2002 Summit Days please contact (02) 9362 1237 or email becbanana@hotmail.com

June-August 2002
"I was going to conquer the world . . .
But first, I have some smaller steps to take"

Like many young student leaders, Emily Onikul (Galston HS - NSW) felt confident. A year ago she set out on a whirlwind overseas leadership tour, returning reinvigorated to use her new knowledge and skills to lead anew back home. As a delegate on the 2001 PASTA SRC Leadership Tour to North America, Emily here reflects on a year's hard learning since. And why she now believes it was all worth it.

This time last year, my life was fairly manic, as all senior students who are heavily involved in student leadership will tell you. Trying to balance the year 11 workload, fulfil SRC responsibilities, maintain a substantial social life, a part time job and over all positive well being is difficult enough. Preparing myself emotionally, financially, mentally and physically for what was to be an utterly life changing trip - my focal point this time last year - made it even harder.

That’s right. I was fortunate enough to be one of the 24 individuals (20 students, 4 advisers) who applied to and were selected by PASTA to represent Australia on its 4th North America Tour in 2001. What an opportunity it turned out to be...

Before the tour I recall feeling excited about the whole experience, intrigued by my new “family” members, anxious about the plane trip, nervous about the independence of a month away and over the moon about having a credit card!!

While I was away the overall experience was thrilling. It was highlighted by the bond created amongst our tour group, including both the students and advisers, and by meeting new, empowered people everyday and being exposed to and a part of such an efficient and developed system of national student councils. It was an emotional rollercoaster along the way, simultaneously running into both highs and lows.

But what goes up, must come down, Right? Regardless of how much we evaluated, debriefed or critiqued our month away, nothing could possibly have prepared us for the anticlimax of “reality”. I had learnt so much about myself, and all that I was capable of, that on my return home I fell down. Hard. The greater height you reach, the greater distance you fall. And, as international student delegates for Australia, we had been on top of the world!

For the first few nights once home, my biggest insecurity was waking up and not having my newly found best friend lying beside me, there to see me through the day. The distance between the interstate delegates also grew further upon return. Then there was explaining it all to others . . .

Things worsened when you put thought into them. Telling someone a story, your words so passionate and fresh, it is hard not to relive your encounter completely. It is then, when talking about a particular place you visited or a special person you met that you reflect on your time away, which by now feels like an eternity ago. Then you realise that it was in fact only two weeks ago since you returned and you start to question...”Was it worth the hype, the build up, emotional strain and money?” The answer lies within the individual and their personal experience.

It has taken me one whole year to fully come to terms with our trip and my experience and only now am I beginning to see the benefits. I can honestly say that I no longer regret sending away my application form sixteen months ago. I do not regret hours spent writing sponsorship letters and receiving only rejections back. I have come to terms with the emotional angst that “the tall poppy syndrome” may cause and no longer resent being a leader. And, I no longer hold the early mornings and the lack of sleep while on tour against the advisers who organised us.

It wasn’t until I started preparing myself for my Year 12 half yearly exams, nearly 10 months later, that it occurred to me that I was putting into practise every single skill I had developed whilst in America. Time management, self-discipline, prioritising and stress management are amongst the lessons learned or relearned through active participation abroad. Now I was applying them. Here. At home. At school. For HSC exams. My time away, I realised at last, had really helped my self-development. Now, everyday, I feel better equipped because I am confident in who I am and my ability to achieve whatever I put my mind to do. I came back with the mentality that “I was going to conquer the world”. One year later, I still believe that I can. But first, I have some smaller steps to take.

“How do you eat an Elephant?”
”...one piece at a time!”

Emily Onikul
Galston High School, NSW
May 2002

PASTA Newsletter 28 - Supplement to Connect 135-136
What does membership of PASTA offer you?

- Positive support for SRC teacher advisers;
- Practical workshop ideas for use in schools;
- Regular seminars, workshops and conferences at an Association, State and National level at reduced registration rates;
- Regular newsletter and journals including annual subscription to Connect and optional access to NASC’s Leadership for Student Activities;
- Training and development within the SRC area;
- A support network for SRC advisers;
- Access to SRC networks;
- Special resources for students and teachers;
- Opportunities to be involved in discussions on the future of SRCs at all levels;
- Attendance at open meetings of PASTA which are held at the Joint Council Buildings, Corner Marion and Norton Streets, Leichhardt, NSW.

Phone: (02) 9564 3322; Fax: (02) 9564 2342

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- 5 - 8 August: NSW SRC State Conference - Vision Valley (Hornsby area)
- 7 September: Committee & Members Meeting - Topic: “Strategic Directions” - PTC
- 28 Sept- 13 Oct: Holidays Joint PASTA - NSW DET Planning Meeting - date TBA
- 1 - 4 October: NASPAC VI, Melbourne
- 26 October: Committee Meeting / District PD Day - Baulkham (or other host district)
- 7 December: Committee Meeting / Members Christmas Get-Together - PTC Leichhardt

For 2003

- 4 - 5 January: 2002 Overseas SRC Tour Reunion / Orientation I for 2003 Delegates
- 22 February: PASTA Annual General Meeting - PTC Leichhardt
- Term 1 2003: ‘Fresh Start 2003’ PD Day for New Advisers
- Term 2 2003: Advanced PD Day for Experienced Advisers / Consultants
- June / July 2003: 6th Annual Overseas SRC Leadership Tour - Buffalo, New York State
- Term 3 2003: Resources Development Day for SRCs

AND for 2004

- 3 - 7 August: 2nd International Student Representative Conference (ISRC 2004) to be held in Edmonton, Canada
Reconciliation Day at Asquith Girls High School

More and more, schools are recognising the importance of our aboriginal heritage in a variety of ways. Some do it through community involvement, others through special days or assemblies. The following is a report of how the students at Asquith Girls High School decided to do it this year. Perhaps your SRC could look at something similar.

A feature event on the calendar this month was the Reconciliation Assembly and ceremonial raising of the Aboriginal flag held on Tuesday, 21st May. The day was presented by our student leaders, Stacey D and Natalie K and the Social Justice Team - Wajma E, Kathy B, Wajma S, Kate W, Amy C, Evelyn W, Thea W, Sunera K, Juwairia M, and Mariam A.

Well -what does Reconciliation mean?

The aim of Reconciliation in Australia and at Asquith Girls High School is to see a united community which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all. We can all see this become a reality by:

- acknowledging that Aboriginal people were the first peoples of Australia
- accepting and understanding the injustices of the past
- understanding that our society and school needs to build upon a just and diverse society to develop a realistic national identity appropriate for the 21st century.

With these ideas in mind our assembly shared the spirit of Reconciliation.

Our guest speaker, Mr Marnie Lachmaier gave us a clear understanding of his perspective of being Aboriginal in modern day Australia when he explained what Reconciliation means to the Aboriginal people. A highlight of the assembly was Mrs Sekula’s Year 12 Performance Group featuring a four segment dramatic presentation, The Seven Stages of Grieving, while Natalie K’s sensitive explanation of ‘The Meaning of Reconciliation’ gave everybody a real sense of the purpose of the day.

Also present at the assembly was Victoria Brown, Vice-Captain of Asquith Girls HS in 2001. Her main task of the day was to present Year 12 2001’s gift of a new flag pole to the school and to see the Aboriginal flag flying from it at the dedication ceremony that followed the assembly. The Aboriginal flag was blessed by Mr Lachmaier in his indigenous language as it was raised for the first time before our students of Aboriginal background and our student leaders.

Most significantly, this event involved the participation of every student in the school with their contribution of a dot ‘signature’ on a special plaque from each roll class.

In Aboriginal culture, the dots on Dot Paintings have traditionally and symbolically told a story. On Reconciliation Day, each dot on the boards is a symbol of each individual student in our school on this day. When the boards are joined together as one large mural, we will think of the true meaning of Reconciliation.

Mrs M Bonnor

For further information on this day, contact student Amy Bott at: <louie_downunder@hotmail.com>
r.u.MAD?

a toolkit for change not charity

The r.u.MAD? program is proving itself a versatile toolkit for teachers wanting to enhance student participation, leadership and decision-making. r.u.MAD? stands for “Are You Making a Difference in the Community” and is a web-based program ready to download from www.rumad.org. In essence, it helps teachers get their students involved in authentic community projects with the slogan “change not charity”.

The program is values based and set out in stages (preparation, planning, action and evaluation). Students start by considering events or situations they consider unfair or problematic. They brainstorm the “big possibility”, ie the ideal solution, such as world peace, or an end to homelessness, or sustainable environmental practices. They then devise creative but manageable local solutions which will contribute to the “big possibility”, such as forming a peace club to run street stalls, or donating old coats on National Coat Day, or getting the local supermarket to stock calico bags as an alternative to plastic.

The above are all real examples from Victorian schools using the program.

There are many other “case studies” mentioned on the website. One example is Melbourne Girls College which formed an actual philanthropic foundation to raise money, invest the capital, call for applications and then make grants to local community groups. In July they made their first such grant, $750 to the Brosnan Centre’s “Cook’n’ Cool” program which helps young offenders re-integrate into society. The photo shows the foundation’s executive handing over the cheque, outside the Centre in Brunswick. This is “enterprise education” in action.

Another use for the program is to underpin SRC and JSC procedures and decision-making. For example, at Spenser Street Primary in Clifton Hill, the Junior School Council were ‘workshopped’, to clarify and articulate their personal values. The student representatives then took the listed values back to their homegroups and repeated the workshop with their classmates. At the following JSC meeting a slightly amended list of shared core values was agreed on – friendship, family, generosity and having fun at school. A Mission Statement is now being drafted based on these agreed values, and a number of initiatives have been launched including a review of playground equipment and play spaces, special days to raise grant money along the lines of a Student Foundation, and publicity amongst the student body to explain the role of JSC. The student executive has also attended the ‘Senior’ School Council to explain their Mission Statement and activities.

John Davidson
r.u.MAD? Schools Coordinator

For more information or help in getting your MAD projects going, contact me at john@educationfoundation.org.au
Taking Democracy in Hand

• “This is the first time I’ve had something so important to participate in. It seems like I now know much more than most kids at my school — about how the education and juvenile justice systems connect, about how to analyse a speaker or writer’s perspective, about how to motivate people. It makes me want to run something myself!”

• “You can divide us into five schools, you can divide us into 100 schools. But if the students aren’t behind it, it will fail. You need - you have - to convince us to believe in this. Right now, we don’t.”

These two quotes, each spoken by a public high school student, open and close a new paper - Taking Democracy In Hand: Youth Action For Educational Change in the San Francisco Bay Area - written by Barbara Cervone of What Kids Can Do and co-produced with the Forum for Youth Investment. The goal of this paper - more than field notes, less than a case study - is to bring into the light the remarkable efforts of Bay Area young people to improve the quality of their public schools. It draws upon site visits, interviews and conversations with ten Bay Area youth organising groups, highlighting some of their burgeoning accomplishments and growing wisdom. In the process, we hope that it makes a convincing case that young people are critical, though often neglected, actors in school reform. The paper is now available online at:

http://www.whatkidscando.org/pdflibrary.html

Taking Democracy in Hand is the first product of a larger collaboration between the Forum for Youth Investment and What Kids Can Do, aimed at documenting and advancing youth action for educational change throughout the country. As we continue to write on-the-ground stories like those contained in this paper, we also will be developing commentaries, conducting a light national scan of relevant efforts, gathering and sharing existing resources and literature, and bringing what we learn into a variety of national forums on education and youth engagement. Ours is a modest effort, but one that we hope will be of service to young people like those we write about in Taking Democracy in Hand.

We invite you to advise and join with us as we continue this work. We are eager to learn of local, national an international efforts relevant to this work, to gain insights into what will help advance and support the work of young people as educational change-makers, to receive suggestions on where to best focus our joint work. Please contact us to (a) give us feedback on this paper, (b) share stories, initiatives or resources you are aware of, or (c) talk about partnering with us in these efforts. We look forward to hearing from you.

Joel Tolman
Forum for Youth Investment
<joel@iyfas.org>

Youth Action for Educational Change In the United States

A Case Study Prepared for the Lucent/IYF Workshop on Education Reform

The Challenge

Young people learn the most when they are engaged, emotionally and intellectually, in the subject matter they are learning. Engagement is equally critical to young people’s development - especially for older youth, for whom words like 'relevance' are the watchwords of meaningful experiences. Unfortunately, research indicates that, in the United States, opportunities for engagement and leadership actually decline in availability as young people get older (Sipe and Ma with Gambone, 1998). In particular, young people say that they are seldom engaged in their schools, either with their heads or their hearts.

If they are seldom engaged in their learning, young people are even less often engaged in real decision making and power sharing in their schools. In particular, they are rarely treated or welcomed as critical actors in school reform and redesign. An examination of comprehensive school reform models in use around the United States indicates that only a handful treat young people as important
actors in the process. In local and national meetings of educational decision-makers around the United States, young people are either absent entirely or included only in token ways.

Yet there are numerous reasons to believe that engaging young people in school reform is a critical step – if not the critical step – in improving schools. As with other kinds of engagement, youth action in school reform will almost certainly improve the learning outcomes for the young people involved. More pragmatically, young people have it in their power to stymie any school reform efforts – as indicated by a recent school-wide meeting in a San Francisco high school, where students attacked an effort to break down their school into a number of smaller units. More positively, young people have also proven their ability to bring about educational change, through efforts around the United States (see text box). In the words of Eric Braxton, head of a youth organising effort called the Philadelphia Student Union, “if schools are going to work, students are going to have to be the agents of change; they’re going to have to lead the change in schools.”

What would it mean if young people were taken seriously as educational change makers? And what would it take for young people to be treated as a critical part of the school reform equation? In the United States, a growing number of organisations, institutions and individuals are exploring and, through their actions, providing answers to these questions. In increasing numbers, young people are tackling educational policies - small and large - at the local, state, and national levels. National youth action intermediaries and networks are adding new horsepower. Schools and districts are opening up space. In communities around the country, institutions called “democracy high schools” are springing up – based on the premise that students should be treated as full citizens and real decision makers in their schools. National education associations and school reform advocates are taking note.

This emerging work and burgeoning support raise hope. With this momentum, however, comes the need to strengthen and leverage these promising efforts. Connections among the various areas of activity just mentioned are far from firmly established. The evidence base for this work is underdeveloped. The work of young people and their allies hasn’t yet been brought into the light, and isn’t widely known around the United States. Many grassroots efforts lack the capacity to engage more young people, and many resource-rich institutions - while saying they want to engage youth - have yet to fully invest themselves in supporting youth engagement. The bottom line: Good work is taking place around the country, but to maximise its impact it needs to be documented, learned from, and shared.

**The Response**

A recent meeting in Washington, DC, brought together about 100 officials from the US Department of Education, the offices of several members of Congress, and representatives from numerous national education organizations. The topic of the meeting – youth action for education reform – was new to many of the audience members, even those seasoned in school reform work. They listened, clearly engaged, to stories of youth organising in New York City, Philadelphia, and the San Francisco Bay Area – stories about students training the police officers who enforce school truancy policies, about youth-led efforts that prevented a city’s school district from doing business until new policies were adopted, about a campaign by young people that resulted in millions of new dollars for youth programming. Surprisingly, this group of education policy-makers did not dismiss these unorthodox tactics, nor their young practitioners. Instead, they demonstrated with their questions and comments a new openness and interest to young people as an important element of the school reform equation. In the words of one participant, school board member from a large suburban district, “we’re in the midst of a major school reform effort, and this is making me think – why haven’t we involved the students so far? How can we do that?”
This meeting — co-hosted by the Forum for Youth Investment and its collaborator, What Kids Can Do — is part of a larger project by IYF’s US partner to support and advance youth action for educational change. It demonstrates one of the two guiding goals of the project: to create a new openness and new opportunities for youth engagement within the education and school reform communities. At the same time, our joint efforts aim to create new capacity within efforts to engage young people in school reform, and new capacity within young people themselves. In other words, our work aims to influence both the supply and the demand parts of the equation — to create supports for youth engagement, and to create opportunities for young people as they are ready to be engaged.

In the context of those ambitious goals, our strategies — like the meeting described above — may seem both modest and far from the ground. But our strategies reflect our organisational strengths and roles. The Forum’s primary capacities are in framing issues in clearer and more compelling ways, in building connections between organisations, in providing insights into national field-building tasks, and in advocating for young people among other national organisations. What Kids Can Do is a documentation and communications organisation, specialising in telling and spreading the stories of young people engaged in “powerful learning with a public purpose.” Given these strengths and a limited budget, the Forum and What Kids Can Do are using a number of low-cost, hopefully high-impact strategies in this work.

Bring stories of youth action for educational change into the light.

The meeting described above is one of several efforts to make young people’s efforts better known and understood — especially by educational decision-makers and school reformers. Another example is a series of on-line publications that tell the stories of young people doing school reform work. In most cases, we are using pre-existing channels for spreading these stories. For instance, this meeting was held as part of forum that brings together educational policy-makers on a regular basis, and we are working to place stories in the US education media. We are using these pre-existing communication channels because they are inexpensive and have a broad reach, but also because they are channels that our audiences trust and use regularly.

Develop a clearer picture of the national climate and infrastructure needed to support youth action for educational change.

To develop a better understanding of what it will take at the national level to support youth engagement in school reform, the Forum is in the midst of a national scanning and assessment process — interviewing the leaders of current efforts, asking them what they see as the critical obstacles and next steps, comparing their work to what it takes to build a field or movement. This national scan will result in a paper that can guide joint planning and agenda-setting.

Bring young people and their voices into national and local school reform conversations and efforts.

At meetings of the Council of Chief State School Officers (the organisation of leaders of state education agencies in all US states), the Carnegie Corporation’s multi-city Schools for a New Society Initiative, the National Forum on the American High School, and the Coalition for Community Schools, the Forum or What Kids Can Do have helped young people play prominent speaking roles. Through writing workshops hosted by What Kids Can Do, and through meeting documentation by the Forum, we have helped young people create written expressions of their opinions about school reform. And through direct technical assistance, the Forum has helped individual school districts engage young people in their school reform efforts.

Provide clearer, more compelling ways to understand and describe the roles of young people in school reform.

The language and understanding of youth action for educational change is not yet fully developed, nor well integrated into mainstream discussions about education reform. While this may seem insignificant, research has demonstrated that ideas are only successful in influencing policy when they are framed in understandable, commonsense ways that connect to everyday realities. With this in mind, the Forum and What Kids Can Do are developing commentaries, simple diagrams, talking points, and the like, meant to re-frame the role of young people in education reform.

Support and connect existing efforts through which young people are engaged in school reform.

The Forum and What Kids Can Do do not have the capacity or expertise to provide deep, ongoing assistance to grassroots efforts. Nor are we the best people to form and maintain a network of related efforts around the country. Yet both individual capacity-building supports and network-building efforts are needed, according to the local
and national stakeholders we have interviewed. With this in mind, the Forum and What Kids Can Do are 1) providing what capacity- and network-building support that we can, and 2) encouraging and supporting others who can better play these roles. For instance, we are currently gathering the research and written resources related to youth action for educational change – little of it readily accessible – and creating a resource guide that is likely to turn into an online resource center. We are also opening space for connection opportunities whenever possible – like the recent meeting described above, a gathering of youth-led reform efforts during the summer, and sessions at upcoming conferences.

All of this work is undertaken with the hope that other organisations will be motivated and pushed forward by our efforts, and that they, in turn, will create the long-term capacity to support youth action for educational change on a national scale.

The Impact

To be honest, we are not yet sure of the reach and impact of this project. The work, while building on efforts over the last three years, has just begun in earnest over the last several months. Further, measuring the impact of strategies like documentation, convening, and re-framing is difficult, and involves a theory of change with many steps between our actions and the lives of young people. Yet we can point to a handful of clear victories thus far:

- **School district actions.** As a result of students' involvement at an initial learning meeting for school reform teams for 10 urban districts, and ongoing follow-up from the Forum and several other organisations, young people played substantial roles in reform decision-making in these districts. This success can be attributed in part to the inspirational initial experience provided by the Forum, but is in large part the result of continued emphasis on youth engagement by the team staffing the initiative of which the cities were part.

  - **Lasting and expanding openings.** After the Forum organised youth involvement in a Learning Institute for the Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO made student involvement a regular part of their meetings. A number of other national organizations – the Learning First Alliance, the Coalition for Community Schools, etc. – have begun to ask the Forum for support in involving young people in their meetings.

  - **Changed minds.** The educational decision-makers involved in events hosted by the Forum and What Kids Can Do have left with new interest and commitment to young people’s engagement, according to meeting evaluations and personal feedback.

  - **Positive feedback.** At a number of national meetings, student panels have been the most positively evaluated aspect of the program. At a meeting co-hosted with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Center for Youth Development, nearly a third of the respondents cited students’ voices as the most useful part of the event. A large minority of participants in the recent meeting of education policymakers described above indicated that they would substantively incorporate the lessons from the panel into their ongoing work. According to one participant, youth action for educational change is "something federal agencies/policy makers should truly accept – integrate into mentally and consequently decision-making."

  The results of our work seem most impressive when an initial inspiring experience – a story, a meeting, etc. are built into a larger process that makes participants accountable for youth engagement, and that provides them with instruction and capacity to engage young people.
Pitfalls and Missteps

The challenges we have faced in the project related primarily to the statement just made about inspiration, instruction, and impact. Our organisational strategies have, thus far, focused mostly on inspiration – through meetings, publications, and related communications vehicles. Yet these strategies have not yet pushed nearly as far toward impact as we would like.

One example is illustrative. School districts, after hearing a student panel at a national meeting, go home with little understanding of what more meaningful, ongoing youth engagement looks like, or even how to effectively support the relatively low-level engagement achieved through student panels. They call the Forum for help on how to host a student panel, when really we would like to offer help in creating ongoing, deep structures for youth engagement – but don’t have the influence or the expertise to effectively move them in the right direction. The result has been many student panels, forums, and focus groups – some effective, some meaningless and without enthusiasm or intelligence – but relatively few young people involved in the highest levels of decision making, relatively few sustained mechanisms for involvement, and relatively few stories of young people bringing about real change. The lesson we have learned: engaging young people in school reform does not come intuitively to schools; inspiration needs to be teamed with instruction and accountability in order to make a difference.

Lessons Learned,
Lessons Worth Sharing

Again, our work is in its early stages. Yet, we are convinced that its general outlines – focused on changing the expectations and attitudes of the education and school reform community, while also increasing the readiness of young people and their allies to engage in school reform – is a powerful and replicable one. In fact, other IYF partners are in some ways better positioned to take on this work than is the Forum. With financial resources to support educators as they engage young people, and with a greater experience than the Forum in direct technical assistance to sites, many of the IYF partners are well positioned to move from inspiration to impact in a way that the Forum is just beginning to do. Moreover, many IYF partners are already well known for their expertise in youth engagement; work on youth action in school reform is a natural way for the partners to become part of the school reform conversation.

Our limited experience indicates that several factors are critical in moving youth action into the education reform mainstream. First, in shifting the expectations and assumptions of education decision-makers, young people and the leaders of grassroots youth engagement efforts seem to be particularly effective advocates – more effective than national experts, in fact, though pairing young people and local organizers with national experts may give efforts increased credibility. Second, it is critical to put forward a clear picture of meaningful engagement, as well as a road map of how schools, districts, and policy makers can move toward that picture. Youth engagement is new enough ground for most educators that clear messages and ongoing supports are both critical.

On the other hand, while the picture must be clear, educators need to understand that there are many meaningful roles that young people can play – that youth action for educational change takes many forms. Finally, as with any effort to influence educators, the use of communication channels and voices that educators trust, and the creation of messages that speak in their language and to their priorities, are important.

We believe, like Eric Braxton of the Philadelphia Student Union, that education reform efforts can only be successful when they have the support of students. We believe, as well, that young people deserve a place in the school reform process. We hope, then, that the IYF partners will see youth action for educational change as a critical part of their work to improve schools and support young people.
SRCs: Getting the Active Support of the Principal

Some thoughts from a former SRC President who tried numerous times (usually successfully) to get a variety of events to happen at school.

Getting the active support of the Principal or administration can sometimes be tricky. Your Principal is a busy person and can sometimes be hesitant when students propose something new that they would like to do in the school. A good Principal will take the time to listen to new ideas, especially if they come from a formal student body such as the SRC. You should be able to expect, at the very least, to hear the reasons behind a 'No' explained. The following, however, is more about what you can do to get your proposals through by being organised.

Sometimes when you propose something, this is how it goes:

Stage 1 - The run-around

This is to see how serious you are about your suggestion. The Principal asks for additional information (sometimes more than is needed). So if you don’t get your initial request in some time before the approval needs to be given, the chances of missing the boat are pretty big. Strategy: get all of the Principal’s concerns out at the start so that you can track down all the material you need to support your case.

Stage 2 - Indecision

The Principal agrees to look into it and get back to you. Again it’s a race against the clock. Principals are busy people too and sometimes they just forget. Before you finish the current discussion, make your next appointment to see the Principal, so that you both have a time frame.

Stage 3 - Logistics

By this stage, unless you missed something, you’ll know if the Principal is supporting your proposal or not. If you haven’t been given a flat ‘No’, then a discussion will no doubt take place about how to run your activity in terms of managing venue, staffing, etc. If you both put your minds to it, you can usually solve these problems. After all, the organisation exists to timetable a whole school into classes, doesn’t it? If arguments like this are brought in as a reason that the event can’t happen, you may need to ask bluntly whether the school wants to do it at all.

If you have a teacher supporting your proposal, then this organisational meeting is a good one to have them in on because they’ll keep an eye out for procedural difficulties and for possible solutions. The more you already have things organised before this discussion, the better the outcome should be. For instance, getting permission to use a certain venue from the staff member who looks after it, or approaching some friendly teachers on behalf of the SRC to ask them to supervise at the event. This way, the Principal needs only to give the “Yes, this all sounds fine” approval without having to take on all of the organisational responsibilities.

So what if you get a flat ‘No’?

Stage 4 - Accountability to School Council

If your proposal is a genuinely good idea and there are no apparent reasons as to why it should not go ahead, but you still don’t feel as though you are getting the support of the Principal, then the School Council are good people to keep informed of what the SRC is working on. If the Principal has already vetoed the proposal then this probably isn’t a good idea. However, if over some time, you have reported to the Council about your initiatives, then you will have the option of informing them that your proposal was rejected. Consequently, the Principal will most likely need to explain and justify the reasons to the Council. If you don’t have student reps on the Council, send a concise report to each meeting with one of the parent or staff reps. Note that the objective here is not to go over the Principal’s head but to discourage a ‘No’ response in the first place unless there are good reasons.

While all of this sounds like doom and gloom that’s more trouble than it’s worth, in general, most Principals will support you if you demonstrate that you are organised, keen and responsible. When you are planning and negotiating, give yourself plenty of time, perhaps starting the wheels in motion months in advance. Be flexible but firm, and have a number of contingency plans up your sleeve. Eventually you will have the opportunity to run a student activity from scratch, which is a most rewarding experience, and an achievement to be proud of. And remember – “If at first you don’t succeed, then skydiving might not be for you.”

Paul Tresidder
Case Study: Student Voice

Features of a Successful Student Participation Model

The success of any student participation group is dependent on a combination of a number of variables. The following features (explained below) contribute to making Berwick Secondary College’s Student Voice the success that it is.

Vision/ Common Goal
At the beginning of the year the Student Voice Vision is spelt out to the new leaders - these leaders are aware of the main vision of the Student Voice very early on, which is why they opt to join the group. All members of the Student Voice team are encouraged to know and believe in the Student Voice Vision. A number of common goals are established early on in the year - the Student Voice team is a group of like-minded students all working towards a common goal.

Incentives/Motivation
Whilst the leaders tend to have their own intrinsic motivation, it is vital to maintain motivation of the Student Voice team by offering benefits and incentives. Benefits should not, however, be expected. Material incentives of being a member of the team include such things as receiving a Student Voice t-shirt and Student Voice badge; attending a leadership camp and team tour; Student Voice Leader of the Year Award.

Organisations/Resources
We are always on the lookout to identify useful and helpful organisations and resources. SRC specific resources are few and far between. People can be called upon to present their ideas to the team, eg guest speakers at the leadership camp; organisations and resources also encourage new ideas and suggestions.

Teamwork
Some team building and bonding experiences are undertaken during the Student Voice camp - encouraging the development of teamwork. Working as part of a team means making new friends, developing communication skills and always having others around for support.

Communication
Two way, strong communication between all key players is essential - Student Voice - Administration - Student Body - Teachers – Parents - Community – other student groups - etc. Communication takes a lot of effort, but ensures all the key players are involved and up to date, making the best use of our most effective resources.

Student Led
Student Executives are given the responsibility to run the organisation. This provides students with leadership opportunities, provides a sense of real ownership and allows for the team to develop into whatever form students want it to be.

Constitution
The constitution is a set of rules, outlining how the organisation is to be run. The constitution is closely abided by but can be changed (through correct procedures) to accommodate student wishes.

Regular Meetings
Weekly meetings are run. Meetings can be formal and informal, compulsory and non compulsory. A combination of meeting types ensures regular contact and keeps people informed and accountable.

Resume
Involvement in the SRC not only builds skills but also looks good on the resume, which will help with future job hunting. Not that this should be the only reason for getting involved!

Building Friendships
Encourages development of friendships between students from different year levels, as well as students who normally wouldn’t associate. Like minded students work on projects that interest them, with other students interested in the same area.

Student Empowerment/Ownership
Students have control of deciding which direction the organisation will head. Members of the team develop a loyalty to the Student Voice, because the organisation is theirs. They then want to work on tasks and make a difference, make the team a success.
Chance to Make a Difference - Projects Undertaken

An opportunity exists to make a real difference, to identify and change things for the betterment of the school. The Student Voice is always organising or running some activity. Activities are both big and small and vary considerably, hence encouraging involvement from different groups of students.

Personal Fulfillment/Enjoyment

Being a member of such a team allows students to develop a sense of belonging, of achievement, of enjoyment - through the involvement and participation required.

Organised

High level organisation is needed; each student needs to keep track of the tasks they have taken on; overall organisation needs to exist within the group also. Being organised includes keeping track of what things need to be done, using ‘To Do’ lists, calendars and timelines.

Publicity

Effective publicity informs others of the organisation's activities, through a number of methods including www, bulletin, Student Voice newsletter, school newsletter, PA announcements, posters, word of mouth, form group announcements - people can be informed of up and coming events or the outcome of past events.

Networking

Student Voice leaders develop working relationships with other SRCs and like minded students state wide, via conferences and organised activities. The Student Voice leaders run training sessions for local primary students. Networking not only helps with new ideas and support, but is another opportunity to develop friendships.

Leadership Opportunities

Opportunities arise for students to participate in conferences and forums with students from other schools. These opportunities vary and may include focusing on various topics, eg youth forums, SRC training, young leaders days.

Administration Support

Administration sees the importance of the Student Voice team and provides huge support. Student Voice often seeks financial support when running events. It is important to maintain a good working relationship - as permission, advice and support is sought regularly.

Role Models

Leaders are expected to behave in a positive manner at all times, setting a positive example for their peers. Behaviour should be such that the student body strives to reach the level of commitment and participation of Student Voice leaders.

Goal Setting/Planning

Early on in the year, the Student Voice team partake in a goal setting session - where they learn what goal setting is and the importance of goal setting. This session leads straight into planning for the year. Decisions need to be made on what big activities to undertake and who will do what and by when. Goals need to be reviewed and continuous planning undertaken throughout the year.

Improvements

Despite its many successes, Student Voice acknowledges that it is far from perfect. Regular reflection, both formal and informal is undertaken in an effort to improve our faults and operate at full capacity.

Cathey Dragasia
Berwick Secondary College
Manuka Road, Berwick Vic 3806

June-August 2002
eMpowerology

eMpowerology is an organisation dedicated to promoting student participation and leadership in both primary and secondary students. eMpowerology believe that student leaders are capable of a whole lot more then is generally expected of them. With the right training, student leaders can take the initiative to really make a difference in their schools and not just operate at a token level.

What can eMpowerology offer you?

eMpowerology is a unique organisation offering subscription to b.e.@s - a quarterly newsletter (1 per term). Subscribing to b.e.@s offers you practical advice and handy hints for JSC/ SRCs; ensures you keep up to date with services being provided by eMpowerology each term; and there is the added bonus of receiving a 15% discount on all eMpowerology services for the duration of the subscription.

Furthermore eMpowerology offers:

A. Advertised Programs - Various activities are held across the state and we invite anyone to participate. These activities include: Teacher Advisor Workshops; SRC/JSC Weekend Workshops; and SRC/JSC Holiday Programs

B. School Tailored Services - Individual schools can employ the services of eMpowerology to fulfill specific needs for their own SRC/JSC. These services include: SRC/JSC Camp Consultation and Running; Tailored SRC/JSC Workshops; Establishing an SRC/JSC; Constitution writing; and Coordinating Democracy Tour

For more information visit our website or contact us:

eMpowerology
PO Box 1483
Clayton South, 3169
W: www.empowerology.org
E: info@empowerology.org
Ph: 0418 178 450

School Councils UK

In the UK, SRCs or Student Councils are referred to as 'School Councils'. School Councils UK is an organisation that runs training sessions for teachers and students about School Councils, and produces and sells resources - kits, videos, reports, badges etc - around such training. Two recent kits are:

Primary School Councils Toolkit

This material is addressed to both teachers and students. There's a 10 session program for teachers: introducing pupil councils, the role of teachers, setting up class councils, resolving conflict through peer mediation and so on. Similarly, there's an 11 session program for primary school students introducing School Councils and taking participants through the steps of formation and operation: agendas, charters of behaviour, mediation etc.

Secondary School Councils Toolkit

The secondary toolkit has a more 'open' structure, focusing on the role of a Working Party of teachers and students using these materials in introducing ideas and training across the school.

In each case, the toolkit contains lesson plans, overheads, discussion sheets and resource documents. Each has an associated video aimed particularly at persuading school communities that a student council is valuable.

These materials are not cheap - especially with the current state of the Australian dollar. For further information, contact School Councils UK:

www.schoolcouncils.org; <info@schoolcouncils.org>
phone: +44 020 8349 2459; fax: +44 020 8346 4895

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Events and Opportunities

Form One Lane - South Australia Style

It has been a long-term dream of VISTA’s to take Form One Lane interstate. So, in May this year, a team consisting of Rod Land, David Mould and Kate Buchan hit the road and invaded Adelaide in a way only VISTA knows how to.

Although many participants had never attended a PD seminar aimed solely at SRC teachers, they embraced it so warmly that the motivation in the room was incredibly intense all day. By the end of the first session the participants all felt that they weren’t the only ones out there in their positions, and (especially the group of primary school teachers) had networked their way into a support group that they would be sure to make use of in the future.

Participants were challenged by three guest presentations, and undertook one of four workshops, after which they presented their workshop outcomes to the rest of the group. (Everyone learnt a lot from the group singing about writing SRC constitutions to the tune of the Rolling Stones’ Satisfaction.) The entire group worked on several sessions together, brainstorming ideas about what the role of an SRC teacher is, resources that were available and those that everyone would like to see available, as well as techniques to inject the fun element back into SRCs.

And as the discussions continued long past the seminar finishing time, continuing with informal drinks at the local pub, the day was deemed a success by all the participants as well as the VISTA staff on hand.

To find out about Form One Lane and VISTA, check www.srcteachers.org or contact: VISTA@srcteachers.org

Kate Buchan

...the next...

Form One Lane
3rd September, 2002
Bairnsdale, Victoria

For all details, contact:
Second Strike Productions
22 Menzie Grove, Ivanhoe Vic 3079
Phone: (03) 9855 8900; 0412 743 951

Training Activity: Mapping the School

Who makes the decisions in your school?
What bodies and committees exist?
What do they have power over?

A whole group training session can ask these and other questions: who else is involved in making decisions? how does it link together? The aim is to draw up a ‘map’ of how decisions are made.

Start by writing down on the board what people in the group already know about Councils, Committees and individuals. This should include: who is on these committees? when do they meet? what power do they have? who do they report to? do the individuals report to and/or are responsible to others (to committees and/or to individuals).

Try to draw a ‘box and arrows’ diagram to show how decisions are made.

Look at this diagram and identify the gaps - things we don’t know about what bodies exist, membership, meeting times, powers. Then ask: "Who can help us fill in the gaps?" Identify available 'sources' in the school who will provide information.

Form small research teams of students to interview the identified sources of information. The teams should make appointments to meet with their ‘source’ and then bring this information back to the group (on the training day, or in a week’s time).

Add the information to the diagram. Each part of the map should show what a committee or person makes decisions about, who is on the committee, when they meet, who they report to etc.

Draw up the map neatly and put it on the SRC noteboard - or publish it in the school diary!

Roger Holdsworth

June-August 2002
What’s In It For Us?

Pupil Consultation and Participation

Educating students today is a far different and more complex proposition than it has been in the past. (Nieto, 1994)

I would argue that it is a priority in education to consult young people about learning. They have a lot to tell us; they are observant, analytic, and on the whole their voices are constructive and not oppositional. Consultation enhances pupils’ sense of self-respect and their sense of contribution to the school as a community. Moreover, consultation offers teachers a practical agenda for responding to the things that get in the way of young people’s learning.

From an early age in school, young people are capable of insightful and constructive analysis of social situations and if their insights are not harnessed in support of their own learning, then they may use them strategically to avoid learning in school and conspire unwittingly in the process of their own underachievement.

There are many reasons for taking seriously what pupils have to say about teaching, learning and schooling: most importantly our concern about pupils who disengage and our awareness that schools have changed less in the last twenty years or so than young people have changed and that the structures of schooling offer, on the whole, less responsibility and autonomy than many young people experience outside school.

The data on the three questions that follow (What’s in it for pupils? What’s in it for teachers? What’s in it for schools?) come from various projects (national and local, longitudinal and short term, in primary and secondary schools, some recently completed and some current); all have had pupil consultation as a distinctive feature.

What’s in it for pupils?

• being heard and being taken seriously;
• a greater sense of membership so that they feel positive about school;
• a stronger sense of respect and self worth so that they feel positive about themselves;
• a stronger sense of agency so that they are ready to contribute to the improvement of learning;
• adults understanding their experiences and taking action to help students establish and sustain a positive attitude to learning and to themselves as learners.

But we have to ask ourselves, in the acoustic of the school, whose voice is heard and whose voice goes unheard?

What’s in it for teachers?

• a practical agenda for improvement;
• a sharper awareness of young people’s capabilities and a revaluation of images of childhood;
• a re-affirmation of the importance of the relationship between teachers, pupils and learning.

But it can be uncomfortable: teachers can feel anxious about the possibility of personal criticism and uncertain where, in a pressured timetable, they can find space for consulting pupils.

What’s in it for schools?

• an agenda for change that can make a difference;
• a stronger sense of the school as a learning community;
• a basis for self-evaluation;
• a commitment to ‘enacting’ and not merely ‘teaching’ about citizenship.

But it can present challenges that not all schools are ready to confront.

Fashion – or foundation for ‘a new order of experience’?

Does pupil consultation/pupil participation/pupil voice – all ways of signalling that pupils matter in school – represent merely a populist movement that will soon fade, or is it underpinned by something important enough to survive the pressures of the time?

We know that it will take time and very careful preparation to build a climate in which both teachers and pupils feel comfortable working together on a constructive review of aspects of teaching, learning and schooling. A precondition is that teachers must see the students’ perspectives as worth engaging with. But the issue of sustaining development in the present climate is also challenging. Will the commitment to pupil participation survive? It depends in part on what mandatory tasks schools have to engage with. Tyack and Tobin (1990) remind us about the temptations of the project conveyor belt: ‘Each is taken up in turn, elbowed out to make room for the next newcomer, and yet we are not saved’.

A lot of energies and forces have come together in support of pupil consultation and participation: work on the rights of the child; youth councils and parliaments; citizenship education. Another influence has been research in the social sciences which asks powerful questions about the impact on constructions of childhood of an ideology of immaturity. Young people, ‘the most photographed and least listened to members of society’, are constantly presented as in a state of ‘becoming’ rather than as ‘being’ actors in their own right. This view of young people as ‘inadequately socialised’ still retains a powerful hold on educational, economic and social planning.

But what motivates us in our support for student participation and student consultation? Are we ‘using’ student voice to serve the narrow ends of a grade-obsessed society, or empowering students by offering them greater agency in schools? What is the balance in our concern between school improvement and school empowerment?

Jean Ruddock

References


Professor Jean Ruddock is co-ordinator of the ESRC Network Project (see Connect 133-134). This article is adapted from her address at the Network’s November 1, 2001 conference and is the first in a series of articles planned by the Network as coverage of that event. See: http://www.consultingwithpupils.co.uk/
Some Questions to Help Clarify Student Interests in Student Participation Projects

Starting

- Are there any areas of discontent/concern about a situation in the school or the community?
  - What might be done to help resolve our concerns?
  - What do we think of these suggestions?
  - Do we think any of them are worthwhile?
  - Why or why not?
- Do we consider the project really important?
- Is it important to other young people as well as ourselves?
- Is this being done somewhere else?
  - Can we learn from this?
- Are there other programs that present themselves that may help support our project or extend it in a different way?
- Why should the project be started?
- How might it get started?
- How could we contribute?
- What would we expect to get out of it?

Planning It

- What will we be doing?
- How will we schedule our activities?
  - What hours will be required?
  - Can it be done in school hours or need it operate after school hours?
- How many people will need to be involved?
  - How many students? How many adults?
- What students? What adults?
  - What age groups are best suited to the activity?
- Who will be in charge of the project?
  - Will a management committee be necessary or useful?
  - Who does what?
- Can we assume a significant role in charting its directions, or will we have to depend solely on adults?
- What do we expect from each other?
- How long will it take?
- Can we keep it going long enough to make a useful contribution?
- Can we accomplish what we are setting out to do in the time available?
- Do we think it is something another group can pick up, once we have shown the way?

Learning From It

- Will doing this project be a challenge to us or give us any skills or experiences we’d like to have?
  - Do we think we can learn from it?
- How could we fit this project into our curriculum?
- Would it make school more interesting/rewarding?
  - Why?
- What school credits should participants earn?

Permission

- Do we need permission to undertake the project?
- Are there any legal/legislative impediments?
  - How can we deal with these?
- Do parents need to be informed and their permission/endorsement sought?
- How might we gain community/parent support and/or participation?
- How would unions, employers, local government etc feel about our activity?
  - Do we need their assistance/endorsement?

Support

- What kinds of materials and equipment do we need for the project?
  - Are these available from school/our own resources?
  - Can we make them ourselves?
- Do we need money to finance the project?
  - How much is needed?
  - Where/how might it be obtained?
- Do we need support from the school?
  - What kind?
- Can support be gathered from other agencies?
- Who might be a useful contributor to our project?
  - How can we involve them?
- What community resources can offer assistance?
  - How can we involve/tap into them?

Reflecting, Documenting, Communicating

- What are the likely problems/anxieties?
  - How can these be dealt with?
  - How will the day-to-day activities be reviewed?
- How will the program develop/evolve?
- How much of our project needs to be written down for us to help clarify our goals?
- How might we evaluate our project?
- How do we inform all those who need to be informed about our project?

If you have other pertinent questions to add to this list, do so and share your contributions with the rest of the group.

Peter Cole, 1981
Adapted from New Roles for Youth, Citation Press, 1974
Tenth International Democratic Education Conference

As Connect goes to press, the Tenth International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) is being held at Tamariki School, Christchurch, New Zealand; Friday 16th August - Sunday 18th August. Information arrived too late for advance notice in the last issue of Connect, but hopefully there will be a report of this Conference in the October issue.

The conference brings together students, teachers, educators and others interested and involved in democratic education, from around the world. For example, speakers include Yaacov Hecht, Director of the Institute for Democratic Education, Israel; Amukta Mahapatra, member of the Education Steering Committee, State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu, India; Dr Jan Robertson, Director, Educational Leadership Centre, University of Waikato, NZ; Olivia Lorla, Clonlara School and Chairperson, National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (NCACS), USA; Tony Collins, Senior Lecturer, Christchurch College of Education, NZ; Yoshiyuki Nagata, Department of Research Planning and Development, National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Tokyo, Japan.

For direct information about IDEC, contact Tamariki School, PO Box 19-506, Christchurch, New Zealand. e-mail: nztaariki2000@hotmail.com phone: + 64 3 384 9014; fax: + 64 3 384 9029
Education Foundation 2002 Summit

No More Bored Kids: Real Alternatives for Public Schools

Wednesday 9 October, 2002 at the Melbourne Town Hall

The Education Foundation invites you to join with leading educators and thinkers from Australia and overseas to explore radical concepts and real solutions to school education in the 21st century.

What do kids really want and need from schooling? What is the shape of schools to come? How can innovative teaching become standard practice? Does learning have to happen in the classroom?

Alternative Spaces - No More Walls will showcase radical new spaces and places for learning being trialed in Australia and around the world.

Alternative Tasks - No More Bored Kids will explore brave and bold thinking about how schooling can deliver what kids really need and want.

The Education Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which aims to strengthen and support creative learning opportunities for young people in Australian primary and secondary public schools, particularly those experiencing social, educational or economic hardship.

Active Citizenship

The third biennial conference of Victoria University's Institute for Youth, Education and Community is being held on:

29-30 August, 2002

at the Conference Centre, Level 12, 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne.

The theme of Active Citizenship will be addressed in presentations, panel discussions, and workshops.

Information: http://w2.vu.edu.au/iyc

OBESSU Publications

While in Europe, I met with representatives of OBESSU (the Organising Bureau of European Secondary Student Unions). I brought back two of their recent publications: the report of a consultation with students on Language Learning: Languages: A Cultural Adventure and their Guide on Building School Student Structures. If you would like to have a look at either of these, contact me at Connect.

Roger Holdsworth

OBESSU/ESSIC, Westermarkt 2 - 5e, NL-1016, DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands

http://www.obessu.org

obessu@obessu.org

Democracy Starts Here:
Junior School Councils at Work

This 48-page book was produced by teachers and students from a group of schools in the north of Melbourne in 1996. Stories from 10 primary schools describe the operation and focus of their Junior School Councils. Then each school provides a brief answer to key practical questions.

An invaluable resource for developing active citizenship in primary schools!

$7 a copy (posted); $12 for 2 copies

- from Connect - see back page

Back issues of Connect

Each issue of Connect contains stories about active citizenship in the classroom and in school governance. These stories of Junior School Councils (JSCs), Student Representative Councils (SRCs), classroom approaches and projects - all illustrate practical ideas for recognising and developing the active citizenship of young people.

Back copies of Connect are available (see back page):

$4 for a single issue or $8 for a double issue.

An index to the contents of back issues is also available ($3).
Student Voice in British Columbia

In 1990, a group of dedicated students and educators saw a need for enhancing student leadership in British Columbia (BC), Canada. The BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, with the support of the Ministry of Education, assisted the group in launching a concept called BC Student Voice.

Since then, the Voice has grown to represent all regions across the province. BC Student Voice has placed representatives on provincial Ministry of Education committees and represented student opinion at many regional and provincial meetings.

BC Student Voice has developed its own vision, mission and goals. Supported by adult advisors, students meet regularly to review provincial directions, gather support for their various regional initiatives and facilitate development of school and district student voices.

Vision: Our vision is for all students in the province to be heard in matters affecting their education.

Mission: The mission of BC Student Voice is to empower students to address their needs, interests and concerns by strengthening, at all levels, the links among students and their partners in education.

Goals:
- To increase the awareness of the BC Student Voice throughout the province;
- To establish broad representation of students for the provincial BC Student Voice by creating a regional representative network throughout the province;
- To communicate information about BC Student Voice with all partners in education;
- To encourage all members of the BC Student Voice to meet with their principals and vice-principals to discuss further involvement of students and methods of networking with other schools;
- To increase awareness and understanding, and to facilitate positive change in social issues.

Contact:
Sharon Cutcliffe
200 - 525 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver BC V5Z 1K9
Phone: +1 604 689 3399
E-mail: stvoice@bcvpna.bc.ca

Clearinghouse

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:

Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA, Deakin West, ACT) Vol 22 Nos 1, 2, April, June 2002
Education Links (Centre for Popular Education, UTS, NSW) No 64, Autumn 2002
Education Views (Education Queensland, Qld) Vol 11, Nos 1-11; January-June 2002
First International Student Representative Conference: Report and Recommendation (PASTA, NSW)
Network News (Network of Community Activities, Surry Hills, NSW) April, June 2002

Professional Voice (AEU, Vic) Vol 1 Issue 4 June 2002
Rights Now (National Children's and Youth Law Centre, NSW) March 2002
Starlink (Boronia, Vic) Issues 44 and 45, March, June 2002
Yikes (YACVic, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 2, Editions 1, 3; March, June 2002
Youth Studies Australia (Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Tas) Vol 21 Nos 1, 2, March, June 2002

International:

Communication Research Trends (Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, Los Gatos, USA) Vol 21 Nos 1, 2, 2002


Education Now (Bramcote Hills, Nottingham, UK) Issue 35, 36, Spring, Summer 2002

Education Revolution (AERO, New York, USA) #34, 35, Spring, Summer 2002

Forum (UK) Vol 43 No 2; Summer 2001: Special issue on Student Voice (ed: Michael Fielding)

Leadership (NASSP, USA) Vol 30 Nos 8, 9; April, May 2002

OBESSU: Languages - A Cultural Adventure and Guide on Building School Student Structures (OBESSU, Amsterdam, Netherlands) 2002

Options in Learning (ALLPIE, USA) No 19, Summer 2002

Our Voice, Our School (School Councils UK, London, UK) Issue 1, March 2002

Primary School Councils Toolkit (Di Clay and Jessica Gold, for School Councils, UK) 2000


Secondary School Councils Toolkit (Di Clay, Jessica Gold and Derry Hannam, for School Councils, UK) 2001

Southern Exposure (Institute for Southern Studies, Durham, NC, USA) Vol 30 Nos 1, 2; Spring, Summer, 2002

Voices of Reason (School Councils UK, London, UK) - video

Youth Leadership for Development Initiative and Broadening the Bounds of Youth Development: Youth as Engaged Citizens (The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development/Ford Foundation, USA) 2001

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- Cross-referenced index to contents of Connect back issues ($3) $ ...........

Miscellaneous Resources:

- Students and Work - 1985 Connect reprint booklet #5 ($5) $ ...........
- Democratic Decision Making in Schools - Victorian PEP (1987) ($3) $ ...........
- Democracy Starts Here! Junior School Councils at Work (1996) ($7 or $12 for two copies) $ ...........

Foxfire Resources:

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

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