Connect

supporting student participation

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& Incorporating the PASTA Newsletter #7

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This Issue

Here in Connect 112 are the first reports from the Australian student trip to the U: National Association of Student Councils Conference. In the next few issues we hope to carry some comparative accounts of what was learnt from this experience. In particular, we are interested in issues about the real power and participation that students have: how are US students and their Councils really involved in overall school decision making? How do student governance activities become part of the curriculum rather than an extra? How does this compare with developments and hopes here in Australia?

This raises basic questions again about the nature of student participation: is it termed 'extra-curricula' (outside the organised learning activities), 'co-curricula' (sitting alongside the curriculum) or is it central to the curriculum and to teaching and learning approaches? And, in anticipation of curriculum developments here, how does student participation and representation relate to Civics and Citizenship - an optional 'example' or at the active core of what it means to be a citizen today?

Perhaps it's also necessary to reiterate that student participation is not a noun: you don't 'do' student participation ('oh, we did student participation last year and it didn't work!). Rather it is a verb: an approach, a way of teaching and learning, a way of relating, a way of valuing. Student participation means including students in decisions and action about their own education and about the world in which they live TODAY - about their present citizenship!

One school with whom I'm working, recognises that being serious about student participation and about valuing the role of young people may require a cultural/attitudinal change both within the institution and within individuals. When marginalised young people reflect on what such changes would entail, they firstly emphasise the need for respect.

The Federal Government makes much of the phrase 'mutual obligation' at the moment. However, I suggest that mutual obligation is, in order, the THIRD form of mutuality to be sought: mutual respect and mutual commitment come first. Without these, there is nothing mutual about obligation. It remains an un-negotiated, one-sided imposition!

Roger Holdsworth

NEXT ISSUE: #113 - October 1998
Deadline for material: end of September
WANGARATTA DISTRICT
YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The Country Connections Youth Participation Project has been in operation for nearly twelve months. Its origins lie in five years of groundwork which began with the formation of a Wangaratta District Curriculum and Welfare Network in 1993. This was an initiative developed by Jan Osmotherly, who at that time was a Principal class Curriculum Consultant for the Department of Education. The objective of this network was to establish the means for schools and community agencies to work collaboratively to better support young people at risk in this area. This led to the formation of the Wangaratta STAR (Students At Risk) Project and to a successful submission to be one of 15 pilot areas for the Victorian Government's Extra Edge program administered through the Department of Education.

When the funding for this program looked like being withdrawn, a submission was prepared for the 'Country Connections Project.' The focus was to be on the youth participation aspect of developing resilience in young people. Much of the groundwork at a systemic level to get student welfare higher on the priority list had been done. However, little work had gone into assisting the young people themselves to participate meaningfully in decision-making about their issues or in helping them to establish a credible vehicle by which their voice could be heard.

In the words of one young person:

"A lot of us suffer from a chronic disenchantment with life..."

This is supported by recent research which reveals rises in the incidence of homelessness, depression, suicide, attempted suicides, and drug and alcohol abuse in young people - especially those in rural areas.

Whilst there have been a number of recent federal and state government initiatives launched to address some of these issues which relate to a chronic sense of hopelessness in too many teenagers - there has been little consultation with young people themselves.

The Country Connections Youth Participation project is a small means of doing something about this. It is encouraging young people to have a voice, to take on positions of responsibility and participate meaningfully in school and community decision-making. It is about creating a sense of hope and purpose instead of hopelessness and purposeless drifting. The following article is based on a large report which describes and evaluates some of the strategies that have been implemented in the past twelve months. There have been some heart-warming successes and some sobering mistakes ('learning experiences').

There is so much still to be done. I wish it could have assisted more young people and that we had managed to create more systemic support for the ideas of the young.

But it is a start. And if it has made a significant difference to a few young people then it has been worth it.

Jan Osmotherly

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It was now very important, having raised the awareness and motivation of school and community administrators to work together, to focus on the youth voice. To that end, towards the end of 1996, an extensive consultation was undertaken with representatives from the nine district secondary schools and some young people out of school about the issues which they felt were important to their lives. In December we held what was called the Wangaratta District RSG (Regional Student Gathering). At the conclusion of this meeting, students volunteered to keep the concept of a regular Youth Forum going, and Beechworth volunteered to host the next one in 1997.

The group of students from Beechworth Secondary College who volunteered to host the first forum in the series devised the title ‘TEENROAR’. The accompanying caption was “It’s time we were heard.” The rationale behind the whole concept was articulated well by this group: “We believe in the importance of giving young people a voice to express their ideas and concerns over the issues that affect them. For too long, it is the adults who have made the decisions and policies about how to support young people without even considering their opinions.”

It is this which underlies the Country Connections Youth Participation Project.

Theoretical Framework

Rather than continuing the victim mentality of ‘students at risk’ and its concomitant focus on ‘fixing kids’, the resiliency philosophy is about the development of effective strategies to cope with the world despite sometimes debilitating environmental, familial and personal experiences. No matter how hard it may be - it requires a complete flip in thinking - instead of seeing some students as full of needs and problems, we see them as full of strengths and resources.

The key factors in developing resiliency are:

- High expectations;
- Close bond with at least one caring and supportive adult;
- Opportunity to participate meaningfully, and have roles of responsibility.

Michael Rutter’s research on successful schools unequivocally documents the protective nature of youth participation. According to Rutter (1984, 89), in the schools with low levels of delinquency, children were given a lot of responsibility. “They participated very actively in all sorts of things that went on in the school; they were treated as responsible people and they reacted accordingly.” These schools created a variety of opportunities to ensure that all kids found something they were interested in and could succeed in.

The reverse process of participation is alienation, the lack of bonding to social institutions - a process that has consistently been identified in study after study as a major risk factor for involvement in alcohol and other drugs, delinquency, school failure, depression and suicide. The challenge for social institutions and especially for schools, is to engage young people by providing them with opportunities to participate in meaningful, valued activities and roles. Maton’s research with older adolescents and at-risk teenagers found that engagement in ‘meaningful instrumental activity’ was significantly related to their life satisfaction, well-being, and overall self-esteem, and was as powerful a factor as that of social support.

The operating dynamic reflects the individual’s need to bond - to participate, to belong, to have some power or control over one’s life. According to many education reformers, when schools ignore these basic human needs of kids and adults, they become ineffective, alienating places.

“When one has no stake in the way things are, when one’s needs or opinions are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere.”


REFERENCES:

Bobbie Benard: Fostering Resiliency In Kids - Protective Factors in the Family, School and Community, Western Regional Centre for Drug-Free Schools and Communities

Michael Rutter: ‘Resilient Children’ in Psychology Today

Kenneth Maton: ‘Meaningful involvement in instrumental activity and well-being; studies of older adolescents and at risk urban teenagers’ in Journal of Community Psychology

FORUMS

TEENROAR 1 “It’s Time We Were Heard” Beechworth SC
TEENROAR 2 “Action” Bright P-12 College
TEENROAR 3 “Express Yourself” Rutherglen HS
TEENROAR 4 “Teenmagic” Wangaratta HS

At the conclusion of Teenroar 4 at Wangaratta High School, it was decided that in 1998 TEENROAR would become TEENATION. This was to signify that there had been enough talking and “roaring”: young people had been successful in being heard and establishing a statewide reputation for convening excellent Forums. Now the focus needed to shift to follow-up action. What kinds of activities/programs could be implemented in schools and communities to better support young people?

TEENATION “Go For It” Benalla College
Local Rationale

There is a very significant number of young people who are homeless, involved in drug and alcohol abuse, suffering from depression and who have attempted suicide in our district. It is vital that the local community does not shake its head in disbelief, but that it commit resources to prevention strategies to try and minimise the problem in the future. In the Department of Education's Wangaratta District, our most recent comprehensive research revealed that 20.5% or 1 in 5 of our secondary school population is regarded as 'at risk'.

As the theoretical research demonstrates, youth participation in meaningful activities has a very effective impact on reducing the risk factors for young people. Also, it is essential that young people's voices be heard about the issues that affect them. For too long, it is the adults who have made the decisions and policies about how to support young people without involving them in the process.

Aims of Project

- To increase youth participation and input into school and community decision-making;
- To develop leadership skills for use in the school and community;
- To improve resiliency in all students and create a sense of belonging and connectedness to the community through meaningful participation;
- To empower young people to build more positive relationships and better communication skills;
- To give young people a voice on issues that significantly affect their lives;
- To reduce self-destructive behaviour in young people by implementing programs of self-help and self-esteem building.

A PROCESS FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANISING TEENROAR/ACTION YOUTH FORUMS - GETTING STARTED

The following points describe some of the key stages in getting this process off the ground. This is a framework which is flexible and needs to be adapted to the community context in which this project may be replicated.

- Discussion with schools re the objectives of Teenroar. Need to convince Principals that it will assist them to meet school charter goals (usually there is something about creating a safe and supportive environment for all students). Theoretical framework and some local research statistic establishing a need are most useful tools for this process. Start by informal discussions of idea with key school personnel.

- Arrange for presentation of concept, rationale - what will be required of each school - to District Principals meeting and District Student Welfare Coordinators Network. Essential to do your homework and relate objectives of Youth Forum (student participation) to existing School Accountability Framework and School Charter.

- Work out draft budget in advance and where it is possible to get support. How much are you asking from the school; how much could you hope to raise from sponsorship or community groups; is there a community agency worker or someone who can act as facilitator or do you need to allow funds to pay someone to do it? There is no set answer to this. But the important thing is everyone will be concerned about the dollars, so you must work this out in advance.

- Establish links with any existing youth action group or student representative group. Ask them to assist to prepare questions for a consultation with young people to establish their needs and issues.

- Conduct consultation with young people in cluster of schools and communities.

- Arrange for young people to assist with collation of responses. Record and distribute results to key personnel in schools.

- Liaise with a particular school/community where you already have some connection and who you feel will be supportive re hosting the event. (It is very important that the first one is a big success and the credibility of young people as conference organisers is established.)

- Having established a host school/community, liaise with the school and young people re how to encourage volunteer organisers. Is advisable to have a mix of year levels. Need to promote the whole concept so that it can appear 'cool' to be involved not just something extra for the 'goodie-goodies'.

- Presentation to school staff re theoretical framework behind Teenroar - explanation of what will be involved. Crucial that teachers understand what is going on and why. Invite volunteers to support project - it is crucial to have a couple of teachers who are supportive and willing to lend students a hand.

- Communicate general information to whole school community - School Council presentation; article in school newsletter for parents; article in local papers for community. Let everyone know that young people are taking the initiative and doing something positive to support each other.

- Promote concept through lots of 'youth-friendly' means. Advertise meeting of all interested volunteers.

- SET DATE for event.

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• Meet with interested volunteers at lunchtime. Enthuse them with past experiences of successful Teenroars. Discuss results of consultation with young people around the district. Come up with theme. Arrange regular meeting time of volunteer young people with facilitator and supportive staff. (Once a week is essential.)

• Devise list of all different tasks and roles eg media liaison officer, public relations, advertising, workshop co-ordinator, graphic design - logo - program design, contact with other schools, venue co-ordinator, catering, entertainment etc. Talk about what is involved. Do a team-building exercise.

• Assign students to tasks and have a back-up person for each major role.

• Discuss agenda - kind of workshops needed to meet expressed needs. Brainstorm list of presenters. Workshop co-ordinator to find out contact details and ask them if interested.

• Ensure all tasks are underway. Get letters written inviting schools, inviting presenters, requesting sponsorship from local business. Arrange for letters to be signed from Principal.

• Organise students to go around the community speaking to local business, shops and groups promoting the concept and requesting support.

• Get logo done as soon as possible so can start promotional work.

• Make media contacts in advance.

• A lot of work to ensure groups of students come from other schools.

By this stage, momentum should be established. This kind of organisation goes on for a minimum of six weeks, but can be longer. Some young people will drop out and others will come to the fore. You may wish to have community agency people work with students so they can co-facilitate workshops with them.

Reproducible Features

The following important strategies should be considered in replicating this project:

• Communicate the rationale, aims and key components of the project to the community. It is essential that everyone knows what is happening and why. This includes Principal, school administrative and support staff, teachers, School Council, parents, students, local government, community agencies, service clubs, shops, businesses.

• The agenda must be determined by the young people. The project will not succeed unless they have a sense of ownership.

• Careful thought needs to go into planning how you will attract a variety of young people to be involved.

• The assistance of one adult facilitator (external to the school) and at least two supportive teachers is required.

• Date of event needs to be fixed well in advance and check carefully it does not clash with any other important school or community events.

• Young people need to suggest ‘youth-friendly venues.’

• Team-building exercises with the volunteer young people.

• Negotiate rights and responsibilities of being part of the group... (including you will not take time off classes unless you seek permission first. You must undertake to catch up on any work missed. If you are unable to complete a task assigned to you, let someone else in the group know immediately so as someone else can do it.)

• Ensure that notices re planning/ organisation meetings go into appropriate school bulletins well in advance.

• Where possible, liaise with a community agency which works with clients who have dropped out of school. Discuss ways in which this client group could have a role in the Forum. (See example of Benalla Teenaction for how this was approached.)

• Have roles and responsibilities for organisers written down.

• Establish a routine for meeting and a means of communication between meetings.

• Meet with Curriculum Committee and discuss ways in which elements of the project could be incorporated into the curriculum.

• ENCOURAGE, ENCOURAGE, ENCOURAGE.

• Give positive feedback throughout. (Often, ringing up a professional person they do not know it is a big hurdle for a young person to get over. You must be supportive.)

• Celebrate stages in the project. For example, when the logo is designed or when some individual secures some sponsorship.

• When planning the agenda allow for reasonable length lunchtime with preferably some entertainment happening. Past experience has shown that it is during this ‘free, comfortable’ space, that young people will approach workshop leaders about additional information or for support.

• Do not try and fit too much into a day.

• Have a separate program for the adults who are attending.

• Always pay attention to catering and food. This does have a bearing on the success of the day.

• Consider use of the arts as an important aspect of the day rather than just ‘talk-fests’. Our experience shows that use of drama, art, music, sculpture are very effective means of communicating and helping young people to express their feelings and ideas.

• Ensure that throughout the planning you are considering follow-up. This is not a one-off event. You are providing a forum for young people to increase their knowledge and skill base so as they can support others. How will you ensure that this happens? What follow-up procedures will you have in place?

• Think about media promotion from the start. One of the lasti
benefits of Teenroar is that a positive image is projected of young people helping themselves.

- Ensure that local government representatives and politicians attend the Forum in a listening capacity. Again, it is integral to the credibility of the Forum for the teenagers to know they have a real audience listening to their views.

- Work with young people re choice of workshop facilitators. They need to be skilled in their area and have a good rapport with young people.

- Ensure evaluation processes are in place at the onset of the project.

- Make sure that there will be public acknowledgment and recognition of the young people who worked on the project.

- **BELIEVE IN THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES.**

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**EVALUATION FINDINGS DRAWN FROM FOUR YOUTH FORUMS**

The following points have been collated from:

- written feedback sheets from students, teachers, workshop presenters;
- taped interviews with students, teachers and presenters;
- records of meetings with Principals;
- meetings with community agency staff;
- informal focus group discussions with young people in and out of school.

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**Key Features of Effective Teenaction Youth Forums**

- **YOUNG PEOPLE DECIDE THE AGENDA AND ORGANISE IT. SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OF PROCESS AND PRODUCT**

The Teenaction Youth Forum phenomena - the most visible focus of the *Country Connections Project* - embodies the three key factors known to foster resilience in young people:

- High expectations;
- Close bond with at least one caring and supportive adult;
- Opportunity to participate meaningfully, and have roles of responsibility.

**High Expectations**

There is an expectation of all young people who participate in some way to the organisation and presentation of a Teenroar Forum that the outcome will be a highly professional product. Near enough is not good enough. Every minute detail must be attended to from keeping accurate financial records to sending thank you letters to those who have assisted in some way. Anyone who has been involved in organising a conference will know how much work is required, and the four events that have taken place over the past 12 months of this project have been mammoth undertakings.

"The young people responsible for Teenroar should set up a small business as Event Organisers. I'm serious. The standard is so high. They could compete well with many an adult company."

Roger Holdsworth
Manager, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne University

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**Close bond with caring, supportive adult**

Throughout the project the young people are challenged and supported by the facilitator. It is essential that this person earns the trust and respect of the group and whilst challenging them to work at a high standard, is there to listen, support and encourage at all times. Most importantly - this adult believes in them!

**Opportunity to participate meaningfully, and have roles of responsibility**

This is absolutely central to the project. The young people work as a team to create something which is relevant, important and purposeful. There is a real audience for their work - their peers! They feel empowered because they are actually helping others and have critical roles of responsibility to ensure it all happens.

The following reflections from organisers reflects this:

"For me, being part of something that did something beneficial for the youth was really cool."

"I learnt a lot about who I am and how I cope with certain situations."

"A lot of hard work really does pay off! I was honestly surprised by the response received."

"It’s the feeling that I have done something really worthwhile."

"It keeps surprising me that a group of teenagers can produce something this big."

"I personally didn’t realise how many people would benefit from a conference like this."

"And to think - we did it! It’s a blast."

"Just pulling the whole thing off was really important to me. I couldn’t let everyone else down even though I felt like giving up."

**RELEVANCE OF ISSUES TO YOUTH CULTURE**

Process is important but so is the content. Intrinsic to this whole project is the encouragement of the youth voice. What do they see as important in their lives - at this time - in this area? Groups of young people in nine schools and communities were consulted as to the issues they considered to be most important to them and about which they felt they needed to learn more about. This process informed the agendas at each of the Forums. In addition, as part of the evaluation of each Teenror, participants were asked to write down what they would like covered at the next Forum. The host school organisers would take all this input into account and then determine the workshops and theme of the day.

At no time, were they told that they should or should not do a particular topic. Thus, there was a genuine sense of ownership, which engendered more commitment from the young people. This was in no small way responsible from the kind of reaction they received from their peers who attended the workshops.

"The highlight for me was being really open in the workshop about drugs and my various addictions. I felt supported and accepted and not judged. Once I spoke out everyone else did as well."

"It was great to be in a group where it was safe to express myself."

"I wish more of my friends could have been here so they could have got some help."

In response to the question of why you think days like Teenror/Teenaction are worthwhile, the following responses further illustrate the relevance of the program.

"The things that we learn on these days we don’t learn at school."

"We learn how to take stuff back to our community."

"Helps people realise they are not alone."

"It makes it easier for young people to talk about things they feel are important."

"Young people know what is really important for other young people."

"It is more enjoyable and relevant to us."

"Everyone gets involved because we don’t feel intimidated."

"Because you find out that there are people out there that care."

"You learn how to help others."

"It deals with issues that really matter to us."

"You can speak freely."

"It’s good to learn from people your own age."

"Deals with stuff I always wanted to know about."

"Gives responsibility in organising things and proves we are useful."

"It’s like group counselling. You feel supported."

At an evaluation session held after Teenror 2 in Bright last year, the organisers were asked: “Why do you think it is important to participate in something like Teenror?”

The response is brief but critical:

“So that we can establish things that we know we need not things they (the adults) think we need."

I do not read this as a put-down of teachers or parents or other adults, but rather the statement of a simple fact, that as a teenager you are more likely to know more of the intricacies of the youth culture than if you are not a teenager.

**SAFE, YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**

This is a very important aspect of the success of each Teenror/Action. If you are going to make inroads into resolving issues that are putting young people at risk then you need to create a very supportive environment in which young people feel comfortable to express how they feel.

There are some key features to this which evolved as the project progressed and where we are in the position to make interesting comparisons.

Connect 112:
Separate workshops for students and teachers

At the first Teenroar in Beechworth, adults who had brought the students to the day (mainly teachers but also included some parents) selected from the same workshop program as the young people. This meant that in a few instances, a student found themselves in the same workshop as one of their own teachers or even their own mother. The feedback from both presenters and participants was that this was a severely inhibiting factor. The young person did not feel comfortable enough to disclose personal stuff about such things as sexuality, drug taking or just generally personal feelings.

The recommendation was made by the Beechworth organisers to the Teenroar 2 organisers from Bright that they run a separate program for the adults. This they did, and separate programs became a feature from then on.

Whilst some schools and particular teachers were a bit uneasy about this, it was the young people who were responsible for the organisation and who were to recommend how it was best to proceed if the desired outcomes were to be achieved. There is little doubt in the young people’s minds and in the views of the workshop presenters that the workshops where known adults were not present were far more successful.

The young people need to be given the choice about what they disclose and to whom.

Involvement of young people from several different schools/communities

There is no doubt that this is one of the highlights of Teenroar. It has been a unanimous response from participants at four forums that they liked being in workshops where they mixed with students from other schools. It contributed to them feeling less vulnerable, less alone and feel some affirmation for their feelings/experiences. The insular nature of some small rural communities means that a wider perspective on issues is hard to obtain and confidentiality is more difficult.

"Great being with other kids you don’t know. You are freer to say what you really think. You don’t have to express your feelings in front of friends (not cool)." (Year 10 male)

“This is one of the best things about the day. It is a great advantage for kids to mix with those from other communities and schools so they get a wider perspective on issues. Sometimes they are very isolated and don’t know if other towns are the same, if other schools have similar cultures, if other young people are experiencing the same issues. Opportunities like this are very valuable and affirming.”

(Workshop leader)

Venue in the community somewhere rather than on a school site

Whilst two of the Teenroars did take place at school and they were quite successful, the overall recommendation of the young people was that the workshops and the whole atmosphere was more relaxed and friendly and less inhibited away from school. I think this is a reasonable conclusion given that most people feel more comfortable to explore personal issues away from their workplace. There seems little doubt that a ‘youth-friendly space’ chosen by the young people is a very important determinant of the outcomes of the day.

“It allows them a safe space in which to discuss issues such as drugs, sex, relationships, etc. It also helped them to feel not so isolated or alone on particular issues after hearing about others talk about their difficulties... I think sometimes it may be difficult to address these issues at school. Being in a new space assisted this process rather than being at school.”

(Workshop leader)
ISSUES WHICH NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

Whilst there are many positives about the Teenroar/Teenaaction Youth Forum phenomenon, there are still a number of issues to be further worked upon to improve their effectiveness. For each point raised, I will explain the context in which it was expressed and make comments in response.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION PROJECTS - CURRENTLY EXTRA-CURRICULAR

There are a number of 'blockers' to effective student participation which need to be addressed. Nearly all the of the 40 students who have had a role as an organiser say that they have trouble negotiating time to work on the project (even with a pledge to catch up on any work missed). They also report a negative attitude from some staff about them spending time on something other than the set schoolwork.

The learning outcomes of Teenaaction are that young people develop the skills to:

- Work effectively as a team;
- Take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour;
- Solve problems in a constructive manner;
- Communicate effectively in writing and orally, with a range of people for different purposes;
- Manage time efficiently;
- Independently negotiate with businesses, professional organisations and individuals;
- Work to a deadline.

These learning outcomes encompass the key competencies required by employers throughout the country, not to mention that they also are the skills which will equip a young person to relate well to others and function successfully as a community member.

The issue thus becomes:

- How can student participation through learning activities such as Teenaaction be incorporated into the curriculum?

There has been some progress towards resolving this big issue but there is a long way to go. Some students have managed to use their role in Teenaaction as an English Communication Project; some of their writing, for example media releases, has been able to be included as a writing folio piece; design of logos and T-Shirts has been able to fulfil a work requirement in Art & Graphic Communication. However, in the main, the bulk of the work they do not only goes unrealised, and thus no formal credit is given, but student can get behind in their other subjects and find their workload has really increased. This is a great concern, particularly for VCE students.

I believe that there are ways that could be investigated of offering such projects as electives, or just in working harder to plan their involvement so that it can substitute for class-work. I do not believe that there will be a problem in matching the work required in the project to outcomes in the Curriculum Standards Framework or the VCE.

- There is not enough follow-up in schools or communities re issues raised at Teenroar/Action Youth Forums

This major issue has been raised by all major participants in this project - students, teachers, young people out of school, youth workers, community agencies and us (Osetfield Consultans).

There is no doubt about the success of Teenroar/Teenaaction as an event, and as a project for the student organisers. The feedback from the clients, the young people, clearly tells us that this is so. However, what about after the event is over? Important issues are explored and each Forum has become progressively better at incorporating planning sessions to help students on the strategies of how to take information and ideas back to their schools and communities. However, the fact remains: this is the hard part.

Students make recommendations which they wish to put to the school and local community but find it difficult to get the systemic support to have the recommendations properly explored.

Those attending the day feel a sense of responsibility to take important issues back to school but are we asking too much of them? How does a young person get the support to implement a program to combat prejudice and homophobia? How does a young person get support to implement more mental health education into the curriculum?

"Some of the school representatives at Teenroar are vulnerable and at risk young people. Are we asking too much of them to give them the responsibility to take big issues back to school. Are we setting them up to fail?" (Workshop leader - Community Health Counsellor)

We have always been aware of this issue and were keen to deal with the concerns of the above worker as soon as possible. A meeting was called on October 15th after the Express Yourself Teenroar at Rutherglen to focus on the issue. All workshop presenters were invited to come and plan strategies for supporting young people to implement programs in the school context. A number of the ideas suggested then have been implemented. There is more of a community agency presence in schools and because more young people have information on who to contact for support, there has been an increase in collaborative community agency and school programs. There was follow-up phone contact with some of those individuals who it was felt really needed support and appropriate arrangements put into place to do this.

Nevertheless, the issue is a very important one which has not been adequately resolved.

It is believed that the next focus of the project, should it continue, needs to be on developing the systemic structures necessary to support young people and authentic youth participation. Only if such structures become part of the mainstream will the needs of the young people be adequately addressed. To
this end, Country Connections has most recently focused its efforts on a District SRC Youth Action Network. This is one means whereby we may implement systemic change.

- **Meaningful student/youth participation is not supported by current school and community decision-making structures and processes.**

It is one thing to believe you have the right to raise issues and discuss them freely. Teenaction does seem to have been successful in that the students feel they have succeeded in doing that and they have a real sense of ownership over the agendas developed. However, the next step - of being taken seriously by the school and the community - is a bigger obstacle.

"The school should have more support for such projects as this and teachers should recognise student contributions. They need to ask us for input into how student welfare services are run. We need more students on committees and School Council. They are always talking about students yet we are not properly represented."  
(Teenaction student organiser)

On the positive side, there were two schools who were very supportive of having students present their recommendations to staff meetings and who did take action on a few of their recommendations. This is a fantastic outcome. The self-esteem of the students visibly grew and there was a real feeling of achievement. They were being listened to. However, in other schools there has been a real challenge to arrange a forum for their ‘voice’ to be legitimately heard. Lack of time and resources in schools is a very important factor. There are a number of very supportive teachers who would dearly love to spend more time working with students to support their ideas; however, their current workload doesn’t allow them time to do this. Schools and students need the support of the community to do this. For this to happen, the youth voice must first be taken seriously. Young people are not surprisingly rather cynical about the eventuality of this.

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**DISTRICT SRC: YOUTH ACTION NETWORK**

**Background**

It was always believed that facilitating the youth voice through the Teenroar/Teenaction Forums would be insufficient to generate long term change for the youth population per se. There were direct benefits for the host school, for the individuals who had a key organising role, and to the students who attended the four days as has been documented above. However, the Country Connections Project has always aimed to institute change at a systemic level so that the positive outcomes would be long term.

To this end, it was believed that we had to build on the existing vehicle for student participation and policy-making: the SRCs or Student Representative Councils. If we could strengthen these groups then there would be a better structural framework for implementing the programs and recommendations arising out of the Teenroar Forums. The formation of the District SRC Network is the beginning of a strategy to turn the ‘ROAR’ into positive ‘ACTION’.

Furthermore if we are to be serious about student participation then we mean "an active role for students in decisions about implementation and education policies and practices and of the key issues that determine the nature of the world in which they live." (Roger Holdsworth - Manager, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne University)

**History**

The brief history of the Wangaratta District SRC Youth Action Network is as follows:

- Consultations re content of a SRC Training camp in relation to Teenroar outcomes - September, October, November, 1997
- Negotiations with various community agencies to secure funding for a Training Camp. Successful negotiations with The Centre, Wangaratta, secured some ACFE Funding
- Organisation of camp - October, November
- Country Connections SRC Training Camp - November 25, 26, 1997. Involved students from ten district schools - 60 students
- Formation of District Network put forward as recommendation to camp
- Collation of outcomes of camp - December
- Letter to Principals - December and January with SRC Camp report and announcement of District SRC Network
- First Network Meeting - February 19th - Beechworth
- Second Network Meeting - April 2nd - Wangaratta (Galen College, host school)
- Third Network Meeting - May 21st - Myrtleford (Myrtleford SC, host school)

**Aims**

- To increase youth participation and input into school and community decision-making;
- To develop leadership skills for use in the school and community;
- To improve resiliency in all students and create a sense of belonging and connectedness to the community through meaningful participation;
- To empower young people to build more positive relationships and better communication skills;
- To give young people a voice on issues that significantly affect their lives.
Feedback

We have not instituted any formal evaluation mechanisms for the District Network as yet. It is still very much in the early stages, but if the project is funded to continue we will be monitoring closely performance measures relating to increased input by students to decision-making committees and indicators that their recommendations have had an impact on policy and practice.

The feedback from the Training Camp in November last year was extremely positive. This was evidenced by the excellent turn-up we had for the first District Network Meeting. The fact that schools released students and their SRC Liaison teacher for the day to travel to the meeting is evidence in itself that it was seen by school administrations as an important priority.

It was also extremely pleasing to see that at our last meeting, three different SRCs reported having input into their school community’s Youth Suicide Prevention Policy. This is in stark contrast to the main roles of some of these groups in the past which concerned fund-raising, the organisation of casual dress-days and a school dinner-dances. We are now seeing a move towards input into important policies.

The other very exciting indicator of success is not yet official so cannot be included as evidence at the time of writing. However, we have it unofficially from the Senior Project Officer in the Department of Education - Ross Appleby - that this Network is to be used as the model for a statewide SRC student leadership project. Ross attended our second meeting and has been in constant contact since then.

We are looking forward to further developments in this area.

Jan Osmotherly

This article is drawn from the Evaluation of Country Connections Youth Participation Project, 1996. The full report is available for $15 (plus $2 postage) from Osfield Consultants, ‘Nardoo’, RMB 8456, Orchard Drive, Wangaratta Vic 3678
Ph: (03) 5766 2626; Fax: (03) 5766 2770
Email: osfield@w140.aone.net.au

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the evaluations presented above. It is hoped that these will inform subsequent school/community programs designed to address the needs of young people. Most importantly, this report affirms the need for all to listen to the youth voice.

1. That Forums such as Teenaction be continued in some form. That such forums preserve the following characteristics:
   - Young people determine the agenda around issues important to them;
   - Young people take the major roles of responsibility re organizing the event;
   - That they be supported by a facilitator from outside the school and at least two supportive teachers from within the school;
   - That the event take place at a ‘safe and supportive youth-friendly space’ to be negotiated by the young people;
   - That young people from at least two different schools and communities be invited to attend to allow networking;
   - That a significant component involve assisting young people with the strategies and resources to implement action back in their communities.

2. That a working party be formed of young people, teachers, community representatives, Curriculum Co-ordinators and Key Learning Area leaders - to explore how student participation projects (for example, Teenaction) could be incorporated into the curriculum rather than being extra-curricula.

3. That resources be directed towards developing systemic structures to support the recommendations of young people so that their voice is included in school and community decision-making eg School Council, Curriculum Committee, Local Government Committees:
   - That this ensure adequate representation on these decision-making bodies;
   - That adequate training be provided to fulfil the roles.

4. That increased meaningful student participation become part of each school’s charter and be reported on in its annual review.

5. That school and community agencies work collaboratively to incorporate the needs of young people - as identified by them - in their support service planning.

6. That Student Representative Councils examine their role in terms of improving the support structures for those whom they represent.

7. That the District SRC Youth Action Network be adequately resourced and supported to follow up key recommendations from the Teenroar/Action forums.

8. That the District SRC Youth Action Network have a direct input into the Management Committee for the School- Focused Service (currently being tendered).

9. That schools and communities work collaboratively to provide a Youth Support Worker at each school site with a dual role.

10. That schools and communities further explore the use of creative arts projects to assist young people to express themselves, experience greater self-esteem, and establish a sense of belonging and connectedness to the local environment.

11. That any future policy and program development at local, district, regional or statewide level re youth suicide prevention or ‘Turning the Tide’ initiatives formally involve young people in the consultation and decision-making process.
PASTA NEWSLETTER
# 7 - August 1998

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

SEE OUR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION AND APPLICATION FORM IN THIS ISSUE

PASS THE PASTA
AUSTRALIAN SRCs MAKE HISTORY

The 1998 Australian wide SRC USA tour was jointly sponsored by PASTA Inc. (Professional Association of Student Representative Council Teacher Advisers) and the Central Coast Campus of the University of Newcastle (CCC).

As an historic first, this tour each year, will help to:
• Lift the profile of the Student Representative Council movement within Australia;
• Recognise the dedicated work of the volunteer Student Advisers in schools;
• Highlight the leadership role being played by both PASTA Inc. and the Central Coast Campus (CCC), in championing the cause, within Australia and around the world, of both active citizenship and the promotion of student involvement in community based decision making and problem solving as measured by the CSC Awards Program and the continued development of SRCs in schools.

I would like to take this opportunity to officially recognise and thank Professor Les Eastcott, the Director and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Central Coast Campus of the University of Newcastle, for his patronage and support, for without his faith and commitment towards the work of PASTA, few of our goals could have been so quickly achieved.

The Australian delegation to this year's 62nd NASC National Conference was an outstanding success and the Kansas Organising Committee informed us that without the participation of the Australian Delegation all of their tasks would have been harder to achieve. The Australian Delegation was made up of 30 student leaders (aged from 14 to 17 years), representing three Australian states and the ACT and six Staff Student Adviser members of PASTA Inc. (Ralph Murray, PASTA President, my wife Christine; Ken Page, PASTA Treasurer and Tour Co-ordinator, and his wife Sue, who is the SRC Adviser to Narara Valley High School; Jeanne Bow, PASTA Vice-President Metropolitan Schools and the Kogarah SRC District Co-ordinator and her husband, Graham Bow.)

Background

NASSP - the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in the USA - is the largest school leadership organisation in the world. In the USA NASSP represents:
• more than 45,000 middle level and high school Principals and assistant Principals;
• more than 58,000 staff student activity advisers (cf SRC Advisers in Australia) organised across the USA by the National Association of Student Activity Advisers (NASAA) - PASTA Inc. is the national Australian affiliate to both NASSP and its action organisation NASAA, with whom we have had a 20-year relationship and upon whose organisational structure PASTA has been modelled; and
• more than 1.5 million students involved in NASSP Programs (talented and selective Student Leaders only): the National Honor Society, the National Junior Honor Society, the American Technology Honor Society, the Middle Level Student Activities Association, and the National Association of Student Activity Advisers, which are supported by State and then District branch networks (ref: National Association of School Councils National Conference Press Release, June 1998);
• diversified and incorporated its national organisational structure over 65 years "serving all leaders in Middle Level and High School Education";
• Founder and Sponsor of the following: National Honor Society, National Association of School Councils, National Junior Honor Society, National Association of Student Activity Advisers, American Technology Honor Society, Middle Level Student Activities Association, National Alliance of High Schools, National Leadership Camps Program, NASC National Conference, and National Staff Advisers Fly-In Conferences.

NASSP today is a not-for-profit incorporated association overseeing a multi-million dollar student leadership industry that it itself as created and developed.
PASTA Inc: As one of the co-founders and the first President of PASTA Inc., it has been my honour and privilege to help champion the cause of student leadership, participation and representation through the establishment of SRCs within the Australian educational environment. The fruits of our labours have resulted in the establishment not only of a national professional teachers' association (PASTA) to better coordinate this important work, but has also led to:

- establishment of the NSW State SRC Conference (1987);
- establishment of the NSW SRC Council (1991);
- establishment of the National Student Participation Conference (NASCAP) held in association with the biennial conferences of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) (1995 Melbourne; 1997 Sydney; 1999 - Hobart or Perth);
- CSC Awards Program (1998-9: two year trial) - a joint initiative between PASTA and the CCC;
- the inclusion of the PASTA Inc. Newsletter in Connect magazine (Nov 1997);
- ‘Civics, Citizenship and SRCs’ Department of Education in-service 20-21 March 1998, to introduce the CSC Awards Program to NSW State Schools;
- establishment of a steering committee (PASTA member Ross Appleby, Karingal Park HS) for the initiation of a Victorian SRC State Council and Victorian State SRC Conference (1998);
- establishment of a steering committee (PASTA member Kim Roberts, Sorrell School) for the initiation of a Tasmanian SRC State Council and Tasmanian State SRC Conference (1998);
- establishment of a steering committee (PASTA member) for the initiation of an ACT SRC Council and ACT Annual SRC Conference (1998);
- establishment of 2000 International SRC Conference Steering Committee as a joint venture between PASTA/CCC/ACSA and the Sydney University (1997);
- establishment of an Australian SRC Steering Committee to work towards the first Australian SRC Council Conference, to sit for the first time during the Easter break in 2000;
- 1998 USA SRC tour jointly sponsored by PASTA and the CCC;
- 1999 SRC USA tour jointly sponsored by PASTA and the CCC;
- the Researchers Affecting Education (RAE) and PASTA joint Conference, 15 September at the University of Western Sydney, Milperra Campus.

Strategies for the Future

A. Establishment of a strategic partnership between PASTA Inc. and the CCC

1. The CSC Awards program has already generated considerable interest and support and as a future national program, it has already helped to raise the profile of both PASTA and the CCC. Through both our newsletter in Connect and the evolving CSC Awards Program, PASTA and the CCC have been provided with a continuing opportunity to further promote themselves, both through sponsorships and the hosting of Conferences and events of both national and international importance.

2. The supporting of a national annual SRC Tour to attend the USA NASC National Conference places both PASTA and the CCC firmly in the public eye as “the champions of Australian Student Representative Councils” supporting the nation’s youth and future leaders whilst at the same time providing a unique opportunity for PASTA and the CCC to network the USA and all other international SRC movements as an official part of NASSP and its affiliates.

B. Establishment of a strategic partnership with NASSP

1. The SRC-USA Tour each year will permit contact with a national forum of over 2000 delegates representing all USA educational districts and sponsoring institutions of higher education and an opportunity to raise the profile of PASTA and its projects in the USA;

2. Contact with NASSP will give us the opportunity to negotiate a mutually beneficial partnership both related to the introduction of the CSC Awards Program to the USA and other joint ventures such as the first 2000 International SRC Conference and all future conferences which are to be held in the host city of the Olympics every four years;

PASTA Committee

The success of PASTA to date rests with the energy and vision of our committee and it is with regret that we accept the resignation, through ill health, of Colin Ellis our Vice-President Primary Schools. Colin has been a passionate supporter of SRCs and student School Parliaments and we wish him a quick and complete recovery.

1998/99 SRC USA TOUR

The 1998 SRC USA Tour has become a reality and an outstanding success. Charles Kingston (PASTA Vice-President National/International Affairs) provided the dream; Ken Page (our Tour Coordinator) and I made that dream a reality by ensuring that this tour would be the tour of a life time and the first of what will now be an annual event. To Jeanne Bow and her husband Graham, Ken’s wife Sue and my wife Christine go the many thousands of thanks for ensuring that the touring students had their every concern and request quickly addressed, making this, the first SRC USA Tour, the wonderfully successful tour it was.

Plans are already underway for the 1999 trip to Minneapolis, Minnesota. If preliminary indicators are anything to go by, this Conference is set to be bigger and better than even the one held in Derby this year.

If you will be in years 9, 10, 11 or 12 in 1999 and are interested in being considered as a delegate for the 2nd National SRC Tour to Minneapolis, Minnesota, contact Ken Page by:

Phone 02 4396 6485
Fax 02 4393 1157
Email suepage@ozemail.com.au
for further details (including an application form).

Ralph Murray, President
THE MAGIC OF 98
A DREAM FULFILLED

At 10:23 am on Thursday, 23rd July, 1998, thirty triumphant students and six even happier advisers arrived back at Sydney's International Airport after one of the most exciting excursions that any-one could ever wish to be a part of: the first attendance of an Australian delegation at an American National Secondary Student Conference.

The planning for this trip had begun some 15 months before in March 1997 when Ralph Murray and Ken Page suggested at a PASTA meeting that PASTA investigate the possibility of finally making Charles Kingston's dream of a group of Australians attending this conference become a reality. A number of people in America were contacted to see if they were prepared to accept a group of Aussies at their National Conference. These included Bobbie Evans (1998 Conference Co-ordinator, Derby, Kansas), Donna Clarke (National Conference Co-ordinator, Reston, Virginia) and Mary Jo Patterson (National Leadership Program Director, Reston, Virginia). Their acceptance of PASTA's proposals meant that we could proceed to the next step - advertising for students to apply to attend the 62nd National Conference to be held in Derby, Kansas in July, 1998.

NASPAC IV (held in July, 1997) became the launch vehicle for this momentous event. One of the workshop sessions at this conference was devoted entirely to the preparation and planning of the itinerary for this tour. Thanks must be given to the many students and adults who freely contributed their ideas and suggestions at this time. The outcomes of this workshop and further discussions with the American Co-ordinators resulted in PASTA sponsoring a 30 day tour that would include attendance at the National Conference in Derby, Kansas, a tour through South West America taking in the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas, attendance at one of two National Leadership Camps, a week in Anaheim visiting Disneyland, Knotts Berry Farm, Universal Studios and Tijuana, Mexico, and a 3 day stopover in Honolulu.

Well it's been a long day already. I've been up since 5 am and I'm feeling tired. Hope to have a great time - Jody

By the end of the trip we will have made some unforgettable friendships - Heidi

I have not had a winkle of sleep and the funny thing is I'm not tired. The sunlime morning was amazing. The clouds gave the effect that there was a bushfire in the sky - Kylie

I can still remember saying 166 days to go. Now we're here. Thinking also of Charles and how much he must wish he were here... his dream and our reality - Jeanne

I guess it didn't seem real until now. Nervous, tired, excited, scared - I'm just a mixture of emotions. Can't wait until we are on solid ground again - Tracey

For me it is still a bit unreal. I'm beginning to wonder if ever going to sink in - Jody

I can't believe we are all awake again. It's only 3 am (Aus time). Everyone seems to be having a great time and the excitement is still running high - Sue

August 1998
The Australian delegation is like one big family - Tamara

Today has finally arrived - Wednesday, 24th June. I can tell just by looking around that this is going to be one of the best months of my life - Cherie

I've worked very hard for this trip and I'm very excited! But nervous!! It's going to be a great trip - Lea

A big thank you to Sharon and Shelley for all their help in informing us about what to expect at the conference - Ralph

It's finally arrived and I'm very excited. I'm a little worried about the workshop but it's only one day. I've got the rest of the trip to think about - Fiona

Well, we're finally here and just this morning it was hard to believe that I'm actually going to America. That's pretty cool - Holle

OK we're just about to leave. Oh well can't turn back now. I just can't wait - Stephanie

Thank God. The big day has finally arrived - Aida

OK, the little plane on the TV screen seems to be moving horribly slowly. The sun is setting and the cabin is stuffy. Ahhh, the life in economy class! It's not too bad, at least now. I can't wait til we get to LA - Natalie

Students wishing to attend were asked to apply in writing stating their leadership experience and how they thought they would be able to use the experience gained from this trip when they returned to Australia. From the 54 students who applied, 43 were eventually selected to be part of this exciting venture. Of these, 30 finally made the decision that they would be able to meet the costs involved both in time away from school and family, as well as the monetary costs for the tour. And so began an intense period of letter writing, fund raising, clothes buying etc. Meetings were held in April (at the Joint Council rooms, Leichhardt) and early June (at Bathurst High School) to get to know as many of the students and their parents as possible. These meetings were the only opportunity for the whole group to get together before their departure from Sydney on the 24th June, 1998 bound for Derby, Kansas and the 62nd National Leadership Conference.

After travelling for some 25 hours (or more in the case of some students), the group arrived at Wichita airport where they were greeted by 200-300 Derby High School students and parents yelling and screaming “Aussie, Aussie”. You would have thought that some famous rock star had arrived. The next week was indeed ‘magical’.

These pretzels are making me thirsty. It is 5 pm Aust time and pitch black outside - Nathan

I have dreamt of going to America since I was 2 years old and now my dream is coming true - Sarah

I look out the window and see two or three stars. I am tired and need sleep - Rebecca

I guess I haven't actually realised that I'm actually going across the world, but the great thing is, I feel really confident that this is going to be the trip of a lifetime - Hayley

It's only 57 minutes to LA and I can't wait. The view from the plane has been beautiful this morning, especially the clouds. I hope the meals are better on the way home - Jay

So far the trip is great. If the rest of it is as good then we're in for a really good time. I never realised how far away America actually was - it seemed so close before we left. I can't wait to set foot on American soil and the most exciting part to start - Shane

By Crickey what a day. 36 Aussies on board ... en masse!! Bit of a shock for us Kiwis but I hope you feel we're bearing up OK all the same. Have a great trip guys - Alec, Flight Attendant, NZ 14
The airport at LA is something else. As we taxied in we had about 6 or 7 planes following us about every 100 metres or so down the runway. A really huge and busy place - Ken

I've had a lot of firsts today - my first plane flight and my first trip out of the country. It's a wonderful feeling, 10 kms of the ground going 900 km/hr. It's awesome - Tammy

Up, up and away. What an experience. What an adventure. What a great bunch of kids - Chris

We arrived last night and had a big surprise waiting for us at the airport. There were about 200 people there to welcome and cheer us. It was really great. I met my host family and they were really really lovely. I can tell we are going to have the best time - Tracey

The welcome at the airport was unbelievable. There was a big yellow banner with my name on it. The atmosphere is just the best - it's like State Conference times 100 or so - Hayley

Hollie and I met our host family. They are great to say the least. The basement which we are staying in is luxurious. It just started, but I don't want this week to end - Jenny

Although the conference itself didn't start until the 27th, the Derby people went out of their way to make us welcome. Pre-conference events such as the visit to the Cosmosphere in Hutchison and Cowtown in Wichita were appreciated by the whole group. The conference itself was an exciting and exhilarating time. It began with 2000 delegates being entertained by a laser light show and ended with an invitation to all (including Australia) to attend the 63rd National Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota in July, 1999. In between were meetings, workshops, a visit to the zoo, parties, Oklahoma hellos, dinners, dances, Wal-mart, block parties, motivational speakers, Mr Phil, Wichita State University, new people, swapping, formal ceremonies, flag presentations, Koala cuddles, friendships, and a host of other events and people too numerous to mention. Among the most treasured moments would have to be getting a standing ovation after the presentation of 'We are Australian' at the General Session and seeing some 3000 American people stand to honour

The State Room at Derby High School looks excellent, great decorations ... lunch today at the Presbyterian Church is another wonderful example of Derby hospitality - Jeanne

Oh my goodness, it's just so American - milk and cookies in the kitchen - Jody

You guys are so much fun!! You wore me out yesterday. I hope you had fun at the Cosmosphere. I'm learning more Australian sayings and differences in lifestyles every time I'm with you. I'm trying hard to learn everyone's name, I'm close to knowing them all. I can't wait for what lies ahead - Shelley (Australian State Guide, Derby High School)

Food here is so much fun. The conference is so well organised as so many people are committed. I think I might invest in some sleep as I'm exhausted - Ashleigh

Sometimes I forget we are not in Australia. When you get used to the small differences, it's quite similar - Heidi

We have been preparing for the conference for two years. Everything is great. Rebecca is staying with us. It's so neat to see how different and alike we really are. Hope you all have a great time in Derby and America - Mindy (State Guide, Derby High School)
I'm totally blown away by the effort, confidence and entertainment Kansas put on display today. The USA has imprinted an overwhelming positive image on me - Michelle

The opening session was amazing. I had tears of excitement rolling down my face. Your faces said it all - you were blown away. It's only begun and it will get better - Shelley (Australian State Guide, Derby High School)

Sensational, awesome, absolutely fantastic. Another wonderful day. How much better can it get - Christine

Today was great and my presentation ran well. It was a laugh to listen to the Americans try to talk Aussie. It was great the way they tried to guess the meaning of some of our phrases - Kylie

Our appearance at the general session was an unqualified success. Everyone has said how wonderful it was. It makes me wonder what we were all so worried about a day or two ago - Ken

The canyon is amazing. I knew what to expect but nevertheless I was still blown away by its size and beauty - Cherie

the presentation of the Australian flag at the candle lighting ceremony.

The conclusion of the conference saw the group (amidst many tears from friends and host families) board a coach to begin the second stage of the tour - the trip to the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas. A picnic lunch at Oklahoma City, doing the 'Pony' at a parking lot in Shamrock, Texas, hotels in Amarillo and Albuquerque, Indian Trading Posts, a cadillac burial ground, a fourth of July parade, a visit to a local hospital, Doris and Dave, the magnificent Grand Canyon scenery, and Hoover Dam were all added to our store of memories. Upon our arrival at Las Vegas we were greeted by half a dozen of the students whom we had met at the conference. They had arranged to show us the sights of the 'city that never sleeps'. What started out as a group of about 35 soon grew to about 70 as more and more of the local students joined the procession. Starting at a bus stop outside the Circus Circus Casino, our tour of the strip began at the Coke Factory, progressed to New York, New York (where the group rode the roller coaster) and Caesar's Palace, before finishing with the long walk back to Circus Circus. While some of the group managed to get a good night's sleep before boarding the coach to the airport and the third leg of the tour, others only managed 1 or 2 hours (if that). Another load of memories to store away.

It was at this point that the group split into two parties to attend the leadership camps, with half of the group proceeding to Lake Tahoe, Nevada while the remaining half went on to

I have to say that I am really enjoying myself with these Aussies. You make me laugh. You are a great bunch - Doris (Bus Tour Guide)

The Canyon is spectacular with deep gorges and smaller canyons going everywhere. The vistas change so quickly that it is impossible to see them all - Ken

I knew the Grand Canyon was big but Oh My God. The Moqui Lodge has been pretty good and I've actually got some sleep - Catherine

Charles met us in the lobby with three friends - and so started an amazing night on the town. We hopped a bus uptown to the Coca-Cola factory, then across to New York, New York for a roller coaster ride. We finished at Caesar's Palace with a group of about 40 extra kids showing us around - Ralph

Vegas really lives up to its name. The main street is like one big party 24 hours a day. It was so much fun inside casinos, shops and on roller coasters. The word that comes to mind instantly is extravagant - Michael

Before we left, my mum told me to expect the unexpected. Did anyone realise that we'd be overcome with the emotion of losing new friends. - Natalie
You would not believe what 12 hours of sleep can do. It works wonders for the human body and mind. I now have enough energy to walk straight - Tamara
Well, I've done this twice now, just when all of us feel nice and relaxed we've had to leave behind our new friends. I wouldn't have said I'd feel this way today but I cried for so long. This week gave me so much more than I expected. Last night was amazing - Carlin

I am so tired I am going to try and get some sleep because of last night - Sarah

Lake Tahoe was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen... the final banquet was last night - it was fun. We all got dressed up and the guys all sang to us and then escorted us to dinner - Heidi

It has been wonderful getting to know a few of you. Each year for me has been special for a different reason - this year part of that reason is the Aussies - Chris (JC, Lake Tahoe)

Australians have a spirit and pride that I envy. I hope all of you have been impacted by your visit to America because I have been impacted and impressed by you. Please come back some day - Randy (Co-Director, Lake Tahoe)

Outlaw Ranch, South Dakota. While the venues and experiences of these two groups were obviously different, both camps attempted to give the students attending instruction in a range of skills. These included communication, problem solving, planning, goal setting, organisational evaluation and leadership skills. As well as these, there was time for fun with mini-olympics, hoe downs, talent quests and a formal dinner as part of the program. Again, friendships were formed that will continue now that everyone is back home. All too soon it was time to once more board a bus to the airport for the final legs of the trip - Anaheim and Honolulu. Breakfast at Anaheim consisted of a doughnut each (for those that were quick enough before they ran out) and a cup of coffee or hot chocolate. In spite of the poor nutritional value of such a meal, it seemed to supply enough energy to keep everyone able to shop, go on rides, go on more rides, admire the homes of the rich and famous, find the stars of the Stars, do even more shopping, see the fireworks, and still be awake enough to order Chinese take-away at 2 in the morning. The many shows and street presentations at both Disneyland and Universal Studios were worth the price of admission on their own without all of the added benefits such as rides, food, and shopping that these places offered. Tijuana (and the factory outlets that were visited on the way back to LA) allowed full rein to be given to those of the group seeking a bargain. As the coach driver was heard to say: “Talk about born to shop!” The visit to Foshay School gave a different view of what life in American schools was like, while most felt that they would have liked more time to explore the many wonders of the Science museum near the University of Southern California.

Well today has been a blast. It has been fun and our groups are really starting to bond. The activities are heaps of fun and not as formal which tends to bring us closer together - Jay

Aussie, Aussie Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi. I'll be singing that in the bathroom for the rest of the week. The pony song won't make any sense to the people in San Diego, but I'll do it anyway. James and Ken are two of the craziest people I have ever met. Thank you for bringing your culture to Lake Tahoe - Ricardo (JC, Lake Tahoe)

All our councils have bonded really well. We had some JC gifts. This was really inspirational. Then came the bonfire. This was definitely the highlight of the day. Councils chose appropriate songs to perform. We sang “Time of your life” and we all cried - Hayley

Today there was a shift in leadership from the ACs to the JCs. Some of our students really enjoyed a meditation and relaxation session - Leaders did lots today on problem solving and leadership - Jeanne

Today has been really fun. I was a bit tired this morning but that all went away when we started doing Council meetings - Michael
The formal dinner was very exciting - Fiona

The world becomes a smaller place when relationships are formed and friendships made like those we've seen this past week. We are many - but we are one. Thanks for all your contributions. It is obvious to me that your delegation understands all about leading from the heart - Jane (Co-Director, Lake Tahoe)

Today we went to Tijuana, Mexico. I don't think I have ever had as much fun in my life as trying to bargain with the people there. The only problem was that we were only there for three hours. After that we headed for the factory outlets (Levi, Calvin Klein, Nike, Guess). These were all fairly cheap which is probably why I spent so much - Paul

Disneyland was great. Main street was beautiful and the separate towns were cool ... I finally got to meet my hero Mickey Mouse - Stephanie

This is just the best time of my life. It is breaking my heart having to leave - Monique

As soon as we got the hang of haggling and started to enjoy it, we were on our way to cheaper memorabilia. As the group shuffled through the shops we were constantly bombarded with proposals ... we board the bus loaded with bargains from stores - Rebekah

We've only just stopped shopping. It's going to be so strange not seeing everyone everyday. I have made so many friends both from Australia and across the world on this trip - Kate

Finally the end is in sight. This has been a once in a lifetime experience and the group has formed bonds which will never be broken ... I feel as if a period of my life has come to a close, yet I also feel renewed motivation. I'm ready to go back to school and make a difference - Natalie

We have gone from 30 individuals out to do ourselves proud, to one group knowing how to do each other proud, and that is a magnificent feat for such a short period of time - Hayley

REMEMBER: PASTA membership fees are now due. Please note that because of our affiliation with Connect magazine, fees have been increased as follows to cover the cost of this magazine to our members:

- Ordinary member $50
- Student/Concessional $25
- Overseas members $50
- Institutions $80
- Corporations $100
RETURN TO:

5. Other (eg. venues, categories, transport, costs) ____________________

4. Workshop topics and/or performance areas __________________________

3. Keynote speakers and/or performing artists __________________________

2. Publicity and promotion material ______________________________________

1. A possible theme and/or logo __________________________________________

C. Attached are a few ideas on:

Conference

1. A theme. We are interested in (check all that apply to you):

- [ ] Electronic
- [ ] Physical
- [ ] Medical
- [ ] Psychological
- [ ] Social
- [ ] Cultural

Phone: __________________________

Address: __________________________

Organization: __________________________

Position: __________________________

Name: __________________________

A contact phone number is: __________________________

Exprssion of Interest Form 2000 Conference

Send your completed copy to us so we can move ahead and keep you involved in the process. If you want to really show your interests and provide us with the information we need, we would like to hear from you before the end of the year.

Planning Your Future

Take part in:

2000 Olympic Committee

Behind this major cultural Olympic year event is a huge potential for benefitting from the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Participation in the Olympic Games is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and can provide a unique marketing and promotional platform. To participate, you must be prepared to invest and distribute a dossier of a score or handfuls of promotional materials and product to the Olympic athletes and officials. Not only will you be showing your support of the Olympic Movement, you will also be demonstrating to the world that your company is a partner in the Olympic Movement.

SFC OLYMPIC

CREATING AN INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION AROUND AUSTRALIA

Participation in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games is an opportunity for businesses, organizations, and individuals to be part of a unique and significant event. By involving yourself, you can participate in the Olympic Movement and contribute to the success of the Games. This is a chance to be part of the Olympic experience and to make a difference in the lives of others.

New Millennium

Expressions in the New Millennium

Sydney 2000

SFC Conference

1st International

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I wish to apply to join/renew my membership for the year ending 30th June, 1999.
Talkback Classroom

Giving Young People a Voice

OK, so doing a pre-record was winning it slightly, but the thought of our voices going un-edited, uncensored and protected from the world by a mere seven second delay was nearly more than Jilly, Tim and I could bear. I imagine that ‘Eltham High and Terry Laidler Unplugged’ was also particularly frightening for the big knobs at the ABC who thought that maybe we couldn’t cut it. As it turns out, by the end of that forty minutes we were only just warming up.

Background

Since early this year I have been working on the Eltham High team for Talkback Classroom (TBC), a project being run by the ABC. The project is sponsored by Telstra, the Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra and the ABC, and is coordinated by Steve Cutting. The aim of TBC is to get students out of the classroom and into the field to learn more about chosen issues and more about how the media, particularly radio, works as an industry. Students choose a particular issue to investigate, and present two radio programs on 3LO and ABC regional radio, showcasing what they have learned and gained from the experience. The project concludes with a live interview on Triple J with a politician who is involved in the area of the chosen issue. The ABC is promoting this project as a chance for students to have a publicised opinion, and an important role within ABC radio, interviewing prominent politicians. Guests on the program last year included Cheryl Kernot, Peter Reith, Tim Fischer and Judy Moylan.

Our Programs

As the Talkback Classroom team from Eltham High (in Victoria), Jilly Charlwood, Tim Lisle-Williams and I, Kate Mildenhall, are exploring current issues surrounding Aboriginal Affairs. Our research will culminate with an interview with the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs - Senator John Herron. So far we’ve been involved with the Wik Forum for Youth at the Melbourne Town Hall, the Nillumbik Gayip, interviews with leading Aboriginal spokespeople such as Wayne Atkinson and Gary Nelson, visits to the Federal Court case on the Yorta Yorta land claim, and finally we camped out on Yorta Yorta tribal land in the Barmah Forest and talked to some local Aboriginal people to see first-hand the land that is in dispute.

Our first program was pre-recorded, but was still an exciting first time experience of radio. Being in the studio and trying to be articulate is something I suppose we will eventually get used to. One aspect of the discussion with Terry Laidler was some pre-recorded ‘actualities’ of us interviewing various Aboriginal spokespeople. We were given the responsibility of finding appropriate parts from more than three hours of tape, and so felt that we had become an integral part of the team - as journalists, editors and producers. Later this year we will have the opportunity to interview Senator Herron on Triple J. This should be an exciting interview for us and for listeners, and we hope that it will make good, controversial and interesting radio.

A Learning Project

Initially we thought our role was to research and report, acting in the role of ‘pseudo-journalist’. However, we’ve since realised that this project is all about our learning experience. It is learning about Aboriginal history and current issues, and also learning about the media, and the role young people are often forced to play in this major industry.

Education about Aboriginal history, culture and current issues is scarce at both the primary and secondary levels in Australia. There is and always has been reluctance to teach Australian children about the original owners of our land and the cultural genocide of the Aboriginal people that was committed by European invaders. Because of this lack of teaching and learning, generations of black and white Australians have grown up ignorant of the history of our country. This is something Jilly, Tim and I have become passionate about - making sure that as students we have the opportunity to learn about our Aboriginal heritage. In fact we think it is compulsory learning, because our own recent experiences and learning has taught us that the future of reconciliation lies not in 10-point plans and court decisions, but in the education of young Australians to promote understanding and tolerance.

This project has opened our eyes. As Tim said when we were talking about our understanding of Aboriginal issues: “Before I was angry; now I’m pissed off!” We are excited about our interview with Herron. It is not only an opportunity to interrogate a politician and do it on the hottest radio station in town, it is a sign that we are being listened to, and being heard by people who have a great deal of influence over the general public. It is comforting to know that the media are finally giving air time not just to big-mouthed Queensland politicians, and wise old adults - but to young people, the wise old adults of the future: people who can make a difference.

One of the down-sides to this project is seeing behind the scenes of a major media organisation: realising that the ‘natural’ bush sounds behind so many interviews are actually painfully pre-recorded at a totally different location; knowing that we can only ask certain questions of government employees so that they are not forced to indicate their opinions on government policies; and finally understanding that ultimately
it is not about what we think is important, but what makes ‘good’ radio. These were all eye-opening and somewhat disappointing experiences. They were, however, experiences that have taught us to be wary of the media, and to not trust all that we are told - knowledge that is essential in our sensationalised society.

**A Voice That is Listened To**

I am looking forward to the rest of the year, being part of what I think is an important program for students. Here is an outlet where we not only can have a voice, but a voice that is authoritative and listened to. We are given the right and the responsibility of interviewing prominent politicians, and are given a chance to prove ourselves and intelligent, articulate and confident adolescents, who play an important role in society and therefore in the media. I think the ABC and Steve Cutting should be congratulated for TBC, and for giving students a chance to learn about current issues, themselves and the huge part of our lives which is the media industry.

Being students, and classified as the ‘younger generation’ is not as liberating as the general public would have us believe. We influence the world more through our tastes in fashion and music than our ideas on politics and human rights. And this isn’t because we don’t have ideas on politics and human rights and many other ‘grown-up’ issues - it’s because more often than not we are not listened to, or taken seriously. For too long young people have put up with the stereotyped images that exist - we live in limbo, somewhere between the freedom of our childhood and the responsibilities of adulthood - and it is about time that we are seen as active participants in decision making at a national level. I have to admit that things are looking up though, and projects such as Talkback Classroom are designed to give students an outlet to voice their opinions.

*Kate Mildenhall*
*Eltham High School*

The Talkback Classroom (TBC) is giving students insights into one of the most powerful mediums in the world. Sponsored by Telstra, the Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra and the ABC, TBC gives students the chance to conduct interviews with prominent people either from the comfort of their own classrooms, or in an ABC studio.

TBC features on three ABC networks: Triple J, 3LO in Melbourne, and ABC regional radio. The programs are broadcast live, run for 20 to 25 minutes, and are heard monthly on each network.

Project coordinator Stephen Cutting says students who participate gain an understanding of how the medium works and, in particular, how the three different ABC radio networks function. Students also develop some of the skills of an investigative journalist, learn specific communication skills relating to radio, and better understand the processes involved in creating a radio program on a particular theme.

“We expect students to also develop interview techniques,” Cutting says. “They get the chance to research an important area of government decision-making which may affect their lives, as well as becoming aware of the importance of active citizenship by better understanding how Australian society works and how they can have a say in the future.”

Officers working with the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) provide curriculum material, including on-line research help, and contribute to two professional development days for schools taking part. The PEO also assists in getting politicians to participate in the Triple J radio forums.

The Telstra grant enabled Cutting to buy specialist equipment so that live outside broadcasts can be produced in the schools. All Triple J interviews, however, take place in the ABC studios.

“Although the project is intended to cover a number of curriculum areas, such as media studies, English, studies of society and environment and so on, it has been deliberately developed with a strong emphasis on civics,” Cutting says. “This doesn’t mean it is a civics project per se, rather that its central theme revolves around important national issues and decision making.”

The schools taking part in the project this year are responsible for presenting one radio segment on each of the three networks. These must be related to an investigation of issues on a major area or portfolio of government decision making.

A case study on the environment, for instance, involved an interview with federal Environment Minister Senator Robert Hill on Triple J last month, while other schools are preparing programs for 3LO focusing on a particular environmental issue, as well as interviews with noted conservationists or others involved in the area on regional radio.

“The Triple J segment provides a forum for students to interview federal politicians and reaches more than 550,000 people - mostly in the 10-29 age group,” Cutting says. “The Sydney morning show presenter introduces the segment shortly after the 10 am news and then hands over to the students.”
...As most of the politicians who take part are either ministers or shadow ministers, Cutting says the students selected must be well informed and confident communicators.

...The TBC segment gives students an opportunity to create a coherent program (as opposed to the one-off interview on Triple J) on an issue or a number of issues related to the area assigned to the school. Students are encouraged to respond to the challenge in creative and original ways and are expected to make statements and express their own views. Although they go to air live, the programs may include pre-recorded elements such as vox pops and fragments of interviews.

On regional radio, the segment goes to air from 10.40 am to 11.00 am and is facilitated via a live ISDN link from the classroom to the ABC studio. Those being interviewed are connected by phone.

"This program continues the portfolio approach but has an emphasis on students interviewing high-profile people related to the field, but no politicians," Cutting says. "Last year, for example, students interviewed Dr Phillip Nieuze about euthanasia."

While the format for regional radio may feature broadcast class discussions with up to seven students taking part, most revolve around the same interview format as runs on Triple J.

...Ten schools are taking part in the project this year and in each school students are involved in planning and conducting interviews using a hands-free phone. A number of 'broadcast quality' recordings are made as preparation for the live broadcast.

At Alexandra Secondary College, Telstra supplied almost $23,000 mainly for equipment to establish ISDN links and meet the telephone costs of participating schools, and to "enable young people in rural Victoria to have both a voice and the ear of decision and opinion makers," says Dr Dallas Isaacs, Telstra's learn-IT national manager.

Students at the college were among the first to contribute to the Global Classroom's 'global voices' page on the World Wide Web using real audio technology. The page offers sample recordings of interviews conducted for the project.

Meantime, the ABC's web page (www.abc.net.au/learn/talkback) allows students to access interviews and even gives them the opportunity to feed in questions during live interviews. So while a program may be produced in Melbourne, Western Australian students in Perth can still submit questions.

Cutting says an interview planned with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer in August will be broadcast live over the internet and students in five schools around the world will be participating. Although the project is located in Victoria, there has been a trail run in Adelaide as well and Cutting hopes that next year schools across Australia will be involved.

Stephen Cutting can be contacted on 0417 35 0081

From Australian Educator, Winter 1998

Alex Farrar from MacRobertson Girls High School: Her forthcoming program includes an interview with the Prime Minister

August 1998
On the 20th of July, the SRC of Balwyn High School hosted an inter-SRC conference for members of Student Representative Councils. The conference was one of the first of its kind in the area, organised solely by students. The issues discussed related to student democracy and student participation within schools. The student voice is one of the most valuable things students feel they have. Where there were examples of schools frustrating the student voice, reports came that students in turn became frustrated.

The Hon. David Davis MLC, representing the Premier, opened the conference and started discussion on the structure of SRCs. The Hon. John Brumby, Leader of the Opposition was the next guest speaker to lend support to the conference, looking at the bigger picture of SRCs and how they fit into the world we live in. Connect's very own Roger Holdsworth addressed the conference on effective participation in student democracy and Ross Appleby from the Department of Education spoke briefly on how to carry ideas and plans from the conference into action within their own school, and looked at the plans to form a state-wide SRC.

The keynote speaker of the day, Rod Quantock, was thrilled to be a part of a conference focusing on democracy for students, citing hopes that one day we would finally have a real government. In his usual brilliant style, Rod entertained whilst discussing the importance of promoting democracy in schools.

It is clear from this and other conferences, that the students are consistent on being heard. Students' opinions should be regarded as one of the most important, students said, because it is they who are most affected by decisions made. Conference participants argued that students had the right to take part in decisions made on their behalf. The strong voice of the conference stated that SRCs were essential to the running of a school, and as elected representatives of the students had the right and the skill to represent students at all levels of school decision making.

Many students were appalled when informed of schools without an SRC, and Principals who believe they represent the students. Whether the Principals live up to this assertion was considered immaterial by the attenders, who decided unanimously that the students should be represented by students.

For the most part, the conference yielded no immediate solutions to these concerns, but has proven more valuable to students in other ways. Students reported taking great delight in meeting other Student Councils, sharing ideas and solutions to individual problems, networking, learning of other SRC structures and making new friends.

The general consensus was that many more of these conferences need to be run for the students to network and find support in other students and recommendations to this effect have been made to the government. Suggestions of establishing a Regional and/or a State SRC to connect Student Councils in a more formal manner were received with much enthusiasm.

Some students from the conference, eager to see this energy and determination reach the next step, have begun coordinating an Eastern Metropolitan Region SRC, as a result of the overwhelming support for such a concept. The idea will be to provide support, share ideas and solutions with other SRCs in the area. The long-term plan, that also received overwhelming support from the conference, was to build toward a state-wide SRC.

The true value of this conference lies not in any project that the Government can carry out, but in giving students more opportunities to voice their opinions and network between other schools.

What needs to be done to link SRCs across schools for a sharing of ideas and the provision of support?

David Mould
Balwyn High School SRC

Proposals from the Conference

The following is the collation of proposals from the participants to increase student participation in co-curricular activities and in student democracy. There are also proposals for increasing the power and the value of student democracy within schools.

- Each school should be required to have at least one seat on the school council reserved expressly for a representative of the student body.
- The SRC should be present on each decision making body within the school.
- Schools lacking a student representative council should be encouraged to form one.
- Projects need to be implemented to help SRCs that feel they are dominated by teacher influence.
- The SRC needs to be viewed by students as a student organisation free from teacher control.
- Schools need to have more respect for their SRC, offering them more time to listen and greater access to resources and facilities.
- Awards should be given by the school and by the state, to those in the SRC who are noted for longstanding service, dedication and achievement.
- Students need more incentives to participate in school democracy.
- A joint SRC training camp.
- A web page based on student democracy and SRCs in particular, with options to communicate with others and share information.
- A magazine for SRCs to communicate through - or if every SRC was to subscribe to Connect.
- More conferences like "Our Future - Our Way" need to be held. This proposal was almost unanimously recommended.
- A statewide or at least regional SRC needs to be set up. Most proposals recommended either state or regional SRCs, but many also suggested both working in concert. This proposal was almost unanimously recommended.
Conference Evaluation - Ideas for Improving Student Conferences

Student Views
At the end of the conference, participants handed up an evaluation sheet, commenting on the running of the day. The overwhelming majority of participants thoroughly enjoyed the conference and urged a repeat of it. Here are their views divided into praise and criticisms. Some comments in one category may be directly contradicted in the next, and this is because in those cases, opinion was divided with no clear majority.

Praise
- Conference gave the opportunity to share ideas, air problems, network with other SRCs. It was interesting, informative and exciting.
- It was great not having teachers controlling it, which gave students the freedom to speak their minds.
- Politicians were interesting and thought provoking.
- Rod Quantock was brilliant. Funny, evocative and sincere.
- Statewide SRC is an excellent idea.
- More conferences like this need to be run.
- It was good to get involved in real issues as well.
- The session on discovering how other SRCs are structured and what they achieved was really valuable.

Criticisms
- Sausages were badly cooked and some tasted of Pepsi.
- Heating was a problem.
- Discussion groups often lacked focus or direction. Directions given were vague.
- Political bias showed in the arrangement of speakers.
- Politicians were boring/irrelevant.
- Most issues were irrelevant.
- Issues too narrow.
- No means to act after discussion.
- External issues e.g. Racism should be left out of the conference.
- More schools needed to be present.
- The day ran too long.
- All speakers should have a question time at the end of their address, or question time should go for longer.

Organising Group
The Conference Management Group felt that the conference was a huge success. The overwhelming response informed us that the conference was worthwhile and should definitely be conducted again. For this reason, and to prepare a report for the Balwyn High School SRC, the management has compiled this report on the running of the conference, with suggestions for improving it, to aid any future conference of this style.

Set-Up
- Tables were too close and crowded. People felt that they had little room to work in, afraid of kicking the people in front of them.
- Due to a power failure, heating was inactive, making working uncomfortable. Whilst this was unavoidable it did have an effect on the participants.
- In future, a venue should be selected that is smaller unless more people turn up to another conference than at this one. Some felt the size of the room contributed to a feeling of isolation and prevented people getting to know one another. The size of the hall caused some sound problems and a smaller one would be preferential. A carpeted floor would have been better for the overall environment.
- Music should not be played during workshops. We experimented with this to create a more relaxed atmosphere, but for the most part it was just distracting.

During the conference
- Discussion groups require a facilitator or an appointed group leader, who has instructions not to dominate the conversation but keep the group functioning well. We found that without this, some groups tended to wander too far from the topic.
- Discussion topics need to be kept in tighter focus, with more specific objectives. Our best recommendation is to share different topics around the conference and request that they produce something at the end of that particular workshop. As it was, topics were left a little vague and some students felt detached from the subject after a while. A tighter focus on topics may also have prevented the noticeable lag in enthusiasm after lunchtime.
- Having politicians as guest speakers was a debated topic. Whilst some students received them very well, others did not. It was decided that in future, any politicians should be briefed better on the conference material and requested to speak more specifically on the issues of student democracy and SRCs within schools.

continued page 31

August 1998
HELPING CHILDREN RESOLVE CONFLICT

Children at Currambena School have the language and skills to negotiate, and don't see aggression or force as a reasonable way to resolve a problem. They are consciously aware of using appropriate ways of communicating and strive to resolve conflict without violence. Teachers, parents and others have observed that these skills have contributed to high levels of self-esteem in these children.

For many years, the staff have been using 'Conflict Resolution' skills and strategies highly regarded in the commercial world to improve adult communication skills. The teachers have adapted the process to the school setting with children from the age of three. The children are immersed in an environment that teaches, supports and models the use of these skills on a daily basis. They are encouraged to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and its consequences.

Since its establishment as a self-funding parent cooperative alternative school in 1969, Currambena Pre-school and Primary in Sydney has sought to stimulate educational thought and practice. While recognising the importance of supporting the social and emotional development of its children as an integral part of the school curriculum, Currambena also appreciates that conflict is a natural part of human interaction. Conflict arises over misunderstandings, unexpressed and unmet needs, different values and perceptions. At Currambena, conflicts become opportunities for cooperative and creative problem-solving.

Throughout their time at the school, the children are taught to develop conflict resolution skills. These include identifying and expressing their feelings, speaking clearly for themselves, active listening, interpreting body language, separating the problem from the person, mediation, clarifying, questioning, negotiating, reflecting and reframing. In addition to the children using these strategies on an individual basis, they also have the opportunity to apply them at a class and whole-school context in weekly class and school meetings. The older group also investigate, study and discuss national and international conflicts and strategies being (and not being) used.

The acquisition of these skills empowers the children to address their own needs while still respecting the needs of each individual. If support is required, the children are encouraged to seek the assistance of a teacher who acts as a mediator for the children. Problems are dealt with immediately and a resolution that results in a 'win-win' approach is sought. When both people win, both become committed to the solution and relationships grow stronger. The result has been very positive.

The Conflict Resolution Program at Currambena is also closely integrated with the Protective Behaviours Program. This is a NSW program intended to empower children with skills to protect themselves against threats of danger, including physical and emotional danger. Research has shown that protective behaviour strategies are more likely to be successful with children who are strong communicators. Effective communication skills and in particular the ability to resolve conflict peacefully are critical components of social harmony. It is of great concern that aggressive behaviour is a major problem confronting school communities.

Because of the level of outside interest and in light of increasing social difficulties being faced by some schools across Australia, the Currambena school community decided to develop a teacher video resource to assist the broader educational community to implement this positive approach to conflict resolution and to help promote the establishment of more harmonious school environments.

References
The video, entitled: 'Conflict Resolution: The Cooperative Alternative', produced in conjunction with Television Multimedia, was released in July 1998. For further information, please contact Currambena School on (02) 9427 0644.

Carol Perry
Teacher and part-time Coordinator
Currambena School
205 Longueville Road
Lane Cove NSW 2066

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Vol 7 No 6 (Issue 66) August 1998
PO Box 365, Caulfield East 3145

Connect 112:
SECONDARY EDUCATION AND YOUTH AT THE CROSSROADS

The fourth UNESCO-ACEID (Asia-Pacific Centre for Educational Innovation for Development) International Conference will be held from 10-13 November 1998 in Bangkok, Thailand.

"The well-being of its youth is critical to any and every society - for the present and into the future. The criteria for determining well-being are principally the task of youth - in partnership with others: the management of well-being is a foremost task of education - in partnership with others.

"This Conference is being organised to undertake an in-depth study into what education needs to become to empower young people for adolescence and adulthood into the 21st century.

"To undertake this study, two principal themes are addressed, namely:

• the well-being of youth, the threats to it, and the ways of making well-being a reality; and
• the innovations required in education, especially secondary education, to advance and to ensure well-being."

Further information from:

Rupert Maclean
Fourth UNESCO-ACEID
International Conference
UNESCO-ACEID
PO Box 967, Trakanong Post Office
Bangkok 10110 THAILAND
Ph: (66 2) 391 0577 Ext 112/167;
Fax: (66 2) 391 0866
Email: aceid@thai.com

AUSTRALIAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental action locally will be the focus of this year's Australian Youth Parliament for the Environment (AYPE) at Parliament House in Canberra in September.

Student delegates from all over Australia will have the opportunity to present solutions and recommendations on environmental policy to Federal Members of Parliament, including the Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill.

"It is important for young people to know they can work cooperatively with decision-makers," says Claire Crocker, National Coordinator for the AYPE.

"During the conference, students work on equal terms with politicians, scientists and others and the process is very solution-oriented."

The AYPE will present a report to the Minister containing information about the many practical environmental projects students will have conducted during the first half of the year. Many of the projects will be included on the AYPE website along with links to school home pages so students can share their ideas.

The AYPE is a non-political, non-religious environmental action education project coordinated by young people for young people. Schools wishing to be involved should contact Claire Crocker, National Coordinator, The Australian Youth Parliament for the Environment, at http://actein.edu.au/aype or on phone 0417 483 909.

From: Youth Options, June 1998

SCHOOLS WANTED

The University of Sydney has been contracted by DEETYA to undertake research on innovation and best practice is improving student learning. They are inviting school participation in the project. For further information:


STUDENT PARTICIPATION E-MAIL DISCUSSION GROUP

To join: Send an e-mail to: <majordomo@edna.edu.au>
saying (in the body of the message): subscribe student-participation

... post topics for discussion ... make announcements ... ask questions ...
... share information and resources ...

August 1998
STATE OF THE WORLD FORUM::
EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM

The State of the World Forum is a global educational organisation that annually gathers leaders, innovative thinkers and specialists from around the world to address humanity’s most critical challenges. Additionally, throughout the year, through regional conferences, strategic initiatives, task forces, the Internet and mass media, the Forum facilitates comprehensive discussion, analysis and action to impact and shape the world. (The Forum has 20 Co-Chairs including Sonia Ghandi, Tansu Çiller, Mikhail Gorbachev, Thabo Mbeki, Jose Ramos-Horta, Desmond Tutu, James Baker etc.)

The purpose of the Emerging Leaders Program is to expand the participation of youth in the State of the World Forum to promote intergenerational dialogue and youth-adult partnerships, provide young leaders with a global perspective on their problems and concerns, and build the capacity of young leaders to play an integral role in their communities and in the creation of a new global society. It is the goal of the Emerging Leaders Program to have a wide representation of youth from around the world.

In 1998, the Forum will be held in San Francisco, USA from October 26 to November 1. Information arrived with us too late to meet this year’s application closing date (August 5th), but readers may wish to make contact for advance notice of the 1999 program.

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Further information:
http://www.worldforum.org

FROM THE EDGE
stories of pain, struggle and victory by young people

From the Edge is a publication of writing by young people from BEAT (Bridging Education and Training) and other schools throughout Victoria. They have all experienced significant life challenges and their stories reflect on these challenges. It is in the telling of these stories that the capacity of these young people to live on and maintain their hope and determination is so strongly expressed. The writers have experienced violence, incest, emotional pain, homelessness, ‘the system’, have committed crime and engaged in drug and alcohol abuse. They are both country and city students, the city students themselves reflecting a diversity of backgrounds.

(BEAT is an educational program for marginalised young people who are both out of school and struggling with issues such as homelessness. It is under the auspice of the Salvation Army and has centres in Collingwood in Melbourne. For more details contact Alan Brooker at BEAT on (03) 9415 8491.)

From the Edge is edited by Michael Hyde, specialist teacher of creative writing for both students and teachers, editor of award-winning student anthologies and author. A special Foreword by author John Marsden comments: "these are gutsy pieces with tremendous energy and punch, no wasted words. Above all they achieve ... the hardest quality in writing - personal voice."

Copies of From the Edge are available for $8 (plus $2 postage in Australia) from Fitzroy Legal Service - Publishing, PO Box 280, Fitzroy 3065. Fax orders to: (03) 9416 1124 or phone (credit card orders) (03) 9417 4848. Copies are also available from BEAT.

Edited by Michael Hyde
Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can’t lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on: (03) 9489 9052 or (03) 9344 9637

STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:
From the Edge (Ed. Michael Hyde; BEAT, Vic) 1998

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:
Curriculum Perspectives (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Deakin West, ACT) Vol 18 No 2, June 1998
Education Alternatives (Caulfield East, Vic) Vol 7 Nos 5, 6 (July, August 1998)
Evaluation of Country Connections Youth Participation Project (Osfield Consultants, Wangaratta, Vic) 1998
Evaluation of the Extra Edge Program (Econsult; Vic Department of Education) April 1998
Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) June 1998
Starlink (Melbourne, Vic) Issues 27, 28; May/June, July 1998

YACSARound (YACSA, Adelaide, SA) July/Aug 1998
Youth Options (Youth Bureau, DEETYA, ACT) June 1998
Youth Studies Australia (ACYS, Hobart, Tas) Vol 17 No 2, June 1998

Overseas:
AERO-Gramme (AERO, Roslyn Hts, NY, USA) #24
Education Now (Nottingham, UK) No 20, Summer 1998

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SRCs ORGANISING: Improving Student Conferences ...
continued from page 27

- Whilst a strong attempt was made to be politically neutral, this was not necessarily successful, and greater efforts would need to be made in future to ensure that no political bias seeps through.
- There was concern amongst the managing team that none of the speakers were female. Whilst this was not commented on specifically by participants, the management group felt that an effort should be made towards a gender balance.
- Discussions need to be more directed towards a solution to problems.
- Each group should make more frequent reports to the whole conference and topics should vary so that the same thing is not being repeated three or four times.
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79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85/86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95/96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106/107, 108/109, 110, 111, 112
   • Cross-referenced index to contents of Connect back issues ($3) $ ........

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

Foxfire Resources:
   • Sometimes a Shining Moment (Wigginton) ($25) $ ........
   • Foxfire 9 (Doubleday Anchor) ($25) $ ........
   • Foxfire: 25 Years (Doubleday) ($25) $ ........
   • A Foxfire Christmas (Doubleday hardcover) ($25) $ ........
   • Shining Moments - Foxfire video (1 hour) (loan for 1 week: $5) $ ........

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