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**Connect**

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**This Issue:**

While talking recently with some teachers, I was asked for some practical examples of effective class meetings. After all, if we want to develop more democratic and purposeful practices within schools, the operation of these practices within our classrooms should be the basis for their broader application.

And worries about being able to set up and maintain effective class meetings may undermine resistance to implementing negotiated, participatory and purposeful learning approaches. "I worry that it will all get out of hand... I worry that the loud and bullying voices will dominate... I worry that it won't be a productive experience for me."

I suspect that such documentation and sharing does exist (if you know of good material, please point us all towards that), but I was unable to cite any articles in *Connect* that have dealt with this in a systematic way - unlike other issues which have explored SRCs, JSCs, students and radio and so on.

So let's remedy that. The note below calls for you to put pen to paper (or fingers to keys) and record what you do - good practice, worries, attempts that failed (and that you learnt from), your regular and usual approaches, and so on. These could be articles by teachers, or students, or parents, or whole classes, or principals, or consultants. It would be good to get such material ready for *Connect* 142 (August, 2003), but if it takes more time to accumulate useful articles, so be it.

Three starting thoughts:

First, if *Student Councils* are to work well, it is essential that representatives are effective in reporting back to students, having purposeful discussion (so that students can direct them), and gathering ideas. And this climate of democracy and participation at the classroom level shapes the input of students across the school - it ensures that representatives are not just elected in a 'popularity contest', but that representation itself is taken seriously and purposefully. How does this happen? What structures are put into place? How are representatives trained and supported to do this? How are class meetings held?

Secondly, if students are to be engaged in *purposeful and productive learning*, how are the on-going decisions about what and how 'taking place in the classroom? How is curriculum decision-making shared? How are class meetings held - in any or all classes?

And in both these arenas, how do we ensure that *all* students have access to decision-making - not just the verbally self-assured, the confident, the loud or the compliant students? How do we ensure that our class meetings enable those students traditionally excluded from participation (including those who sit quietly, saying nothing) to be partners in decisions and action?

Well? It could be a very useful resource. Over to you!

Roger Holdsworth

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**Next Issue: #141: June 2003**

**Deadline for material: end of May**

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If we are to have effective *Student Councils*; if we're to make schools more democratic; if we're to build meaningful participation, then the way we operate within our classrooms is critical.

**Class Meetings!**

*How do we do them? What have we learnt? What are some do's and don'ts? You are invited to contribute stories, ideas, approaches, techniques for a future special issue of *Connect*. All contributions welcome - from primary and secondary schools!*

**Deadline: end of July, 2003**

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Connect 140:
Student Action Teams
Tackling Road Safety
2003 Project launched

When you look at the figures for deaths and injuries on the roads - locally, state-wide or nationally - young people are greatly over-represented - whether they be pedestrians, passengers or cyclists. About 80 students from primary and secondary schools in the Darebin area in Melbourne’s north have made a commitment to do something about this. They are firstly researching unsafe areas near their schools, and then planning to take action later in the year.

At a Student Forum at Northland Secondary College on Wednesday April 9th, these students looked at the figures available for road deaths and injuries - in Darebin, in Victoria and in Australia. They compared age groups, in some cases examined the information by gender, and then presented their observations to the whole group in graphs and verbal reports.

The Forum kicked off a project in which student teams will operate in 14 schools to investigate and tackle local road safety issues. The project is based on a Student Action Teams (SAT) approach which has been used successfully across the state around safety, environmental and other topics. These SATs consist of groups of students who take on a challenge, or identify an issue of community concern, and then research and develop action around these issues - action that is intended to make a real difference to that community. (See references at the end of this article for more details and resources.)

The focus on Traffic Safety has been adopted by the Darebin Schools Network, based on their work with Junior School Councils over the past 14 years. In 2003, the Network has expanded its operation to include three secondary colleges, and this new partnership of 14 schools is working with support from Traffic Safety Education within the Victorian Department of Education and Training, VicRoads and the City of Darebin’s Road Safety Strategy.

The project’s outline says: “The approach engages primary and secondary school students as actors or proponents for traffic safety as well as recipients of information. Through such means, students are more likely to develop conscious models of safe behaviour for themselves, and advocate such models within families and local communities.”

During 2003, student representatives from the schools will meet on three occasions, and work within the curriculum in their schools between these Forums. The first Forum introduced the topic, asked students to examine its seriousness, and then challenged the school teams to initiate a Student Action Team approach to tackle it. It also focused students around the need for local research to investigate the experiences and needs of their local communities. A second Student Forum will be held late in Term 2, at which the students will report back about the outcome of their research, and begin to plan appropriate action. At the third and final Student Forum later in the year,
teams will be asked to report back on action they have taken, and on any outcomes achieved.

**Student Forum 1**

The first Student Forum began with a brief game to encourage students to mix and meet others, and to form groups according to various criteria.

The first Workshop extended on this ‘getting to know you’ activity by sharing information about the current operation of Junior School Councils and Student Representative Councils in these schools. Students from each of the schools provided responses to seven sets of questions, and then each school worked on one of these questions to compile and to summarise overall group responses.

These summaries will now be published by one of the schools into a project newsletter. This activity was also designed to introduce some simple information analysis skills.

In the second workshop, inter-school groups (mixing the primary and secondary students) were each provided with a different set of the actual figures of road deaths and injuries for Darebin, Victoria or Australia, broken down by age and (in some cases) gender. They were asked to examine these and report on what they noticed. Many groups graphed these figures, which consistently showed large numbers of young people (0-16 years) involved as pedestrian, cyclist and passenger victims. “Who in the room is in this age group?” … all the students. The groups talked about gender differences (strongest for cyclists), about their own experiences, and about possible causes.

One student noted: “When I saw these figures, I was first of all surprised, then angry, then determined to do something about them.”

After the break, school groups reconvened to look at how they might tackle these issues. They were asked: “What are the particular safety issues around your school? How will you find out what others experience and think?”

And so a research agenda was outlined. Some ideas and tools were provided: a process flow-sheet (‘What do we want to find out?’ ‘What questions could we ask?’ ‘Who do we need to ask?’ and so on), several sample survey forms, an analysis check-list, and other resource material.

Finally, each school reported on their planned steps on returning to school. Most indicated that they would report back to others in the school, and begin a process of surveying students, parents and teachers. Some planned to look at and measure traffic conditions near their schools (speed of cars passing, or drop-off/pick-up congestion). Some students took copies of the data to present to meetings or assemblies within their school communities.

All accepted the challenge to do something, and to work together on this project.

The group will report in future issues of Connect about their progress … as students take action to make some changes within their communities about what are literally life and death issues.

*Roger Holdsworth*

**Some Resources**

**Student Action Teams:**

- **The Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne** has produced a **Working Paper** on the evaluation of a statewide Student Action Teams project. It is available from the Centre (Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne Vic 3010; ph: 03 9344 9633) for $11 plus $5 p&h.
- **A second report** that includes evaluation results from Phase 2 of the statewide SAT project will be published shortly by the Centre.

**Road Safety:**

- **CrashStats** is a Victorian online database containing all reported road injury statistics since 1991. It can be searched at [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)

**This Project:**

- For more information about the Darebin project, contact Thérèse West, Preston South Primary School, Hotham Street, Preston Vic 3072. Phone: (03) 9484 1544.
- For copies of the Forum worksheets, contact Connect.
DEMOCRACY BEGINS AT SCHOOL
A new world trend in education

Imagine, for a moment, that your children were given considerable freedom to choose what to learn, how to learn and, to some degree, even when to learn. What do you suppose would happen? Would they run amok? Would their academic performance wither as they romp into frivolous pursuits? Would they ever bother to learn anything worthwhile? Yet this seems to be one of the main objectives characterising a new and growing trend called ‘democratic education’.

On my first visit to a democratic primary school, I was immediately struck by how dissimilar it was from anything I remembered from my school days. In place of neatly ordered rows with children poised at their desks, I saw a rabble of children spread all over the classroom; some sitting alone at a table, appearing quietly engrossed in a text or activity, others mobbing a teacher on the floor, scrambling to get as much information from her as they could. Each child appeared purposefully absorbed in their own project, some in small groups, some seemingly content with their own company.

This classroom had nothing of the formality and officiousness I recall from my own school experience. I was confronted by an unfamiliar absence of restraint; the teacher-pupil tension and uneasy control dynamic that would seem ordinary was missing. If anything, the teacher seemed more like a friend or an auntie than a figure of authority. To sum it up, the children were in a child-friendly environment.

I remember when teachers and grown-ups looked large and intimidating, and when, at least face-to-face, we treated them with deference. The schoolchildren of yore were in a subordinate role - but here I was faced with poised, up-front kids who seemed mature and confident beyond their years. As a visitor, they treated me respectfully - but like a person, not like an ‘authority’.

In place of the stressed-out teachers struggling to maintain control of a class, these seemed to be having fun with their kids. Whereas I remember teachers having to herd pupils into every new activity, working hard to maintain their focus and attention, here I saw children in the active role, emphatically drawing the learning from their teacher. This novel approach to education came across as pleasurable and exciting.

World conference on democratic education

The ‘democratic’ approach to education is not an isolated experiment, limited to one or two schools here and there. In fact, the schools I visited belong to a dynamic and growing international network of democratically run schools. They form part of an evolving movement devoted to teaching children democratic values and responsibilities by immersing them in a democratic environment.

Last year (2002), an International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) was held in Christchurch, New Zealand. It was attended by around 200 teachers and school principals from ten countries. The IDEC conference is held annually (this year it will be held in New York), to facilitate the exchange of experience, research and development. Organisations such as IDEN (International Democratic Education Network) and ADSA (Australian Democratic Schools Association) provide an additional forum for discussion, debate, research and mutual support, through which this innovative and revolutionary method can continually be refined and perfected.

Definition of ‘democratic education’

Participants at the Christchurch conference took little time to agree upon a satisfactory definition of ‘democratic education’. They established that Article 26(2) of the International Declaration of Children’s Rights, which is directed toward freedom, tolerance and understanding, constitutes a working framework for the day-to-day practice in democratic learning environments. In a nutshell, this means that students are given a vote over curricular and administrative decisions that affect their lives. However, it was recognised and accepted that within this defining matrix there is a broad spectrum of variation. Some schools are almost totally non-directive with their pupils, while others offer a more conservative blend of direction and negotiation.

Democratic education in practice

These schools aim to promote the democratic values of egalitarianism, tolerance, pluralism, freedom, social and environmental responsibility, by modelling and living these values in the classroom. They contend that the best way to learn these values is by living them day-to-day from the earliest years. This is a bold move, since the schools most of us went to were anything but democratic institutions. We did as we were told, and we were punished, often physically, for infractions to the rules imposed on us. We were told what to learn, how to learn and when to learn, and denied significant choices until age 16.

In a democratic school, each child is given as much control as is feasible over his or her learning journey. Compulsion is replaced by self-determination, obedience by responsibility. Within certain limits, children self-regulate the schedule of their learning and have a significant voice in the choice of subject matter. In pre-school, for instance, a number of activities are simultaneously available at different work areas. Children move independently from one activity to another, remaining longest with what most arouses their fascination - although group activity...
is encouraged. What fuels each child’s progress is therefore not the teacher’s pressure, but his own natural interest, her thirst for discovery and mastery.

A fundamental principle is that children are more motivated to learn, and they learn better, to the extent that they have choice over how and what they learn.

Many democratic schools also give children a vote on any administrative decisions regarding the day-to-day running of the school which would impact on them personally. “If they are to live in a free world,” explains Olga Leontieva, Russian educator, “they must be educated as free persons.” (Education Revolution, Summer 2002) Thus, democracy in education is not only about freedom. It is also about responsibility, and about providing a broad spectrum of social and civic education that includes - but is not limited to - academic subjects.

Democratic processes in the classrooms include voting, council meetings and the forming of committees. Debate and questioning are encouraged, in order to foster critical thinking.

The teacher-student relationship is unusually equal and non-authoritarian. Referred to by their first-names, teachers are viewed by pupils as older and knowledgable friends and guides. They are respected as partners in a collaborative education process. They are there to help, to inspire and to provide learning tools and opportunities rather than to direct or dictate. This dialogical relationship gives children more room to grow into self-motivated and self-responsible individuals. They work in pursuit of their own goals, rather than to please someone in authority.

Many democratic schools encourage parents to participate in classroom activities. This makes the school environment more familiar, and builds a sense of community. By taking part in their child’s education, parents can become close to their friends and teachers. Particularly for the younger kids, this measure reduces - even eliminates - separation anxiety, by softening the boundary between school and home. To the child, the school feels much like an extended family, or village.

A fundamental principle is that children are more motivated to learn, and they learn better, to the extent that they have choice over how and what they learn.

Learning processes in democratic schools are specially adaptive to each child’s unique learning style. Learning programs are individually tailored to suit even the more idiosyncratic minds. This flexibility and responsiveness to the individual enables every child to feel recognised and valued. It is not unusual to see children all working on something different. Yaacov Hecht, an Israeli educator, is one of the leading lights of the democratic education movement. He maintains that every individual has a unique learning profile, so standardised methodology can do many students a dis-service and limit or narrow the scope of their development. In this environment, children learn firsthand that they and all others have a unique and worthy contribution to make. Whereas many children who have difficulty fitting in, risk being diagnosed or falling through the cracks, the democratic model insists on tuning-in to every child’s unique style of information processing, and reaching each child according to his or her proclivities, until he or she begins to thrive. This requires teachers to be particularly keen listeners and observers. It also requires them to be open-minded about the surprising diversity of keys that unlock the minds of each individual.

The object is to locate each child’s personal passion, and to harness this force to educational purposes. Driven by passion, a child’s thirst for learning is almost bottomless. What I saw in the classroom I visited was every child in hot pursuit of learning, and coercion was conspicuous by its absence. Instead of the teacher working hard to get the children to pay attention, they played a more passive role: that of being available to the volley of questions and calls for assistance. Thus the child’s immense reservoir of energy for play, creativity and exploration are co-opted in the service of learning.

This method implies a commitment to honour each child’s right to be playful. In fact, democratic educators recognise that play is the engine of learning. They not only emphasise that learning can be fun, but also that learning should be fun. Playfulness is a product of evolution, because through play we develop and perfect essential skills. Play makes learning attractive, and assists memory retention; it is a rehearsal for new skills and dexterities. When children are enjoying learning for its own sake, rather than competing, or trying to live up to what adults expect of them, motivation ceases to be an issue. One democratic primary school had, until recently, a no homework policy. When some of the children heard about the idea of homework, they began to demand it. They actually wanted to carry on schooling at home! In response to pupils’ demands, this school has been handing out homework assignments ever since. I remember homework being a battleground, a particularly gloomy venture foisted upon us against our will.

Learning is most powerful when playful, personally relevant and meaningful to the child. So, almost anything that captures a child’s attention can be deftly turned into a learning opportunity. For example: one class’s fascination with a frog was transformed into a long-term study project covering biology and the rudiments of scientific observation. The Harry Potter craze was exploited in a number of creative ways. It provided fodder for lessons in character study, developing writing skills in various genres, even interpretive design and three dimensional visual-spatial skills, based on drawing or constructing models of buildings described in the books. A camping trip became the
background for solving complex mathematical problems, such as calculating areas, and deducing the size of ground sheets needed to accommodate a number of tents.

The process of self-discovery is given paramount importance in democratic schools. Children are given much support to find and follow their hearts, their inner truth, and to give their unique gifts the fullest possible expression. They are not told who, what or how they should be - they are helped to trust and develop their own purpose and potential. The teacher's role is to support this process by providing the opportunities and tools that are most appropriate to each child's unfolding.

The faculties of reasoning and critical thinking are considered to be at least as important as the narrow focus on right or wrong answers to a problem. There are many instances in which democratic educators try to accommodate a number of 'right' answers, as a way of honouring each child's developing thought process, and their unique perspectives.

Competition is de-emphasised or non-existent in democratic schools. Instead, they place a very strong emphasis on the development of emotional intelligence, relationship skills, conflict resolution skills, co-operation - the stuff of success in human relations that underpins all other successes in life. They devote substantial time and attention to helping children develop a secure emotional centre, and a strong sense of self-worth. Alongside academic subjects, children receive instruction in appropriate assertiveness, negotiation, empathy and listening skills, and clear self-expression. Day-to-day social interactions, in the classroom or the playground, are sometimes turned into valuable lessons for healthy relating.

**Discipline issues**

In practice, it appears that bullying is less of a problem when children are given more choices, when they love what they are doing at school, and when they feel personally valued there. Nevertheless, democratic schools have come up with a number of innovative solutions for dealing with student conflicts, bullying or disruptive behaviour. Nevertheless, any persistent behavioural problems are discussed openly in the classroom. Students and the teacher take turns voicing their feelings and opinions, and creative solutions are derived through group consensus. Thus, the kinds of everyday conflicts are viewed as nuisances and interruptions are made use of as experiential lessons about relationships.

In a school in Christchurch, New Zealand, students who quarrel request a communal conflict resolution with the aid of an elected chairperson, who is another child in the class. The process is supervised and moderated by a teacher.

**The object ... is to help children grow in social sensitivity and responsibility.**

Group processes such as these short circuit conflict or bullying before it escalates. In place of punishment, blame or shame, they provide a healing process. 'Bullies' are supported in finding appropriate expression for their pain, and 'victims' are shown resources for self-assertion, setting boundaries, and asking for help. The object of such interventions is to help children grow in social sensitivity and responsibility.

**How big is democratic education globally?**

The influence of democracy in education has spread rapidly, far and wide. In Japan, which is said to have the 'free school system' now claims nearly one hundred schools. In China, as well, what they call the 'free school system' now claims nearly one hundred schools. Some students, wishing to continue learning along democratic lines, have created their own university. Japanese research showing the success of 'free schools' has prompted a recommendation to government that state schools be democratized, in order to combat their massive problems of school refusal and bullying. These problems, which have been linked to the rigid, high-pressure and highly competitive culture of mainstream Japanese education, are far less present in the 'free schools'.

There are at least 250 such schools or similar in the USA, where home-schooling is also common as a reaction against the regimentation and punitive nature of their regular school system.

Nowhere is democratic education more developed than in Israel. For Israeli educator Yaacov Hecht, this schooling system has profound social implications that stretch beyond the churning out of good academic performers. Having founded over 22 democratic schools in Israel, Hecht is now the head of the Israeli Institute for Democratic Education. He has established an Academic Department of Democratic Education in 'Hakibbutzim College' in Tel-Aviv, which conducts research and development, trains new teachers in democratic methods, and publishes four books a year in the field. What propels the visionary Yaacov Hecht is his conviction that the democratisation of schools will create individuals who are more self-directed, socially responsible, and more embracing of human diversity - a vital insurance for the future of humankind. In keeping with this larger social-ecological purpose, the Institute operates an ambitious project called 'education for peace' which currently includes a program to democratise over 100 regular public schools.

The Israeli and Japanese experiences suggest that the trend to make education more democratic and more child-centred, extends beyond the schools that call themselves 'democratic'. Democratic education principles have been gradually penetrating many mainstream and alternative schools.

In England, there are dozens of schools that embrace principles of democratic education to varying degrees. The oldest one, Summerhill, has been operating successfully for over 80 years, and it serves as a model for a large number of schools worldwide.
As the trend toward more democratic education gathers momentum, more such schools have opened in New Zealand, Germany, Denmark, Russia, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Nepal and India.

**Democratic Schools in Australia**

There are a number of schools in Australia that incorporate elements of democratic education in varying but significant degrees. To the best of my knowledge, Sydney has four primary schools and two high schools, with at least four more around NSW. Throughout the other states, there are roughly twenty more schools affiliated with the democratic education system.

**What about the ‘bottom line’?**

Even in the schools claiming the most democratic methods, there are limits to freedom of choice. As in every other school, they are required to equip children with a range of examinable, standard basic skills, as dictated by government. They differ by providing a greater variety of approaches to the learning of these skills.

So, what happens when children are given a vote on their educational lives? Can children, with some guidance, chart their own course for learning? Or would this experiment prove to be reckless, a failure, would it lead to chaos? In practice, democratic educators find that kids do not tend to take advantage of their freedoms in order to slack off - they are hungry for learning. A recent study commissioned by David Blunkett, the English Minister for Education, looked at the academic results, exclusion data and attendance rates for 12 English democratic high schools from a diverse range of socio-economic areas. On all these variables, it was found that the democratic schools performed better than expected, compared to the national average. The overwhelming view of head-teachers and senior managers was that student participation in curriculum design benefited their self-esteem, motivation, sense of personal responsibility - for themselves and their school community - and this in turn enhanced their attainment. The study commented favourably on attendance levels and student motivation to learn.

In Japan, the ‘free school’ system has successfully controlled the epidemic problems of bullying and school refusal while maintaining a standard of academic performance.

Closer to home, when a Sydney democratic school that has been in operation for 30 years conducted an informal study of a number of its graduates, they found that almost all of them had progressed successfully through high school, had obtained UAI scores higher than 90, and hence been accepted into their chosen tertiary courses.

But democratic schools also address dimensions of achievement and human potential not measured by basic skills criteria and academic success. Perhaps Yaacoov Hecht has a point, when he links this style of education to social evolution and world peace. Close by, a Palestinian refugee named Hussein Issa, dreamed of educating children not traditionally, in the principles of Peace, Democracy and Tolerance. He formed a democratic school with Israeli Eyal Bloch, near Bethlehem. Children from these two otherwise antagonistic cultures were bussed weekly to shared grounds, where they learned each other’s language, prayers, customs, heard each others’ traditional songs, and forged deep bonds of friendship, through the vehicle of a co-operative agricultural project. They called it the Hope Flower Project. In a world that is riven by ethnic hatred, dictatorship and cataclysmic weaponry, one can hardly imagine a more vital educational emphasis.

**Robin Grille**

Robin Grille is a Sydney-based psychologist. He has a private practice in individual psychotherapy and relationship counselling, and can be contacted on (02) 9999 0035 or: intenc@worldpacific.com.au


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**Haileybury SRC Conference 2003**

On Friday 28 March, over 260 student leaders and teachers from a cross section of schools around Victoria came to Haileybury College in Victoria for its annual SRC Conference. The aim of these activities was to encourage SRC members from different schools to come together, share ideas and gain the necessary skills to become better leaders in their schools and the wider community. Learning from the inaugural conference in 2002, the day progressed very smoothly and effectively.

The keynote address for the conference was delivered by renowned motivational speaker Mark Dobson, covering important aspects of leadership and ways to ensure that responsibilities don’t hinder your character or what you believe in. Following morning tea, the student leaders attended three of twenty different sessions on a range of issues related to leadership and SRCs. Some of these were run by prominent people in leadership and student participation, such as Roger Holdsworth, David Mould, Mark Dobson, David Zygier, Cr Geoff Lake and Meg Upton, and covered topics such as Chairing Meetings, Networking and SRC Working Models. Others seminars were run by student facilitators from Haileybury, covering topics such as Conflict Resolution, SRC Initiatives, Meeting Procedure, Individual and Group Responsibilities and Constitutions, while experienced Haileybury staff spoke on topics such as Public Speaking and Publicity/Marketing.

Roger Holdsworth led a plenary session, where students reported back on what they had learnt that day, before the conference closed. The staff and students at Haileybury should be thanked for allowing the conference to be held there. In particular, thanks must go to the organising committee, especially Assistant Dean (Student Leadership) Yanni Galanis, for their efforts in putting this SRC Conference together.

**Jeffrey Leong**

Chair, SRC Conference Organising Committee, Haileybury
TAKING ACTION!

What is the structure of SRCs in NSW government secondary schools?

School SRCs
- Consist of members of the student body (Year 7-12) within the secondary school

District SRCs
- Consist of elected members from each school within each district (40) to attend meetings once or twice a term

Paired District SRCs
- Consists of two geographically paired district SRCs

NSW State SRC Conference Working Party
- Consists of one elected student member from each paired district SRC forum in NSW. Meetings are held in March, May and July to plan and run the State SRC Conference (5 to 8 August, 2003)

New South Wales Student Representative Council (NSW SRC)
- Consists of one elected student representative from the other paired district SRC in NSW. Meetings are held each term in November (of preceding year), March, May, July and September

What took place at the first meeting this year of the 2003 NSW SRC?

The meeting was hosted by Minter Ellison Lawyers, Sydney, on Friday 21 March, with the objective of meeting the state’s student leaders and consulting with them about ideas and on how businesses such as Minter Ellison Lawyers might be more involved with schools.

The following is a Minutes Summary of the 21 March, 2003 meeting which was distributed to every secondary school SRC via the district student welfare consultants who co-ordinate district SRC forums:

Business and Education Working Together – Phil Clark, Managing Partner, Minter Ellison Lawyers/Alan Laughlin, Deputy Director-General (Schools), NSW Department of Education and Training

DET is keen to link schools with business. NSW SRC members ‘brainstormed’ ideas (examples): career education/expos/work experience/executive shadowing focusing on rural schools and/or schools in need; mentoring programs; scholarships; awards; adopt-a-school program where a specific business links with a specific school.

ACTION: Minter Ellison Lawyers to meet with Alan Laughlin to discuss NSW SRC ‘brainstorming’ outcomes.

The Importance of Harmony – Hetty Cisloowski, Assistant Director-General Schools/Secondary Education (DET)

March 21 is Harmony Day. Schools should operate as usual in difficult times and remain non-political, be balanced, even-handed and supportive. SRCs should encourage students to express views but also to act responsibly to produce constructive outcomes.

ACTION: Practical exercises in promoting harmony to be incorporated into the NSW SRC kit on student wellbeing and positive relationships, to go to secondary schools.

‘How About Teaching?’ Student-led career education video – Sheryn Symons, Personnel Directorate (DET)

School SRCs will be asked to develop a school-based project that promotes teaching as a career through a video called How About Teaching? It was developed by 2002 NSW SRC and NSW Department of Education and Training.

ACTION: District and school SRCs to discuss the importance of the video in promoting teaching as a career to students as well as student leadership, by targeting Years 10, 11 and 12 in conjunction with the school’s careers adviser.

5th Rugby World Cup Promotion - Brad McCarr, ‘EdRugby’ (Australian Rugby Union)

Promotional ‘flyers’ going to schools; educational programs linked to the World Cup, membership, banner competitions, school and community events, tickets and ‘give-aways’. Register on-line: www.rugby.com.au/edrugby

ACTION: NSW SRC and State SRC Conference Working Party to promote in districts and schools and at the 2003 State SRC Conference (August 5-8).
Young in Action: ReconciliACTION – Sylvie Ellsmore

Young people have developed an organisation for young people aged 16 to 29 years to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. A statewide gathering will take place in Glebe, Sydney on Wednesday/Thursday, 23 and 24 April. To register: email Sylvie@ReconciliACTION.org.au or call (02) 9555 6138.

ACTION: For information go on-line: http://www.reconciliaction.org.au

University Tertiary Education Fee Structures – Anna York, President, National Union of Students

Changes are being made to university fee structures by the Federal Government. A community forum will be held at Sydney Town Hall on Thursday 8 May prior to the changes being released. Contact for details. Contact annayork@hotmail.com

ACTION: NSW SRC to promote the above issues at school and district SRC forums.

SRC Mentoring Program – Zoe Behrend, University Student

Ex State SRC members have established an e-group as part of a program to assist student leaders at school, district and state forums. Contact srcmentorsgroup@yahoo.com for assistance.

Promoting Stewart House as THE SRC Charity – Janelle Ellis, Promotions Officer

Stewart House is supported by teachers and students. 2003 NSW SRC is promoting it as the SRC charity. It allows students from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop a sense of ‘self’, especially through the Dare to Dream program. Information is available on http://www.stewarthouse.org.au or ph: (02) 9938 3100.

ACTION: On-going promotion by NSW SRC and State SRC Conference Working Party. ‘Stewart House’ is to send information to school SRCs.

NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK, 5 to 13 APRIL, 2003

In the House Forum

NSW Parliament House, 8 April
organised by the Office of Children and Young People and the Premier’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC), NSW Government

This interactive forum invited young people aged from 12 to 25 years in NSW to actively participate and discuss such topics as political and community life. One hundred and fifty (150) young people attended the forum from a variety of geographic areas across the state.

The forum was opened by the Minister of Youth Affairs, Ms Carmel Tebbutt, with a welcome given by Alan Madden representing the Eora Nation. Television personality and ABC presenter Julie McCrossin facilitated a panel and aroused thoughtful contemplation and humour throughout the day. The forum was televised for the ABC and was promoted and discussed on ABC radio.

The forum included:

- Building an effective local youth council;
- Community participation and volunteering;
- How to increase participation within your school;
- Working together;
- Formal political process;
- Advocacy and lobbying.

The ‘How to increase participation within your school’ workshop was facilitated by four members of the 2003 NSW SRC and Kate Foy, an officer in the Premier’s Department, with assistance from two members of YAC and the NSW Department of Education and Training’s student leadership officer, Stuart Hearne.

The workshop’s main theme for discussion was ‘Are SRCs about fundraising, leadership or democracy?’ Participants were formed into sub-groups to examine relationships between teachers and the student body, SRCs and the community, students’ access to SRCs, and how schools can work better for students.

Check out the links below for more information on YOUTH WEEK 2003 or In the House:
The youth week site proudly sponsored by:

Tarah Pickett
2003 NSW SRC Member, Newcastle District
PASS THE PASTA

PASTA's 6th AGM held on 22nd February, 2003, saw the following committee elected:

President: Ken Page;
Immediate Past President: Bob Kijurina;
Vice President (Country): Charles Kingston;
Vice President (National/International): Greg Arrow;
Secretary: Ellen Sheerin;
Assistant Secretary: Lisa Wiseheart;
Treasurer: Sue Page;
Committee Members: Anna Dickinson, Rebecca Heinrich, Alfie Walker, Chris Murray (Appointed on 29th March).

As the newly elected President, I would like to welcome them to their positions with the expectation that, as a group, we will be able to continue to provide a much needed service to the SRC community. It is with deep regret that we lose the services of founding member Ralph Murray from the committee, as his many contributions over the years have been invaluable. Hopefully this will be only a temporary loss and we will see Ralph resume a committee position sometime soon.

Since the start of the school year, the committee has been very busy with a number of projects. First was a series of meetings with representatives of the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) to discuss the next steps in the process of improving the status of SRC advisers in NSW DET schools. The first of these meetings took place in December, 2002, between PASTA and NSW DET representatives, and involved broad discussion on the best way to approach this issue. The second meeting (held in January, 2003) had the additional input of Judyth Russell, representing the NSW Primary Principals' Association. At this stage we have reached broad agreement that there is a definite need for time to be made for networking and professional development for primary school advisers. Lack of resources in this area is also seen as a problem; a possible solution lies in the formation of a writing team to develop something by the end of this year. The next meeting, to be held in April, 2003, will focus on the needs of secondary school advisers.

Representing the Secondary Principals' Association, Christine Cawsey has been invited to supplement the core group for this discussion. I would like to thank Bob Kijurina, Charles Kingston, Sue Page and Ken Page (PASTA); David McKie, Helen Kerr-Rubicek and Stuart Hearne (NSW DET); and Judyth and Christine for their contribution to this project. To assist us in gaining support for advisers, if you would like to provide any information on the time you give to this position or any allowances/concessions you might have been given as an adviser, can you please let us know so that we can add it to the evidence we are accumulating.

Second on the agenda was the second joint PASTA/NSW DET Professional Development day for SRC advisers. Titled Fresh Start 2, it was held on 15 March and concentrated on the many problems faced by teachers new to the role of SRC adviser. An enthusiastic audience consisted of primary and secondary teachers together with a number of SFO1s - Student Welfare. The evaluations on the day were very positive, suggesting the need for more time and resources at all levels to make effective changes. Many look forward to the next such adviser oriented event. This is why we have set aside the afternoon session of each of our regular meetings for such professional development activities (Check calendar for dates and topics).

Ken Page
Benefits to Schools and Communities Of Student Leadership Activities - Part 2

Rationale and Arguments in Support

One of PASTA's projects aimed at improving the profile and working conditions for student leadership teacher advisers includes ongoing discussions with the NSW Department of Education and Training, representatives of primary and secondary Principal's Associations and other educational groups in non-government sectors in various states and territories. Following is the second part of a summary of some of the ideas and source materials currently being considered. See the February 2003 issue of Connect for Part 1 - Purposes, Perspectives and Practicalities. This summary has been prepared by Charles Kingston, Co-Founder of PASTA and current Vice-President - Country. Other PASTA subcommittee members on this project are President Ken Page and Immediate Past President Bob Kijurina.

Your ideas and comments on this process are warmly welcome. Please contact the Secretary of PASTA at: esheerin@ozemail.com.au or the relevant officers directly.

TOWARDS A HIGHER STATUS FOR SRC ADVISERS

• Historical Practice: This is not something new, in Australia nor elsewhere. However, in Australia, in the early 21st Century, it is something that needs a new emphasis to make it more vibrant, more acceptable and better known for its excellence as essential educational practice rather than mere 'extracurricular' tokenism.

• Formally departmental endorsement: Structures and levels of support of SRCs and Student Leadership Programs are current policy and practice in NSW and elsewhere. They need firm, consistent implementation in the structures and timetables of schools.

• Principal's opportunity: Leadership is what principalship is about. As students are meant to be at the heart of education, their roles as young leaders should be a principal role of principals and their associations. In the USA the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals has actively funded and supported a National Association of Student Councils since 1930. Canada and the ICP have a similar ethos and practice.

• Professional development opportunity: Training is both needed and feasible. Personnel and resources exist to effect a wide range of possible approaches. If used. Teachers need to put money and effort into networking to lobby for such support.

• Curriculum integration: SRC uses and enhances all currently recognised subject areas. Corollary? All subject areas can co-opt SRC related skills and students in class.

• Co-curricular cooperation: Coordination strengthens all. Student decisions re priorities, scheduling, promotion and academic/behavioural expectations are vital.

• Civics and Citizenship Education: Active citizenship can be recorded, assessed and credited. It should be explicitly shown on school reports and part of School Certificate matters.

• Pupil well-being: Students are well placed to see, help and direct peer needs. Student groups have the energy and immediacy to create programs to deal with them.

• Promotion of schools: Articulate leaders create greater staff and student body respect, motivate community support and encourage parents to enrol new students.

• Management of schools: Involving students in management enhances them, improves school tone, distributes ownership and eases the burdens of management.

• Financial benefits: Money is saved through pupil initiated and supported environmental and welfare projects as well as made from traditional fund-raising efforts.

• Jobs and tertiary studies: Involvement in student activities has been found to be the most consistent and best preparation for later success in future studies and careers.

• Democratic heritage: Australia is a peaceful, constituted democracy. Creating knowledgeable, skilled, motivated young citizens to sustain it is not done merely through textbooks but through real decision-making and practical positive involvement.

• National developments: SRC and teacher professional bodies nationally continue to develop but require greater sharing amongst them. Governments and the media generally applaud the facade but, as yet, have adopted no sustainable national structure.

• International opportunities: Affiliations with national SRC bodies in the USA, Canada and links with Thailand and Europe exist through PASTA. The 1st International Student Representative Conference (for secondary students and advisers) was held in 2000 in Sydney; the 2nd will be in Canada in August 2004. The International Principals' Confederation supports student and adviser links across borders.
THE SRC / SLA ADVISER 'PROBLEM' ...

- Identification with a single adviser - who just happens to be interested - is the norm. A program position - expected to be filled by a trained teacher in the field - is the aim.

- Communication between schools and within and between SRCs - therefore the support network needed to sustain motivation as well as access useful human and material resources - has been made difficult by a lack of profile, a lack of an established precedent for it, or even a lack of in-house assistance in overcoming bureaucratic hurdles to achieve it.

... CAN BE MET BY THE PRINCIPAL OPPORTUNITY:

- To make maximum impact in the positive use and sustainability from year to year of this invaluable resource through practical support for teachers doing the advisory jobs.

- To follow up the enthusiastic responses by principals to the 1995 student speeches and individual discussions with students at the 2nd International Principals' Conference in Sydney with practical actions at the grass roots level.

... SO THAT:

- Advisers become recognised as also teachers of a valid subject and/or teachers of leadership skills in general in addition to other accepted KLA or grade or other duties.

- All concerned are in a position to access all available training and resources in this field.

- Time and status assures the job is not an 'extra' but an integral part of what schools do.

... IN ORDER TO ASSURE THAT, IN FUTURE:

- Student activities in the student leadership area are justifiable, reportable curriculum.

- Civics and Citizenship Education crosses all curriculum boundaries and includes active citizenship projects such as those carried out by SRCs, Peer Support programs, etc.

- The skills and attitudes expected and developed from and by well-developed and supported SRCs/SLAs are fundamentally the same ones practised and expected in normal classroom, job and life situations: Personal Development/Self-Awareness/Problem-Solving/Decision-Making/Organisational Techniques/Group Process/Multi-cultural Awareness/Goal-Setting/Volunteering/Community Involvement/Civics and Citizenship Responsibility/ Communication/National and International Awareness/Networking/Teamwork/Project Planning/Leadership Development/Values Clarification/Concer for Physical Environment/Use of Resources/Commitment/Assessment and Evaluation Techniques/Evaluations and Action Research/Conflict Resolution/Communication with Different Ages and Audiences/Diplomacy/ Representation/Meeting Skills/Reflective Skills/Awareness of Cultural Environment/Vision.

- The more that what happens in the 'classroom' is extended to include the recognition that what happens in SRC etc activities is also 'the classroom', the more the reverse positive benefits occur - that is, students representing, leading, guiding, role-modelling, encouraging other students in participating in a multiplicity of situations.

...AND THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY RECOGNISES THAT...

SRC/Student Leadership structures provide a framework for student involvement in long-term planning, scheduling, promotion, coordination and balancing of all other activity projects and, thereby, enhancement of the well-being of the entire school and community.

Sources of Documentation and Support Material

One of PASTA's medium term objectives is to publish resource modules on a variety of SRC skills areas for the use of advisers and student groups. One set would be devoted to publications. At present, a wide range of historical and current documentation on the value of this area of education is available from PASTA and others. It includes items from:

- NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) - Pupil Welfare Unit 1995-2003;
- NSW Department of Education (Former Western and other Regions) - 1979-1995;
- 'Best Practice in Civics and Citizenship' materials;
- Professional teachers Council (PTC);
- Professional Association of SRC Teacher/Advisers (PASTA) - 1995-2003;
- Banana Power (Student Owned Leadership Training) - 2000-2003;
- Connect, the Australian magazine of student participation - 1979-2003;
- Victorian SRC Teachers Association (VISTA) - 2001-2003;
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and its National Association of Student Councils (NASC) - 1931-2003;
- Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisers (CASAA);
- Youth Forum (YF NSW) - 1979-c.1991;
- Peer Support Foundation - NSW;
- National Schools Project.

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**Students are Doing It For Themselves**

Recent information from sources in England and Europe (see below for contacts) have provided examples of school student-run organisations and their work.

**Ireland**

Derry Hannam writes to tell us that the Irish school students are the latest to ‘do it for themselves’; they have got a national organisation up and running in less than two years.

*Voicebox*, the newsletter of the UK School Councils Network (Issue 1, Spring 2003) also reports on this:

Irish secondary students are now represented by the Union of Students in Secondary Schools. Among a recent set of requests made to government were some which have particular relevance to student councils.

Founded just two years ago, the Union of Secondary Students (USS) has already made its presence felt in government consultations and discussions. Among the main objectives being pursued by the USS are the establishment of laws to set up student councils in all Irish schools and the involvement of school students in decision-making processes. This links to Article 2 of the European Charter of School Students Rights, which requires that “school students must be involved in the decision-making processes in all matters of their own concern.”

In a recent letter to Ireland’s Education and Science Minister, Noel Dempsey, the USS presented a list of some 35 requests for government action, on issues including the qualifications available, rewarding schools that provide top quality extra-curricular activities, transport in rural areas and providing lockers for all students in schools.

Of particular interest to student councils outside of Ireland are their suggestions for the election of student representatives to boards of management (governing bodies) and more active promotion of the fact that the Irish government encourages student councils.

They would like to make contact with interested school students elsewhere - contact Emer or Barry at the Irish Union of Secondary Students: <info@ussonline.net>

**Obessu**

OBESSU is the European network of school student organisations. Their office has just moved from Amsterdam to Brussels. Contact by e-mail: <obessu@obessu.org>.

Just recently the Czech and Lithuanian school students have announced international conferences.

**Czech Republic**

The Czech students' organisation (ASK) is organising a conference in Brno from June 26-29 to discuss how to set up effective school student organisations. Contact Zbynek Solec at <ask@askcr.cz>.

**Lithuania**

Linas Cepinskas of the Lithuanian School Students organisation (LMS) was organising a similar conference for the organisations of school students from all the Baltic States in Vilnius in April. Contact Linas at <seima@banga.lt>.

**Norway**

Jan-Fredik Stoveland of the Norwegian school students' organisation (EO) explains that in Norway every county has its own branch of the organisation and that 20 young people are paid by the government for one year between school and work or university to live in Oslo and run the national organisation.

**Contacts:**

School Councils UK
2nd floor, Lawford House, Albert Place, London N3 1QB
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8349 2459
http://www.schoolcouncils.org
e-mail: peter@schoolcouncils.org

Schools Councils UK has recently set up a network of student councils; the launch issue of their newsletter *Voicebox* is available free from them.

Derry Hannam
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e-mail: derry@demo51.freeserve.co.uk

*April 2003*
Student Council Action in England

In England, writes Derry Hannam, there has been success in persuading Baroness Ashton to include students in the new arrangements for the governing bodies of secondary schools. The statutory guidelines are about to emerge from the Department for Education and Skills.

School Councils UK is developing a network of student councils and believes that an adult lead will be needed for some time before a national student run organisation emerges. Networks of student councils are also emerging from the activities of local education authorities in places like Bedfordshire, Essex and Portsmouth - though not all are genuinely run by the school students - yet!

The new minister responsible for citizenship education is very supportive of the need for an English Secondary Students Association and he said that he would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with a group of young people. "I believe that he is genuinely interested in the opinions of young people," writes Derry, "and understands the point that students should have an organisation where they set the agenda and bring forward issues of concern to them - not just responding to the agendas of others in consultations and focus groups."

In a recent issue of the UK journal Young People Now, there is an article entitled:

**PARTICIPATION: School just got interesting**

This is summarised by their introduction: "The Government wants to involve young people in all forms of decision-making that affect their lives - including school". The full article can be found at:


The article, by Dipika Ghose, cites Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, established in 1990, that enshrines the right of young people to have a voice on issues that affect them, as the basis for the move towards participation in schools. The introduction of compulsory citizenship classes as part of the national curriculum in England, and the Education Act 2002 which made consultation with young people a statutory requirement in education, have reinforced this.

**DfES Discussion Paper**

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is also publishing a formal consultation document in April, produced with help from the National Children's Bureau, containing guidance that young people must be involved in the running of the schools they attend. This guidance on pupil participation will be released for public consultation, and aims to provide advice for schools and local education authorities on ways of consulting with children and young people.

Options up for discussion will include the range of ways young people can be involved in the implementation of student councils, peer mentoring, formal consultation and youth forums. The report is due to be finalised by summer 2004.

**Deptford Green**

The article describes Deptford Green, a secondary school in the south London Borough of Lewisham, that has been running a student council for the past two years.

Their student council is made up of two representatives from each of the eight tutor groups in a year. These make up the year council, which sends two representatives to the whole student council every three weeks to discuss issues raised by the tutor groups and year councils. Representatives from the whole student council then meet the senior management team of the school every third week to explain their concerns.

Such youth participation approaches also extend beyond the school environment into the local community. In the past two years, student council activities have included a discussion with the council's highways safety officer about a dangerous road junction between the school's split sites, persuading school governors to part with £9,000 to improve school toilets, and a safety investigation into the local railway underpass which led to the council installing streetlights a year later.

The article quotes Peter Pattisson, Deptford Green's citizenship teacher and outreach officer: "We now have a consultation culture where local authorities, the police and other statutory bodies are being obliged to listen to stakeholders, and young people are part of this. We need to avoid a tokenistic approach by taking their views seriously." In talking about the student council, he says: "There is nothing the children can't discuss, although teachers can draw the line. But we make sure we explain why things can't be done. You can't just say no without a reason because that is demoralising."

The impetus for the student council initiative has been the introduction of citizenship within the national curriculum in recent years.

Gideon Lyons, from School Council UK, is also quoted: "If schools see students as clients of the school, then they can only improve their services by consulting them. Getting pupils to participate in a meaningful way in the running of their school lowers truancy and exclusion levels and results in higher academic results." He adds that teachers also say they get treated with more respect because participation reduces the 'them-and-us' aspect of school life.

Finally, the article quotes some young people from Deptford Green:

I'm the school council rep for my class, and we raised a lot of issues to do with vandalism and graffiti in and around the school. I am also on a committee that is trying to improve the school grounds, so that people won't want to destroy it.

Matthew

Achieving change takes time and effort, but I've learned that anything is possible. I am now able to recognise the process and procedure that we have to go through to change something. I have learned to listen to other people, say what I think and work as a team.

Tunde
Establishing A Theoretical Framework For Student Involvement In Educational Policy-Making

What do theorists concur about student involvement in educational policy-making? Should students be involved in helping to shape the educational system that exists to serve them and, if so, how can they be involved?

This article attempts to answer these questions and produce a theoretical framework for student involvement in educational policy-making. In doing so, the article begins by defining what is meant by educational policy and policy-making. As well, the article provides a brief account of why some theorists concur that students should be involved in helping shape the educational systems that are there to serve them. The article also discusses the various methods by which some theorists suggest that students can, and are, actively involved in working with adults in helping to shape educational policies. Since some theorists agree with student involvement in educational policy development and concur that students around the world are actively involved in doing so in an advisory capacity, the article addresses some of the constraints that must be overcome in the educational field if students are going to become truly accepted stakeholders in educational planning processes.

Defining Educational Policy and Policy-Making

If we are going to discuss the concept of student involvement in educational policy-making, it is first necessary to gain an understanding of what a policy is and how a policy is developed. Young and Levin (1998) define the term ‘policy’ as “a general guideline that shapes decisions and actions” (p 60) and the term ‘policy decision’ as “one that has broad implications within a particular setting, whether a country, province, or school” (p 60). According to Jackson and Jackson (1990), policy-making involves a long series of related activities and the process is far more involved than making a simple decision. The authors assert that policies are established to address a particular problem or pursue specific goals. Policies are much broader in scope than decisions and therefore, the authors indicate that as policies are created to pursue certain goals and objectives, decisions are made within the framework or guidelines of the policies. According to the theorists, “public policy is the broad framework within which decisions are taken and action (or inaction) is pursued by governments in relation to some problem or issue” (p 582).

During the process of policy-making, Jackson and Jackson (1990) propose that the important social elements of culture, institutions, and behaviour come into the policy-making process. Cultural norms of society help shape the policies that may be established by placing demands for policies to address certain issues. Cultural norms can also restrict the type of policies that are made. Consequently, the authors assert that cultural norms play a very important part in motivating policy-making as well as governing the type of policies that are made. The authors also indicate that the institutions in our society play an important part in determining what policies will be made to address a certain issue and how these policies will address the issue. Policy-makers are restricted in the institutional structure because they are accountable to the institution and therefore, policy-making may very well be restricted by policies of a higher order within the institutional structure. Also, according to these authors, the institutional structure may very well dictate who the policy-makers might be. According to the theorists, the social element of behaviour includes the various interest groups that have a stake in policy-making and who will place demands on the policy-makers. Hence, policy-making is very much influenced by the various interest groups in society or in an institution. The theorists refer to the various influences and restraints on policy-making as the “Policy Funnel of Causality” (p 599).

According to Young and Levin (1998), educational policies are those policies that “shape the structure of schools” (p 60) by determining what is taught, how it is taught, how students will be treated, and how the school will operate in general. In determining educational policies, Jackson and Jackson (1990) propose that the policies must be established in the context of the norms and wishes of society, the economics of the time, and within the guidelines of policies that may be established at a higher order. In terms of developing educational policy, the steps in the policy-making process, as expressed by Young and Levin (1998), include defining the educational issue or problem, determining who will be involved in making the policy, examining the various courses of action to address the issue or problem, adopting the best course of action to address the issue or problem, and reviewing and modifying the adopted course of action. The authors assert that educational policies are established at different levels. However, most of the work that goes into establishing a policy is done outside the governing body itself, by committees or other interest groups. The authors indicate that the participans in educational policy-making can be “internal stakeholders” (p 70) such as teachers, administrators, school trustees, secretaries, students, bus drivers and caretakers, or the participants can be “external stakeholders” (p 71) such as various community organisations or businesses. Hence, the authors assert that the question of who should participate in policy development should be decided firstly by examining who will be more accepting of the policies, and secondly by examining who has a moral right to participate in making the policy.

If this is the case, who has more right to participate in educational policy development than students?

Why Should Students Be Involved In Educational Policy-Making?

According to some theorists who support student involvement in educational policy-making, there are several strong arguments to support their claim. An OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) report in 1989, proposes that the major expansions in education around the world that took place during the boom in the 1950s and the 1960s have been followed by governments today cutting back on expenditures in education. This means fewer school buildings and fewer teachers. Because of this, the OECD report advises that people and governments want more accountability in education. One way in achieving this, according to the OECD report, is to involve students in a shared decision-making process in education. The OECD asserts that one characteristic that is common in all successful schools is
collaborative planning and shared decision-making. Authors such as Treslan (1983) and Hodgkinson (1991) advise that there is a need for more student involvement in educational policy-making primarily because students have traditionally been left out of all planning in the past. Since educational administration is arranged in a line of hierarchy, the authors assert that students, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy, are forgotten when it comes to educational planning and policy-making. Hodgkinson (1991) proposes that all parts of the educational organisation are important and the input from all stakeholders, including students, should be taken into consideration during educational policy development since all stakeholders have their own values and concerns. If students are permitted to take part in educational policy-making, Treslan (1983) advises that they will learn valuable lessons about democracy and citizenship which they can use the rest of their lives. According to this author, “an ideal secondary school governance structure subscribes to the concept of shared decision making to maximize member influence” (p 127). With all stakeholders taking an active part in educational planning, Hodgkinson (1991) asserts that the common interest, which is the education of students, will not be forgotten.

Williams (1964), Mackin (1996) and Scane and Wignall (1996) concur with Treslan (1983) in terms of the valuable lessons in democracy and citizenship that students can learn by being involved in educational policy development. According to Williams (1964), if students are permitted to take an active part in educational policy-making, they will learn how to participate in democratic procedures and they will learn to develop leadership skills that will be very valuable to them throughout their lives. The author also asserts that if students are permitted to take an active part in shared decision-making in education, there is less chance that the main goal in education, the education of students, will be forgotten.

During a study on student participation on school councils in one high school in the Toronto area, Scane and Wignall (1996) also found that students, by participating in educational policy-making, can learn valuable lessons in the democratic process and in building communication skills. Mackin (1996) also concurs that a school should have a caring and personalised environment where students can learn valuable lessons in democracy. However, the author throws out a caution by suggesting that unless the administrative structure in education changes and unless students are permitted to take an active part in educational policy development, the students will never learn how to develop democratic decision-making skills. The researcher suggests that so far the educational system has not accomplished a great job in allowing students to learn and practice democratic principles.

Perhaps the greatest hypocrisy of US schools is the long-standing pretense that they prepare students to be good and practicing democratic citizens. The truth is that high schools, next to prisons, may be the least democratic institutions in this country. Students are told where to go and when, what to do and how to do it, and have little or no voice in school-wide or classroom decisions. As a consequence, they have little opportunity to practice being thoughtful democratic decision-makers. (p 14)

Beck (1990) proposes that schools are failing to meet the needs of students primarily because of the way students are treated. He advises that students must be allowed to pursue the things that really interest them in education. If schools are going to try to meet the needs of all children, the theorist advises that schools are going to have to become more child-centred and democratic. Consequently, the researcher recommends that there must be more input by students into the educational system. Hamilton (1975) also agrees that schools will meet the needs of all students more effectively if the students are permitted to take an active part in the educational planning. By participating in educational development, the author argues that students will gain a better understanding of the goals of education and they will be happier and more successful. The more successful students will immediately pass on the positive points of their education to others. According to Hamilton (1975), “children are the ambassadors who explain the school to the parents and the public” (p 130).

Wood (1977) indicates that if students are going to have a positive educational experience, they need to feel respected and treated fairly. These are among several factors that he lists as being necessary in a school climate in order to have an atmosphere for shared decision-making. Therefore, if students are permitted to take part in educational policy-making, the students themselves can ensure that they are being treated with fairness.

A number of theorists therefore concur that students should be involved in educational policy-making because they are the major stakeholders in education and because they will learn valuable lessons in democracy, leadership, and citizenship. Also, by taking an active part in a shared planning approach to education, theorists assert that students will have a more positive educational experience.

Methods Used To Involve Students In Educational Policy-Making

During recent years, educational policy development has progressively moved from the total control by educational administrators, to a more hands-on communitarian approach by all stakeholders in education. Theorists propose that students are becoming actively involved in helping to establish educational policies by serving on school councils, school improvement teams, curriculum planning teams, school advisory groups, educational commissions and directive boards.

Sheppard and Devereaux (1997) suggest that in an effort to promote more effective schooling, site-based management is gaining momentum in education reform. Through site-based management, all stakeholders in education including parents, students, teachers, community members and the administration can work together to make educational policies at the local level. The authors propose that, over recent years, countries all around the world are heading in a site-based management direction by forming school councils at the local school level. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (1996) is concerned about creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning in American high schools. In 1996, the NASSP issued a report recommending that students, parents, teachers and school administrators work together to establish school policies that would build positive school working environments. The method by which the NASSP recommends that all stakeholders in education get together on policy development is through the formation of local school councils. In its 1996 report, the NASSP recommended that, “each high school will establish a council to work with the principal in reaching decisions to make the school an effective organization for student learning” (p 10). Fletcher (1989) and Young and Levin (1998) are other theorists who support the formation of school councils in order to bring all stakeholders in education into policy-making processes. According to Fletcher (1989), the establishment of school councils in England means more participation by students, parents and teachers in the actual running of the schools and having more say in curriculum and how it is taught. During recent years, as school districts throughout Canada began to consolidate, Young and Levin (1998) give an account
of why it was necessary to put into place a mechanism that would allow all stakeholders in education to be involved in educational policy-making. Since school district offices are becoming more distant from students, parents, communities, teachers and school administrators, local school councils are beginning to be instituted in many of the provinces and territories across Canada. Therefore, the authors assert that, in many cases across Canada, students have a direct input into educational policy-making as members of the local school councils.

Furtwengler (1996), Bectel and Reed (1998), Clark and Clark (1996), Henry and Vilz (1990) and Tewel (1995) concur that students can become directly involved in educational policy development by participating on school improvement teams at the local school level. Furtwengler (1996) describes how seventeen schools across the United States established school improvement teams involving students, parents, teachers and school administrators. The mandate of each school improvement team is to develop school improvement plans, identify problems and review goals. The theorist indicates that “the contribution of student leaders was a major factor in overall school improvement, fostering discipline in less effective schools and supporting behaviour in more effective schools” (p. 38). Bectel and Reed (1998) discuss how school improvement teams, including students, helped restructuring efforts at a racially-mixed high school in the United States.

Tewel (1995) writes about the school improvement process that took place in Lane High School in Brooklyn. Lane High School was a place where neither teachers nor students wanted to be since the school was racked with violence and disruption. After a school improvement process was put into place in 1976, with parents, teachers, students and school administrators all having a valuable part to play, the author asserts that the school changed around and it gradually became a place where everyone wanted to be. The theorist argues that the only way to improve a high school educational system is for all stakeholders to adopt ownership of the problems and the system and become involved in the process for change.

While reporting on the school improvement teams established in thirteen schools in the Kenmore Town of Tonawanda School District in Buffalo, Henry and Vilz (1990) advise that school improvement teams must include all educational stakeholders, and students have a major part to play. The authors assert that “only by working together as a team can we benefit and promote our final product - successful students” (p. 79). Clarke and Clarke (1996) assert that school improvement teams must involve all the stakeholders, including students, in the creation of policy development for school improvement. The authors propose that “collaboration facilitates the study of the issue and the decision-making process by involving those closest to the problem with the resources and authority to make the necessary changes” (p. 6).

Weber (1996) discusses how student participation on curriculum planning teams in the United States helped create a collaborative approach to curriculum planning that made the curriculum more sensitive to the needs of all students. The author asserts that “interaction between teachers and students helps teaches become students and students become teachers” (p. 80). Mackin (1996), Leisey, Murphy and Temple (1997) and Treslan (1983) concur that students can become very active in helping to make educational policies by participating on school advisory groups.

Mackin (1996) examines how one high school, Southgen High School, serving the towns of Amberst and Mont Vernon in New Hampshire, developed a more personalised school atmosphere in 1992 by having students act on advisory groups. The author writes that the students and staff at Southgen High School began with a mindset that students must have a say in the governance of the school and in their education.

Leisey, Murphy and Temple (1997) report on how students and parents were used as advisory groups by the Coffee County School District during a process to consolidate three high schools in the district. During the consolidation process, students and parents were asked to present their concerns about the merger to the school board and they advised the school authorities in terms of how to implement the school consolidation in order to try and better meet the needs of all students.

Treslan (1983) argues that students should serve on advisory committees and decision-making assemblies because they must be given a chance to acquire responsibility. The researcher also indicates that students must be able to build relationships with their fellow students and with the school staff in a policy-making capacity. In doing so, students will begin to take ownership of their education.

Stevens (1994) writes about how the New Zealand Education Act in 1989 removed school boards from educational management and in their place, local boards of trustees were established. Students, parents, teachers and school principals serve on these boards. The author asserts that although education in New Zealand still remains under the control of the central government, a lot of decisions concerning education at the local level are produced in a shared decision-making process.

Climaco (1989) describes how the schools in Portugal have become democratic in an attempt to develop student-centred schools in which all the needs of the students are met. At the secondary school level, under the new school organisation, schools are run by three management bodies, the Administrative Board, the Directive Board, and the Pedagogical Board. The Directive Board which operates under the Administrative Board is made up of five teachers, one non-teaching staff member and one high school student. All members of the Directive Board are elected by their peers and, as an administrative board, they organise and control such matters as extra-curricular activities, teacher education, curriculum development, and school services. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (1996) sponsored an education commission to examine the secondary educational system in the United States and to develop a vision for high school renewal across America. Students had an active part to play on this commission. According to the NASSP report, “the Commission that formulated these proposals included principals, other administrators, and teachers; it was one of the few panels of its kind to have students as members” (p. 5).

Recently, students have had an important part to play in education in Canadian jurisdictions such as Ontario, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan while serving on various commissions. Students in the provinces of Ontario and Newfoundland took an active part in recent Royal Commissions set up to study possible changes in the education system in each of these provinces. In Ontario, the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (For the Love of Learning) (1994) made several recommendations to the government to give students a greater voice in educational policy-making. Recommendation 143 of the 1994 report asked that all school boards have at least one student member as a board trustee. These student trustees came into being shortly thereafter, although they do not have the power to vote as trustees. Students in Newfoundland were asked to make public submissions to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education in 1992. Students in Saskatchewan actively sit
on the Saskatchewan Council on Children. This council provides a forum for discussion and direction to the government in the areas of social services, housing, health, recreation, and all issues that have an impact on children living in Saskatchewan.

Therefore, according to the various writers discussed in this paper, there is a move by educational authorities around the world to draw students into the educational policy-making arena and to make educational policy-making more localised. In all the different methods used to include students in the policy-making process, as discussed by the various writers, students serve in an advisory capacity and, although they may help shape and formulate a policy, the students do not actually have a say in the actual passing of the policy. Therefore the role that is developing for students in the educational policy-making forum is one of an advisory capacity. However, whether student involvement is only on an advisory level to policy-making as recorded by the writers, or whether students are actually involved in the actual formulation and passing of educational policies, the fact remains that the movement has already begun to have more student participation in the development of the educational systems that are there for the purpose of serving the students around the world in the first place.

Constraints to Involving Students in Educational Policy-Making

Various writers assert that there are constraints to student involvement in educational policy-making, and if students are going to become true participants in the policy-making process, then the constraints must be recognised and dealt with. During his study on "Student Influence In Decision-making In Secondary Schools", Wood (1977) examined the participation of students in decision-making and policy-making in two Ontario schools. The students participating in the study pointed out several obstacles that must be addressed if students are going to be active in educational policy development. It was found that the greatest obstacle to student involvement in policy-making at the school level is the perception by many adults, including teachers and administrators, that students are simply not capable of making educational decisions. Although Woods completely disagrees with this perception, his study pointed out that the perception does exist. During a study of students on school councils in the Toronto area, Scane and Wignall (1996) found that students are very much prepared and capable to take part in policy-making groups such as school councils. As a result of their study, the authors assert that "councils that exclude students risk losing a valuable resource for the improvement of their schools and of their educational process" (p. 14).

Woods (1997) found that the second most significant obstacle to student involvement in educational policy-making is the fact that many teachers and administrators simply do not know how to include students in a policy-making process. The inclusion of students is a whole new area for them and one for which they are not prepared. Treslan (1983) advises that all individuals in any educational organisation must learn to work together in a 'rational approach' (p 127) to educational policy-making. In terms of a rational approach, the author suggests that all stakeholders must learn to cooperate in such a way that they will strive to achieve the common goal, which in this case is the education of students.

A third obstacle to student involvement in educational policy-making, as identified by Wood (1977), is the lack of leadership necessary to provide opportunities for student involvement in educational policy-making. The author found that the students who participated in his study identified educational leadership as a critical element for involving students in policy development. Treslan (1983) suggests that leadership in education must stress democratic principles in order to ensure the total participation of all stakeholders including students.

Another obstacle to student involvement in educational policy-making, as identified by Wood (1977), is the lack of confidence students have in themselves. Stevens (1994) also recognised this problem after the New Zealand Education Act (1989) removed school boards from the educational hierarchy in New Zealand and replaced the school boards with local boards of trustees. According to this author, "some students reported that they felt overwhelmed by being the only young person on the school boards" (p 5).

The conflict between students and teachers in terms of what is the proper place of students in education and whether or not students should be involved in educational policy-making, is another obstacle identified by Wood (1977) to student involvement in policy-making. Stevens (1994) advises that in New Zealand, students are permitted to serve on policy-making committees as long as student issues are being discussed. Treslan (1983) recommends that all people involved with a school (parents, students, teachers and administrators) must be considered equal in a policy-making process and they must have an equal say in all matters.

Another obstacle to student involvement in policy-making, as identified by Wood (1977) is the element of time. Because of the teaching load of teachers, the extremely tight school schedules, overworked administrators and the heavy demands placed on students, there simply is not enough time to devote to policy development processes that always include students. Beck (1990) is also concerned about the problem of time as an obstacle to student input into educational policy-making. The author asserts that because of changes that have taken place in our society today and because of cutbacks in finance and personnel in education, teachers and administrators are trying to be all things to all people. In doing so, students are often forgotten in terms of developing a collaborative planning process in education. In order to overcome this problem, Treslan (1983) recommends that the policy-making process must remain flexible in terms of maintaining a capability of modifying plans to suit all external conditions.

According to Wood (1977), if students are going to be successful participants in educational policy-making, the obstacles to student participation must be addressed. Treslan (1983) advises that any educational planning group should contain six elements that are extremely important to the success of the group. The author asserts that in terms of student involvement in policy-making, students must be free to speak, all participants in policy development must learn to cooperate, planning must be flexible, all planning members must be considered equal, and all stakeholders must be permitted to be involved.

Conclusion

Education in many parts of the world appears to be entering a period of student involvement in policy-making, if only in an advisory capacity. Writers argue that students should be involved in the planning of their education because it helps them develop skills in democracy and citizenship, and educational policies will become more student sensitive. Just as there are benefits to students becoming involved in educational policy-making, there are also obstacles that are preventing students from becoming the active members of the policy development arena that they should be according to these writers. In order for students to become true stakeholders in educational planning and policy-making, the structure of the
education systems and the administrative styles of educators must change to become more student accommodating. The educational structures around the world will have to provide for student involvement in policy-making by establishing policy that will give students a formal role to play in policy-making processes. The educational structures must change from a line of hierarchical authority to a system where all stakeholders have equal opportunity to participate in educational planning and decision-making.

This structural change needs to occur not only at the school level, but at district and higher levels of educational government. It must be evident to students that they are very much a part of the entire policy-making process. If students are to become true stakeholders in the policy-making process in educational systems around the world, the administrative styles of educators have to become more open to student involvement in policy-making at all levels. Educators must become more open to working with students on policy matters, rather than attempting to do everything for students. Time and opportunities must be created to allow students to become involved in the policy-making process at all levels. Educational administrators must be open to change and willing to share power. Teacher training programs and administrative courses need to allow opportunities for educators to learn how to work with students in educational planning and policy development.

It is my belief that as students become more and more involved in educational policy-making as advisors through school councils, commissions, school improvement teams and other avenues, educators will begin to realize that students do have something to offer and they can make a difference at the policy-making table. As more and more opportunities are made available for students to participate in educational planning and policy-making, the constraints upon student involvement in policy development will begin to crumble.

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We Were Wrong...

Please note that the website for the SEAA Conference: Social Education for a Changing World, provided in the last issue of Connect, was incorrect. The correct web address for information and registration is included below.

Information Sources on Children's and Young People's Media Production


Film projects in the United Kingdom: The National Youth Agency: www.nya.org.uk/be.ng-seen-project-list.htm

Radio programs made for, with, by and about children and young people around the world: The Drumbeat, Issue 172 on Youth Radio: www.comminit.com/drum_beat_172.html

The Young People’s Media Network aims to stimulate young people's involvement in the media in Europe and Central Asia: www.comminit.com/drum_beat_147.html

from News from ICCVOS, Sweden; No 2, 2002

Rethinking Student Leadership

The February 2003 issue of Leadership (published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], USA) contains some useful articles that challenge and extend the 'traditional' role of student councils:

Beyond School Walls: "As times and students change, student leadership evolves with them. Today's student leaders don't just serve their schools by heading up clubs or being elected to student council. They're members of school boards and site councils, play active roles in youth city councils, serve on city-wide student governments, and more." (Nancy Griffin-Bonnaire, 4 pp)

Youth as Equal Partners: "Many school boards, site-based councils and other groups traditionally made up only of adults are recognizing the benefits of engaging youth as equal partners in decision making." (Lyn Fiscus, 3 pp)

The Power of Circling: Restorative Justice at the Middle Level: "A restorative justice program at this Wisconsin middle school that featured circling for discussion and activities in homeroom each morning promoted respect, responsibility, and cooperation, and provided more opportunities for student leadership." (Kelly Akins and Lori Trowbridge, 4 pp)

Putting the Youth in Youth Councils: "Youth across the United States are participating in policy decisions that affect them by becoming active members of Youth Councils." (Helen Oliff, 2 pp)

Copies of these (and other) articles are available from Connect for research purposes - 10¢ per page plus 50¢ postage. Ask us also about subscription information if you are interested to get this journal regularly.

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Australian:

Alternatives to Basic Skills Testing Network (Lane Cove, NSW) Survey
Education Views (Education Queensland, Brisbane, Qld) Vol 11 Nos 21-22; Vol 12 Nos 1-3; Nov 02-Feb 03
Network News (Network of Community Activities, Surry Hills, NSW) April 2003
Teacher Learning Network (TLN, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 10, No 1, Summer 2003
YACSAround (Youth Affairs Council of SA, Adelaide, SA) Issue 1, 2003
Yikes! (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic) Vol 2 Edition 5, February 2003
Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 22 No 1, March 2003

International:

Education Now (Nottingham, UK) No 39, Spring 2003
Leadership (NASSP, USA) Vol 31 Nos 6, 7; February and March 2003
News from ICCVOS (Göteborg, Sweden) Vol 5 No 1; 2001; Vol 6 Nos 1, 2; 2002
Voicebox (UK School Councils Nework, London, UK) Issue 1, Spring 2003

Documents

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

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

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530  Golden Grove High School: "Operation Boredom" (Merydith Willoughby, November 2002) (30 p; $3.00)
531  The Nature and Extent of Student Involvement in Educational Policy-Making in Canadian School Systems (Stuart Critchley in Educational Management and Administration 31:1, 2003 pp 97-106) (10 pp; $1.00)
532  Students Can Provide School Boards with Valuable Information for Effective School Consolidations; Don't Use the Students as Tokens (Stuart Critchley) (27 pp; $2.70)
533  What Role, If Any, Do Students in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, Have in Helping School Boards Plan for School Consolidation? (Stuart Critchley) (21 pp; $2.10)
534  Establishing a Theoretical Framework for Student Involvement in Educational Policy-Making (Stuart Critchley) (24 pp; $2.40)

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